

Relational Degradation

The Reconfiguration of the Relational Subject

Discussion I

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Abstract

Problem. A class of relational deformations resists the vocabulary in which relational harm is ordinarily described. Some have no identifiable perpetrator, some proceed without malice, and some are assembled entirely from judgments no party was wrong to make. The vocabulary of act, intention, and fault has nothing to attach to in such cases, and this is argued to be a consequence of a premise it carries without stating: that the subject is prior to the relation.

Approach. The paper proceeds deductively from the ontology of generative relational being, on which the subject is not an entity standing in relations but is what is generated within them. A consequence follows by definition rather than by inference: any degradation of a relation is a change in the conditions under which subjects are generated. Seven cases are examined, not as evidence for the thesis but as exhibitions of the paths by which the alteration transmits.

Findings. Two corrections cut against the natural formulation. Degradation does not diminish the subject's dynamics but reconfigures them, and the reconfigured dynamics are frequently the more intense. And the reconstitution of subjects cannot be the wrong, since every relation reconstitutes its participants. A criterion is therefore required, and it cannot be framed in terms of generativity without collapsing into the utilitarian norm the framework exists to displace. The criterion the ontology entails is revisability: degradation is present when the reconfiguration forecloses the possibility that the conditions of generation be further revised through common experience.

Contribution. Revisability is proposed as the sixth principle of the ethics of relational reproduction, and as a meta-principle rather than a further virtue: it governs not relations but the five principles themselves, since any principle that has lost its revisability may degenerate into an instrument of the party it was framed to constrain. A second result concerns distributive justice, shown to be limited in principle, and not merely in execution, with respect to abandonment.

Keywords: relational degradation; relational subject; generative relational being; recognition; revisability; symbolic power; distributive justice.

A note to the reader. This is a discussion paper. It is circulated in order to be argued with, and objection, counter-example, correction, and disagreement of every kind are actively sought rather than merely tolerated.

The invitation is not a formality. The paper proposes, as its principal contribution, that no norm may be held in a form that forecloses its own revision through what is subsequently found, and that the framework advancing this proposal is bound by it. A claim of that kind is answerable to what is brought against it, and it is worth no more than the objections it has survived. The conditions under which the argument would be false are stated explicitly in Section 22, and the questions it cannot answer are recorded in Section 21. Both are set out so that they may be used.

Correspondence of any kind is welcome, and disagreement is welcome most of all.

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AI usage statement. The ideas, claims, and theoretical framework of this paper originate with the author. AI tools were used as an aid in drafting, in the location and verification of sources, and in revision. The origin of each idea has been verified by the author, who takes full responsibility for the content.

1 INTRODUCTION

Relations deteriorate, and the ways in which they do so have been studied in literatures that do not readily speak to one another. Moral philosophy examines the wrongs that parties do to one another. Recognition theory examines the injury sustained when a subject is denied the acknowledgment it is owed. Psychoanalysis examines what a subject does with the deprivations it undergoes. Political sociology examines the arrangements within which such deprivations become routine, and international relations examines the conditions under which parties who intend no harm arrive at catastrophe. Each has produced results, and none of them is contested here. What is contested is that the phenomena they treat are separate.

This paper puts three questions. The first is whether the forms in which relations deteriorate—betrayal, war, abandonment, the withdrawal of response, public categorization, administrative indifference, and the loss of trust—are seven kinds of harm that happen to resemble one

another, or one alteration transmitted along seven different paths. The second is what, if they are one alteration, is altered, since the vocabulary of act and fault locates the alteration in the subject and cannot then explain the cases in which no one acted. And the third is what distinguishes a degradation from a mere transformation, since relations transform their participants continually and it is not obvious, and must not be assumed, that transformation is a harm.

The questions are worth putting because the vocabulary in which relational harm is ordinarily described fails before a class of cases that is neither small nor peripheral. It fails where the injury sustained from an intimate differs in kind, and not merely in degree, from the injury a stranger could inflict, since it can record only that the wrongdoer was close and must treat a difference of nature as an aggravating circumstance. It fails where catastrophe arrives without malice, as in the situation the realist literature has described, since a vocabulary that must find a fault will find one, and where none exists it will invent one. And it fails most completely where a community ceases to sustain one of its members and no member decided it: there was no occasion on which the question was put, no moment that could be named, and no participant whose conduct, taken singly, was wrong. There was a logic, running to its limit, and a vocabulary constructed to attach a predicate to an agent has nothing to attach.

It is argued here that these failures share a source, and that the source can be stated. The vocabulary carries, without stating, a premise about what a subject is: that the subject exists prior to the relation and is affected by it. On that premise, whatever befalls a subject must have been done to him, and what is done must have been done by someone. The cases in which no one did anything are then not merely difficult but unintelligible, and the vocabulary's response to unintelligibility is to supply an agent it does not have.

The paper proceeds by denying the premise. On the ontology of generative relational being, developed by the author elsewhere, the subject is not an entity that stands in relations. It is what is generated within them, and its properties, its capacities, and its continuity are sustained by the relation's ongoing generation and are not otherwise sustained. The consequence is immediate and it is definitional rather than inferential: if the subject is what is generated in the relation, then the conditions of the relation are the conditions of the subject's generation, and to alter the one is to alter the other. No further mechanism is needed to carry the alteration across, because there is no gap across which it would have to be carried.

The cost of this approach should be admitted at once. The argument is conditional upon its premise in a manner that admits of no repair from within. A reader who holds that the subject is prior to the relation will find that nothing here obliges him: the cases will appear to him as a collection of harms, variously administered, and the criterion as one moral intuition among the available ones. He will not be mistaken to think so. He will be disagreeing with the premise, and the premise is where the disagreement belongs. This paper does not argue for the ontology, and the cases are not offered as evidence for it.

The questions have a place in the framework's development, and it should be stated plainly

since it bears on what the paper is for. The framework has advanced an account of what relations generate, of the wealth that a shared and unrepeatable history bears, and of the conditions under which the circulation of that wealth is just. It has said comparatively little about what happens when generation goes wrong, and the little it has said has been organized by the vocabulary it was elsewhere at pains to displace, treating degradation as a wrong done by someone to someone. The present paper is an attempt to bring the account of degradation under the same ontology as the account of generation, and its principal result is a normative one that the framework did not previously possess.

They have a place in a longer movement as well. The site to which value has been anchored has shifted before. It was anchored, under conditions in which the terms of life appeared as given from without, in a source beyond the human. It was anchored thereafter in the sign, which could carry worth so long as the sign remained scarce. As the reproduction of signs has cheapened, that anchoring has failed, and value has migrated toward what the reproduction of signs cannot cheapen, which is relation. But a value that has migrated to relation is a value exposed to whatever can deform relation, and the deformations are not new. What is new is that they now reach the site at which value is held. A theory of relational value that has no theory of relational degradation is a theory of an asset without a theory of its destruction, and the omission is not one that a further account of the asset will repair.

The paper's departure from the nearest existing frameworks may be stated in a sentence each, and is set out at length in Section 3. Recognition theory holds that recognition is owed to what a subject already is; the present account holds that recognition is among the conditions under which a subject comes to be, from which it follows that the subject who has achieved nothing is not thereby without a claim, and that a dense and particularizing attention may be a form of recognition and may nonetheless foreclose the one who receives it. Psychoanalysis locates the source of the subject's transformation within the subject; the present account locates it in the structure of relational generation, and asks not what the subject did with what befell it but what the relation was doing such that this befell it. Structural realism takes the anarchic condition as given and derives the dilemma; the present account takes that condition as produced and asks after its production, and disputes nothing the realist says about the world once the production is complete. And generative justice concerns the path by which value returns to those who generate it, which presupposes that something has been generated and taken; the case of abandonment lies outside it, since what the abandoned lacks is not the return of what he made but a relation in which making would be taken up.

Two corrections govern everything that follows, and both cut against the natural way of speaking. The first is that degradation does not diminish the dynamics of the subject generated within a relation. It reconfigures them, and the reconfigured dynamics are frequently the more intense, so that the observation of vigorous generation is no evidence whatever that a relation is sound. The second is that the reconstitution of subjects cannot itself be the wrong,

since every relation reconstitutes its participants and education is not thereby a species of violence. A criterion is therefore required, and the requirement is not a formality. One of the seven cases—administration by category—alters the conditions of generation with the greatest deliberateness of any considered here, sets aside the particularity of every subject it touches, and is nevertheless the condition of a form of justice that no one proposes to abandon. An account that could not distinguish it from the others would have produced a complaint and not a criterion.

The criterion offered is revisability, and it is shown to be entailed by the premise rather than selected by the author. A relation that can no longer be revised through common experience does not cease to generate subjects; it generates one subject, repeatedly, and that is what it is for a condition of generation to have been closed. From this a normative claim follows which is the paper's principal contribution. Revisability is proposed as the sixth principle of the framework's ethics of relational reproduction, and it is proposed as a meta-principle and not as a sixth virtue standing alongside the five: it governs not relations but the five principles themselves, since a principle whose interpretation can no longer be revised is interpreted by the party it was framed to constrain, and a constraint interpreted by its object is not a constraint. The framework that states the principle is bound by it.

The remainder of the paper is arranged as follows. Section 2 sets out the three failures of the vocabulary of act and fault and diagnoses their source. Section 3 locates the argument with respect to the literatures nearest to it. Section 4 states the premise, derives the consequence, and supplies the definition of degradation that the framework requires and the ordinary use of the word does not. Section 5 makes the two corrections and introduces the three-layer structure used throughout. Section 7 sets out a taxonomy of the seven cases along three independent axes—the distinction each removes, the form of attribution each admits, and the availability of repair—so that each case may be read as occupying a determinate place rather than as one more instance in a list. Sections 8–14 examine the paths of transmission, and Section 15 compares them. Section 16 eliminates the candidate criteria, including the one the framework would most naturally propose and which it must refuse. Section 17 states the criterion and exhibits its entailment. Section 18 states the constraint separating the description of a mechanism from the justification of what it produces. Sections 19 and 20 recapitulate the five principles, show what they cannot settle, and propose the sixth. Section 21 records what the paper has not done, Section 22 states the conditions under which it would be false, and Section 23 explains why it is offered as a discussion.

2 THE VOCABULARY OF ACT AND FAULT PRESUPPOSES A SUBJECT PRIOR TO RELATION

The vocabulary in which relational harm is ordinarily described is a vocabulary of act and fault. There is an agent who acted, an intention with which he acted, a fault in the acting, and

a liability that follows from the fault. The vocabulary is old, it is serviceable, and it runs so smoothly across the ordinary cases that what it cannot say is seldom noticed.

Three things it cannot say. They were named in the introduction and are set out here, since the diagnosis that follows depends upon their being seen precisely.

The first concerns the specific quality of the injury sustained in betrayal. That the betrayed party is harmed, the vocabulary records. That he is harmed in a manner unlike the harm a stranger could inflict, it does not, and the difference is not one of magnitude. A stranger may do more damage and be forgiven the more easily. It has the resources to say that a wrong was done and that the wrongdoer was close, but it has no resources to say why the closeness alters the kind of the injury rather than its degree, and it therefore treats as an intensifier what is in fact a difference of nature.

The second concerns the possibility of catastrophe without malice. In the situation the literature of international relations has described as the security dilemma, each party arms in response to the arming of the other, each acts on a correct assessment of its position, and the outcome is a war that neither sought and both were rational to have prepared for. The vocabulary of act and fault can describe this only by locating a fault, and if no fault can be located it must either invent one or fall silent. It commonly invents one. To call the outcome an aggression is to have converted a structural predicament into a moral one, which is to say that it is to have misdescribed it.

The third is the most difficult and it will occupy this paper at length. A person who has become unable to contribute may find that a community ceases to sustain him, and it is characteristic of such cases that no one decided it. There was no meeting at which the question was raised. There is no moment that could be identified as the moment of abandonment, and there is no participant whose conduct, taken by itself, was wrong. What there is, is a logic, running to its limit. The vocabulary of act and fault is constructed to attach a predicate to an agent, and where no agent is available it has nothing to attach.

These are not cases at the margin of an otherwise sound account. They are among the central forms in which relational life deteriorates, and the vocabulary of act and fault is silent before them or, worse, speaks and misdescribes.

It is tempting to treat the difficulty as a matter of scope. The vocabulary was made for the acts of persons, one might say, and these are not acts of persons but conditions of systems; two vocabularies are needed, and each may be sound within its province. The response is inadequate, and its inadequacy is instructive. The three cases are not remote from the province of moral judgment. They are the occasions on which moral judgment is most urgently demanded and most conspicuously fails, and a vocabulary that must cede precisely those occasions to another discipline has not been given a boundary. It has been given a diagnosis.

The diagnosis this paper offers concerns a premise that the vocabulary of act and fault carries without stating, and it is a premise about what a subject is. On that vocabulary the subject is prior to the relation. He exists, he possesses properties and intentions, and he then enters into dealings with others; the relation is a thing that happens between subjects who were already there. On that premise the three cases are indeed anomalous, since if the subject is already constituted, then whatever befalls him must befall him from outside, and what befalls him from outside must have been done by someone.

The premise is not obviously true, and this paper proceeds by denying it.

3 RECOGNITION BELONGS AMONG THE CONDITIONS OF THE SUBJECT'S GENERATION

The argument stands close to four literatures and takes something from each. Because the proximity is close enough to invite assimilation, the departures are stated before the argument proceeds.

3.1 *Honneth grounds recognition in what the subject already is*

The account is nearest to the theory of recognition, and the difference is not one of emphasis.

Recognition, as Honneth develops it, is owed to what the subject already is: to his personhood, which love acknowledges; to his standing as a bearer of rights, which law acknowledges; to his achievements and his contribution, which esteem acknowledges. Misrecognition is accordingly a failure to acknowledge something that is there to be acknowledged, and the injury is the injury of having one's existing worth denied. The account is retrospective in its structure, and the retrospection is not incidental to it: what grounds the claim to recognition is a property the subject possesses in advance of the recognizing.

The present account cannot take this form, and the reason is the premise. If the subject is generated in the relation, then there is no antecedent personhood standing behind the relation and waiting to be acknowledged. Recognition is not the acknowledgment of a subject who was already there. It is among the conditions under which a subject comes to be there at all.

Recognition, in this framework, is not retrospective but constitutive. It does not acknowledge what the subject is. It is among the conditions under which the subject is generated, and this is why its withdrawal does not merely wound a subject but alters what a subject can be.

Two consequences follow, and both mark a departure.

The first concerns the case that recognition theory handles least well. If recognition is owed on the basis of what a subject has achieved or can contribute, then the subject who has achieved nothing and can contribute nothing has no ground on which to claim it, and the

theory must either supply a supplementary ground—an appeal to bare personhood, which is a different principle—or leave him unprotected. On the present account the difficulty does not arise in that form, because recognition is not owed *on the basis of* anything. It is a condition of generation, and a condition is not a reward.

The second concerns Honneth's assumption that recognition is a good of which more is better. Section 12 exhibits a form of attention that is intense, sustained, and elaborately particularizing, and that forecloses the subject as thoroughly as any neglect. The categorized subject is not ignored. He is watched with a fixed attention, and every observation confirms the category. That such attention is a species of recognition, and that it is nonetheless degrading, is not a possibility for which a theory that treats recognition as a scalar good has provided.

3.2 Psychoanalysis locates the transformation within the subject

The account uses the vocabulary of the symbolic and it does not adopt the explanatory structure that vocabulary ordinarily carries.

Psychoanalysis locates the source of the subject's transformation within the subject: in the operation of the symbolic order upon it, in what it does with its constitutive lack, in the fantasies by which it makes that lack bearable. The present account locates the source in the structure of relational generation. The distinction is not a preference among vocabularies. It is a disagreement about where an explanation should begin, and it has a consequence that will be visible in the cases: where a psychoanalytic account asks what the subject does with what befalls it, this account asks what the relation was doing such that this befell it.

What is retained is the observation that the subject does not confirm itself. Some external confirmation is required, and its withdrawal is not a discomfort the subject might tolerate but a condition of its continuing to be a subject. Section 11 depends upon this, and Section 21 records that the paper has not established it.

What is refused is the assimilation of the whole account to that observation. That the subject requires an external confirmation does not settle what may supply it, and the framework's interest lies precisely in the possibility that relational generation might supply what has elsewhere been supplied by a fixed and unquestionable authority. Whether it can is not established here. It is the question the framework exists to pursue.

3.3 Realism takes as given the condition this account takes as produced

The realist account of the security dilemma is not disputed. It is, within its domain, correct, and Section 9 says so without qualification.

The disagreement concerns where the analysis begins. The realist takes the anarchic condition as given, and derives from it that a rational party must read another's capacity as a threat. The derivation is sound. What the framework does not permit him to ask is how the condi-

tions of generation came to be such that capacity is legible as threat rather than as capacity, and this is not a question he has declined to answer but one his premises do not raise. The present account takes the anarchic condition as produced, and asks after its production.

The difference may be put sharply. Realism describes with precision the dynamics of a world in which a certain recoding has already occurred. It does not describe the recoding, and it does not possess the means to.

3.4 Generative justice presupposes that something has been generated and taken

The framework's account of value, and of the circulation that returns value to those who generate it, is indebted to the theory of generative justice, and the debt is acknowledged in the framework's prior work.

One departure is registered here because it bears on the criterion. Generative justice is an account of value's return to its producer, and it is therefore an account concerning producers. Its central injustice is extraction: value is generated and does not come back. This is a real injustice and the account of it is not disputed.

But the case of Section 10 lies outside it. The abandoned subject is not one from whom value has been extracted. He is one whose generation has no recipient, and there is nothing to be returned to him because nothing has been taken. A framework organized around the return of value has no purchase here, and the difficulty is structural rather than an oversight: an account of just circulation presupposes that something circulates.

Generative justice concerns the path by which value returns to those who generate it. The case of abandonment concerns admission to the circuit at all, and it is not an instance of extraction. What the abandoned lacks is not the return of what he made but a relation in which making would be taken up.

The sixth principle proposed in Section 20 is offered as an addition on this point. It does not replace the criterion of just circulation and is not in competition with it. It states a condition prior to circulation, which is that the relation must remain able to revise the terms on which it admits and generates its participants, and it is a condition that a circuit may fail while circulating justly among those it has already admitted.

3.5 The account is silent on motive and derives no political conclusion

Two disclaimers, and they are made because the vocabulary invites the misreadings they exclude.

The account is not a theory of the individual's psychology and makes no claims about motive. That the participants in a degraded configuration act without malice is asserted repeat-

edly, and it is asserted because it is true and because the explanatory burden of the account does not require it to be false. No case in the cases is explained by the wickedness of anyone.

And the account does not derive political conclusions from its dynamical claims. That a mechanism can be shown to sustain the conditions of a system's continued operation is a description, and Section 18 states why it must never be permitted to become a justification. The vocabulary of generativity is unusually exposed to the collapse of that distinction, and the constraint is stated formally for that reason.

4 THE SUBJECT IS GENERATED IN THE RELATION, AND THE CONSEQUENCE IS DEFINITIONAL

The premise is stated in its strong form, because the weak form will not do the work and it is important to see why.

The weak form would say that the subject is influenced by his relations. This is a causal claim, it is uncontroversial, and it is compatible with everything the vocabulary of act and fault assumes. A subject who is influenced by his relations is a subject who was there to be influenced, and the influence is a thing that happens to him. On the weak premise the three omissions of Section 2 remain omissions, since the question of who did the influencing is still available and still unanswerable.

The strong form says something else.

The relational subject. The subject is not an entity that stands in relations. It is what is generated in them. Its properties, its capacities, and its continuity are not possessions carried into the relation but are sustained by the relation's ongoing generation, and they are not otherwise sustained.

This is the premise of generative relational being, and it is not adopted here for the convenience of the argument. It is adopted because it is the framework's ontological commitment and because the argument of this paper is an unfolding of that commitment rather than an addition to it. What must be shown is that the commitment has the consequences claimed. That it is true is not shown, and a reader who declines it will find nothing in what follows that compels him.

The distinction between the two forms may be put as a distinction between two questions. On the weak premise, one asks what a relation does to a subject. On the strong premise, that question is malformed, and the question one asks instead is what a subject is generated as.

4.1 *The consequence follows by definition*

Grant the premise and the principal claim of this paper follows immediately.

If the subject is what is generated in the relation, then the conditions of the relation are the

conditions of the subject's generation. A change in the former is a change in the latter, and it is not a change that must be transmitted by some further mechanism whose operation could be doubted. There is no gap across which a transmission would have to occur. To alter the conditions under which a subject is generated is to alter what the subject is generated as, and the two descriptions pick out the same event.

In generative relational being the relational subject is not an entity outside the relation but is continuously formed within its generation. Any degradation of a relation is therefore not merely a change in the relation. It is a change in the conditions of generation, and thereby a reconfiguration of what a subject can be generated as and of how the subject's dynamics can unfold.

The cases examined below are accordingly not attacks upon subjects. They are alterations in the conditions of relational generation, and the subject changes in consequence. This is the respect in which the account differs from the accounts with which it will be most readily confused. Psychoanalysis locates the source of the subject's transformation within the subject. Psychology locates it in cognition and affect. The present account locates it in the structure of relational generation, and it does so not as a matter of emphasis but as a matter of what the subject is taken to be.

4.2 *Degradation is a change in the capacity to generate subjects*

The title of this paper contains a word that, left undefined, would render it empty. Degradation, in ordinary use, means that a relation has become worse, and a paper that established that some relations become worse would have established nothing. The premise supplies a definition, and it is a definition with content.

Relational degradation. Not that a relation has diminished, and not that a relation has become worse. A change in the relation's capacity to generate relational subjects, such that the space within which a subject may be generated is constrained, redirected, or closed.

Two things follow from this definition and both are needed.

The first is that degradation is not a moral term. It names a structural alteration, and whether the alteration is to be condemned is a further question that the cases I must answer and that the definition itself leaves open. This is a feature and not a defect. A theory that built the condemnation into the description would have no way to accommodate the case of institutional indifference, which alters the conditions of generation with the greatest deliberateness and is nevertheless the condition of a form of justice we have no wish to abandon.

The second is that degradation is important for a reason that is not about relations. It is important because the relation is the site at which subjects are generated, and it is only in virtue of that fact that a change in relations is a change of any consequence at all. Ordinary relational theory can say that relations matter to people. The present account says something stronger and stranger, which is that people are what relations are doing.

5 DEGRADATION RECONFIGURES THE SUBJECT'S DYNAMICS

The consequence drawn in Section 4 is easily stated and it is easily stated wrongly. Two corrections are required before it can be put to work, and both cut against the natural way of speaking.

5.1 *The reconfigured dynamics are frequently the more intense*

The natural formulation would be that the degradation of a relation degrades the dynamics of the subject generated within it. The formulation is wrong, and its wrongness is not a matter of wording.

Consider what is observed in the relations that have most conspicuously deteriorated. A community organized around a shared enmity does not exhibit a diminished capacity for action. It commonly exhibits an intensified one: its members act with greater decision, identify with greater conviction, and coordinate with greater efficiency than they did before. A group that has fixed upon one of its members as an object of contempt does not become listless. It becomes inventive. It generates fresh descriptions, discovers new occasions, and elaborates the categorization with a fertility that no equivalent effort would have produced in its absence.

The dynamics have not weakened. They have been reorganized, and the reorganized dynamics may be the more intense.

Relational degradation does not diminish the dynamics of the subject. It reconfigures them. Generation continues, and may continue with increased vigor; what changes is the space within which it can occur.

This correction is not a concession. It is what saves the thesis from vacuity. To say that degradation degrades is to say nothing; to say that degradation reconfigures is to say something that could be false, and the modes of reconfiguration can then be distinguished. Four may be named at the outset, and the cases below will exhibit them: generation may be *constrained*, so that fewer paths remain open; *distorted*, so that the paths that remain lead elsewhere than they did; *closed*, so that generation along a given path ceases altogether; or *redirected*, so that the subject is generated toward a configuration it would not otherwise have approached.

The correction has a further consequence, and it will be needed below. If degradation

does not consist in the diminution of generation, then the presence of vigorous generation is no evidence that a relation is sound. A relation may generate copiously and generate only one thing. The question is never whether generation is occurring, and any diagnostic that asks only that question will report health in precisely the cases where health is most absent.

5.2 *The reconstitution of subjects is universal and is not itself the wrong*

The second correction concerns what the account must not claim.

If the relation is the site at which subjects are generated, then every relation constitutes its participants, and every alteration of a relation reconstitutes them. Education reconstitutes the student, and it is intended to. The student who emerges from a long apprenticeship is not the student who entered it, and the difference is the whole point of the exercise. A friendship of many years has constituted both parties in ways that neither would have chosen in advance and neither would now surrender.

It follows that the reconstitution of a subject cannot be the mark of degradation, since reconstitution is what relations do.

That a relation reconstitutes its subjects is not a defect but a definition. The criterion of degradation must therefore be sought elsewhere than in the fact of reconstitution, and any account that condemns reconstitution as such has condemned relation as such.

This is a serious constraint and it is the reason the criterion is necessary. It rules out, at a stroke, the most natural formulation of the normative claim. One cannot say that degradation occurs when a relation determines what its participants become, since that is the ordinary operation of every relation that is worth having. Something must be said about *how* the determination is effected, and the saying of it is the work of the criterion.

5.3 *Degradation originates at a layer that intervention does not reach*

It is convenient to distinguish three layers, and the distinction will be used throughout.

At the first layer stands the mechanism of relational generation: the conditions under which relations produce what they produce. At the second stand the relational subjects continuously formed within that generation. At the third stand the dynamics of those subjects among themselves, by which new relations are produced and the system continues to generate.

Degradation occurs at the first layer. It is transmitted to the second, and it alters the third.

Degradation originates at the layer of relational generation. Intervention is ordinarily directed at the second layer, by protecting the subject who has been injured, or at the third, by sanctioning the subject who has injured him. This is why intervention so often fails. The pathology is at a layer that neither intervention reaches.

The observation is not offered as a counsel of despair, and it does not entail that protection and sanction are worthless. It entails something narrower and more useful, which is that protection and sanction address consequences and that a relation whose generative conditions have been altered will continue to produce the consequences after each of them has been addressed. The role vacated by a sanctioned participant remains available, and it will be occupied.

6 THE CASES EXHIBIT THE PATHS OF TRANSMISSION

The seven cases that follow are not evidence for the thesis established above. The thesis follows from the premise, and no case could strengthen it. Their function is different, and it is the function that a unifying account most requires.

A thesis which held that all relational degradation is a reconfiguration of relational subjects would be empty if it could not say how the reconfigurations differ. A unification that abolishes the differences among the things it unifies explains nothing, and the charge is easily earned. The cases are therefore presented as *paths of transmission*, and the question asked of each is a single question, put in the same words each time.

By what path does an alteration at the layer of relational generation transmit into a reconfiguration of the subject generated there?

The answer differs in each case, and the differences are the substance of this part. Where a case has been misdescribed in the author's own earlier treatment, the misdescription is stated and corrected, since a path that has been misidentified is worse than one that has not been examined.

One further constraint is observed. The mechanisms at issue are visible in ordinary relations, and they are described here in ordinary relations. An argument that borrows its force from the emotional weight of an extreme example is not carrying its own weight, and the extreme cases are omitted for that reason rather than from delicacy.

7 THE CASES ARE DISTINGUISHED ALONG THREE INDEPENDENT AXES

The seven cases are set out before they are examined, so that each may be read as occupying a determinate place in a structure rather than as one more instance in a list. Three axes distin-

guish them, and the axes are independent: a case's position on one does not fix its position on the others.

7.1 *The distinction that is collapsed*

Each case removes a discrimination the relation was formerly able to make, and the discriminations removed are not the same.

CASE	THE DISTINCTION REMOVED	WHAT IS LOST
Betrayal	this relation <i>vs.</i> any relation of its type	specificity
War	a subject <i>vs.</i> an object of strategy	interiority
Abandonment	this person <i>vs.</i> any person of whom nothing is expected	singularity
Withheld response	present <i>vs.</i> absent	standing to be addressed
Public categorization	this person <i>vs.</i> one who may be so treated	the entitlement not to be categorized
Institutional indifference	this case <i>vs.</i> any case of its type	particularity
Loss of trust	this other <i>vs.</i> any other who might fail me	the standing to be entrusted

The distinctions are mutually irreducible, and the irreducibility is easily missed. A subject may be reduced to an object of strategy and remain an irreplaceable object of strategy; a relation may be reduced to its terms while both parties continue to acknowledge one another as subjects. That the seven are one alteration does not entail that they are one loss, and an account which allowed them to merge would have abolished the differences it was constructed to explain.

7.2 *The form of attribution*

The second axis determines whether the vocabulary of act and fault has anything to attach to, and it is the axis on which the difficulty of Section 2 becomes tractable.

CASE	STRUCTURE OF THE ACT	IS THERE A PERPETRATOR?
Betrayal	unilateral, intended, retrospective	yes
War	bilateral, may be unintended, self-fulfilling	possibly none
Abandonment	systemic	ordinarily none; a logic
Withheld response	coordinated, each act permissible	none, and none acted
Public categorization	three-party, intended, public	yes, and he knows it
Institutional indifference	institutional, intended, principled	yes, and he acts rightly
Loss of trust	incremental, each step warranted	none, and none erred

The column on the right exhibits a spectrum that moral philosophy is not equipped to traverse. It runs from a perpetrator who intended what he did, through configurations in which no one acted, to one in which the administrator acted deliberately and acted rightly, and terminates in a degradation assembled from judgments no party was wrong to make. A vocabulary that attaches a predicate to an agent can operate at one end of this spectrum and is silent at the other, and the silence is not a gap in its application but a consequence of its premise.

7.3 *The availability of repair*

The third axis anticipates the criterion and is the reason the cases are arranged as they are.

CASE	WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY OF REPAIR
Betrayal	a new specificity may be built; the old is beyond recovery, since the claim was about the past
War	both parties must cease objectifying at once, and each party's ceasing exposes it
Abandonment	<i>transfer cannot reach it</i> ; what is required is a different condition of generation
Withheld response	the faculty that would perform the repair has been enlisted against it
Public categorization	the audience's discriminations must change, and the subject cannot address the audience
Institutional indifference	<i>nothing does</i> ; appeal, hearing, and legislation are available
Loss of trust	there is no fault to acknowledge and no act to undo

Two rows are marked. The third carries the paper's sharpest practical consequence, and Section 10 argues it: distribution operates within the conditions of generation, and abandonment alters those conditions, so that the limitation of distributive justice here is one of principle

and not of execution. The sixth carries the paper's criterion, and Sections 17 and 20 argue it: the case in which the conditions of generation are altered most deliberately is the case in which repair remains available, and what distinguishes it is neither the gentleness of the alteration nor the intentions of those who administer it.

7.4 *The order of composition*

The cases are not independent, and two orderings among them will be used.

Objectification makes abandonment available. Once the other has been recoded as an object of strategy, an object of no strategic value is a discardable object, and the recoding is a precondition of the discarding. The converse does not hold. To render a subject indistinguishable from those of whom nothing is expected is not to render him an adversary, and the asymmetry supports a proposition that is uncomfortable and, so far as the author can determine, true: *the enemy is more fully recognized than the abandoned*. War accords the other the standing of an agent. Abandonment accords him no standing at all.

And the legitimate collapse licenses the illegitimate one. Where an institution has established that categorical treatment is proper, the categorizer of Section 12 need not manufacture an injustice. He need only invoke a category the institution has already authorized, and Section 12 shows that this is what he does. That the legitimacy of the one furnishes the cover of the other is the direct cost of the concession made in Section 13, and it is not a cost the account may decline to pay.

8 BETRAYAL REWRITES THE RELATION'S PAST

8.1 *The alteration and its path*

What the betrayer does is not, in the first instance, to end a relation. It is to redescribe it, and the redescription is retrospective. The claim implicit in the act is not that the relation will henceforth be of a different kind. It is that the relation was always of that kind, and that the other party had misunderstood it.

The subject generated within that relation had been generated on terms which the redescription cancels. He discovers not that a support has been withdrawn but that the support he took himself to have had was never of the character he supposed. The generative mechanism he relied upon is not destroyed. It is disclosed never to have existed in the form he relied upon it in.

He is generated thereafter as a subject who was mistaken about the conditions of his own generation. This is the specific quality of injury that Section 2 found the vocabulary of act and fault unable to name, and it explains why the closeness of the betrayer alters the kind of the harm rather than its degree. A stranger cannot inflict it, because a stranger was not among the conditions of one's generation and cannot retrospectively cancel what he was never party to.

8.2 *Forgiveness cannot retract a retrospective claim*

Forgiveness can establish a new relation on new terms, and frequently does. What it cannot do is retract the retrospective claim, since that claim is not an act to be undone but an assertion about what was already the case. A new relation may be generated. The old conditions of generation cannot be restored, because they are now held never to have obtained.

Betrayal is irreversible not because trust is laborious to rebuild but because its operation is retrospective. What it alters is not the future of the relation but the account of its past, and no subsequent act has authority over the past.

8.3 *The injury lies in the account of the past*

Betrayal has been treated principally as a violation of trust, and the philosophical literature on trust supplies the resources for that treatment. Baier's account of trust as the acceptance of vulnerability to another's goodwill, and the accounts of betrayal that follow from it, explain why betrayal is a wrong of a distinctive severity: it exploits an exposure that the betrayed party undertook on the betrayer's account [2]. Margalit's distinction between thick and thin relations explains why the wrong is graver where the relation was thicker [13].

What these accounts share is that they locate the injury in the future. Trust was extended, the extension is now revealed to have been unwarranted, and what is lost is the capacity to extend it again. The account is correct and it is incomplete, and the incompleteness is exactly where the present framework contributes.

What the betrayed party reports is not, characteristically, that he can no longer trust. It is that he does not know what the relation was. The injury is to his account of the past, and the loss of future trust is a consequence of that injury rather than its content. On the vocabulary of trust this is difficult to say, since trust is a forward-looking attitude and a forward-looking attitude cannot be damaged retrospectively. On the present account it is straightforward: the relation was among the conditions of his generation, the redescription cancels those conditions, and he is generated thereafter as one who was mistaken about what generated him. The distinctive severity that Baier explains by the exploitation of vulnerability is explained here by something prior, which is that the conditions of one's own constitution have been retrospectively withdrawn.

9 WAR RECODES THE OTHER BEFORE IT DESTROYS HIM

9.1 *The recoding precedes the violence*

The relation is recoded as adversarial, and the recoding precedes the violence. This is the order that matters and it is the order the ordinary account inverts.

The sequence runs from subject, to enemy, to target, to casualty. It does not run from subject to casualty. The evidence is available in the preparations that precede any organized hostility: the construction of the adversary as a category, the elaboration of the narratives that make membership in that category legible, and the production of the figures in relation to whom one's own participation becomes intelligible. Were the destruction of persons the object, none of this would be required. That it is invariably undertaken indicates that what is being built is not a capacity to destroy but a system for the production of subjects, without which the destruction could not be sustained by those who are to carry it out.

The subject is thereafter generated only as an enemy, or only as one who confronts an enemy. Here the first correction of Section 5 shows its necessity. The dynamics of the subject so generated are not weakened; they are heightened. Resolution, solidarity, and coordinated capacity all increase, and it is the increase, and not any lassitude, that makes the configuration self-sustaining.

9.2 *Realism describes the world the recoding has already produced*

The realist account of the security dilemma is not contested here, and this paper does not undertake to refute it. The realist describes with accuracy the dynamics of a world in which the recoding has already occurred, and within that world his conclusions follow. What he does not ask, and what his framework gives him no means of asking, is what altered the conditions of generation such that the other's capacity is legible as threat rather than as capacity. He takes the anarchic condition as given [21]. The present account takes it as produced, and the difference is not a disagreement about the dynamics but a disagreement about where the analysis begins.

The constructivist literature has pressed this objection before, and what the present account adds to it should be said. Wendt's argument that anarchy is what states make of it, and the wider claim that the identities and interests of states are socially produced rather than given, already deny that the anarchic condition is a datum [19]. The present account does not dispute this and is indebted to it.

Where it departs is in what the production is taken to produce. For the constructivist, what is constructed is an identity or an interest, which is to say a property of an agent who is there to bear it and who might in principle bear another. The agent survives the construction, and this is what makes the constructivist proposal a hopeful one, since identities may be reconstructed by altering the intersubjective understandings that sustain them. On the present account the agent does not survive the construction, because the agent is what the construction generates. What is at stake in the recoding is not which identity a party bears but what kind of subject is generated at all.

The difference is visible in what each account predicts about reversal. The constructivist expects that a reconstruction of shared understandings will restore the parties to a condition

in which cooperation is available. The present account expects that it will not, and Section 17 gives the reason: the recoding has closed the channel through which understandings would be revised, and it is that closure, rather than the content of the understandings, that must first be undone.

10 ABANDONMENT LEAVES THE SUBJECT'S GENERATION WITHOUT A RECIPIENT

10.1 *The alteration and its path*

The relational system ceases to include the subject in its future. Nothing is done to him. What ceases is that he is no longer among the parties with respect to whom the system's forward generation is organized.

His generation loses its recipient. He continues to generate—he acts, he speaks, he attempts—but the generation is not taken up, and the relational uptake that would have made it generative of anything further does not occur.

10.2 *The abandoned subject loses his singularity*

It is natural to describe his position by saying that his value has fallen to zero, and the description is wrong. Zero is a position. To be assigned it is to remain locatable within the order, to be a determinate element of it, and to be someone concerning whom the order can still say something, namely that his contribution is nil. That is not the situation of the abandoned. The situation of the abandoned is that he is no longer generated as a particular at all.

What abandonment removes is not the subject's value but his singularity. He does not become worth nothing. He becomes indistinguishable from any other of whom nothing is expected.

10.3 *A transfer restores a magnitude, and singularity is none*

A transfer restores a magnitude, and what has been lost is not a magnitude. Resources supplied to a subject who is no longer generated as a particular are received by the category and not by him. He remains a member of the class of those from whom nothing is expected, distinguished now only by being a funded member of it.

The repair required is not a redistribution but a different condition of generation, and distribution operates within the conditions of generation and cannot alter them. This is a limitation of principle and not of execution, and it is the sharpest consequence the present account carries for the theory of justice.

10.4 *Capability, misrecognition, and exclusion each stop short of singularity*

The condition has been approached from three directions and each supplies something the others do not.

The capability approach holds that what is owed is not a quantity of resources but the real freedom to do and to be, and Sen's insistence that equal resources may yield unequal capabilities already denies that a transfer settles the matter [16]. It is nearer to the present account than any other and it stops at a definite point. A capability is a capacity of a person and is assessed by asking what that person can do. The abandoned subject may retain every capability and be abandoned nonetheless, because what he has lost is not a capacity of his own but a relation in which his exercise of it would be taken up. What is missing is not on his side of the relation.

Fraser's distinction between maldistribution and misrecognition marks the same territory and divides it differently [5]. Misrecognition, on her account, consists in institutionalized patterns of cultural value that deny a person the standing of a full partner in interaction, and the present case would be classed under it. What the classification does not supply is why the two remedies do not substitute for one another, and the present account gives the reason: misrecognition of this kind is not a further harm standing alongside maldistribution but an alteration of the conditions under which the subject is generated, and a transfer, which operates upon a subject already generated, cannot reach it.

The literature on social exclusion supplies the empirical texture and characteristically declines the theoretical question, treating exclusion as a compound of deprivations rather than as a condition with a structure of its own [17]. The structure is what the present account offers here. What the excluded subject loses is neither resources nor capabilities nor esteem, but singularity, the property of being generated as this one rather than as any of those; and the reason no transfer restores it is that a transfer restores a magnitude, and singularity is not a magnitude.

11 WITHHELD RESPONSE COMPELS THE SUBJECT TO NAME HIMSELF

11.1 *Coordinated silence satisfies every condition of a symbol*

Response is withdrawn. The subject speaks and the exchange continues past him; he is present and is not addressed. No act is performed against him and no name is applied to him, and it is characteristic of this case that each of its constituent non-acts is, taken singly, unimpeachable. No one is obliged to reply.

It is tempting to conclude that this case, alone among the seven, operates without symbolic mediation. The conclusion should be resisted. The withdrawal is coordinated. It is not that each participant independently happens not to respond; the non-response is consistent, is

directed, and is anticipated by all parties including the one who suffers it. Coordination of that kind requires a shared rule, and a shared rule is a symbol whatever its mode of expression.

What is distinctive is the form the symbol takes. It is not a predicate. It does not assert what the subject is, and it therefore offers nothing that could be contested. It asserts a negated membership, and a negated membership requires no positive content. It need not hold that he is deficient, only that he is not among us.

The absence of a name is not the absence of a symbol. Silence, where it is coordinated, directed, and anticipated, satisfies every condition a symbol is required to satisfy. What it withholds is not its meaning but its predicate.

11.2 The subject supplies the account, and the faculty supplying it is thereby disabled

Here the transmission runs through a gap rather than through an imposition, and this is the crucial structural difference from the case of Section 12. Where a categorization supplies the subject with an account of himself, the withdrawal of response supplies him with none, and leaves him with a question that will not be left alone. The subject requires an account, and where none is furnished he will furnish one. It is he who names himself.

The interpretation he generates is generated by the very faculty upon which any revision of it would have to depend. This is the structural peculiarity of the case and it may be stated without metaphor. The subject's interpretive capacity is enlisted in the production of an account whose effect is to disable that capacity. He is not persuaded of anything. He has concluded it, and a person does not doubt his own conclusion in the manner in which he might doubt an assertion made to him.

11.3 External kindness is absorbed, and the configuration is self-sustaining

The first is that external kindness is characteristically ineffective. A reassurance is received as consolation, an attention as pity, and a response, where one occurs, as the exception the rule anticipated. Each counter-instance is processed by an interpretation that has already specified how counter-instances are to be read.

The second is that this configuration requires no maintenance. A categorization must be continually re-performed, and Section 12 will make something of that requirement. The withdrawal of response, once established, is completed by the subject himself, and the community that initiated it need do nothing further.

11.4 Internalization is this case completed

It has been usual to treat the internalization of a degraded self-understanding as a distinct phenomenon, remarkable for the coincidence of the one who degrades with the one degraded.

It is not a distinct phenomenon. It is the completed form of the case described here, and the coincidence is not a curiosity but the mechanism.

11.5 The subject supplies the category that symbolic violence would have imposed

The psychological literature on ostracism has established the phenomenon and much of its structure. Williams's programme has shown that exclusion is registered rapidly, that it is registered even where the excluding party is known to be arbitrary or is not a party the subject values, and that it threatens the fundamental needs of belonging, self-esteem, control, and meaningful existence [20]. The findings are not disputed and the present account depends upon them.

The theoretical accounts of internalization supply the other half. Bourdieu's symbolic violence names the mechanism by which the dominated come to apprehend their position through categories that are the categories of the dominant, and Fanon's account of internalization exhibits its operation upon a subject who has no external standing from which to contest them [3, 4].

What is not supplied by either literature, and what the present account offers as its contribution here, is why the internalization is not merely a frequent sequel to exclusion but its completion, and why the interpretation the subject generates is uniquely resistant to correction from outside. The reason is structural rather than psychological. In the case of a categorization, an interpretation is imposed, and an imposed interpretation retains a mark of its origin: the subject may still hold that it came from elsewhere and is therefore contestable in principle, however unavailing the contest. Here nothing is imposed. A gap is left, the subject is required to close it, and the interpretation that closes it is his own conclusion. A subject does not doubt his own conclusion in the manner in which he might doubt an assertion made to him, and every subsequent kindness is received by an interpretation that has already specified how kindness is to be read. The literature on symbolic violence explains how the categories of the dominant become the categories of the dominated. It does not explain the case in which no category was supplied and the dominated supplied his own.

12 PUBLIC CATEGORIZATION ALTERS WHAT THE AUDIENCE CAN DISTINGUISH

12.1 The three-party structure is constitutive

The rule by which the community distinguishes among its members is rewritten, and the rewriting is public. This is the constitutive feature of the case and it is the one most often mistaken for an incidental one.

The operation is not performed upon the subject. It is performed before an audience, and the alteration it effects occurs in the audience's capacity to distinguish, not in the categorizer's.

The categorizer need not believe what he asserts, and frequently does not. What is required is that others come to find the assertion available. This is why the operation is almost never conducted in private: conducted in private it would accomplish nothing, since the party whose discriminations must change would not be present.

The operation is a demonstration, and its site is the audience. What is altered is not what the categorized subject is, but what the community is able to say about him, and thereafter about anyone.

12.2 *Bystander silence completes the operation, and resistance confirms the category*

The silence of the bystanders is central rather than peripheral. It is not a failure to intervene, and to describe it so is to mislocate it. It is the evidence that the audience has accepted the categorization, and that acceptance is what the demonstration was for.

Resistance by the categorized subject is characteristically unavailing. The contest is not between him and the categorizer. It is conducted in a forum he cannot address, and any conduct of his is available for redescription as confirming the category. Conduct well and he is the exception. Conduct badly and he is the instance. Protest and he is what such persons do.

The categorizer commonly bears the subject no particular animus. The subject is not the object of the exercise. He is the medium through which the demonstration is conducted, and a medium is not hated.

12.3 *Where rules are forming the operation instructs; where they are fixed it invokes*

Where the community's rules of discrimination are still forming, the operation is pedagogical. It exhibits, to participants who have not yet settled the matter, what the available categories are, and it is the most vivid instruction they will receive.

Where the rules are institutionally fixed, the operation cannot proceed by instruction and does not attempt to. It proceeds by invoking a category that already carries authorization, with the effect that resistance to the categorization becomes indistinguishable from resistance to the institution that authorized it.

In the first setting the operation creates a category. In the second it places the subject into a category the institution has already licensed. The second is the harder to resist, since to dispute it is to dispute the institution.

12.4 *Labelling theory misses the audience and misreads the silence*

Labelling theory has held the essential insight for six decades. Becker's formulation, that deviance is not a quality of the act but a consequence of the application of rules and sanctions by others, and Lemert's distinction between primary and secondary deviation, already locate the operation in the community rather than in the one who is labelled, and already recognize that the label produces the conduct it purports to describe [12, 11]. Goffman's account of stigma supplies the phenomenology of the labelled subject's position with a precision this paper does not attempt to improve upon [7].

Two things are missing from these accounts and they are what the present framework adds.

The first is that the operation is a demonstration *addressed to a third party*, and that the third party is where the alteration occurs. Labelling theory locates the label in the community and does not ask why the labelling is characteristically performed in public, nor what the audience is for. It treats the audience as the aggregate of those who come to hold the label. The present account holds that the audience is not a recipient of the label but the site of its installation, and that the operation is therefore not a communication about the labelled subject but an alteration in what the community is able to distinguish—after which it is able to distinguish so about anyone, and not only about him.

The second concerns what a bystander's silence is. On labelling theory it is a failure to intervene, which is to say a non-event, and the literature on the bystander effect treats it accordingly, as an absence explained by diffusion of responsibility [14]. On the present account it is not an absence at all. It is the completion of the operation, since the demonstration is conducted precisely in order to establish that the categorization may be made without objection, and a silence is the evidence that it may. To call it a failure to intervene is to have described the constitutive element of the mechanism as though it were a missing one.

12.5 *Attribution fails, and responsibility does not*

The categorizer, examined closely, is not the author of the configuration either. He must sustain it continually, since a demonstration that ceases to be performed ceases to persuade, and he cannot easily withdraw, since the position he occupies is the position that would otherwise be available for him to occupy. He is a participant in an arrangement no participant authored.

The consequence for intervention is the one Section 5 predicted. To remove the participant is to leave the role, and the role will be filled. But the consequence must not be permitted to become an exculpation. That responsibility cannot be located exhaustively in individual psychology does not entail that there is no responsibility. It entails that responsibility has been sought at the wrong layer.

13 INSTITUTIONAL INDIFFERENCE FORECLOSES PARTICULARITY AND KEEPS REVISION OPEN

This case is different in kind from the six others, and the difference is the pivot of the paper.

13.1 *Setting aside particularity is the institution's purpose*

Relations are categorized. The subject is processed as an instance of a type, and his particularity is set aside deliberately and as a matter of principle.

This must be stated without hedging. The moral force of legal equality consists precisely in the setting aside of particularity. To treat like cases alike is to refuse to generate the subject as a singular, and the refusal is not an unfortunate side-effect of an otherwise admirable arrangement. It is the arrangement. An administration that attended to the particularity of every case would not be a better administration. It would be a system of favor.

If the reconfiguration of subjects were itself the wrong, then legal equality would be a wrong, and universalism would be a wrong, and procedural justice would be a wrong. This is absurd, and its absurdity is the reason a criterion is required.

13.2 *Sacrifice of the part for the whole is the form every imposition takes*

It is tempting to justify the case by observing that the local generation of subjects is sacrificed so that the general generation may be sustained. The observation is available, it is not obviously false, and it must nevertheless be refused.

The form of the sentence—that the part is given up so that the whole may continue—is the form in which every systemic imposition has justified itself, and an account that accepts it as an explanation has forfeited its standing to reject it as a justification. Section 18 states the constraint and the reason for it.

The legitimacy of this case does not rest upon its service to the whole. It rests upon something else, and identifying what that something is is the task of Sections 17 and 20.

13.3 *Weber's description is accepted and the critical inference declined*

Weber's account of bureaucratic rationality states the case with a clarity that has not been improved upon: administration *sine ira et studio*, without hatred and without affection, is not a deformation of administration but its perfected form, and the elimination from official business of love, hatred, and all purely personal feeling is precisely what makes calculable administration possible [18].

The critical literature has drawn the darker inference. Bauman's argument that the bureaucratic mode of organization is not merely compatible with atrocity but supplies its conditions,

and Arendt's account of the functionary who does his work without thinking, both hold that the setting aside of the particular is what permits the unthinkable to be administered [9, 1].

The present account accepts Weber's description and declines the critical inference, and the ground on which it declines it is the paper's contribution here. The critical accounts treat categorical administration as degrading *because* it sets aside the particular, from which it follows that the arrangement is dangerous in proportion to its success. If that were right, the remedy would be less administration, and the conclusion is one that few of the critics have been willing to draw and that none has been able to make coherent.

The present account holds that the setting aside of the particular is not what makes an arrangement degrading, and it must hold this, since to hold otherwise is to condemn legal equality. What distinguishes the administrative case is that its determinations remain revisable: there is an appeal, a hearing, a proceeding in which the categorization may be contested, and a legislature by which the categories themselves may be altered. The arrangement that reconstitutes the subject furnishes the means by which he may be reconstituted again.

This yields a prediction that the critical accounts do not, and it is a prediction on which the present account may be tested. It is not the categorical form that renders an administration dangerous. It is the closure of the channels of revision, and an administration that categorizes with the greatest severity while keeping those channels open is, on this account, less dangerous than one that categorizes gently and has closed them.

14 THE LOSS OF TRUST CANCELS THE COMMON FUTURE WHILE COOPERATION PERSISTS

14.1 *Trust is the capacity to generate a common future*

The common future is cancelled. The parties continue to transact, to cooperate, and to communicate, and an observer would find the relation intact by every behavioral measure. What has ceased is that they generate anything forward together.

It has been said, and it was correct as far as it went, that trust is not prediction. What was not said is what trust positively is, and the omission left the account thin. Trust is the capacity to generate a future in common. Its loss is therefore not a downward revision of one's estimates concerning another's conduct—such a revision is compatible with a perfectly functional relation—but the withdrawal of the relation from the business of jointly producing what neither party could have specified in advance.

What is lost when trust is lost is the capacity to generate a common future. Cooperation, exchange, and communication may all continue unimpaired, which is why the loss is invisible from outside and is frequently invisible to the parties themselves.

The subject is left without a counterpart for joint generation. He may still act, and his acts

may still be reciprocated, but they are reciprocated within a settled frame rather than taken up into anything new. His generation contracts to the repetition of what is already specified.

14.2 *The degradation is assembled entirely from correct judgments*

This is the feature that distinguishes it from the six others, and it is the feature that will trouble the cases I. There need be no occasion on which anything occurred. Each successive withholding is a reasonable revision in light of the evidence, no step is mistaken, and no party has erred. The degradation is composed entirely of correct judgments.

A degradation may be assembled from steps each of which is rational and none of which is wrong. If this is so, then rationality is, under certain relational conditions, among the mechanisms by which subjects are reconfigured, and this is a consequence the account must accept rather than evade.

14.3 *Trust as estimate registers no loss here; trust as joint generation registers it*

Two literatures treat trust and they treat it as two different things.

The decision-theoretic tradition treats trust as an estimate. To trust is to act on a judgment concerning another's likely conduct, and the rationality of trusting is assessed by the accuracy of the judgment and the payoffs that attend it [8]. On this account, the withdrawal of trust in the face of adverse evidence is not a degradation at all. It is learning, and to describe it as a loss is to have misdescribed a correct inference as an injury.

The sociological tradition treats trust as a mechanism for the reduction of complexity. Luhmann's account holds that trust permits a party to act as though a range of possibilities were foreclosed, and thereby makes possible undertakings that could not survive the entertainment of every contingency [10]. This is nearer to the mark and it remains an account of what trust does *for* a party rather than of what it does *between* them.

The present account holds that trust is the capacity to generate a common future, and the difference from both is not terminological. On the decision-theoretic account there is nothing to explain in the configuration described above, since each withholding was warranted and the outcome is what warranted withholdings produce. On the present account there is a great deal to explain, and the explanation is that a relation may satisfy every party's estimates and cease to generate anything the estimates did not already contain. What is lost is not a belief about the other. It is the standing to undertake, with him, what neither could have specified in advance.

This is the paper's most uncomfortable contribution and it is stated as such. If trust is an estimate, then rational updating cannot degrade a relation. If trust is the capacity for joint generation, then a sequence of rational updatings can extinguish it, no step being mistaken and no

party at fault. The account is committed to the second, and it accepts the consequence, which is that rationality is, under certain conditions, among the mechanisms by which relations are reconfigured. It does not follow that the parties acted wrongly. It follows that the vocabulary of act and fault has, once again, nothing to attach to.

15 THE PATHS DIVERGE AT THE CHANNEL OF REVISION

The taxonomy of Section 7 distinguished the cases by what each removes, by the form of attribution each admits, and by what stands in the way of repair. Having examined them, a fourth column may now be added, and it is the column on which the remainder of the paper turns.

CASE	ALTERATION AT LAYER ONE	PATH TO THE SUBJECT
Betrayal	the relation's past is rewritten	he was mistaken about the conditions of his own generation
War	the relation is recoded as adversarial	he is generated only as enemy, with heightened dynamics
Abandonment	the system ceases to include him in its future	his generation has no recipient; singularity is lost
Withdrawal of response	response is withheld, in coordination	he must supply his own account, and the faculty supplying it is thereby disabled
Public categorization	the rule of discrimination is publicly rewritten	he is generated only as the category, and resistance confirms it
Institutional indifference	relations are categorized by principle	his particularity is set aside; <i>the channel of revision remains</i>
Loss of trust	the common future is cancelled	he has no counterpart for joint generation

One entry in the third column is unlike the others, and it has been marked. Six of the seven paths close the possibility that the subject may be generated otherwise. The seventh does not, and it is the case in which the alteration at the first layer is the most deliberate of all.

Whatever distinguishes it from the six is not the gentleness of the alteration, and is not the good intentions of those who administer it. the casesI argues that what distinguishes it is the only thing that could.

16 THE CANDIDATE CRITERIA FAIL, INCLUDING THE FRAMEWORK'S OWN

The cases have established the difficulty in its sharpest form. Six paths close the possibility of the subject's being generated otherwise; a seventh does not, and the seventh is the one in

which the alteration of generative conditions is most deliberate and most complete. A criterion is therefore required, and before it is offered the candidates that will not serve should be eliminated, since each is more attractive than the criterion that survives.

16.1 *Reconstitution is universal*

This was settled in Section 5 and is repeated because it is the candidate to which the argument most naturally reverts. Every relation reconstitutes its participants. If reconstitution were the wrong, then relation would be the wrong, and the account would have condemned the condition of its own subject matter.

16.2 *Generation may increase under degradation*

This was settled in Section 5 also, and it is worth pressing. A degraded configuration may generate with greater energy than the configuration it displaced, and commonly does. The observation that a relation is generating vigorously is therefore not evidence that it is sound, and a criterion framed in terms of the quantity of generation would return a verdict of health in the cases where health is most absent.

16.3 *Foreclosure of future generation reinstates the utilitarian norm*

This candidate is the most tempting and it must be refused with the most care, because it appears to be the framework's own.

The proposal would be that a symbol which fixes a subject in a position, closing the future he might have had, is a degrading symbol, while one which leaves that future open is not. The proposal is circular, and worse, it reintroduces the very norm the framework exists to displace.

Suppose the wrong done to the abandoned consists in the closure of his future generation. Then a subject who genuinely will not generate again—and such subjects exist, and their existence is not a marginal complication—is not wronged by the closure, since there was nothing there to close. The criterion protects the productive and abandons precisely the party for whose sake the account was constructed.

To replace usefulness with generativity is still to legislate a utilitarian norm. It preserves the structure in which a subject deserves recognition *because* he will bring something about, and merely renames what he will bring about. “He deserves recognition because he can still generate” and “he deserves recognition because he can still contribute” are the same sentence.

The consequence is one the framework must accept and must not soften. Generativity is the phenomenon that this account describes. It cannot also be the reason for which recognition

is owed, and an account that made it so would have dismantled itself in the act of grounding itself.

17 A RELATION THAT CANNOT BE REVISED GENERATES ONE SUBJECT REPEATEDLY

What distinguishes institutional indifference from the six others is not that it reconstitutes less, nor that it generates more, nor that it is more gently administered. It is that the subject it reconstitutes may still be reconstituted again, and by common experience.

The criterion. Degradation is present when the reconfiguration of a subject's conditions of generation forecloses the possibility that those conditions may be further revised through common experience.

The criterion was not selected. It is entailed by the premise, and the entailment should be exhibited rather than asserted.

If the subject is what is generated in the relation, then his continued generation requires that the relation remain capable of taking up what is new. A relation that can no longer be revised by common experience has not ceased to generate—this was the burden of the first correction—but it can generate only what it has already specified. It produces, and it produces the same subject, indefinitely.

A relation that can no longer be revised through common experience does not stop generating subjects. It generates one subject, repeatedly. And that is what it is for a condition of generation to have been closed.

17.1 *Administration keeps the channel open; the six others close it*

Administration by category reconstitutes the subject and sets aside his particularity, and it does both by design. It nevertheless leaves the channel of revision open, and the openness is not incidental to it but is among its constitutive commitments: there is an appeal, there is a hearing, there is a proceeding in which the categorization may be contested, and there is a legislature by which the categories themselves may be altered. The subject may be reconstituted again, and the means by which he may be are furnished by the arrangement that reconstituted him.

Education reconstitutes the student more thoroughly than any of the seven cases reconstitutes anyone, and no one proposes that it is thereby a violence. The student may dispute the teacher, may exceed him, and may become something the teacher did not envisage. The reconstitution is complete and the revision remains available.

The six others close the channel, and they close it by different routes. In betrayal the revision would have to reach a past that is no longer available for revision. In war the subject may be revised only within the category of the adversary. In abandonment there is no counterpart to take up a revision. Where response is withheld, the faculty that would perform the revision has been enlisted in producing what would have to be revised. Where categorization is public, any attempt at revision is received as confirmation. Where trust has been lost, the joint generation in which a revision would consist has itself been withdrawn.

Institutional indifference passes and public categorization fails, and not because the first is gentle and the second cruel. The first keeps open the channel through which its own determinations may be revised. The second closes it, and closes it as the condition of its operation.

17.2 *A harsh relation may pass and a benevolent one may fail*

Three consequences follow, and none is comfortable.

The first is that a relation may be harsh, categorical, and impersonal, and may not be degrading. This will strike some readers as a defect. It is the price of a criterion that can distinguish a court from a mob, and any criterion that could not make that distinction would be worthless whatever else it could do.

The second is that a relation may be warm, attentive, and well-intentioned, and may be degrading, if the attention it supplies is of a kind that forecloses the subject's revision of what he is taken to be. The account is committed to this and the commitment should be stated. Benevolence is not a defense.

The third is the one raised by the case of Section 14. If a degradation may be assembled from steps each of which is individually rational, then the criterion condemns a configuration that no participant erred in producing. The account accepts this. It holds that responsibility is not thereby dissolved but is relocated to the layer at which the conditions of generation are determined, and it acknowledges that the machinery for assigning responsibility at that layer is not well developed, in this paper or elsewhere.

18 THE WALL BETWEEN DYNAMICAL DESCRIPTION AND NORMATIVE JUSTIFICATION

One constraint governs the use of everything above, and it is stated separately because the vocabulary of this paper is unusually exposed to its violation.

The account describes mechanisms. It observes that certain reconfigurations of subjects can be found, across many systems and at many scales, to sustain the conditions under which those systems continue to operate. The observation is available and it is worth pursuing.

What may not be done is to convert the observation into a reason.

That a reconfiguration sustains the conditions of a system's continued generation is a description. It is not a justification, and it must never be permitted to become one. The sentence "the part was given up so that the whole might continue" is the form in which every systemic imposition has ever defended itself, and an account that accepts it as an explanation has surrendered its standing to refuse it as a defense.

The exposure is specific to a framework of this kind and it should be understood precisely. A vocabulary organized around generativity can state, in its own terms and with perfect fidelity, that the destruction of a subject's generative capacity enlarged the generative capacity of the system containing him. In a coupled system this may be true. It is a proposition about dynamics and it may be established or refuted by evidence.

It supplies no reason for anything.

The account is therefore obliged to be able to say, and does say, that a reconfiguration which forecloses a subject's revision is a degradation *even where it can be shown to have enlarged the generative capacity of the whole*. This is sayable only because recognition has not been grounded in generativity, and it is the second time in this paper that the refusal of Section 16 has done necessary work. A framework that grounded recognition in generativity would find the sentence unsayable and would discover, too late, that it had constructed an apparatus for the justification of exactly what it was built to name.

19 THE FIVE PRINCIPLES ARE SATISFIABLE WITHIN A CLOSED RELATION

The criterion of Section 17 does not stand alone. It joins a set of principles the author has developed elsewhere, under the heading of an ethics of relational reproduction, and the relation between the criterion and those principles requires stating, since the criterion is here proposed as an addition to them and an addition must be shown to be needed.

The five principles state the conditions under which a relation may reproduce itself justly.

The ethics of relational reproduction: five principles. A just relational reproduction satisfies five necessary conditions. *Generativity*: it does not foreclose the participants' capacity to keep generating. *Co-reproduction*: the relation is reproduced through joint participation and not by the decision of one party alone. *Non-exploitation*: it does not depend on the instrumentalization or sacrifice of any participant. *Restraint and non-entrenchment of power*: since the generation of value carries power, it generates at the same time the counter-power that restrains power and prevents its entrenchment. *Subject preservation*: it does not purchase unity by effacing the other as a subject; coincidence is not the aim, and the preservation of difference and of the subject is what makes continued generation possible.

The five are not in question here, and the argument of this paper has been conducted within them. What is in question is whether they suffice, and the case of Section 13 shows that they do not.

19.1 *Administration by category satisfies all five and forecloses every subject it touches*

Administration by category may be examined against each of the five, and it satisfies each.

It does not foreclose the participants' capacity to keep generating. It sustains that capacity at the scale of the arrangement as a whole, and it is ordinarily instituted for that purpose. It is reproduced through joint participation, since the categories are legislated and the legislation is answerable. It does not depend upon the sacrifice of any participant, and it is characteristically designed to ensure that no participant is sacrificed to the convenience of any other. It restrains power and prevents its entrenchment, and this is not merely compatible with it but is very nearly its definition. And it does not efface the other as a subject; it declines to attend to his particularity, which is a different thing, and it declines equally for all.

Administration by category satisfies the five principles and collapses the singularity of every subject it touches. Public categorization violates the third and the fifth, and collapses the singularity of one. The two are formally alike in what they do to the subject, and the five principles separate them by pointing to violations in the one case that are absent in the other.

This is not nothing, and it should not be dismissed. But it does not reach the difficulty, and the reason is worth stating exactly.

The five principles are conditions upon a relation *as it presently stands*. Not one of them asks whether the relation remains open to being altered. A relation may satisfy all five and be closed, and a closed relation that satisfies all five will continue to satisfy them, since it is the relation itself that supplies the terms in which the satisfaction is assessed.

The point may be put as a difficulty about self-assessment. Each of the five is a predicate applied to a relation, and the application requires a description of the relation under which the predicate can be evaluated. Where the relation has closed the channel through which its own descriptions might be revised, it furnishes the descriptions itself, and it furnishes them in terms that its own operation has fixed. A configuration that has foreclosed the revision of its categories will report that it does not exploit, since exploitation is defined in terms it has fixed; that it preserves subjects, since what a subject is has been fixed likewise; and that it restrains power, since the power it recognizes is the power its own descriptions admit.

The five principles are not thereby refuted. They are shown to be insufficiently protected, and what protects them is what must now be added.

20 REVISABILITY GOVERNS THE FIVE PRINCIPLES THEMSELVES

Revisability. A relation must preserve the possibility that the conditions of its own generation be revised through common experience. This is the sixth principle of the ethics of relational reproduction, and it is proposed here as this paper's addition to that ethics.

The ground of the principle was given in Section 17 and is restated in a sentence. A relation that can no longer be revised through common experience does not cease to generate subjects. It generates one subject, repeatedly, and that is what it is for a condition of generation to have been closed.

20.1 *The sixth principle governs the five*

Its relation to the five is not that of an item added to a list, and it is not a further excellence a relation might exhibit alongside the others. It does not govern relations. It governs the five principles themselves, and it is for this reason that it belongs to a different order.

The argument is short and it is general. Every principle requires interpretation, and the interpretation is performed by those to whom the principle applies. Where the channel through which that interpretation might be revised has been closed, the principle does not thereby cease to be satisfied. It is satisfied, and it is satisfied in terms the closure has fixed. What was a constraint upon a relation becomes an instrument of the relation, and the conversion requires no bad faith and may be accomplished by parties acting in perfect sincerity.

Any principle that has lost its revisability may degenerate into an instrument of oppression. Not because the principle was mistaken, but because the party who interprets it is the party it was meant to constrain, and a constraint interpreted by its object is not a constraint.

Each of the five, held without the sixth, degenerates in a manner that may be stated exactly, and the degeneration is not a failure to satisfy the principle but a satisfaction of it under a description the closed relation supplies.

Generativity becomes *I define what counts as generation*. This paper has insisted throughout that a degraded configuration generates copiously, and the insistence bears its fruit here: a relation that produces a single subject with unfailing fertility satisfies the first principle by every measure the first principle supplies. The principle does not distinguish fecundity from repetition, and it cannot, since the distinction is unavailable at the moment of assessment and becomes available only across the revision of what is being assessed.

Co-reproduction becomes *jointly, but only in the manner already fixed*. That the parties act together does not entail that anything they do together may alter what they are doing. A relation may be reproduced by every participant and changed by none of them.

Non-exploitation becomes *I define what counts as exploitation*. The configuration of Section 14 exhibits the difficulty in its purest form: no participant instrumentalizes any other, no step is mistaken, and the degradation is assembled entirely from correct judgments. There is no exploiter to be found and the principle has nothing to attach to. What is required is not the search for a violation but the observation that the relation can no longer be revised by what the parties experience within it.

Restraint of power is defeated by its own success, and the counter-power congeals into a power. A counter-power instituted to restrain power is itself a structure, and structures entrench. The account of asymmetry given here bears on the point directly: the asymmetry of a relation continuously produces power, and what prevents that power from settling is not a countervailing structure but the continuous absorption of the power into the relation's ongoing generation. Absorption is work, and work stops. Where it stops, the power need not be seized. It is subsided into, and no one need have done anything for it to have been.

Subject preservation becomes *only a subject answering to my description is worth preserving*. To hold the other as a subject, and to hold him as the subject one has determined him to be, are not distinguishable at any single moment. They are distinguishable only across time, and only by whether he may become someone else.

The five principles ask whether a relation is presently just. The sixth asks whether the relation still permits that question to be raised again. Without the sixth, the five may be satisfied within a closed system, since it is the system that supplies the terms in which their satisfaction is assessed.

This is the general form of what the cases found in the particular case of the symbol. It was said there that what is dangerous in a symbol is not that it exists but that it can foreclose its own revision. The sixth principle is that observation raised to the level of the norm. It is

not directed at symbols. It is directed at every norm whatever, and at every norm that this framework has itself proposed.

20.2 *Power is absorbed into the relation's ongoing generation*

The fourth principle, as formerly stated, holds that the generation of value carries power and that it therefore generates at the same time the counter-power that restrains power. The account of this paper suggests an amendment, and the amendment is offered for consideration rather than asserted.

Power is not, on the account given here, restrained by a counter-power that stands over against it. It is absorbed, which is to say that it is taken up into the relation's ongoing generation and becomes part of what the relation generates in common. The teacher's power over the student is not held in check by an opposing power the student wields. It is absorbed by the joint work of learning, by the reciprocal correction that work permits, and by the growth in which the asymmetry is consumed. We do not notice the power because it is being used up.

Power need not be balanced. It needs to be absorbed, and absorption is continuous work rather than a standing arrangement. Oppression need not be manufactured; it need only cease to be absorbed.

The amendment matters because it locates the failure in the right place. A relation does not become oppressive at the moment someone seizes an advantage. It becomes oppressive at the moment the work of absorption stops, and the advantage that was always present ceases to be consumed. This is why good relations degrade without anyone doing wrong, and it is why the sixth principle is not an optional refinement of the fourth but the condition under which the fourth can be sustained at all. Absorption requires that the relation be able to take up what is new. A relation that cannot be revised cannot absorb.

20.3 *The principle applies to the framework that states it*

A meta-principle that exempted its author would not be a meta-principle. It would be a device for the protection of one norm against the scrutiny it demands of every other, and the exemption would be the first instance of the closure the principle was formulated to name.

The framework is therefore bound by it.

If generative relational being cannot accept the revision of its own theory through new common experience, then it has violated its own sixth principle. The principle is not directed at symbols, nor at the norms of others. It is directed at every norm whatever, and the first norm to which it applies is this one.

The self-application is not a rhetorical gesture and it carries a cost that should be stated. It means that the five principles are not a foundation, and that the sixth is not a completion. It means that a further principle may be required, that one of the six may be shown to be mistaken, and that the framework has no standing to resist such a showing on the ground that its principles are its own.

This is the position the framework in fact holds, and it holds it for a reason that is not modesty.

20.4 *The norm is itself in historical motion*

The ethics of relational reproduction was not derived from an axiom and is not presented as the discovery of a permanent truth. It was developed as an account of the conditions under which relations reproduce justly, under material conditions that the author has elsewhere argued are themselves in motion: the site at which value is anchored has shifted before, and appears to be shifting again, and the norms adequate to one configuration of that anchoring are not thereby adequate to another.

A norm produced within a historical movement remains answerable to that movement. It does not stand outside the process that generated it, surveying it; it is a part of the process, and it is revised as the process discloses what the norm could not have anticipated.

A norm generated within a historical movement must remain revisable by that movement. To hold otherwise would be to claim for the norm a position outside the process that produced it, which is precisely the position that the framework denies to the subject and cannot consistently claim for its own principles.

The addition made by this paper is offered in that spirit and is itself an instance of it. The five principles were adequate to the cases against which they were framed. They were shown, in Section 19, to be inadequate to a case that this paper's analysis brought into view, and the inadequacy was not a defect in their formulation but a limit of the experience from which they were drawn. A sixth is accordingly proposed, and it is proposed under the same condition it imposes: that it be revisable by what is subsequently found.

That the framework has been enlarged in this manner is not a concession. It is the operation of the sixth principle upon the framework itself, and it is the only evidence available that the principle is more than a demand made of others.

The form of the present paper is governed by the same consideration, and the point is easily mistaken. To hold a claim revisably is not to hold it tentatively, and it is not satisfied by an author's willingness to issue a second version. A revision made by an author is an exercise of the interpretive authority the principle is concerned with, and an account revisable only by the hand that wrote it has been opened to no one. What the principle asks is that the conditions

of refutation be supplied to the reader, so that the account may be defeated by what he brings and not merely amended by what its author later concludes. The claims of this paper are advanced without hedging, and the means of defeating them are set out in Section 22. That is what it is for a norm to be held revisably, and it is the whole of what the form of this paper is meant to accomplish.

20.5 *The principle is necessary and insufficient*

It must be said plainly, since a principle that claimed more would be worse than one that claimed less.

The sixth principle is a necessary condition and not a sufficient one, and it does not constitute a practice. It states that the channel of revision must remain open. It does not state how the asymmetries a relation produces are to be absorbed, and an open channel through which nothing passes is an open channel in a relation that is degrading. It says nothing to a subject who has no reserves elsewhere, and for whom the availability of a channel he has not the standing to enter is no availability at all. And it cannot restart what has stopped: revisability is a property of a relation that is generating, not a therapy for one that has closed, and to name the property is not to have supplied the means of its restoration.

What the practice would consist in—by what arrangements the surplus a relation generates is returned to those who generate it, by what means a gaze that has become singular is made reciprocal, and what is to be done where the symbol has already congealed—is not settled here. Section 21 records these as questions the paper leaves open, and they are the questions on which the value of the whole account will finally turn.

21 OPEN QUESTIONS THE ARGUMENT LEAVES

Four questions are raised by the argument and are not answered in it. They are stated here rather than left to be discovered, since an account that conceals the questions it cannot answer has not been given a boundary but a disguise.

21.1 *The degrading symbol generates copiously*

It has been said, at several points and without elaboration, that a degraded configuration generates copiously. The observation was used and was not examined, and it will not survive examination unchanged.

A symbol that fixes a subject in a category does not merely persist. It elaborates. It produces fresh descriptions, discovers new applications, and furnishes those who employ it with an inexhaustible interpretive work in which they are, in a perfectly ordinary sense, creative. The consequence is uncomfortable and it should be faced. One cannot oppose such a configuration

by generating more, since it is already generating, and generating with an inventiveness that a countervailing effort will not easily match.

What distinguishes the generation of a symbol that closes from the generation of one that opens is therefore not the quantity of generation and cannot be. The author's provisional view is that the distinction lies in *where the generation unfolds*—whether in the interpreter, who is thereby enlarged, or through him, in which case what he produces is the symbol's confirmation and not his own. But this is a claim about the phenomenology of interpretation and it requires an argument this paper has not made.

21.2 *The subject cannot confirm itself*

The account has said that a symbol deprives the interpreter and has not said why the interpreter remains.

The answer, if there is one, is likely to be that the subject cannot confirm himself, and that a confirmation from outside is not a comfort he may forgo but a condition of his continuing to be a subject at all. If this is so, then leaving the configuration is not an option he declines but an option he does not have, and the choice presented to him is not between comfort and integrity but between his feeling and his existence, which is not a fair choice and is not usefully described as one.

This is a claim about the constitution of subjects and it is a large one. It is compatible with the premise of the argument above and it is not entailed by it, and the present paper is not the place to establish it.

21.3 *A closed relation reports that matters are in order*

The criterion of Section 17 is stated in terms of revisability, and revisability is a structural property that can be examined from outside. There is reason to doubt that the examination can always be conducted from outside.

A configuration that has closed the channel of revision will not report the closure. It will report that matters are in order, and it will do so sincerely, since the language in which the closure could be named is the language the closure has removed. If this is right, then the criterion, though correct, may not always be applicable by the means the paper has supplied, and something else may be required to detect what it correctly defines. What that something is, the author suspects, is not a further structural test but a form of perception, and the suspicion is recorded without being argued.

21.4 *The conditions of generation have been treated as given*

The account has treated the conditions of relational generation as given, and has asked what happens when they are altered. It has not asked how those conditions come to be what they are,

nor by what dynamics they change of themselves, nor what determines—when a relational system can no longer absorb the asymmetries its own generation produces—whether it will reconstitute its arrangements, reconstitute its membership, or reconstitute its adversaries.

That question is the one the author takes to be the most important the framework faces, and it requires a formal apparatus the present paper does not possess. It is the subject of the metamodel developed separately, and it is the reason that work was undertaken.

22 THE ARGUMENT STANDS OR FALLS WITH ITS PREMISE

The argument is deductive and its structure should be evident. A premise concerning the constitution of subjects entails a consequence concerning what the degradation of a relation is. Two corrections keep the consequence from vacuity: that degradation reconfigures rather than diminishes, and that reconstitution as such is not the wrong. A criterion is then required, and the criterion is shown to be entailed by the premise rather than chosen by the author. The cases exhibit the paths by which the consequence transmits, and they do not establish it.

The paper is therefore conditional upon its premise in a way that admits of no repair from within. A reader who holds that the subject is prior to the relation—that it possesses its properties independently and enters into dealings that leave its constitution untouched—will find that nothing in the argument obliges him. The cases will appear to him as a collection of harms, differently administered, and the criterion will appear as one moral intuition among the available ones, with no particular claim upon him. He will not be wrong to think so. He will be disagreeing with the premise, and the premise is where the disagreement belongs.

What the paper claims to have shown, conditionally upon that premise, is five things.

That the omissions of the vocabulary of act and fault identified in Section 2 are not marginal but structural, and that they follow from its assumption of a subject prior to relation.

That relational degradation admits of a unified account which does not abolish the differences among its forms, the unity residing in what is altered—the conditions of a subject's generation—and the differences residing in the paths by which the alteration transmits.

That the reconstitution of subjects cannot be the criterion of degradation, that generativity cannot be its criterion either without collapsing into the utilitarian norm the framework exists to displace, and that revisability through common experience is entailed by the premise as the criterion that remains.

That the five principles of the ethics of relational reproduction, which the criterion joins, are insufficiently protected without it, since a relation that has closed the channel of its own revision supplies the terms in which its satisfaction of those principles is assessed. Revisability is accordingly proposed as the sixth principle of that ethics, and it is proposed as a *meta-principle* and not as a further virtue standing alongside the five: it governs not relations but the five principles themselves, since any principle that has lost its revisability may degenerate

into an instrument of the party it was framed to constrain. This is the paper's addition to the framework's normative apparatus, and the addition is offered under the condition it imposes, namely that the framework which states it is bound by it, and that a norm produced within a historical movement remains answerable to that movement.

And that distributive justice is limited in principle, and not merely in execution, with respect to the case of abandonment, since distribution operates within the conditions of generation and what abandonment alters is the conditions themselves.

The sharpest of these is the last, and it is the one on which the author would most welcome correction. If the repair of abandonment can be shown to be achievable by transfer—if the supply of resources can be shown to restore the singularity whose loss the account describes—then Section 10 fails, and with it the strongest practical consequence the paper carries.

Objection, counter-example, and correction are welcome at huangwanhong@serendip.ngo. The argument has been set out at this length in order to make it easy to disagree with, and the account is held open for the revision that the sixth principle requires of it.

End of Discussion I. The conditions under which subjects are generated have been treated here as given, and the question of how they themselves change has been deferred. It is the question that matters most, it is not answered here, and it is the subject to which a subsequent discussion would have to turn.

23 REVISABILITY REQUIRES THAT THE CONDITIONS OF REFUTATION BE SUPPLIED

This is a discussion paper, and one objection to the designation should be met at the outset, since it is the obvious one. A preprint may be revised. If the paper's claims are provisional, a subsequent version will say so, and nothing is gained by announcing provisionality in a title.

The objection would be decisive if the designation meant that the author intends to revise. It does not mean that, and the intention to revise is not what the sixth principle of this paper requires. A revision issued by an author is an exercise of the author's interpretive authority. It leaves the terms of assessment where they were, namely with him, and an account that can be corrected only by the party who wrote it has not thereby been opened to anything. What the principle requires is not that the author remain willing to change his mind but that the reader be given the means to defeat him.

The paper is written accordingly. It states, in Section 22, the five claims it makes and identifies which of them it is most exposed on. It names the single finding whose refutation would carry the strongest practical consequence of the whole account down with it. It records, in Section 21, the four questions it cannot answer and the reasons its instruments are inadequate to them. These are not the gestures of modesty. They are the conditions of refutation, and they are set out because an account that supplies no such conditions has not made itself revisable by declaring that it might one day be revised.

The argument is deductive in form. It begins from an ontological premise, draws a consequence that the premise entails, and then examines seven cases in which the consequence may be observed to transmit. The cases are not evidence for the thesis and are not offered as such. If the premise is

rejected, no accumulation of cases will restore the argument; if the premise is granted, the principal claim follows without them.

The cases earn their place for a different reason. A thesis that a relation's degradation is a reconfiguration of its subjects would be empty if the paths of that reconfiguration could not be distinguished from one another, since a unification that abolishes its own differences explains nothing. The function of the cases is therefore to keep the differences, and its adequacy is to be judged by whether the seven paths are genuinely distinct and whether each is recognizable in the terms the argument supplies.

The concluding sections carry the weight. It argues that the reconstitution of a subject is not the wrong, that a criterion is therefore required, and that the criterion is entailed by the ontology rather than selected by the author. The test of this part is a single case. Institutional indifference reconstitutes subjects by category, forecloses their singularity, and is nevertheless the condition of a form of justice we have no wish to abandon. An account that cannot distinguish it from the others has not produced a criterion but a complaint. Whether the distinction offered here holds is the question on which the paper turns.

Two matters are excluded by design. The paper does not argue at the level of extreme cases, since an argument that draws its force from the emotional weight of its examples is not carrying its own weight, and the mechanisms at issue are visible in ordinary relations without recourse to atrocity. And the paper does not derive any political conclusion from its dynamical claims. The distinction between the description of a mechanism and the justification of what the mechanism produces is maintained throughout, and it is maintained deliberately, since a vocabulary of generativity is unusually exposed to the collapse of that distinction. Section 18 states the constraint and the reason for it.

Correspondence, objection, and counter-example are welcome at huangwanhong@serendip.ngo.

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