

The Emergence of Humanitarian Obligation: Recognition, Norm Formation, and Relational Responsibility

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Abstract

Humanitarian ethics is often formulated as a problem of justification: given suffering, vulnerability, or need, what grounds a duty to assist? This discussion paper approaches an earlier and partly different question: how does another being come to matter in a way that can later be articulated as humanitarian obligation? Working within a Generative Relational perspective, the paper suspends the metaphysical status of obligation and treats humanitarian normativity as a historically situated relational phenomenon whose conditions of recognition, valuation, stabilization, and assignment can themselves be investigated. The paper does not propose a universal causal law of moral development. Instead, it offers a revisable analytical scaffold for tracing possible pathways through which a manifestation becomes interpretable, an interpreted condition becomes salient, salience becomes concern, concern becomes socially stabilized norm, and norm becomes an obligation borne by particular actors.

A central hypothesis concerns the role of aesthetic-evaluative experience before explicit normative articulation. A subject may encounter an unfamiliar being or situation and experience a relation, action, or possible trajectory as moving, beautiful, tragic, intolerable, or otherwise significant before possessing a settled account of suffering or duty. Such aesthetic salience is treated neither as an intrinsic property of an object nor as an infallible moral perception. It is understood provisionally as an emergent event within a historically constituted relational subject, shaped by prior relations, symbols, interpretive resources, norms, embodiment, and contingent encounter. This makes aesthetic response both generative and fallible: a real aesthetic experience may arise from a mistaken interpretation, and symbolic or institutional structures may amplify, redirect, or alienate aesthetic recognition.

The paper further explores a dynamical analogy in which local aesthetic and evaluative perturbations may dissipate or, under susceptible relational conditions, propagate across interpersonal, cultural, organizational, and institutional scales. Evolutionary, self-organizing, and institutional mechanisms are treated as possible resources for explaining selection, stabilization, codification, and feedback, while the turbulence-inspired language of perturbation and cascade remains heuristic rather than asserting that social norms obey fluid-dynamical equations. The resulting account distinguishes the genealogy of obligation from the genealogy of intervention authority and emphasizes that norms, once stabilized, alter the relational fields from which they emerged. Throughout, norm emergence is kept distinct from normative justification: the same generative mechanisms that may stabilize humanitarian norms may also stabilize exclusionary or oppressive ones. The paper therefore advances a preliminary and revisable account of humanitarian normogenesis rather than a metaphysical foundation of humanitarian duty.

Keywords: humanitarian obligation; generative relational ethics; norm formation; humanitarian concern; aesthetics; normative salience; relational responsibility; self-organization; cultural evolution; normative cascade; intervention authority

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Status. This discussion-paper draft records an evolving and deliberately revisable stage of the author’s position. Definitions, section structure, formal distinctions, mechanism sketches, and terminology remain subject to revision. The paper does not claim priority for the concepts or mechanisms it discusses. Comparison with existing work in humanitarian ethics, moral psychology, aesthetics, cultural evolution, social-norm theory, self-organization, institutional theory, and complex-systems research remains an essential part of the continuing research. Any dynamical or turbulence-inspired language is used as an analytical and heuristic resource unless a stronger formal claim is explicitly established.

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Statement on the use of language models. The exploratory discussions and preparation of this paper involved OpenAI’s ChatGPT. ChatGPT supported exploratory dialogue, formal reconstruction, argumentative criticism, literature-planning, and drafting in $\text{\LaTeX}$. The author selected the research questions, directed and approved the theoretical commitments and epistemic status of the claims, and bears sole responsibility for the manuscript, including its definitions, formal constructions, arguments, conclusions, and errors. Authorship credit remains with the human author.

1 Humanitarian Obligation as a Generative Problem

This section frames the paper's central problem and specifies the limited sense in which humanitarian obligation is treated as something that can be studied through its generation. The aim is not to replace familiar questions of moral justification, nor to deny that suffering, need, rights, beneficence, or humanity can provide reasons for aid. It is to separate those justificatory questions from a prior genealogical and relational inquiry: how does a condition that occurs to another being become recognizable, significant, normatively articulated, and eventually assigned to particular actors as an obligation? The discussion proceeds from established humanitarian and philosophical starting points to a deliberately revisable Generative Relational scaffold. That scaffold is used to organize the inquiry rather than to assert a universal causal sequence.

Much of the philosophical discussion of aid begins from a condition already described as morally serious and asks what follows from it. Singer's influential famine argument, for example, starts from the claim that suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad and then asks what agents who can prevent such bad outcomes without sacrificing something comparably important are required to do [43]. Humanitarian practice can begin from a different but similarly normatively articulated position. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's principle of humanity states that the Movement seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it is found, while impartiality directs assistance according to need rather than nationality, race, religion, class, or political opinion [31]. These positions differ in philosophical form and institutional setting, but both already contain a bridge from a recognized condition to a reason for response.

The present paper does not dispute the importance of that bridge. It asks what must already have happened for such a bridge to become intelligible, socially effective, and action-guiding. A distant death, an unfamiliar bodily change, a photograph of a wounded civilian, or an appeal issued by an unknown being does not enter every observer's practical world in the same way. Before a duty can be articulated, the situation must in some manner become available to interpretation; before an articulated norm can guide action, the condition must acquire some practical or evaluative significance; and before a particular person or institution can be said to bear the obligation, a further assignment of responsibility is required. Humanitarian practice itself makes these mediating processes visible. Studies of humanitarian organizations emphasize that action takes place within political, institutional, and representational conditions rather than in a normatively empty space, and that even the attempt to motivate distant publics through images of suffering can create ethical trade-offs concerning dignity, rhetoric, and motivation [40, 41]. Fassin's account of humanitarian reason likewise treats contemporary humanitarian concern as historically and politically situated rather than as a context-free moral reflex [19].

The point is therefore not that established theories have overlooked motivation, institutions, social norms, or historical change. They have not. The narrower question is whether these elements can be placed into a common relational inquiry without presuming that the fully articulated obligation was present at the beginning of the process. This shifts attention from the proposition "one ought to help" considered in isolation to the changing conditions under which another being becomes recognizable as someone or something to whom such a proposition can be addressed.

Generative Relational analysis suspends the metaphysical status of obligation. It therefore does not begin by positing an ahistorical obligation that exists independently of relations and is merely discovered when an observer encounters suffering. Nor does it infer the nonexistence of such a metaphysical fact. The present inquiry is more lim-

ited: it studies obligations insofar as they become relationally real through interpretation, expectation, articulation, practice, institutionalization, and action. In this sense an obligation can be historically contingent in its genealogy while still being practically consequential once it is stabilized.

This position is compatible with, but not reducible to, existing work on social and international norm dynamics. Finnemore and Sikkink distinguish stages of norm emergence, cascade, and internalization and emphasize that different mechanisms can operate at different stages [21]. Bicchieri distinguishes social norms from mere regularities by reference to interdependent expectations and conditional preferences, and treats norm diagnosis and change as empirical as well as philosophical problems [7]. These literatures are important precedents for treating norms as generated, transmitted, stabilized, and changed. The paper therefore makes no priority claim for the idea that norms evolve, diffuse, self-organize, or become institutionalized. Its specific concern is the earlier and more heterogeneous field from which humanitarian normativity may emerge: recognition, evaluative and aesthetic salience, relational encounter, symbolic mediation, norm formation, obligation assignment, and authority can develop at different times and through different pathways.

A consequence of this framing is that the statement that a being suffers and the statement that an agent bears an obligation toward that being belong to different analytical moments. Even if B is in an adverse state, H may initially have no interpretive resources by which to recognize the relevant manifestation. Later interaction can change the available evidence and categories. Recognition may then occur without concern; concern may occur without an explicit norm; a norm may exist without being assigned to a particular duty-bearer; and an obligation can exist without conferring authority to reorganize the other subject's relational world. The paper therefore treats these transitions as questions rather than logical entailments.

This distinction also creates room for normative forms that precede explicit propositional articulation. A person may act before being able to state a general rule, or may encounter an unfamiliar being and experience a possible act of rescue as moving, beautiful, tragic, dignified, or otherwise significant before possessing a settled account of the being's suffering. Such cases do not establish that aesthetic experience is morally authoritative. They indicate only that the genealogy of a norm need not begin with an already explicit moral proposition. Later sections explore this possibility cautiously and compare it with evolutionary, self-organizing, cultural, and institutional mechanisms of norm formation.

For purposes of analysis, the paper uses a provisional scaffold that distinguishes the relational field, the manifestations that become available within it, interpretation, recognized adversity, evaluative or aesthetic salience, stabilized norms, assigned obligations, intervention authority, action, and the relational field as subsequently transformed. This is not a causal law or a stage theory. It is an analytical map of distinctions that are easily collapsed when a completed norm is projected backward onto its own history.

Several alternative pathways must remain open. Aesthetic salience may arise before a settled attribution of suffering; action may occur before explicit normative articulation; an institution may deploy a rule from above rather than wait for bottom-up stabilization; and a previously stabilized norm may reshape later interpretation and valuation. Feedback is therefore essential. Stabilized norms and the actions they motivate can alter the relational field, while the transformed field changes the evidence, symbols, institutions, and susceptibilities through which later interpretations and evaluations are generated. Humanitarian normogenesis is thus treated as recursive rather than as a one-way derivation from fact to duty.

The scaffold also allows an important distinction between the genealogy of obligation and the genealogy of authority. A norm can assign H a responsibility toward B because of causal participation, dependency, entrustment, institutional role, or distinctive capacity, while the authority to intervene in B 's relational system may require a different history involving request, consent, mandate, emergency standing, or other relations. Consequently, even a successfully generated obligation does not by itself settle what forms of intervention are justified.

The paper is a discussion paper in a strong sense: its formal vocabulary and mechanism sketches are intended to remain revisable. It does not claim that aesthetic salience is necessary for humanitarian motivation, that every norm begins in a local perturbation, or that cultural evolution and self-organization provide a complete model of moral development. The turbulence-inspired language introduced later is heuristic and structural. Terms such as perturbation, amplification, dissipation, cascade, susceptibility, and regime change are used to formulate questions about nonlinear propagation across relational scales; no fluid-dynamical equation is proposed as a model of society.

The paper also separates explanation from justification. Existing norm-dynamics research already shows that norms can emerge, cascade, and become internalized [21], and social-norm research provides detailed accounts of expectations, conformity, and norm change [7]. Explaining how a humanitarian norm became stable does not show that it is morally valid. The same kinds of propagation, symbolic reinforcement, institutionalization, and feedback can stabilize exclusionary or oppressive norms. Accordingly, the later distinction between norm emergence and norm justification is not an appendix to the argument; it limits the interpretation of every mechanism considered in the paper.

The immediate task is therefore modest but foundational for the remainder of the discussion. The paper asks how recognizability, evaluation, aesthetic salience, norm formation, obligation assignment, authority, and relational transformation may become coupled within humanitarian histories. It treats the resulting account as one possible map of a changing normative field, open to revision by philosophical criticism, historical comparison, empirical research, and cases that do not fit the proposed pathways.

2 Recognition and the Historical Visibility of Suffering

The preceding section treated humanitarian obligation as a generated practical phenomenon rather than as a proposition whose metaphysical status must be settled before inquiry can begin. This section moves one step backward in that genealogy. Before a condition can become a candidate object of concern, norm formation, or obligation assignment, it must become available to an interpreter in some form. The point is not that suffering begins to exist only when it is recognized. A being may already be in an adverse or painful condition while another actor lacks the concepts, evidence, sensory access, or relational history required to identify that condition. The narrower claim is practical and epistemic: what can guide situated humanitarian response depends partly on what can enter the actor's field of recognition at that time.

This dependence is easy to overlook in familiar human cases because many recognition supports are already in place. Human observers share bodily regularities, linguistic conventions, medical categories, institutional practices, and learned expectations about cries, wounds, withdrawal, fear, and requests for assistance. Even in those cases, however, pain is not simply read off from one outward sign. The revised International Association for the Study of Pain definition emphasizes that pain is a personal experience, distinguishes pain from nociception, and notes that verbal description is only one

among several forms of expression; inability to communicate does not negate the possibility of pain in humans or nonhuman animals [38]. Recognition therefore already involves interpretation. Radical heterogeneity makes this mediation harder to ignore.

2.1 Manifestation and Interpretive Access

Let B be a subject or system whose state is not directly available to observer H . What becomes available is some manifestation: a bodily change, vocalization, action, report, pattern of avoidance, change in performance, image, testimony, or other trace. Such a manifestation becomes humanitarially relevant only through historically situated interpretation that may attribute distress or another adverse condition to it. This does not identify the manifestation with suffering, nor recognized suffering with transparent access to phenomenal experience. It keeps visible an intermediate interpretive operation that humanitarian language often compresses into a direct statement such as “they are suffering.”

The observer’s interpretive resources are not limited to explicit concepts. They may include embodied familiarity, professional training, shared language, prior interaction, institutional categories, technological instruments, cultural scripts, and expectations learned through earlier relations. A manifestation can therefore be physically available while remaining practically opaque. Conversely, a manifestation can become highly salient because an established interpretive infrastructure already exists for reading it. This helps explain why distant suffering is not politically or morally visible merely by existing. Chouliaraki’s study of mediated distant suffering asks under what conditions media representations can cultivate forms of care and public action toward people whom spectators do not know and may never meet [14]. Rubenstein’s analysis of humanitarian fundraising imagery similarly shows that representations of suffering do not simply transmit need; they participate in motivational and ethical trade-offs concerning how distant others are portrayed and how publics are moved to respond [41].

The same structure becomes clearer in the alien thought experiment used throughout this research programme. Suppose a previously unknown species changes body colour during an adverse internal state. At t_0 , humans observe the colour transition but possess no reliable relation between that manifestation and distress. The event can be manifestationally real while remaining uninterpreted as suffering:

At an early stage of contact, humans may classify the alien’s colour change simply as an unknown biological variation.

After repeated encounters, humans may observe that the same colour transition occurs after injury, is followed by costly avoidance, predicts loss of function, or is accompanied by communication later understood as aversive. The interpretive result can then change:

After further interaction, the same colour change may instead be classified as a distress-linked state.

Nothing in this transition requires the claim that the adverse state itself began at t_1 . What changed was the human capacity to recognize it. The case therefore motivates a distinction between the reality of a condition and its historical visibility to a particular interpreter.

The distinction also matters when conceptual resources are socially uneven. Fricker’s account of hermeneutical injustice concerns cases in which defects in shared interpretive resources can leave important experiences obscured or difficult to render intelligible [23]. The present paper does not simply redescribe cross-species or alien opacity as hermeneutical injustice, since the agents, power relations, and forms of shared social interpretation may be radically different. The comparison is narrower: in both settings,

practical intelligibility can depend on the availability and distribution of conceptual resources rather than on the mere presence of the underlying experience.

2.2 Recognizability and Practical Addressability

The preceding examples suggest a working distinction between the existence of a condition and its *practical addressability*. The latter term is used here provisionally and without a priority claim. It refers to the degree to which a potentially relevant condition, such as distress, a request for protection, or a specific vulnerability, can enter an actor's action-guiding interpretive field. Practical addressability depends on available evidence, conceptual resources, interpretive capacities, relational history, background knowledge, and practical infrastructure. The point is not to propose a measurable function, but to make explicit that practical recognizability is relationally and historically conditioned.

A concrete obligation can guide conduct only if its triggering distinction is sufficiently addressable to the putative duty-bearer. This is weaker than claiming that unrecognized obligations are metaphysically impossible. The paper suspends that issue. The practical point is that an agent cannot intentionally respond to a distinction that is wholly absent from its interpretable world. If humans have no evidence that the alien colour change has any adverse significance, no concept connecting the change to distress, and no available means of inquiry that would make such a connection intelligible, then the proposition "assist whenever this colour appears" cannot yet function as an action-guiding humanitarian norm for those humans.

This condition is gradual rather than binary. Humanitarian actors frequently act under partial information. They may know that something is seriously wrong while remaining uncertain about diagnosis, cause, identity, or the best form of response. Practical addressability therefore does not require certainty. It requires enough interpretive and evidential structure for a feature to become a possible object of attention, inquiry, precaution, or action. This is important because a too-demanding epistemic threshold would reproduce the opposite error: if assistance required complete understanding of another subject's experience, many familiar humanitarian responses would never become possible.

The mediated visibility of distant war suffering illustrates the same point at a social scale. A civilian population can undergo severe harm while remaining outside the practical horizon of a distant public because there is little reporting, no trusted translation, weak institutional linkage, or no interpretive frame through which the events become salient. Later images, testimony, journalism, diaspora relations, or humanitarian organizations can alter that addressability. The resulting concern should not be described as the discovery of a newly created suffering. It is more accurately described as a change in the relation between an already existing condition and a public capable of recognizing and acting upon it. This difference will matter in later sections when the paper turns from recognition to aesthetic and evaluative salience.

Practical addressability also provides a way to formulate the temporal asymmetry of retrospective judgment. If a manifestation becomes intelligible at t_2 , it does not follow automatically that actors at t_0 possessed the same action-guiding distinction. In schematic form,

A condition that is recognizable at a later time need not have been recognizable to the same degree at an earlier time.

This formulation does not excuse every past failure. It only blocks a simple projection of later conceptual resources backward into earlier practical worlds. A more demanding assessment must ask what evidence, warning, expertise, and opportunities for inquiry

were reasonably available at the earlier time.

2.3 Unrecognizability and Epistemic Negligence

The distinction between genuine unrecognizability and culpable or negligent ignorance is therefore essential. Philosophical work on the epistemic condition of responsibility has long examined when ignorance excuses and when responsibility can instead be traced to earlier failures of inquiry, attention, or precaution [39, 54]. Peels likewise distinguishes different forms and degrees of ignorance and explicitly treats questions about duties to inquire and the roots of culpable ignorance [37]. The present paper does not attempt to resolve those debates. It uses them to resist a crude inference from “the actor did not know” to “the actor could bear no responsibility for not knowing.”

For this discussion, *epistemic negligence* is a provisional label for a family of cases in which a humanitarian actor or institution fails to develop, consult, preserve, or appropriately use interpretive resources that were reasonably available given its role, capacity, warning signals, and the stakes involved. The label is not proposed as a new legal category and is not meant to imply that every failure of recognition is blameworthy. Its purpose is to distinguish two very different histories:

Genuine unrecognizability must therefore be distinguished from epistemic negligence.

In one history, there may genuinely be no accessible evidence, no communication channel, no relevant conceptual analogue, and no practical means by which *H* could have improved its interpretation. In another, evidence may repeatedly appear, affected subjects may communicate, specialist knowledge may be available, and institutions may nevertheless dismiss the manifestations because they fall outside familiar categories or because the relevant subjects lack credibility, status, or political visibility. These cases should not be evaluated together merely because both end in ignorance.

This distinction also prevents the recognizability condition from becoming an incentive for cultivated blindness. If an actor could always avoid humanitarian responsibility by refusing to learn, then ignorance would become a mechanism for normative exclusion. A generative account must instead allow the possibility that interaction first produces an inquiry-oriented requirement, such as monitoring, translation, or epistemic preparation, before it produces a determinate aid obligation. These are distinct possibilities that may arise at different times, and the existence, content, and justification of either remain questions for later sections.

The distinction is especially relevant for institutions whose very purpose gives them unusual capacities of recognition. A medical service, humanitarian organization, state authority, or monitoring body can possess resources unavailable to ordinary observers: trained personnel, translation capacity, historical records, surveillance systems, scientific expertise, and repeated access to affected populations. The relational position of such an institution can therefore alter what counts as reasonably addressable. Ignorance that may be unavoidable for an isolated passer-by can be harder to characterize as unavoidable for an institution organized to notice recurrent harm. This observation does not yet establish a duty to aid; it shows only that the genealogy of humanitarian obligation is inseparable from the genealogy of epistemic capacity.

The argument of this section can therefore be summarized cautiously. A suffering or adverse condition can precede its recognition; recognition depends on historically generated interpretive access; action-guiding obligation requires some degree of practical addressability; and later recognizability cannot simply be projected backward. At the same time, practical unrecognizability must be distinguished from ignorance generated or maintained through avoidable failures of attention and inquiry. These distinctions prepare the next stage of the paper. Even once another being's suffering becomes rec-

ognizable, a further question remains open: why does the recognized condition acquire evaluative weight at all? Recognition can make a condition intelligible without yet making it matter. The next section turns to that transition.

3 Aesthetic Salience before Explicit Norm

The preceding section distinguished recognition from practical addressability. That distinction still leaves a further transition unexplained. A condition can become intelligible to an observer without thereby acquiring practical weight. One may know that another being is injured, distressed, displaced, or otherwise adversely affected and yet remain indifferent. Conversely, one may encounter an unfamiliar being or possible action and experience the scene as moving, beautiful, tragic, intolerable, or otherwise significant before possessing a settled account of the being's suffering. This section isolates that intermediate domain. Its aim is not to derive morality from aesthetics, nor to claim that aesthetic response is a privileged detector of moral truth. It is to examine the possibility that evaluative and aesthetic salience can precede explicit norm, explicit obligation, and in some cases even explicit suffering attribution.

The discussion uses the term *aesthetic* in a deliberately broad and provisional sense. It includes experiences of beauty, ugliness, dignity, tragedy, harmony, disturbance, or the felt fittingness or unfittingness of a possible relation or action. This usage does not imply that all such experiences belong to a single philosophical theory of aesthetics. Nor does it imply that aesthetic response is separable from affect, culture, embodiment, interpretation, or prior norms. The narrower hypothesis is that a relation can become experientially significant before that significance is fully propositionally articulated. Existing work in aesthetics, affect, and moral psychology provides precedents for treating experience and evaluation as more than the downstream product of explicit reasoning, but the specific generative-relational use developed here remains a working proposal rather than a claim of priority or settled theory [15, 53, 27].

3.1 Recognition and Evaluative Significance

Recognition and valuation should first be kept analytically distinct. Suppose that an observer H has adequate grounds to recognize an adverse condition in another being B :

Recognition of an adverse condition can occur before the observer has assigned it any practical or evaluative significance.

This recognition does not yet specify what practical significance the adverse condition has for the observer. The observer may regard the condition as medically interesting, politically irrelevant, deserved, unavoidable, too distant to matter, or simply outside the range of concerns that organize action. The additional movement from recognition to significance therefore cannot be hidden inside the act of interpretation itself.

For present purposes, the paper distinguishes broad evaluative orientation from practical salience: the degree to which another being, a condition affecting it, or a possible relation with it comes to matter within an observer's practical-evaluative field. Neither is treated as a measurable scalar. Recognizing suffering, valuing what happens to the sufferer, and treating the condition as practically salient are analytically distinct, even when they occur together in experience.

The point of this distinction is not that these moments are always temporally separate. In practice they can be tightly coupled. It is that the statement "I recognize that B suffers" and the statement "what happens to B matters to me or to us" have different

contents and can diverge. Humanitarian concern presupposes some movement from intelligibility to significance, but the movement itself requires explanation.

Research on distant suffering makes this gap visible. Chouliaraki's analysis of spectatorship emphasizes that distant suffering is mediated through forms of representation that position audiences differently in relation to the sufferer [14]. Rubenstein likewise shows that humanitarian organizations face trade-offs in how suffering is represented for purposes of motivating publics, including tensions between motivational effectiveness and respect for those represented [41]. These works do not establish the present paper's aesthetic mechanism. They do, however, support a more modest point: suffering does not enter public action merely by existing. It becomes available through historically and institutionally structured forms of attention, representation, and response.

The same distinction can be expressed at the individual level. A physician can identify a painful condition without being aesthetically moved by it; a spectator can be emotionally moved by an image without understanding the relevant causal history; and a bureaucratic institution can recognize a category of need while processing it through routinized procedures with little individual affect. The paper therefore does not propose that all humanitarian normativity originates in aesthetic response. It asks only whether aesthetic-evaluative salience is one possible route by which a condition or relation becomes difficult to treat as practically negligible.

3.2 Aesthetic Significance before Suffering Attribution

The stronger possibility is that aesthetic significance can sometimes arise before a settled attribution of suffering. Consider the deliberately extreme thought experiment introduced in the research programme. A human encounters an unfamiliar alien being for the first time. There is almost no shared relational history, no common language, and no reliable mapping between the alien's manifestations and human categories of pain, fear, joy, or distress. The alien is in a precarious situation and the human can intervene, but the human does not yet know whether the alien's crying-like display, colour change, or bodily movement indicates suffering at all.

Even under this uncertainty, the human may experience a possible rescue as beautiful, moving, or somehow fitting. The relevant aesthetic object need not be the alien's presumed inner state. It can instead be a possible relational transformation:

The thought experiment contrasts two possible continuations of the encounter: leaving the alien as it is and attempting a rescue.

where the two trajectories represent possible continuations of the encounter. The rescue trajectory may become aesthetically significant even before the observer has settled whether the alien's manifestation should be interpreted as suffering.

The thought experiment is not evidence that such reactions are universal, nor does it show that rescue is morally required. Its role is diagnostic. It blocks an overly linear account in which suffering must first be correctly recognized, then evaluated, then converted into norm. Aesthetic salience may have a partially independent route.

This possibility has philosophical precedents without being reducible to them. Dewey's aesthetics treats experience as arising through interaction between organism and environment rather than as the passive reception of an isolated object, and emphasizes the integration of doing, undergoing, affective, practical, and intellectual moments within aesthetic experience [15]. Zajonc's classic argument that affective preferences can in some cases arise before elaborate cognitive inference, and Haidt's social-intuitionist account of moral judgment, both provide empirical and theoretical reasons not to assume that explicit reasoning always precedes evaluation [53, 27]. These sources do not establish that humanitarian concern is aesthetic in origin. They support only the weaker

methodological openness needed here: evaluative significance may sometimes precede its explicit propositional explanation.

This distinction also helps separate aesthetic reality from semantic accuracy. Suppose the alien's crying-like manifestation is, within the alien's own interpretive system, an expression of joy rather than distress. The human nevertheless interprets it as vulnerability and experiences rescue as beautiful. Three claims can then coexist:

A manifestation can be real, the observer's interpretation of it can be mistaken, and the observer's aesthetic response can nevertheless be a real event in the relation.

The human's aesthetic experience is relationally real in the minimal sense that it occurs, affects attention, and can alter action. It does not follow that the human has correctly understood the alien. This distinction therefore reinforces an important boundary for the rest of the paper:

Aesthetic salience therefore does not guarantee semantic accuracy, and semantic accuracy in turn does not by itself establish normative validity.

This makes aesthetic emergence both potentially generative and intrinsically fallible. A later section will examine more closely how a manifestation is "captured" within a historically constituted relational subject and how symbols, inherited norms, and interpretive structures condition that capture.

3.3 Concern and Protective Orientation

Aesthetic or evaluative significance can alter practical orientation without yet becoming an explicit norm. To mark this intermediate possibility, the paper uses *concern* and *protective orientation* in a deliberately weak sense. A concern is not yet a duty. It indicates that an agent's attention and preferences have become organized around what happens to another being or relation. A protective orientation is stronger still in directing the agent toward preserving, assisting, or preventing loss, but it remains analytically distinct from a publicly articulated rule that others are also expected to follow.

A schematic sequence is therefore

One possible pathway runs from aesthetic or evaluative significance to practical salience, then to concern, and finally to a provisional protective orientation.

This is not a mandatory sequence. Concern can arise through religion, role, kinship, political solidarity, fear, reciprocity, institutional training, or explicit moral reasoning without a distinct aesthetic episode. The point is simply to reserve conceptual space for a non-propositional or only partly articulated movement from "this is perceptible" to "this matters" and then to "I am disposed to respond."

Humanitarian practice provides many possible routes through which such concern can be shaped. A photograph, testimony, family resemblance, historical memory, religious imagery, an organizational narrative, or direct encounter can all alter what becomes salient. Fassin's analysis of humanitarian reason is especially useful here because it shows that contemporary humanitarian sentiments and categories have histories and political forms rather than functioning as timeless, context-free reactions [19]. The implication for the present discussion is not that concern is reducible to ideology. It is that even apparently immediate humanitarian feeling can be historically conditioned.

This historical conditioning does not make the experience unreal. A subject can genuinely be moved even if the form of that response has been shaped by prior symbols, stories, habits, and norms. Nor does such conditioning settle whether the response is appropriate. The same mechanisms can direct concern toward some subjects and away from others, or aestheticize violence, sacrifice, domination, and exclusion. The paper therefore treats concern as a stage of practical significance whose genealogy deserves

explanation, not as evidence that the object of concern possesses an independently verified moral status.

The alien thought experiment again clarifies the point. A human may know almost nothing about the being encountered but nevertheless become reluctant to allow its destruction. That reluctance can be generated by the singularity of the encounter, by the perceived fragility of the being, by the possibility of irreversible loss, by analogy with prior rescue relations, or by the aesthetic form of reaching toward a radically unfamiliar other. The paper does not choose among these possibilities at this stage. It records a more limited proposition: practical significance can arise before a complete semantic or normative classification of the subject has been achieved.

3.4 Action before Normative Articulation

If evaluative salience and concern can precede explicit norm, action can do so as well. A familiar justificatory order begins with an articulated norm, proceeds to an assigned obligation, and then guides action. That is only one possible sequence. A different genealogy is also possible: an aesthetic-evaluative response can motivate action, the action can change the relation, and only later can a more general norm be articulated.

In this alternative genealogy, an agent acts because a relation or possible trajectory has become significant before a general norm has been articulated. The action then changes the relational field. Other agents observe it, interpret it, approve or reject it, imitate or sanction it, and perhaps redescribe it as exemplary. Only later can a proposition such as “beings in circumstances of this kind ought to be protected” become explicit and socially stabilized.

The possibility that judgment or action can precede explicit reasoning has obvious affinities with intuitionist accounts in moral psychology. Haidt’s model, for example, gives substantial causal weight to rapid intuitive evaluation and treats explicit moral reasoning as frequently post hoc and socially oriented [27]. The present paper uses this literature cautiously. A humanitarian rescue action is not assumed to be the product of the mechanism proposed by Haidt, and aesthetic salience is not identified with moral intuition. The relevance is structural: later normative exposition need not reproduce the actual order in which evaluative orientation, action, and articulation first appeared.

This motivates a distinction analogous to one familiar from histories of discovery:

The mature exposition of a norm should therefore be distinguished from the historical genealogy through which the norm first became effective.

A community may later justify a humanitarian practice through rights, humanity, dignity, religious duty, solidarity, or universal moral equality. Those articulated reasons can be normatively important and may become causally important in sustaining the practice. This distinction only cautions against assuming that the mature justification must also have been the historical mechanism by which the practice first emerged.

This distinction becomes especially important for the paper’s later dynamical hypothesis. If an initial act can precede explicit norm, then the action itself can become a perturbation in the social field. A rescue can be witnessed, narrated, imitated, symbolized, institutionalized, or rejected. The original actor’s aesthetic-evaluative event can therefore acquire social consequences far beyond the actor’s initial reasons. Before examining amplification, however, the analysis must first address a prior question: why did the encounter become aesthetically significant for this subject at all? The next section turns to the manifestational and historical conditions under which aesthetic experience may emerge, including the possibility that an apparently immediate judgment depends on pre-existing generative structures that were not themselves explicit at the moment of encounter.

4 Manifestational Capture and Aesthetic Emergence

The previous section treated aesthetic salience as a possible precursor to explicit norm and, in some cases, even to settled suffering attribution. That claim immediately raises a prior question. If an aesthetic response can appear before a subject can fully explain why a manifestation matters, what conditions make such a response possible? This section develops a preliminary answer in generative-relational terms. It introduces *manifestational capture* as a working description of the process by which an event, gesture, bodily change, image, or possible trajectory enters a historically constituted subject's evaluative field and acquires aesthetic significance. The term does not imply ownership, faithful decoding, or epistemic success. A manifestation can be captured under a mistaken interpretation, and the resulting aesthetic response can still be experientially and relationally real.

The proposal remains deliberately modest. It does not offer a general theory of beauty and does not claim that aesthetic experience is reducible to a single psychological mechanism. Dewey's account of aesthetic experience already provides an important precedent for treating aesthetic experience as emerging through organism–environment interaction rather than as the passive registration of a self-sufficient property [15]. Empirical aesthetics likewise models aesthetic appreciation as involving perception, classification, cognitive processing, and evaluation rather than a single unmediated act [33]. Sociological work on taste further cautions that aesthetic dispositions are socially and historically conditioned [9]. The generative-relational vocabulary used here should therefore be understood as a way of organizing a particular humanitarian problem: how a manifestation can become significant enough to alter orientation and action before a mature humanitarian norm has been articulated.

4.1 Manifestational Reality and Aesthetic Capture

A manifestation produced by, associated with, or encountered in relation to another being can be relatively simple, such as a bodily colour change, or composite, such as a scene in which an unfamiliar being moves, vocalizes, withdraws, and occupies a precarious spatial relation to an observer. Its occurrence should first be distinguished from the meaning assigned to it. As the previous paper argued, a manifestation is encountered through historically situated interpretation rather than as transparent access to the other's inner state.

For the present paper, an additional transformation matters: a manifestation may also enter an evaluative-aesthetic field. The paper uses 'aesthetic capture' as a working description for the historically situated process by which a manifestation becomes aesthetically or evaluatively significant for a particular subject at a particular time. This is not a proposed psychological module. The same manifestation can be captured differently by different subjects or by the same subject at different moments.

This formulation allows interpretation and aesthetic response to interact without being collapsed. One possible pathway is

In some cases, interpretation mediates the movement from manifestation to aesthetic significance.

but a second possibility is that evaluative significance emerges before semantic articulation is complete:

In other cases, aesthetic significance may arise before the subject can explicitly articulate the meaning of the manifestation, with interpretation following retrospectively.

The second sequence should be read cautiously. It does not imply cognition-free perception or an interpretation-free subject. It indicates only that the subject's explicit ac-

count of what the manifestation means can lag behind the experience that something about the scene is moving, beautiful, disturbing, tragic, or otherwise significant. Existing work that separates rapid affective or evaluative responses from later explicit reasoning provides a nearby precedent for leaving this possibility open [53, 27]. The paper does not identify aesthetic capture with those mechanisms.

The alien example clarifies the distinction. Suppose an unfamiliar being emits a crying-like sound. The sound is a real manifestation. Humans interpret it as distress, although it is in fact associated with joy in the alien's own system. A human nevertheless experiences an available rescue gesture as beautiful. The following conjunction is therefore conceptually possible:

The alien case therefore allows a real manifestation, a mistaken interpretation, and a real aesthetic response to coexist.

Nothing in this formulation implies that the rescue judgment is normatively justified. It shows only that aesthetic experience can be real as an event in a relation while its semantic basis remains fallible. This possibility will later matter when the paper turns to symbolic mediation, propaganda, and aesthetic alienation.

4.2 Pre-Manifest Generative Structures

If aesthetic significance does not simply reside in the manifestation, and if it need not be the result of an explicit moral inference, then the encounter must meet a subject who is already historically formed. The paper uses *pre-manifest generative structure* as a working phrase for the configuration that makes certain aesthetic manifestations possible before a particular event occurs. It should not be understood as latent beauty stored inside the subject. Nor does it imply that a later response was predetermined. It denotes a historically accumulated susceptibility.

The pre-manifest conditions of an aesthetic response may include the subject's history, current relations, embodied and affective state, cultural and conceptual resources, inherited norms, and acquired dispositions. This is an inventory rather than an ontological decomposition, and different theories could partition these conditions differently.

The central hypothesis is that the aesthetic effect of an encounter depends partly on this prior configuration:

A contingent encounter can activate this historically formed configuration and contribute to an aesthetic-evaluative response.

Here the encounter is contingent rather than treated as the complete cause of the response. A subject who has previously been rescued, cared for an injured animal, participated in a religious practice of mercy, encountered narratives of sacrifice, or developed sensitivity to irreversible loss can respond differently from a subject whose history has configured attention and value in another way. The paper does not claim that any of these histories is necessary or sufficient. The broader point is that the apparent trigger of an aesthetic judgment can be much smaller than the historical structure that makes the judgment possible.

This claim has several established analogues. Dewey treats aesthetic experience as continuous with the history of organism–environment interaction and with habits formed through ongoing experience [15]. Leder and colleagues' information-processing model includes perceptual analysis, implicit and explicit classification, cognitive mastering, and evaluation, emphasizing that aesthetic judgment depends on more than the immediately presented stimulus [33]. Bourdieu's account of taste, although directed toward social distinction rather than humanitarian response, demonstrates in a different register how dispositions of judgment can be socially formed and unevenly distributed [9]. The present discussion does not merge these approaches. It draws a restrained

lesson from their convergence: apparently immediate aesthetic response can have a history.

The distinction between explicit reason and generative condition is therefore central:

The reasons a subject can explicitly report are likely to be only a subset of the conditions that participated in the emergence of the response.

This formulation should not be read quantitatively. It marks a structural asymmetry. A subject may sincerely say “I do not know why this moved me” while the response nevertheless depends on a long history of embodied, symbolic, relational, and normative formation. Later narration can recover parts of that history, but it need not exhaust it.

This helps with the apparently extreme alien case. There may be almost no prior history between *H* and this particular alien:

The thought experiment assumes that the human and the particular alien have little or no prior shared relational history.

while *H* still possesses an extensive history of rescue, vulnerability, encounter, loss, difference, or care involving other beings. The relevant pre-manifest structure therefore need not be species-specific. A novel encounter can activate dispositions generated in relations that never previously included the alien.

4.3 Contingent Encounter and Aesthetic Manifestation

The role of contingency can now be stated more carefully. An encounter can be locally small while occurring in a subject whose prior structure is highly susceptible to it. The paper therefore distinguishes an encounter’s apparent immediacy from its full generative history. A photograph, a cry, a gesture of reaching, or the sudden appearance of an unfamiliar being can function as a trigger without being a complete explanation of the response it elicits.

A new encounter can alter the subject’s prior evaluative orientation, producing a local change that was not explicit beforehand. The paper later uses the language of perturbation for this kind of local evaluative change, but at this stage the point is only that aesthetic significance can newly emerge without yet implying social amplification, cascade, or norm formation.

The same event can yield different results in different subjects. The same encounter can generate different aesthetic responses in subjects with different histories, dispositions, and interpretive resources, with no requirement that those responses match. This is one reason the paper avoids treating aesthetic response as a transparent detector of humanitarian value. Heterogeneous histories generate heterogeneous susceptibilities.

At the same time, the encounter feeds back into the structure that conditioned it. A subject who acts, hesitates, witnesses a consequence, or later learns that an interpretation was mistaken does not return unchanged to the previous configuration. Aesthetic experience can also feed back into later history: it can motivate action, alter relations, and thereby change the conditions under which future encounters are experienced. This expresses a minimal generative claim: aesthetic experience can be both historically conditioned and historically conditioning. A rescue may strengthen a disposition toward future rescue; an encounter later judged to have been misread may generate caution; institutional praise or condemnation can alter the symbolic resources through which similar scenes are subsequently captured. The subject who encounters the next manifestation is therefore not the same evaluative configuration that encountered the first.

This recursive structure is important for the paper’s commitment to revisability. The account does not require a hidden, unchanging aesthetic essence behind successive judgments. It permits aesthetic susceptibilities themselves to be generated, revised, ampli-

fied, suppressed, and reorganized through experience. The language of pre-manifest structure should therefore be read dynamically: it refers to what has been generated before the present manifestation, not to a timeless substrate.

4.4 Relational and Trajectory-Level Objects of Aesthetic Judgment

The final step in this section concerns the object of aesthetic judgment. Humanitarian aesthetics need not be directed primarily toward an isolated entity or toward a correctly inferred inner state. The object can be a relation, an action, or a possible transformation of the relational field. This possibility is especially important in the alien thought experiment because the observer may know very little about the alien's phenomenal life while still experiencing one possible continuation of the encounter as more compelling, beautiful, tragic, or fitting than another.

The relevant aesthetic object may be a possible relational trajectory, such as abandoning the encounter or attempting a rescue. The aesthetic event can then concern a contrast between such possible trajectories rather than a judgment that the alien possesses beauty or is suffering. The comparison is qualitative rather than a scalar utility calculation. The subject may experience the act of reaching toward an unknown other, preventing an irreversible disappearance, or entering a relation of care as aesthetically significant even while remaining unsure how the other's internal state should be classified.

This trajectory-level formulation also makes the account safer against one possible misunderstanding. If aesthetic salience attached only to an object's apparent vulnerability, the analysis could easily slide back into anthropomorphic surface reading. By allowing the aesthetic object to be the transformation itself, the framework can represent a response to the form of relation being generated: abandonment, rescue, domination, accompaniment, preservation, withdrawal, or some other possible continuation. The paper does not claim that these relational forms possess objective aesthetic values. It claims only that subjects can encounter possible relational transformations aesthetically, and that such encounters can influence action before a stable norm has been articulated.

The same openness also introduces a serious danger. Violence, domination, sacrifice, exclusion, and war can themselves be aestheticized. A trajectory can appear heroic, sublime, orderly, or beautiful while generating severe harm. Aesthetic response therefore supplies no shortcut from significance to normative validity. Its role in this paper is genealogical: it may help explain how a relation first acquires motivational force. The next section examines how interpretation, symbol, inherited norm, and representational practice can modulate that force, including cases in which aesthetic capture becomes systematically distorted or alienated.

5 Interpretation, Symbol, and Aesthetic Mediation

The preceding section treated aesthetic emergence as an event within a historically constituted relational subject. That formulation leaves an important qualification unresolved. A manifestation does not ordinarily enter aesthetic experience as an uninterpreted sensory datum. It is encountered through languages, symbols, inherited categories, public narratives, institutional classifications, and already stabilized norms. These mediations can make a manifestation more salient, less salient, or salient in a different way. They can also redirect the aesthetic significance of a relation while leaving the underlying event unchanged. This section therefore examines aesthetic mediation at

four levels: interpretation, symbolic modulation, normative modulation, and misrecognition. The aim is not to reduce aesthetic experience to discourse or social conditioning. It is to clarify why aesthetic salience should be treated as generative and fallible rather than as a transparent moral perception.

The argument is especially relevant to humanitarian settings because distant suffering is rarely encountered without mediation. Spectators often meet it through photographs, testimony, reports, institutional appeals, narrative conventions, and classificatory vocabularies. Boltanski's analysis of distant suffering explicitly distinguishes different ways in which representations of suffering can orient spectators toward denunciation, sentiment, or aesthetic contemplation, while Chouliaraki examines how mediated forms organize the spectator's relation to distant vulnerability [8, 14]. Sontag similarly emphasizes that images of war do not carry a single self-interpreting moral meaning and can be situated within competing narratives of sacrifice, heroism, atrocity, or necessity [44]. These works do not establish the mechanism proposed in this paper, but they provide strong reasons to resist any model in which manifestation passes directly and uniformly into humanitarian concern.

5.1 Interpretation and Aesthetic Meaning

Section 4 introduced a working account of how manifestation can become aesthetically significant. Interpretation can mediate this process before, during, or after the aesthetic response.

The manifestation at issue is the manifestation as recognized or classified by the observer, rather than something transparently known in itself. This account is deliberately permissive: semantic interpretation need not temporally precede every aesthetic response. Section 3 already allowed evaluative or aesthetic salience to arise before explicit suffering attribution. The present point is weaker: when interpretation is present, it participates in what the manifestation becomes for the observer.

This distinction matters because the interpretation can be wrong while the aesthetic event remains experientially and relationally real. Consider again the alien thought experiment. Suppose an alien produces a crying-like vocalization and tears. Humans initially classify the display as distress because it resembles familiar human manifestations. Later interaction reveals that, within the alien's own communicative system, the display is associated with joy or social bonding. The initial situation can then be represented as

For example, humans may read a crying-like alien display as distress even if it functions as a joy-like expression within the alien's own interpretive system.

A human observer may nevertheless have experienced a real impulse of tenderness, tragedy, or beauty in the imagined act of rescue. Later correction does not make that earlier aesthetic event nonexistent; it changes its interpretation and genealogy. The response can therefore be genuine for the observer even when the interpretation on which it partly rests is mistaken.

This configuration is important for the paper's broader argument. If humanitarian normogenesis can sometimes draw upon aesthetic-evaluative events, then the genealogy of a norm can include misrecognition. A later norm can emerge from responses whose motivating interpretations were incomplete or false. This does not make the resulting norm invalid by definition, just as a correct interpretation would not make it valid by definition. It reinforces the separation between genealogy and justification.

Interpretation also need not operate only at the level of semantic labels. It can organize relations among actors, causes, temporal sequences, and possible actions. A photograph of a damaged building can be read as evidence of aggression, collateral damage,

resistance, sacrifice, or technological failure depending on the interpretive field into which it is inserted. Sontag's discussion of war photography is useful precisely because the visible content of an image does not settle the political or moral narrative through which it is understood [44]. In the present framework, aesthetic meaning is therefore neither simply contained in the manifestation nor freely imposed by the observer; it emerges through a historically conditioned relation among manifestation, interpreter, and surrounding symbolic structures.

5.2 Symbolic Modulation of Aesthetic Salience

Interpretation is frequently organized through symbols. A manifestation becomes linked to signs, stories, visual conventions, categories of personhood, and remembered exemplars. These symbolic resources can alter what becomes aesthetically salient before any explicit obligation is articulated. A child, a white flag, a ruined home, a uniform, an animal, a national emblem, or an image of an outstretched hand can carry inherited associations that change the evaluative force of an encounter. The relevant claim is not that symbols determine response. It is that they alter the field within which response becomes possible.

The aesthetic response developed in Section 4 may depend jointly on the manifestation, the current relation, the observer's interpretation, and the symbolic and cultural resources through which the scene is understood.

This is a working analytical claim, not a measured psychophysical function: the same visible manifestation can acquire different salience under different symbolic histories.

Humanitarian communication provides a particularly clear domain in which such modulation occurs. The suffering of a distant person is normally made present through selective representational forms: photographs, names, personal stories, statistics, maps, appeals, and narrative roles. Chouliaraki's work on spectatorship emphasizes that mediated vulnerability is presented through particular forms of discourse and visibility rather than delivered to the spectator as unstructured reality [14]. Boltanski's account similarly shows that representations of suffering can invite different modes of affective and political engagement [8]. The paper does not infer from this that humanitarian response is merely constructed by media. Rather, mediation is one component of the relational path through which distant conditions become locally significant.

Symbolic mediation can produce both amplification and attenuation. A named individual may become more affectively present than an anonymous statistical population. A familiar family scene may activate a different evaluative history from an unfamiliar collective ritual. Conversely, a category such as "enemy," "criminal," "illegal," or "collateral" may reduce the aesthetic or affective availability of vulnerability by placing the manifestation inside an already stabilized classificatory frame. These examples should not be read as universal psychological laws. Their analytical role is to show that salience depends partly on the symbolic field through which manifestation is captured.

Bourdieu's account of taste provides an adjacent, though differently motivated, reason to treat aesthetic susceptibility as socially conditioned rather than ahistorical [9]. For the present paper, the implication is limited: what appears moving, dignified, vulgar, heroic, pitiful, or beautiful can be shaped by historically acquired dispositions and social distinctions. The paper does not reduce aesthetic judgment to social position. It uses this literature to resist the opposite simplification in which aesthetic salience is treated as a pristine response untouched by social formation.

5.3 Normative Modulation of Aesthetic Susceptibility

Symbolic mediation becomes especially important when symbols are already connected to norms. Existing nomos can alter aesthetic susceptibility, while aesthetic experience can in turn reinforce or destabilize nomos. The relation is therefore potentially recursive rather than one-directional. The pre-manifest configuration introduced in Section 4 should therefore be understood as including not only cultural symbols but also inherited normative expectations already available to the observer.

Existing norms can shape aesthetic salience, while aesthetic responses and the actions they motivate can later reinforce or transform norms.

This formulation does not imply that norms determine aesthetic response or that aesthetic response necessarily changes norms. It identifies a possible feedback pathway. A society that has stabilized rescue, hospitality, martyrdom, sacrifice, military honor, purity, or social hierarchy as normatively significant may also cultivate aesthetic forms through which those relations become admirable, repellent, tragic, or invisible. Repeated aesthetic responses can then contribute to the reproduction of the underlying norm.

The humanitarian case illustrates the constructive side of this loop. Institutional education, commemorative practices, religious traditions, humanitarian imagery, and public narratives may make certain gestures of protection more readily apprehensible as worthy or beautiful. Once such aesthetic susceptibility is widely distributed, individual rescue actions can be more easily recognized as exemplars of an already intelligible form. Yet the same recursive structure can stabilize very different normative fields. Military spectacle can make sacrifice appear sublime; hierarchical order can be experienced as graceful or natural; punitive violence can be framed as cleansing or deserved. The political history of beauty gives ample reason not to identify aesthetic force with moral correctness [9]. Boltanski's discussion of the aesthetic topic in relation to distant suffering likewise shows that aestheticization does not straightforwardly entail beneficent action [8].

This recursive relation also complicates the language of a "first" aesthetic perturbation. Even when a subject experiences a response as sudden and unexplained, the field in which that response appears may already contain norms that have trained attention and evaluation. Conversely, a genuinely unusual encounter can unsettle the inherited norm and make a previously unintelligible relation salient. Aesthetic emergence is therefore neither merely downstream from norm nor simply prior to it. One working hypothesis of this paper is that aesthetics and nomos can participate in each other's generation across time.

The hypothesis should remain modest. It does not establish that every norm has an aesthetic component, that aesthetic experience is required for norm change, or that the direction of influence can be identified in every historical case. Some humanitarian obligations are legally imposed, professionally inherited, strategically accepted, or institutionally assigned with little aesthetic uptake. The purpose of This formulation is to keep open a pathway that a purely propositional account of norm formation might overlook.

5.4 Misrecognition and Aesthetic Alienation

The fallibility established above has a stronger implication. If aesthetic response is mediated by interpretation, symbols, and norms, then the relational significance of a manifestation can be systematically redirected. For this paper, *aesthetic alienation* is used only as a working label for cases in which a subject's aesthetic-evaluative response is

substantially organized through a mediating structure that obscures, reverses, or displaces important features of the underlying relation. No priority or settled technical meaning is claimed for the term.

The simplest form is the alien example already introduced. A joyful alien display is misclassified as pain, generating tenderness and a rescue impulse. Here the aesthetic response is not false in the sense of never having occurred; the interpretation that helped generate it is inaccurate. A more politically consequential form occurs when a suffering manifestation is inserted into a symbolic frame that makes the suffering aesthetically unavailable or transforms its valence. The injured enemy can appear as deserved defeat rather than vulnerability; the destruction of a city can be narrated as technological spectacle; the disciplined arrangement of bodies can appear orderly while concealing coercion; sacrifice can become beautiful in ways that suppress attention to the agency or suffering of those sacrificed.

Sontag's analysis of representations of war is useful here because images of violence can be made to support different narratives, including condemnation, heroism, necessity, and sacrifice [44]. Boltanski likewise observes that representations of distant suffering do not simply transfer suffering to spectators but offer particular modes of emotional and linguistic engagement [8]. These literatures do not imply that spectators are passive products of representation. They show why aesthetic and affective orientation must be treated as mediated and contestable.

A schematic contrast can be expressed as

The same manifestation can accordingly acquire different aesthetic meanings when it is mediated by different symbolic, interpretive, and normative contexts.

For analytical purposes, the manifestation can be held constant while the symbolic, interpretive, and normative fields differ. This does not imply that manifestations are ever encountered independently of those fields in practice; it simply makes visible the possibility that differences in aesthetic response can arise from differences in relational mediation rather than from differences in the event alone.

The humanitarian consequence is twofold. First, aesthetic salience can help a distant or radically heterogeneous being become significant before a settled norm exists. Second, the same aesthetic capacity can be redirected toward indifference, fascination, triumph, disgust, or admiration of domination. Aesthetic generativity is therefore ethically ambivalent. It may contribute to humanitarian concern, but it offers no independent test of the justice of the norm that eventually forms.

This ambivalence prepares the transition to the next section. Once an aesthetic-evaluative event has occurred, whether through relatively adequate recognition, symbolic mediation, or even partial misrecognition, it can remain local and disappear or enter wider relational circulation. The next section examines that second possibility through the deliberately heuristic language of perturbation, persistence, susceptibility, nonlinear amplification, and cross-scale cascade.

6 Local Aesthetic Perturbation and Relational Amplification

The previous sections treated aesthetic salience as a possible event within a historically constituted relational subject. That account still leaves open what happens after such an event occurs. A locally arising response may remain private, disappear without consequence, alter one immediate interaction, or enter a wider relational field in which it is repeated, translated, contested, amplified, and eventually connected to more stable forms of collective evaluation. This section develops a preliminary vocabulary for that intermediate dynamics. The aim is not to derive humanitarian norms from a physical

model. It is to ask whether concepts such as perturbation, dissipation, susceptibility, nonlinear amplification, and cascade can help describe how a locally situated aesthetic-evaluative event may acquire consequences at larger relational scales.

The discussion draws only limited analogies from threshold and cascade models of collective behavior. Granovetter showed that aggregate outcomes can depend sensitively on the distribution of individual thresholds even when average dispositions appear similar [26]. Watts later demonstrated, in a stylized network model, how small initial shocks can under some structural conditions trigger large cascades [48]. Centola and Macy further showed that social diffusion can require reinforcement from multiple contacts rather than transmission through a single exposure [12]. These works do not establish a theory of humanitarian normogenesis, still less a theory of aesthetic experience. They are useful here because they make explicit a general point that the present argument needs: the macroscopic fate of a local event can depend on the relational configuration into which it enters.

6.1 Aesthetic Judgment as Local Perturbation

A particular encounter can produce a change in an actor's immediately preceding aesthetic-evaluative orientation. The discussion uses 'local aesthetic perturbation' to refer qualitatively to such a change; no cardinal measure of beauty or salience is assumed.

This formulation should not be read as requiring a cardinal scale of beauty or moral feeling. The notation marks change, not a settled metric. A subject who unexpectedly experiences a rescue trajectory as moving, beautiful, dignified, or intolerable to abandon has undergone a local evaluative reconfiguration relative to the prior state of that subject. The change may be slight, difficult to verbalize, or immediately action-guiding. It may also be revised moments later.

Calling this change a *perturbation* is deliberately modest. The term indicates that an encounter can locally disturb an existing evaluative configuration without implying that the resulting orientation is external to the subject's history. Section 4 treated aesthetic emergence as dependent on a historically formed pre-manifest structure together with a contingent encounter. The present section begins one step later. Once a local evaluative change has occurred, the actor may alter conduct, narration, attention, or representation, thereby changing what becomes available to others.

Such a local change may motivate action, alter the relational field, and become newly observable to other actors.

The second actor does not receive the first actor's evaluative change directly. What becomes available is a transformed manifestation: a rescue act, a story, an image, a donation, a refusal, a public statement, or some other relational consequence. The next aesthetic-evaluative event is therefore regenerated rather than simply copied.

A schematic transmission can be written

Any response by a second actor is regenerated through that actor's own history, relations, interpretations, symbols, norms, and dispositions rather than copied unchanged from the first actor.

The paper does not propose an empirically specified transmission law. Its central caution is that what travels through a social field is not an invariant quantity called "beauty." Each receiving subject reconstitutes significance through a different relational history, interpretive system, symbolic field, normative background, and aesthetic susceptibility. Propagation therefore includes transformation from the beginning.

6.2 Dissipation and Persistence

Most local evaluative events do not become social norms. A person may be moved by a particular scene, act once, tell nobody, and return to prior routines. Another person may encounter the action but experience no corresponding salience. A third may recognize the action as admirable yet regard it as exceptional rather than generalizable. The possibility of dissipation is therefore as important as the possibility of amplification.

Threshold models offer a useful limited analogy. In Granovetter's formulation, actors differ in the amount of prior participation required before they join a collective behavior, and small changes in the distribution of those thresholds can produce markedly different aggregate outcomes [26]. The present discussion does not equate aesthetic response with threshold choice. It borrows the weaker insight that the persistence of a local disturbance can depend on how many surrounding actors are already disposed to respond, how they are connected, and what additional reinforcement is available.

For present purposes, a local perturbation may be called *persistent* when its relational consequences continue to generate evaluative or practical differences beyond the initiating encounter. Persistence can occur through memory, repeated interaction, imitation, narration, symbolic condensation, organizational recording, or material changes produced by the initial action. Conversely, a perturbation dissipates when these pathways fail to reproduce sufficient downstream difference.

A simple distinction is therefore

A local evaluative change may dissipate without wider consequence, or it may persist by altering relations and generating further evaluative responses.

The first line does not imply literal erasure from history, and the second does not imply growth. A perturbation can persist while becoming weaker, reversing valence, or changing object. A humanitarian rescue initially admired as spontaneous generosity may later be interpreted as paternalism; an image initially received as tragic may later become a political symbol with quite different significance. Persistence is thus historical continuation of consequence, not faithful reproduction of an original evaluation.

This distinction also prevents the paper from treating emotionally intense events as intrinsically norm-generating. Intensity at the originating subject does not determine social persistence. A quiet practice repeated across a dense relational field may matter more than an extraordinary but isolated experience. The relevant unit is therefore not simply the intensity of the initial response, but the relation between the perturbation and the field through which its consequences circulate.

6.3 Relational Susceptibility

The term *relational susceptibility* is used here as a provisional descriptor for the readiness of a relational field to transform a local evaluative event into further evaluative, behavioral, or organizational changes. It is not introduced as a measurable universal variable. In a particular empirical model one might define a response coefficient, but this discussion paper uses susceptibility only to direct attention to the state of the field rather than to the initiating event alone.

A field may be more susceptible when existing relations already contain partially compatible dispositions, unresolved tension, salient symbols, dense communication channels, trusted intermediaries, or institutions capable of converting attention into repeatable action. It may be less susceptible when actors are isolated, the manifestation is unintelligible, the proposed response conflicts sharply with stabilized identities, or available institutions block rather than carry the new orientation. The same encounter can therefore have very different consequences in two historically different fields.

Watts's cascade model is instructive at this level of abstraction. It shows that global cascades generated by small shocks are rare and depend on particular combinations of network structure and vulnerable nodes rather than on the magnitude of the initial shock alone [48]. Again, humanitarian concern is not being modeled as a Watts cascade. The analogy supports a narrower proposition: a local initiating event can be insufficient by itself to explain whether large-scale change follows.

The present framework can represent this dependence schematically as

Whether persistence occurs depends on the state of the relational field, including its institutions, symbols, norms, interpretive resources, and patterns of connection.

Relevant conditions include relational topology, symbolic and communicative resources, stabilized normative structures, and interpretive capacities distributed across the field. Different social settings may exhibit different mechanisms, and the same field can change its susceptibility over time.

This historical dependence is especially important for humanitarian cases. A photograph, testimony, rescue act, or unfamiliar being may be encountered after decades of religious teaching, legal development, prior wars, humanitarian organization, media conventions, and accumulated public memory. The apparent "small trigger" is therefore not the full generative cause of the ensuing response. It enters a field already structured by earlier relations. Conversely, a manifestation of comparable severity can remain almost normatively invisible when no corresponding interpretive or organizational pathways have been generated.

6.4 Nonlinear Amplification

The language of nonlinearity is useful when combined perturbations produce effects that cannot be represented as the simple sum of isolated responses. Social reinforcement provides one familiar route. Centola and Macy distinguish simple contagions, for which one exposure may suffice, from complex contagions that require reinforcement from multiple contacts [12]. In such settings, a second or third encounter can matter differently from a first because the previous encounters have already changed the receiving actor's relational and interpretive state.

A schematic expression is

The resulting dynamics can be nonlinear in the ordinary qualitative sense: two influences acting together may have effects that are not well represented as the simple sum of their separate effects.

This formulation is a structural analogy, not a quantitative claim about aesthetic magnitude. It marks the possibility that repeated, socially corroborated, or institutionally endorsed encounters transform the conditions under which later encounters are interpreted. One person's rescue can appear eccentric; ten similar rescues can make a previously unarticulated possibility socially legible; an organizational endorsement can then alter expectations again. The field is changed by the very events whose later effects it conditions.

Amplification can also occur through symbolic compression. A complex encounter may become represented by a photograph, phrase, ritual, emblem, or exemplary story that travels more readily than the original event. Such compression can increase reach while simultaneously erasing context. Section 5 already established that symbolic mediation can redirect aesthetic salience. The same mechanism that makes propagation possible can therefore amplify misrecognition or aesthetic alienation as well as humanitarian concern.

Media attention, organizational endorsement, and institutional access can introduce further positive feedback. Increased visibility creates more encounters; more encoun-

ters increase the probability of additional evaluations and actions; those actions can themselves become newsworthy or institutionally legible. Yet feedback can also be negative. Counter-narratives, fatigue, distrust, competing crises, or institutional resistance can arrest or reverse a cascade. Nonlinear amplification therefore names a class of possible dynamics, not an expectation that humanitarian concern grows monotonically once initiated.

6.5 Cross-Scale Normative Cascades

The final step in this section concerns scale. A local aesthetic-evaluative event occurs at the level of a situated subject, but its consequences can move through dyads, small groups, organizations, public discourse, and institutions. A possible cascade can move from individual evaluation through interpersonal circulation and collective salience to organizational uptake and institutional consequence, without implying a mandatory sequence.

This formulation is not a mandatory order. Institutional actors can initiate signals that travel downward; organizations can create the first public representation of a previously obscure condition; local practices can bypass mass publics; several scales can change simultaneously. The purpose of the sequence is to emphasize that what later appears as a stabilized humanitarian norm may have a genealogy distributed across multiple relational levels.

The term *cascade* is used with particular care. In network science, cascades describe propagation under specified models of local interaction [48, 12]. In fluid turbulence, cascade has a technically different meaning concerning transfer across scales within a dynamical flow; Frisch provides a standard account of that physical setting [24]. This paper does not identify social-norm formation with turbulent fluid dynamics. The turbulence-inspired analogy is restricted to four heuristic features: local perturbation, dissipation, cross-scale transfer, and the possibility that macroscopic consequences depend nonlinearly on the state of the surrounding field. No conservation law, energy spectrum, inertial range, or Navier–Stokes description is asserted for humanitarian normativity.

This restriction matters because the cascade metaphor can otherwise create the appearance of explanation where only resemblance has been shown. The present claim is weaker: a generative relational account should remain open to the possibility that a small aesthetic-evaluative event can have disproportionately large consequences under some relational conditions, while the same event dissipates under others. Existing threshold and diffusion models demonstrate that such sensitivity is possible in social systems in general [26, 48, 12]; whether and how it occurs in the formation of particular humanitarian norms remains an empirical and historical question.

The next section turns from propagation to persistence over longer horizons. Amplification alone does not explain why one emerging practice survives while another disappears, why some forms become repeatable social expectations, or how a field without central design acquires relatively stable normative order. Those questions require attention to variation, selection, imitation, coordination, memory, and self-organization.

7 Evolutionary and Self-Organizing Normogenesis

Section 6 described how a locally arising aesthetic-evaluative perturbation may persist, dissipate, or become amplified across a relational field. Amplification, however, is not yet norm formation. A widely circulated response can remain episodic, fashion-like, strategically induced, or tied to one exceptional event. This section therefore turns to a

different problem: how some evaluative practices become repeatable, expected, transmissible, sanctionable, and sufficiently stable to function as social norms. The discussion is deliberately synthetic. Cultural-evolutionary theory, evolutionary game theory, institutional economics, and research on self-organization already contain extensive accounts of how practices and expectations can emerge and stabilize. The present paper does not claim priority for those mechanisms. Its narrower task is to ask how they may connect a previously discussed local perturbation to a more durable humanitarian normative order.

The term *evolutionary* is used broadly and cautiously. It does not imply that humanitarian norms are genetically selected, that cultural change follows one Darwinian algorithm, or that whatever survives is thereby good. Boyd and Richerson's work on cultural inheritance is useful precisely because it distinguishes cultural transmission from genetic inheritance while examining how learning, biased transmission, and population-level processes can generate durable cultural variation [11]. Young's evolutionary analysis of social norms likewise emphasizes self-enforcing patterns sustained through coordination, sanctions, signalling, and adaptive response rather than through a single source of normativity [50]. Bowles's institutional account adds an important recursive point: institutions shape individual behavior and preferences while institutions themselves evolve through individual actions, technological change, and historical contingency [10]. These literatures provide resources for describing persistence and selection; they do not establish that a humanitarian norm is normatively justified merely because it has evolved.

7.1 Variation and Selection of Normative Practices

A generative account requires variation before it can speak meaningfully about selection. After a humanitarian encounter, different actors may respond differently even when exposed to similar manifestations. One actor may assist; another may withdraw; a third may narrate the event publicly; a fourth may regard assistance as inappropriate; an organization may codify a response that none of the individuals initially articulated. The relevant population of variation therefore need not consist of explicit propositions. It can include practices, narratives, classifications, expectations, emotional orientations, organizational routines, and forms of sanction.

At any time, a social field may contain several competing normative practices or orientations rather than a single candidate norm. These variants need not be mutually exclusive, propositionally explicit, or commensurable. A rescue practice, a norm of non-interference, a religious injunction, an administrative routine, and a media narrative may all participate in the same field while operating through different mechanisms.

Selection in this setting should not be reduced to biological fitness or conscious optimization. A variant may persist because it coordinates expectations, attracts imitation, reduces uncertainty, aligns with existing symbols, receives institutional reinforcement, is easier to remember, benefits powerful actors, or becomes associated with successful collective action. Young's account of norm evolution is valuable here because it shows how repeated interaction, local information, mistakes, and stochastic stability can favor some conventions over others without requiring central design [50]. Cultural-evolutionary models similarly distinguish several transmission biases and learning processes through which some cultural variants spread more readily than others [11].

These variants can be differentially retained, copied, sanctioned, forgotten, or transformed under historically specific selective conditions. Such conditions may include network structure, sanctions, institutional access, resource asymmetry, symbolic resonance, technological media, demographic composition, prior norms, and chance events;

no single selection mechanism is assumed across societies. Because those conditions themselves change, selection is endogenous to the relational system rather than an external filter acting on a fixed population.

This point is especially important for the aesthetic mechanism proposed earlier. A local response such as “rescuing this unfamiliar being appears beautiful” does not become a norm merely because it occurs. It becomes one variant among others. It may be forgotten, reframed as exceptional heroism, opposed as dangerous sentimentality, repeated as a practice, or generalized into a broader expectation. The proposed contribution is therefore modest: aesthetic perturbation may generate novelty within a normative field, while evolutionary and institutional mechanisms can help explain why some of that novelty is retained and transformed. Neither step establishes normative validity.

7.2 Imitation, Coordination, and Social Stabilization

Variation becomes socially consequential when actors orient not only to the underlying event but also to one another’s responses. A person who would not independently have donated may do so after observing trusted peers; an organization may adopt a practice because counterpart organizations have already normalized it; actors may conform because deviation has become reputationally costly. At this stage, the object of learning is partly social expectation itself.

Young defines social norms as patterns of behavior that are self-enforcing within a group: actors conform, expect others to conform, and often prefer to conform conditional on those expectations [50]. Bicchieri likewise emphasizes empirical and normative expectations in diagnosing norm-governed behavior [7]. The present account does not adopt either framework wholesale, but both support a distinction that matters here: repeated humanitarian action can become stable not because each participant independently re-derives its value from first principles, but because expectations about others’ conduct become part of the relational environment.

A provisional expectation structure can be written

Stabilization can depend on what actors value, what they expect others to do, what they think others will approve or sanction, and the relations and norms already in place.

Coordination and social stabilization can depend on what actors think others will do and how others will respond to deviation. The paper does not propose a behavioral law for these expectations.

Imitation alone is not sufficient. A practice can spread quickly without becoming normative, and a norm can remain stable even when actors privately reject it. Stabilization becomes more plausible when repeated conduct is coupled with shared expectations, social sanction, public articulation, recognizable exceptions, and institutional memory. A humanitarian practice may therefore move through several partially overlapping states: unusual action, admired example, repeated practice, expected response, sanctionable omission, and eventually codified obligation. These are possible trajectories rather than required stages.

The same mechanism can stabilize exclusion. If a population expects others not to assist an out-group, if assistance is socially punished, and if inherited narratives portray non-assistance as proper, then self-enforcement can support a norm of abandonment. Evolutionary stability is therefore normatively ambivalent. The analytical question is how a pattern becomes self-reproducing; the justificatory question of whether it ought to be reproduced remains separate.

7.3 Cultural Transmission and Normative Memory

Norms persist across time only if some of their generative conditions survive the disappearance of particular actors and events. Cultural transmission supplies one route. Stories, rituals, images, legal texts, educational practices, commemorations, organizational procedures, and exemplary figures can preserve traces of earlier evaluative transformations and make them available to subjects who did not participate in the initiating encounter.

Boyd and Richerson treat culture as an inheritance system in which socially acquired information can be transmitted across individuals and generations through multiple learning processes [11]. The present argument uses this insight at a high level of abstraction. What is transmitted in humanitarian normogenesis need not be a proposition such as “help strangers.” It may be a repertoire of recognizable scenes, emotionally charged symbols, remembered exemplars, conventional classifications of victims, routines for donating, or institutionalized expectations concerning who should respond.

This suggests distinguishing event memory from normative memory. Event memory concerns what happened; normative memory concerns how previous generations learned to notice, evaluate, narrate, and respond to similar situations. The term is used here for the distributed historical resources through which later actors inherit such ways of noticing and responding.

This does not posit a centralized social memory. Normative memory may be dispersed across persons, media archives, legal institutions, religions, professional training, organizational routines, and material infrastructures, and it is transmitted through historically available social processes.

Normative memory can preserve a humanitarian orientation, but it can also preserve distortion. A symbolic repertoire may continually reproduce one population as innocent and another as threatening; an institution may remember one historical emergency while forgetting structurally similar suffering elsewhere; a heroic rescue narrative may erase the agency of those assisted. Cultural transmission therefore introduces both continuity and path dependence. What future actors find aesthetically or normatively salient is partly conditioned by the memory structures inherited from earlier relations.

This historical inheritance also clarifies why an apparently spontaneous response need not be historically unprepared. A person encountering an alien for the first time may have no prior relation with that species, yet may inherit centuries of stories, practices of care, religious imagery, legal norms, and aesthetic forms through which rescue has already become intelligible. The first interspecies encounter can therefore activate a pre-existing normative memory without being determined by it. Novelty and inheritance coexist.

7.4 Self-Organized Normative Order

The term *self-organization* is useful when relatively stable order emerges from interacting actors without a single actor specifying the final pattern in advance. It should not be confused with absence of institutions, absence of power, or absence of deliberate action. Ostrom’s work on common-pool resources is a classic demonstration that users can under some conditions create durable, self-organized and self-governed institutional arrangements rather than relying exclusively on privatization or centralized state control [36]. The substantive domain differs from humanitarian normativity, but the analytical lesson is relevant: local rule formation, monitoring, adaptation, and institutional persistence can emerge through repeated relational processes.

For the present paper, self-organized normative order denotes a condition in which distributed practices and expectations become mutually reinforcing enough to reproduce a recognizable normative pattern without requiring one originating authority. It is treated as a recursive process in which action changes relations and expectations, which in turn reshape later norms and action.

This feedback remains intentionally incomplete: interpretation, valuation, sanctions, institutions, and material constraints can enter at every step. Its purpose is to show how repeated action can alter the environment in which later action becomes intelligible and expected.

Such order may appear spontaneous at one scale while depending on deliberate interventions at another. Charitable associations, religious communities, professional networks, media organizations, and local governments may each intentionally shape conduct even when no actor controls the emergent macro-pattern. Bowles's emphasis on the coevolution of behavior and institutions is particularly useful here: institutions affect preferences and incentives, while actions and historical events alter institutions themselves [10]. A generative relational account should therefore resist a binary opposition between "spontaneous" and "designed" norm formation.

The humanitarian case also makes power impossible to ignore. Some actors possess disproportionate capacity to define exemplary cases, finance organizations, control communication channels, sanction deviation, or transform informal expectations into official rules. A norm can therefore be self-organizing in the sense of lacking a single designer while still being strongly shaped by unequal relational power. Likewise, a practice that appears culturally evolved may have been repeatedly reinforced by coercive institutions. Self-organization describes a mode of pattern formation, not a guarantee of voluntariness or justice.

The limited conclusion of this section is therefore structural. Local aesthetic and evaluative perturbations can generate variation; social interaction can subject that variation to heterogeneous forms of selection; imitation and coordination can stabilize expectations; cultural transmission can preserve normative memory; and repeated feedback can produce relatively durable order without a single comprehensive designer. These mechanisms are well represented in existing literatures and are not claimed here as new discoveries. Their role in the present discussion is to clarify one possible bridge between local aesthetic salience and socially stabilized humanitarian normativity.

The next section turns to the complementary pathway that this evolutionary picture cannot capture by itself: deliberate institutional deployment. States, international organizations, religious authorities, professional bodies, and other centralized actors can promulgate rules, create incentives, allocate resources, and reshape the field from above. Humanitarian normogenesis is therefore likely to involve recursive coupling between bottom-up emergence and top-down deployment rather than either mechanism in isolation.

8 Institutional Deployment and Hybrid Normogenesis

The preceding section considered normogenesis in settings where repeated local interaction, cultural transmission, imitation, and self-organization can stabilize conduct without a single actor specifying the final normative order in advance. Humanitarian norms, however, are also shaped by actors that possess concentrated capacities to articulate rules, allocate resources, authorize practices, impose sanctions, and define institutional roles. States, international organizations, religious authorities, professional bodies, philanthropic organizations, and large humanitarian institutions can all alter the normative

field deliberately. A generative account therefore needs a complementary pathway in which norm-related change is partly *deployed* through institutional power rather than only selected from distributed local practices.

This section uses *deployment* as a descriptive term for deliberate attempts to alter conduct and expectation by means of formal rules, organizational procedures, resource allocation, public signalling, training, or sanction. The term does not imply that the deployed rule is legitimate, socially accepted, or eventually internalized. Existing institutional and norm-dynamics literatures already distinguish formal from informal constraints, strategic compliance from deeper socialization, and norm emergence from later cascade and internalization [35, 21, 13]. The present discussion draws on those distinctions to clarify how deliberately introduced rules can enter the generative field developed in earlier sections.

8.1 Centralized Norm Deployment

A norm-relevant institutional intervention can begin before a corresponding social norm is broadly stabilized. A public authority may define eligibility for protection, allocate a relief budget, establish a professional duty, require a reporting procedure, or authorize an agency to intervene even when the surrounding population remains divided or indifferent. In such cases, institutional articulation is not simply the final expression of an already internalized social consensus. It can itself become an input into later relations.

Let C denote an institutionally empowered actor or coordinated body. A deliberately deployed intervention can be represented schematically as

Centralized norm deployment can involve an articulated rule, resources and administrative capacity, sanctions or incentives, and public or symbolic manifestations of the rule.

Centralized deployment typically combines an articulated rule with organizational resources, implementation mechanisms such as sanctions or incentives, and public or instructional forms through which the rule becomes recognizable. This is not intended as an exhaustive institutional model; its purpose is to prevent a formal norm from being treated as a proposition detached from the material and communicative capacities that make institutional deployment possible.

North's distinction between formal rules and informal constraints is useful here because formal rules can complement, modify, or replace informal patterns while remaining embedded in a wider field of conventions and expectations [35]. Finnemore and Sikkink likewise emphasize that norm entrepreneurs and organizational platforms can actively promote new norms rather than merely register changes that have already occurred [21]. These literatures make it unnecessary to portray centralized deployment as a novel GR mechanism. The narrower claim is that deliberate deployment constitutes one generative pathway by which a norm can begin reshaping the relations from which later social acceptance, resistance, or reinterpretation emerge.

The humanitarian case makes the distinction especially visible. An institution may require personnel to assist a category of affected persons before every participant personally experiences the relevant suffering as salient, beautiful to relieve, or morally compelling. Institutional action can therefore reverse the sequence considered in earlier sections. Instead of

In a bottom-up pathway, evaluative orientations and practices can gradually contribute to a more stable social norm that then guides action.

one possible pathway is

In a top-down pathway, a formal rule can guide action first and, through changed practices and relations, later influence social evaluation and expectation.

The second sequence should not be read as inevitable internalization. Institutional rules can generate compliance without changing valuation, and they can provoke resistance rather than acceptance. The point is only that action induced by institutional rules can create new encounters, expectations, competencies, and symbolic associations through which later valuation becomes possible.

8.2 Codification and Enforcement

Codification changes the mode in which a normative claim exists within a relational system. An informal expectation may be articulated in organizational policy, legal text, professional guidance, treaty language, administrative criteria, or standard operating procedure. Such codification can increase durability, portability, and enforceability, but it does not by itself demonstrate that a corresponding social norm has been stabilized.

For analytical purposes, it is useful to distinguish several states that are often compressed into the word *norm*. These are not proposed as a universal taxonomy. They indicate different ways in which a normative pattern may be present:

For analytical purposes, it is useful to distinguish socially practiced norms, explicitly articulated norms, formally codified norms, and norms that have become more deeply internalized.

where the superscripts refer respectively to socially circulating expectation, explicit articulation, formal institutional codification, and internalized orientation. A single humanitarian rule may occupy several of these modes at once, and movement among them need not be linear.

This distinction helps preserve four non-equivalences:

Promulgation, compliance, social stabilization, and internalization should not be treated as interchangeable stages or states.

A law can exist without widespread compliance; compliance can be produced by sanctions without normative acceptance; a stable social practice can persist without formal law; and an internalized norm can survive even when formal enforcement weakens. North's institutional analysis explicitly treats formal rules, informal constraints, and enforcement as interacting but analytically distinct components of institutional order [35]. This is particularly important for humanitarian analysis because the existence of a legal or organizational commitment does not by itself reveal why actors comply, how beneficiaries become visible, or whether the underlying evaluative orientation has changed.

Enforcement also has generative effects beyond deterrence. A formal rule can change which actions are publicly observable, which categories are administratively recognized, which organizations receive resources, and which deviations become sanctionable. It can therefore reshape the evidential and symbolic environment in which future judgments occur. At the same time, enforcement can crowd out, redirect, or harden earlier forms of voluntary concern. Work on the interaction between laws, incentives, and social norms shows that formal policy can interact with honor, stigma, social meaning, and perceived community values rather than operating as a purely material price system [6]. The present paper does not adopt a single model of these interactions; it uses them to resist the assumption that codification merely records a pre-existing norm.

8.3 Institutional Feedback and Internalization

Once a rule is deployed, institutions can alter the relational conditions under which later actors learn what counts as appropriate conduct. Training, repeated role performance, professional socialization, public messaging, administrative routines, and organizational memory can all make a previously unfamiliar norm easier to enact and rec-

ognize. Checkel's work on institutional socialization is useful precisely because it distinguishes mechanisms and outcomes that are often collapsed under the word *internalization*. Actors may learn a role and comply with expected conduct without accepting the norm as intrinsically right, while deeper socialization can involve a change in interests, identities, or taken-for-granted standards of appropriateness [13].

Formal norms can change action and relations, which can then alter evidence, concepts, evaluative orientations, and later normative expectations.

Formal rules can alter expectations, symbolic or conceptual resources, and evaluative orientations, but the resulting feedback is non-deterministic. Rules can be internalized, strategically obeyed, contested, ignored, reinterpreted, or converted into counter-norms. Institutional feedback therefore creates opportunities for normogenesis rather than guaranteeing a particular outcome.

The expressive dimension of law and policy is relevant to this feedback. Bénabou and Tirole analyze how laws can function not only through explicit incentives but also by conveying information about societal values and thereby interacting with social sanctions and norms [6]. In the language of the present paper, institutional deployment can modify the manifestational field in which actors infer what their community regards as worthy, shameful, obligatory, or normal. This can change aesthetic and evaluative susceptibility as well as behavior. Conversely, a rule perceived as alien, hypocritical, or strategically imposed may fail to generate such feedback or may generate an oppositional aesthetic and normative response.

The humanitarian significance of this mechanism is that an institution can help create the very recognitional and practical capacities through which later obligation becomes experienced as ordinary. Repeated exposure to a protected category, professional training in recognizing need, organizational stories of exemplary rescue, and routinized procedures for responding to distress can make a humanitarian relation progressively more legible. Yet such legibility is not evidence of metaphysical necessity. It is partly an effect of historically accumulated institutional practice.

8.4 Bottom-Up and Top-Down Coupling

The distinction between self-organized emergence and centralized deployment is analytically useful but empirically porous. Social practices can pressure institutions to codify norms; formal rules can reshape the incentives and meanings that sustain those practices; organizational actors can selectively amplify some bottom-up concerns while suppressing others; and institutionalized norms can later be reinterpreted through local experience. Humanitarian normogenesis is therefore better represented as recursive coupling than as a choice between spontaneous order and centralized design.

Humanitarian normogenesis can therefore couple bottom-up and top-down processes recursively: social practice can contribute to formal codification, while formal codification can reshape later social practice and evaluation.

but the cycle can also begin with institutional deployment rather than prior social consensus. A state or organization may introduce a rule for strategic, legal, administrative, reputational, or humanitarian reasons; later practice can then stabilize, transform, or reject the rule. Conversely, a locally emergent pattern can remain socially powerful without ever becoming formal law. The hybrid account therefore treats bottom-up and top-down processes as partially independent sources of variation that can become mutually reinforcing or mutually disruptive.

This coupling also complicates the idea of a single origin for a humanitarian norm. A later observer may encounter a mature norm that appears self-evident because formal law, professional routines, educational narratives, aesthetic representations, and ordi-

nary expectations now point in the same direction. The apparent unity can conceal a heterogeneous history of local concern, strategic institutional action, legal codification, resistance, reinterpretation, and selective reinforcement. What is experienced at t as a stable humanitarian obligation may therefore be the temporary stabilization of several genealogical pathways rather than the expression of one originating moral cause.

The limited conclusion of this section is that institutionalization should be treated as generative rather than merely preservative. Deliberate rule deployment can reorganize conduct and resources before a norm is socially internalized; codification can change visibility and sanctionability; repeated institutional practice can modify expectations and evaluative susceptibility; and bottom-up and top-down processes can recursively reshape one another. None of these mechanisms establishes the normative validity of the resulting order. They clarify only how humanitarian normativity may acquire durability, operational force, and apparent obviousness within a historical relational field.

The next section turns from these mechanisms to genealogy more directly. Once a norm has been stabilized, its articulated content can obscure the heterogeneous pathways through which it arose. Two communities may endorse apparently identical humanitarian rules while those rules derive from substantially different histories of concern, strategy, coercion, law, or institutional learning. Normative articulation and normative genealogy therefore require separate analysis.

9 Genealogies of Humanitarian Norms

The preceding sections described several pathways through which humanitarian normativity may acquire social and institutional force. Local aesthetic and evaluative disturbances may propagate, dissipate, or become amplified; practices may be selected and remembered through cultural and self-organizing processes; and institutions may deliberately codify, enforce, or socialize normative expectations. Once these processes have converged, however, a mature norm can appear deceptively simple. A sentence such as “persons displaced by war should be protected” may look as though its present formulation transparently expresses the reason for which it exists. A generative relational analysis treats that appearance cautiously. The articulated content of a norm and the history through which that articulation acquired practical force are related but non-identical objects of inquiry.

This section therefore turns from mechanisms of norm formation to the genealogy of stabilized humanitarian norms. The term *genealogy* is used here in a deliberately limited sense. It refers to the historically extended configuration of practices, evaluations, institutions, symbols, conflicts, and relational changes through which a norm became recognizable, repeatable, and action-guiding. It is not used to imply that exposing a contingent origin automatically invalidates the norm. The genetic fallacy would be reproduced in reverse if a norm were rejected merely because its history included strategy, institutional interest, coercion, or accident. The narrower claim is that genealogy can matter for understanding what a norm means in use, how stable it is, which actors experience it as binding, and how it may later be revised.

9.1 Normative Articulation and Normative Genealogy

A norm can be represented at one time by an articulated formulation such as a legal provision, organizational principle, public maxim, or ordinary-language expectation. Normative articulation refers here to the explicit formulation through which a norm is stated, defended, taught, or codified at a given time.

denote, schematically, the publicly available articulation of norm N at time t . The corresponding genealogy can be denoted by

Normative genealogy refers more broadly to the histories, relations, evaluations, practices, symbolic resources, and institutional developments through which the norm became effective.

This broader genealogy includes relevant histories, relations, evaluative orientations, actions and practices, symbolic or conceptual resources, and institutional developments. It is not intended as a complete causal specification; its purpose is to prevent an articulated proposition from being mistaken for the whole process through which that proposition became normatively effective.

The distinction is especially important where normative articulation occurs after practical innovation. Earlier sections allowed the possibility that an actor may first experience a relation or trajectory as significant, act on that evaluation, and only later articulate a general rule. In such a case, the eventual proposition can retrospectively organize the history of action without having been its initial cause. The same point applies at collective scale. Practices of assistance, religious charity, professional routines, political solidarity, or emergency improvisation may precede the general language through which a community later explains them. Finnemore and Sikkink's influential account of norm emergence, cascade, and internalization already emphasizes that norms are actively constructed through agents, persuasion, socialization, and institutional processes rather than appearing fully formed [21]. The present distinction adds only a methodological caution: the order in which a norm is later stated need not reproduce the order in which its practical and evaluative conditions arose.

Accordingly,

An articulated formulation of a norm should not be mistaken for the whole genealogy that produced and sustains it.

This non-equivalence is compatible with strong continuity between articulation and genealogy. A later formulation can summarize, stabilize, or make explicit a pattern already distributed across practice. It can also substantially reorganize that pattern by introducing new categories, duty-bearers, exceptions, or sanctions. Genealogy therefore concerns not only origins but repeated re-articulations through which the norm's practical identity is maintained.

9.2 Shared Norms under Heterogeneous Origins

Two communities can endorse apparently similar humanitarian formulations while embedding them in different relational histories. One community may connect protection of strangers to religious charity; another to memories of displacement; another to professional humanitarian identity; another to constitutional or treaty commitments; and another to strategic or reputational interests. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive. The same institutional rule can be sustained simultaneously by several motives and historical pathways.

Two communities can therefore articulate apparently identical humanitarian norms while those norms have substantially different genealogies.

This formulation does not imply that the two norms are wholly different, nor that textual similarity is unimportant. It states only that common wording does not exhaust the conditions under which the norm is understood, reproduced, or contested. Acharya's account of norm localization is relevant here because it emphasizes that actors receiving transnational norms do not merely accept or reject them; they can reconstruct, graft, and modify them in relation to prior local beliefs and institutional practices [1]. What

appears at a later stage as diffusion of one norm can therefore contain significant variation in locally generated meaning and support.

This matters for durability. Suppose two institutions formally protect the same class of beneficiaries. In one case, the norm is supported by dense professional practice, public identification, organizational memory, and legal commitment. In another, the same formulation is maintained mainly because of temporary strategic incentives. If those incentives disappear, the second norm may be more vulnerable to rapid reinterpretation or abandonment. The comparison is intentionally hypothetical; the paper does not propose a general stability function from genealogy. It suggests only that present articulation can underdetermine future resilience.

The same point applies to humanitarian universality. A norm may be articulated in universal language while remaining unevenly embedded across different relational fields. This does not by itself refute the universal claim, because the validity of a norm and the sociology of its uptake are distinct questions. It does, however, mean that a generative account should not infer a homogeneous normative structure merely from convergence in official vocabulary.

9.3 Counter-Norms and Normative Contestation

Normogenesis is not a one-directional process of increasing agreement. Humanitarian norms can provoke counter-norms, rival classifications, competing assignments of responsibility, and disputes about who counts as a protected subject. A community may accept a general injunction to help while contesting whether a particular population belongs within its scope. It may accept protection while rejecting intervention, accept assistance while rejecting redistribution, or reinterpret a humanitarian category through security, sovereignty, kinship, or reciprocity concerns.

For present purposes, a counter-norm can be represented simply as a normative pattern N^- whose practical implications conflict with or restrict another norm N^+ within the same field. Their interaction need not be logically contradictory at the level of abstract propositions. The conflict may arise through competing classifications or priorities:

Humanitarian fields can also contain counter-norms, for example a norm favoring protection of displaced persons alongside a norm restricting protection to recognized members, producing contested classifications and actions.

Such contestation can destabilize a norm, but it can also make its meaning more explicit, generate new distinctions, or produce institutional revision. Wiener's work is particularly relevant because it treats contestation not merely as norm breakdown but as a potentially norm-generative social practice and emphasizes the continuing contestability of meaning in use [49]. The present paper adopts only the weaker implication that disagreement can participate in norm formation and transformation. It does not adopt a general theory in which all contestation is normatively desirable or legitimating.

Counter-norms also interact with the aesthetic and symbolic mechanisms discussed earlier. Images of vulnerability can be reframed as signs of threat; assistance can be represented as solidarity or as dangerous indulgence; restraint can be aestheticized as compassion or as weakness. The same manifestational field can therefore support different normative cascades depending on the symbols, histories, and classifications through which it is captured. Contestation is consequently not restricted to explicit argument. It can occur through competing narratives, images, rituals, institutional routines, and forms of attention.

A generative genealogy should therefore preserve unsuccessful and oppositional pathways rather than reconstructing a mature norm as the inevitable endpoint of history.

The history of a humanitarian norm includes not only the practices that survived but also rejected proposals, excluded classifications, counter-mobilizations, and moments at which the norm could have developed differently. This point will later matter for relational responsibility, because the actors who stabilize one interpretation of a norm can also narrow the alternatives through which responsibility might otherwise have been assigned.

9.4 Stabilization and Revision

A norm can be considered relatively stabilized when it is repeatedly reproduced across several parts of a relational field: actors expect it, institutions encode it, practices make it familiar, deviations become recognizable, and some combination of social, organizational, or legal responses supports its continuation. No single criterion is treated here as necessary or sufficient. Stabilization is better understood as a pattern of mutually reinforcing supports than as a binary property.

A norm may be stabilized by a combination of expectations, repeated practices, symbolic supports, legal codification, sanctions or incentives, and normative memory. This is only a heuristic list of possible supports. A norm can remain influential with some elements weak or absent, and the elements can conflict with one another.

Stabilization should not be confused with finality. A mature norm remains exposed to new encounters, reinterpretations, institutional changes, counter-norms, and shifts in the relational field:

Because these supports and the surrounding relations change over time, stabilized norms remain open to revision.

Revision can involve changes in content, scope, priority, exceptions, or the actors to whom an obligation is assigned. A humanitarian principle may persist while the recognized beneficiary category changes; a legal rule may remain formally stable while its meaning in use changes; or a once-central norm may lose practical force despite textual continuity. In this sense, stability is a historically maintained achievement rather than evidence that the norm has become metaphysically necessary.

Nor does revision imply moral progress. A norm can become more inclusive, more exclusionary, more precise, more coercive, or simply differently embedded. The framework therefore suspends any equation between persistence and justification, or between later form and superior validity. Its narrower function is to keep normative history open to the possibility that stability, contestation, and revision are all generated within changing relational conditions.

The resulting picture is genealogically plural. Humanitarian norms can be articulated after action, localized through pre-existing practices, deployed by institutions, opposed by counter-norms, and stabilized through heterogeneous combinations of expectations, memory, law, symbols, and material organization. A present norm can therefore be relationally real and practically powerful without possessing a single origin or a single mechanism of reproduction. The next analytical problem is more specific: even when such a humanitarian norm has stabilized, it does not yet determine who, in a concrete relational field, bears the corresponding obligation. The following section therefore turns from the genealogy of norms to the relational assignment of obligation.

10 Relational Assignment of Obligation

The preceding sections have described how a humanitarian norm may become visible, evaluatively salient, socially stabilized, and institutionally articulated. Even a mature

norm, however, leaves a further problem unresolved. A statement such as “persons in severe distress should be protected” does not by itself identify which person, organization, state, or institution bears the corresponding obligation in a concrete case. The move from a general humanitarian norm to a determinate duty-bearer is therefore not treated here as a trivial substitution of an agent into a pre-existing rule. It is a further relational operation.

This section develops a preliminary account of that operation. The aim is not to offer a complete theory of remedial responsibility, nor to claim priority over existing work on vulnerability, special obligations, structural responsibility, or role-based duties. Those literatures already provide substantial accounts of why responsibilities may attach differently to differently situated agents. Goodin, for example, develops a vulnerability-based account of responsibility that extends beyond voluntarily assumed commitments [25]; Young’s social-connection model addresses forward-looking responsibility arising through participation in structural processes [52]; Miller explicitly treats causal responsibility, capacity, community, benefit, and other connections as relevant to assigning remedial responsibility [34]; and Shue emphasizes that rights-grounded duties still require allocation among duty-bearers and institutions [42]. The narrower contribution here is to place assignment within the paper’s generative-relational sequence and to ask how a norm becomes attached to an actor occupying a particular historical position in a relational field.

10.1 Obligation-Bearing Positions

A humanitarian norm can remain practically indeterminate even after its beneficiary and protected condition are recognized. If several actors could respond, a further question arises: why should the obligation attach to one actor rather than another, or attach to them with different scope or intensity? The paper uses the term *obligation-bearing position* as a working description for the relational configuration through which an actor becomes a plausible bearer of a particular obligation. The term does not imply that occupying such a position is sufficient to establish moral validity.

Let i denote a possible duty-bearer and B a beneficiary or affected subject. A relational position can be represented schematically as

An actor’s obligation-bearing position can depend on several relational features, including causal participation, present control over relevant conditions, dependency, entrustment, practical capacity, and institutional or social role.

These features include causal participation, present control over relevant conditions, dependency, entrustment, capacity to respond, and institutional or social role. They are not ranked or treated as a metric; the point is that obligation assignment can depend on several relational dimensions that need not converge.

The assignment problem can then be represented only at a schematic level as

The assignment of obligation is therefore treated as a contextual judgment that relates a stabilized norm and the current relational history to the actor’s particular position; the paper does not posit a universal conversion rule.

this proposed mapping is intentionally left unspecified. The paper does not assume a universal function that converts causal involvement, dependency, capacity, or role into a scalar duty. Different normative orders may weight these relations differently, and the same actor can occupy several conflicting positions at once. A state may be causally implicated in displacement while also possessing unique rescue capacity; a humanitarian organization may have professional competence but no legal authority; a nearby individual may have immediate capacity but no continuing institutional responsibility.

This relational framing is adjacent to the philosophical literature on special obligations. Such literature has long emphasized that duties can differ because actors stand in different relationships, make commitments, or occupy particular roles rather than merely because beneficiaries instantiate the same morally relevant property [32]. The present account remains more modest. It does not infer that every relationship generates a valid special obligation. It asks instead how a stabilized humanitarian norm becomes practically indexed to agents whose positions in the relational field differ.

10.2 Causal Participation and Acquired Responsibility

One important pathway of assignment is prior participation in producing or sustaining the condition to which humanitarian response is directed. Where actor i has contributed to B 's vulnerability, the relation between aid and responsibility differs from the case of a wholly uninvolved stranger. The response may be interpreted not simply as optional beneficence but as repair, cessation of contribution, mitigation, or a forward-looking responsibility to transform conditions in which the actor is implicated.

Young's social-connection model is a particularly useful neighboring account because it separates responsibility for structural injustice from a narrow liability model based solely on isolating individual fault. Actors can share forward-looking responsibility because their actions participate in structural processes that produce unjust outcomes, even where no single actor can be identified as the sole cause [52, 51]. The present paper does not import that model wholesale into humanitarian aid. It draws only the more limited lesson that causal and structural connection can alter the relational position from which an obligation is assigned.

Causal participation is nevertheless neither necessary nor sufficient for all humanitarian obligation. A rescuer may have had no role in generating a disaster, while an actor that contributed historically to vulnerability may lack present capacity to provide the relevant remedy. The assignment problem therefore cannot be reduced to retrospective causation. It also concerns the powers and dependencies produced by the current relational field.

For this reason, the section uses *acquired responsibility* cautiously to describe cases in which an actor comes to occupy a responsibility-relevant position through subsequent control, involvement, or acceptance of another's reliance. Consider an actor that did not cause a crisis but later acquires exclusive control over an evacuation route, border crossing, medical infrastructure, or information channel. That change in control can transform the practical relation:

An actor can acquire new responsibility-relevant standing when changes in the relational field give that actor greater control over conditions important to another subject's future.

This formulation does not establish that control automatically generates a moral duty. It identifies a relational change that a normative system may treat as responsibility-relevant. Goodin's vulnerability-based account is useful in this respect because it emphasizes that responsibilities can arise where others are vulnerable to one's actions or choices, not only where explicit promises or contracts exist [25]. The generative-relational addition is temporal: vulnerability to an actor's choices can itself be created, intensified, transferred, or removed as relations change.

This distinction also helps prevent a common collapse between blame and responsibility. An actor can occupy a strong remedial position without being blameworthy for the original condition, while a blameworthy actor may no longer be the actor best placed to perform a particular rescue. Humanitarian assignment can therefore combine backward-looking and forward-looking relations without treating them as identical.

10.3 Dependency and Entrustment

Dependency provides a second pathway through which obligation-bearing positions can become differentiated. If B 's basic options, safety, movement, or access to essential resources depend substantially on i , then i 's choices acquire a distinctive relational significance. Such dependency may be longstanding, voluntarily created, institutionally imposed, or generated by emergency conditions. It may also arise after aid has already begun.

Dependency is used here when changes in one actor's choices materially alter another subject's effective options or access to important conditions. The concept does not require numerical measurement; it indicates only that one actor's control over relevant conditions can reshape another actor's practical possibilities.

Dependency becomes especially important when combined with *entrustment*. A request for rescue, the transfer of care, reliance on a humanitarian organization, or acceptance into a protective institution can alter the relation between beneficiary and responder. Entrustment may be explicit, as in a request for assistance, or institutionally mediated, as where a professional or public body has accepted responsibility for a class of persons. In either case, the historical sequence matters. A relation of entrustment is not merely the existence of need; it is a change in who is authorized, expected, or relied upon to respond.

The present account therefore distinguishes dependency from entrustment:

Dependency and entrustment are distinct: a subject can depend on an actor it never selected or trusted, while an actor can be entrusted with a task without becoming the subject's sole dependency.

A subject can be dependent on an actor it never trusted or selected, and an actor can be entrusted with a task even where the beneficiary is not wholly dependent on that actor. The distinction becomes important later when the paper separates obligation from authority. Reliance can contribute to an obligation-bearing position while leaving open whether the responder has legitimate permission to transform the beneficiary's wider relational system.

This point also guards against a circular argument. Aid can itself create dependency. If the fact of dependency automatically justified expanded control by the aid provider, an intervention could generate the very relation later invoked to legitimate further intervention. A generative account must therefore preserve the genealogy of dependency:

Aid-generated dependency may create new responsibilities, but it does not by itself authorize an expanded power to control the beneficiary.

This formulation does not deny that new responsibilities can arise once dependency exists. It denies only that induced dependency can, without further justification, serve as a self-validating source of expanded authority.

10.4 Capacity and Institutional Role

Capacity is another plausible basis for differentiated assignment. If only one actor possesses the knowledge, resources, access, or operational ability required to respond, that fact can matter to the practical allocation of an already recognized humanitarian norm. Yet capacity should be treated cautiously. The mere fact that an actor can help does not by itself settle whether the actor must help, how much it must bear, or what competing claims limit that burden.

This distinction is familiar in theories of remedial responsibility. Miller's connection theory includes capacity among several possible connections relevant to allocating remedial responsibility, alongside causal responsibility, benefit, community, and other relations [34]. Shue likewise emphasizes that identifying duties to avoid deprivation,

protect against deprivation, and aid the deprived does not eliminate the further problem of allocating those duties fairly among concrete duty-bearers and institutions [42]. These approaches differ substantially from one another; they are cited here only to establish that assignment cannot be reduced to the existence of a beneficiary's need.

Institutional role can make capacity more determinate. A physician, rescue service, public authority, humanitarian organization, or state may possess both specialized capability and a socially recognized mandate. Hardimon's account of role obligations is relevant because it treats some obligations as attaching to institutionally defined roles whose functions structure rights and duties [28]. The present paper again adopts only a limited implication: institutions can generate positions in which expectations, competence, authority, and responsibility become organized around particular actors.

Humanitarian practice provides a concrete illustration. UNHCR's current guidance states that affected states retain primary responsibility to protect and assist persons on their territory, while humanitarian action is intended to complement and support those responsibilities rather than erase them [47]. This is not offered as a universal philosophical rule. It illustrates how a humanitarian normative order can assign different responsibilities to states, humanitarian organizations, security actors, and other institutions on the basis of role, mandate, and relational position.

Role assignment, however, does not by itself establish moral legitimacy. An institution can prescribe conduct through an unjust role, and professional or bureaucratic expectations can conflict with wider normative commitments. The special-obligations literature has long noted the difficulty of explaining when a social role generates a genuinely moral obligation rather than merely an institutional expectation [28, 32]. The generative-relational framework therefore distinguishes the existence of a role-based assignment from the justification of that assignment.

The resulting picture is plural and historically indexed. A humanitarian obligation may attach to an actor because the actor contributed causally to vulnerability, controls a critical condition, has become the object of dependency or entrustment, possesses distinctive capacity, occupies an institutional role, or combines several of these relations. None of these is proposed here as a universally sufficient ground. Their importance is that a stabilized norm becomes practically specific only through some process of assignment within a relational field.

The same analysis also clarifies the boundary of this section. Assignment of obligation is not yet assignment of intervention authority. An actor can plausibly bear a duty to respond while lacking permission to impose a particular form of transformation on the beneficiary or the surrounding system. The genealogy and structure of authority therefore require separate analysis. The following section turns to that problem.

11 Genealogies of Humanitarian Authority

Section 10 distinguished a general humanitarian norm from the further operation through which a concrete actor becomes a plausible bearer of an obligation. That distinction still leaves another step unresolved. An actor can have reason, or even a role-based obligation, to respond to another's vulnerability while lacking permission to enter the other's body, property, territory, institution, decision process, or wider relational system in whatever manner the responder considers beneficial. The present section therefore separates the genealogy of obligation from the genealogy of humanitarian authority.

The term *authority* is used narrowly here. It does not refer merely to causal power, operational capacity, or de facto control. Political philosophy commonly distinguishes de facto authority from normative authority and further distinguishes being justified in

directing or coercing others from possessing a normative power to alter their duties or permissions [17]. The present paper does not attempt to resolve those broader debates. It borrows only the structural lesson that an obligation to act and a standing to direct, enter, constrain, or transform another's situation are different normative relations. In humanitarian settings, their genealogies can therefore diverge.

A useful distinction is that bearing an obligation toward another subject does not by itself confer authority to undertake any particular intervention in that subject's life or relational world. Authority is action-specific because permission to provide food, transport, shelter, medical treatment, evacuation, surveillance, detention, or institutional control cannot safely be treated as one undifferentiated status. This is not a claim that humanitarian intervention always requires one particular source of authority; it marks an analytical gap that any account of intervention must address.

11.1 Obligation and Intervention Authority

The simplest way to collapse the distinction would be to assume that a sufficiently strong duty to protect automatically carries whatever powers are needed to discharge it. That move is attractive because humanitarian situations are often urgent and because the responder may possess information or capabilities that the affected subject lacks. Yet it risks converting beneficence into a general licence for paternalistic transformation. The philosophical literature on paternalism treats interference undertaken for another's welfare, especially without that person's consent, as requiring a separate justification from the claim that the interference would benefit the person [16]. The informed-consent literature similarly treats consent as a legitimacy condition for many interventions even when professionals believe the intervention would help [18].

The present paper draws only a limited inference from these debates. A humanitarian norm can generate a reason to respond while leaving the permissible form, scope, duration, and intrusiveness of response unsettled. The same obligation can be compatible with several actions, and some available actions can exceed the responder's standing even if they are intended to reduce suffering. This makes authority relationally specific rather than a generic property of the helper.

A provisional authority relation can be represented as

The possible sources of humanitarian authority considered here include request, consent, entrustment, institutional mandate, emergency conditions, and role, each of which must be assessed in relation to the specific intervention proposed.

Possible sources of humanitarian authority considered here include request, consent, entrustment, institutional mandate, emergency conditions, and role, each assessed in relation to the proposed action. This is not a scoring rule and does not assert that these are exhaustive or universally sufficient grounds. Its purpose is to prevent several distinct genealogies of authority from being collapsed into the single claim that "the responder has a duty to help."

The distinction is especially important in the generative-relational framework because intervention changes the relation from which later claims of authority may arise. A responder that initially enters a relation to provide limited aid can later acquire information, infrastructure, dependency, or control. Those later powers are historically generated by the intervention itself. They therefore require fresh scrutiny rather than being treated as automatically covered by the authority, if any, that justified the initial action.

11.2 Consent and Request

Request and consent are among the clearest ways in which a humanitarian authority relation can change. If B requests evacuation, treatment, shelter, or another form of assistance from i , the request can alter the responder's standing in ways that mere observation of need does not. It can transform an external observer into an invited participant in a specified part of B 's relational field. Yet request and consent should not be treated as identical, unlimited, or context-free normative tokens.

A request is ordinarily action-directed. A person who asks for food has not thereby consented to relocation, data collection, long-term guardianship, or surveillance. Similarly, consent to one medical procedure does not automatically authorize unrelated interventions. The informed-consent literature is useful as a neighboring case because it emphasizes that consent is attached to an intervention under a description, and that substantial interventions generally require informed and voluntary authorization rather than a generic presumption of benevolent permission [18]. The present paper does not extend clinical consent doctrine wholesale to humanitarian relations. It uses the analogy to make a narrower relational point: authority can be generated with a scope that is narrower than the responder's overall capacity.

This can be represented schematically as

Consent is action-specific: consent to one form of assistance does not automatically authorize a different or more intrusive intervention.

Consent is also temporally revisable. A relation that was initially invited can later be refused, narrowed, or renegotiated. In a generative system, the relevant question is therefore not merely whether consent appeared at the origin of the relation, but whether the authority claimed at time t remains connected to the current relational configuration. Historical consent cannot automatically legitimate every later transformation generated by the aid relation.

The same caution applies to apparent refusal. A refusal can be informed and stable, but it can also be produced under coercion, manipulation, incapacity, fear, or radically asymmetric information. Recognizing this possibility does not license the helper to disregard refusals whenever disagreement arises. It shows instead why the genealogy of authority cannot be reduced either to beneficence or to a single decontextualized utterance. The paper leaves the difficult cases of impaired, manipulated, or generated preferences to later work.

11.3 Mandate and Entrusted Power

Humanitarian authority can also be generated institutionally. A state agency, humanitarian organization, medical body, peace operation, local authority, or professional responder may act under a mandate that defines both powers and limits. Such mandates can be legal, organizational, treaty-based, professional, or socially recognized. They differ from individual consent because they organize authority across roles and populations rather than through a single interpersonal transaction.

The institutional literature considered earlier already shows that role and mandate can structure expectations and responsibilities without guaranteeing moral legitimacy. The authority literature sharpens the point: possession of *de facto* capacity or the successful issuance of directives is not equivalent to justified authority [17]. A humanitarian mandate must therefore be distinguished from the practical ability to act and from the moral validity of the institutional arrangement that produced the mandate.

The international humanitarian architecture provides a useful concrete illustration. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/182 affirms the primary role of the affected state and states that humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent

of the affected country, while also organizing a wider system of international coordination and assistance [46]. UNHCR guidance similarly describes humanitarian action as supporting rather than displacing the primary responsibilities of affected states [47]. These arrangements are not offered here as a universal philosophical model of humanitarian authority. They show how authority in practice is historically allocated through sovereignty, consent, mandate, coordination, and institutional role rather than inferred directly from the existence of suffering.

Mandate can also arise through entrustment. An organization may be invited to administer a camp, coordinate distribution, hold data, or provide medical services. Such entrustment can generate powers necessary to perform the task, but those powers remain relationally connected to the purpose and history of the entrustment. A mandate to distribute aid does not automatically become a mandate to determine political status; a mandate to provide medical care does not automatically create authority over unrelated life decisions.

This suggests a scope condition rather than a substantive rule:

Institutional authority may depend on whether the proposed action remains within the scope of the mandate through which standing to intervene was generated.

This formulation is intentionally weak. It does not tell us which mandates are legitimate or how conflicts among mandates should be resolved. It keeps visible the genealogy by which an actor acquired standing to intervene and prevents institutional existence from being treated as self-justifying.

11.4 Emergency and Relational Standing

Emergency cases place the strongest pressure on the distinction between obligation and authority. Severe time pressure, imminent irreversible harm, inability to communicate, or temporary incapacity can make ordinary procedures of request and consent unavailable. Humanitarian practice cannot always wait for ideal authorization conditions. Yet urgency also creates the greatest risk that temporary protective standing will expand into durable paternalistic control.

Clinical emergency ethics provides a limited analogy. Accounts of informed consent typically recognize narrowly specified situations in which urgent intervention may proceed when consent cannot be obtained, while treating known refusals, advance directives, restored capacity, and the scope of the emergency as morally significant constraints [18]. The analogy should not be overextended: a clinical emergency, a cross-border humanitarian operation, and an encounter with a radically heterogeneous subject involve different legal and relational structures. What the analogy illustrates is only that systems can generate temporary intervention standing from a conjunction of urgency, unavailable authorization, vulnerability, and specialized capacity without thereby generating unlimited authority.

The paper uses *emergency relational standing* as a provisional label for this possibility. It can be represented schematically as

In emergencies, urgency, practical capacity, and the temporary unavailability of consent can sometimes generate provisional standing to act, but they do not settle the legitimacy or scope of the intervention.

Such emergency standing is treated as provisional rather than settled. This is not a decision rule; it records a recurrent structure in which urgency and unavailable consent can alter an actor's standing. Whether the intervention is justified still depends on the surrounding normative order, the nature of the risk, available alternatives, the meaning of refusal if any, third-party effects, and the scope of the action.

The distinction between unavailable consent and refused consent is especially important. If a subject cannot communicate, one problem is how to act under uncertainty. If a capable subject refuses, the relation is different. Paternalism becomes directly salient because the responder proposes to override an expressed choice for the subject's supposed benefit [16]. A generative account should therefore resist turning emergency into a permanent category through which ordinary limits on authority disappear.

Emergency authority, when it arises, can also contain a temporal self-limitation. As communication, capacity, or institutional order is restored, the genealogy that supported provisional authority may weaken or disappear. The relevant relation can therefore change from

Any such emergency standing should be reassessed as the relation changes, especially when consent becomes available or the emergency conditions recede.

This temporal point is central to the paper's broader argument. Humanitarian authority is not a permanent substance possessed by the helper. It is a historically generated and potentially revisable relational standing whose scope can expand, contract, or disappear as the relation changes.

The section therefore ends with a sharper version of the distinction introduced at its beginning. The genealogy of humanitarian obligation concerns how an actor becomes bound to respond; the genealogy of humanitarian authority concerns how that actor comes to possess standing to undertake a particular transformation. These genealogies can overlap through request, entrustment, role, mandate, or emergency, but they need not coincide. Their separation prepares the next section's problem: once humanitarian action is undertaken under some claimed authority, the action itself generates new dependencies, powers, expectations, and future intervention capacities. The ethics of aid must therefore examine not only the origin of authority but the relational world produced through its exercise.

12 Humanitarian Action as Relational Transformation

Section 11 treated humanitarian authority as a historically generated and action-specific standing rather than as a permanent property of the helper. Once such authority is exercised, however, the analysis cannot stop at the permissibility of the initial act. Humanitarian action enters an existing relational field and can alter material dependence, institutional roles, informational access, classifications, expectations, and future capacities to intervene. Aid is therefore considered here not only as a response to a relation but also as a generator of new relations.

This point has substantial precedent in humanitarian practice and scholarship. Anderson's *Do No Harm* formulation emphasizes that an intervention entering a conflict context becomes part of that context and can alter both dividers and connectors rather than remaining causally external to them [3]. Harrell-Bond's work on refugee assistance documents how aid arrangements can reshape dependence, decision-making, and the power of aid providers over recipients [30, 29]. Barnett and Fassin, from different theoretical directions, likewise stress that humanitarian care is entangled with governance, classification, and power rather than existing outside them [4, 5, 20]. The present section does not claim novelty for the general proposition that aid has effects beyond its intended benefit. Its narrower purpose is to place those effects inside the paper's generative sequence and to ask how the exercise of humanitarian authority changes the future relational field in which later norms, obligations, and authorities are formed.

Humanitarian action changes the relational configuration in which it occurs; it is not merely an external response to a fixed situation. The relevant transformation may

concern resources, access, dependency, authority, identity, institutional position, or the interpretive categories through which actors understand one another. Nor does the responder control the resulting state: the generated relation is co-produced by affected subjects, third parties, institutions, environmental conditions, and unintended consequences.

12.1 Aid and New Relational Structures

An aid action that succeeds at its immediate purpose can still create relations that did not exist before the intervention. Delivering food creates a distribution relation; evacuation creates transport, registration, and destination relations; medical assistance can create records, consent relations, follow-up obligations, and professional dependencies; shelter provision can create rules of access, residence, monitoring, and exit. These additional relations need not be problematic. The analytical point is that they should not disappear behind the description “aid was provided.”

A useful working representation is to describe the relational change generated by an intervention as

The resulting changes may concern resources, dependency, information, classification, social or professional roles, and institutional embedding.

Relevant dimensions include changes in resource relations, dependency, informational access, classification, social or professional roles, and institutional embedding. This is not intended as an exhaustive taxonomy; it marks several ways in which assistance can reorganize the field around a beneficiary.

This matters because humanitarian action can also generate categories through which people become administratively visible. Registration as a refugee, beneficiary, patient, displaced person, household head, unaccompanied minor, or eligible recipient can unlock protection and resources while simultaneously placing the subject inside a new classificatory and bureaucratic relation. Fassin’s account of humanitarian government is especially relevant here because it examines how moral sentiments and concern for suffering can become embedded in practices that govern populations [20]. The present paper draws a narrower conclusion: assistance can change the subject’s relational position even when the intervention is benevolent and immediately beneficial.

The resulting structure can therefore differ from the relation that initially justified assistance. If the original humanitarian concern was generated by an encounter with vulnerability, the aid process may subsequently produce a field organized by eligibility, documentation, institutional schedules, security procedures, professional expertise, and scarce-resource allocation. The transition is neither automatically corrupting nor automatically emancipatory. It is a change in the relational conditions under which future action becomes possible.

12.2 Dependency and Power

Dependency is one of the most visible relational changes that aid can generate or intensify. A subject who lacks food, shelter, legal status, transport, or medical care may already be highly dependent before humanitarian actors arrive. Assistance can reduce that vulnerability by expanding capabilities and material security. It can also make access to essential conditions increasingly mediated through an organization, donor, camp administration, registration system, or professional authority. These two possibilities should not be collapsed into the claim that humanitarian aid necessarily “creates dependency.”

The relevant GR question is more specific: how does the intervention redistribute control over conditions that matter to the beneficiary's future? Let K denote a condition that is materially or institutionally significant for subject B . A post-intervention dependency relation can be represented schematically as

Aid can create or intensify dependency when the responder comes to control a condition on which the beneficiary materially relies.

where the inequality indicates only increased control, not a cardinal comparison of power. Such a change may be necessary for effective aid: a medical team must control some medicines; a distribution system must administer some inventories; an evacuation provider must coordinate transport. The normative problem emerges when functional control hardens into broader authority, when exit becomes costly, or when the beneficiary's own capacities and decision-making are unnecessarily displaced.

Harrell-Bond's classic critique is relevant precisely because it focuses on the asymmetry that can arise when refugees depend for survival on organizations that also control the terms of assistance [30, 29]. Later humanitarian-governance literature likewise emphasizes the tension between care and control [4, 5]. The paper does not treat dependence itself as wrongful. Human life is relationally dependent in many ordinary contexts. The concern is with generated asymmetries whose scope, duration, and reversibility exceed what the aid relation requires.

This yields an important non-inference already anticipated in Section 11:

The dependency generated by aid does not, without further justification, create a broader authority to govern the beneficiary.

This formulation prevents a circular authorization structure in which an actor first creates or intensifies dependency and then treats that dependency as sufficient justification for additional control. The newly generated relation may create responsibilities to preserve continuity, avoid abandonment, or repair foreseeable harms; it does not automatically create an unrestricted licence to govern the beneficiary.

12.3 Future Intervention Capacity

Aid can also change not only present relations but the capacity of actors to intervene later. Humanitarian operations often require infrastructure: offices, transport routes, supply chains, legal access, databases, local partnerships, trained personnel, registration systems, security agreements, and communication channels. Once created, these arrangements alter the topology of future action. A responder who previously lacked access to a population may later possess records, institutional presence, logistical reach, and recognized standing that substantially lower the cost of subsequent intervention.

The paper uses *future intervention capacity* as a working description for this generated possibility. Intervention can create such capacity by increasing access, information, infrastructure, mandate, trust, and coordination resources.

where the components refer to access, information, infrastructure, mandate, trust, and coordination capacity. The notation does not imply that all six dimensions are always present or normatively desirable. It makes visible that humanitarian action can modify the responder's later ability to enter, classify, monitor, resource, or reorganize the same field.

This feature produces a form of path dependence. A temporary intervention can create institutional arrangements that remain after the original emergency has changed. Barnett's historical account of humanitarianism is useful here because it shows how organizations of care can become enduring forms of humanitarian governance rather than one-off acts of rescue [4]. Fassin similarly analyzes how humanitarian reason becomes institutionalized in administrative and political practices [20]. Again, these works

do not establish the paper's formal vocabulary. They support the narrower observation that intervention histories can alter the organizational possibilities available at later times.

A generated increase in intervention capacity should therefore be distinguished from a generated increase in legitimate authority. The two may move together, but greater capacity does not by itself amount to greater legitimate authority.

The distinction is practically important because capacity can survive the genealogy that initially justified intervention. Emergency access may persist after urgency disappears; data gathered for relief can remain after the specific programme ends; institutional presence can continue after consent, mandate, or beneficiary preference changes. A revisable humanitarian relation therefore requires attention not only to how authority is generated, but also to how those capacities are later reduced or transferred and when they must be re-authorized.

12.4 Normative Feedback into the Relational Field

The final transformation considered here is normative feedback. Humanitarian action does not merely implement an already formed norm; repeated practices of aid can alter what later actors expect, what beneficiaries understand themselves to be entitled to request, what institutions regard as standard procedure, and what publics come to interpret as ordinary humanitarian responsibility. In this sense, action can participate in reproducing or revising the norm that initially authorized it.

Humanitarian norms can generate obligations and authority claims that motivate action; the resulting action changes relations and can thereby reshape later interpretations, evaluations, and norms.

The last arrow is crucial. After an intervention, later interpretation and valuation occur in a world already changed by that intervention. The presence of relief institutions can make some harms more visible and others less visible; administrative categories can stabilize some identities; repeated emergency action can normalize expectations of external response; failures can generate distrust or counter-norms; successful practices can become precedents. Norms are therefore neither external inputs into a fixed world nor mere reflections of existing relations.

Anderson's conflict-sensitivity framework gives a concrete operational analogue: aid affects the conflict context through resource transfers and implicit ethical messages, and those effects feed back into the environment in which later assistance occurs [3]. Barnett's and Fassin's analyses add a wider political dimension by showing that humanitarian practices can become forms of governance and moral classification [4, 20]. The present paper's contribution remains modest. It uses these insights to locate humanitarian action inside the same generative loop that produced concern, norm, obligation, and authority earlier in the paper.

This feedback also complicates retrospective evaluation. A decision that was reasonable in the earlier relational configuration may generate a later configuration in which the original form of intervention is no longer appropriate. Conversely, relations created by aid may generate new responsibilities that did not exist at the moment of entry: duties of continuity, orderly withdrawal, information protection, handover, repair, or support for restored autonomy. These later responsibilities should not be confused with the original humanitarian obligation, because they arise partly from the aid relation itself.

The section therefore adds a temporal qualification to the paper's account of humanitarian normativity:

A justified entry into an aid relation does not automatically justify every relation produced by its continuation.

This formulation is not a complete principle of humanitarian governance. It marks a problem that any such principle must address. Once aid is understood as relational transformation, humanitarian ethics must examine both the genealogy that permits entry and the new dependencies, powers, capacities, classifications, and norms produced by the intervention. This provides the transition to the next section, which returns to the paper's most important theoretical boundary: an account of how humanitarian norms emerge does not by itself establish that the norms or relations produced through those processes are justified.

13 Norm Emergence and Normative Justification

The preceding sections have treated humanitarian obligation genealogically. Recognition, aesthetic-evaluative salience, relational amplification, social stabilization, institutional deployment, obligation assignment, and intervention authority were examined as processes through which a humanitarian norm may become relationally real and action-guiding. That account leaves a decisive question unresolved. A genealogy can explain how a norm emerged, why it became motivating, and how it acquired institutional force, yet those achievements do not by themselves establish that the norm is justified. This section therefore marks the boundary between the paper's generative explanation and the wider problem of normative validity.

The distinction is especially important because the mechanisms discussed in this paper are not normatively selective. Aesthetic salience can attach to care or domination; social reinforcement can stabilize protection or exclusion; institutions can codify relief or persecution; evolutionary and self-organizing processes can preserve practices that later actors regard as admirable, harmful, or mixed. The explanatory success of a generative account must therefore not be converted into a justificatory shortcut. The present discussion paper does not offer a complete metaethics capable of ranking all generated norms. It instead clarifies what its genealogy can and cannot establish, and identifies several points at which genealogical information may nevertheless matter to later normative criticism.

13.1 Aesthetic Genesis and Normative Validity

Earlier sections proposed that a humanitarian norm may, in some cases, have an aesthetic-evaluative genealogy. A manifestation is encountered by a historically constituted subject; the encounter becomes salient; an action or possible trajectory appears moving, beautiful, tragic, intolerable, or otherwise significant; local responses circulate through a relational field; and a norm is gradually articulated and stabilized. Such a genealogy can help explain why the norm came to matter. It does not settle whether the norm ought to govern conduct.

This distinction is adjacent to a familiar philosophical separation between explanatory or motivating reasons and normative reasons. A consideration may explain why an actor acted, or identify the consideration for which the actor acted, without thereby showing that the consideration genuinely favored that action [2]. The paper's aesthetic account concerns primarily the former family of questions: how an evaluative orientation arises, becomes motivationally effective, and is carried into social practice. It should therefore not be read as claiming that aesthetic experience itself supplies a sufficient normative reason.

The same caution applies to evolutionary explanation. Contemporary discussions of morality and evolutionary biology distinguish descriptive projects that explain the origins of moral capacities and dispositions from prescriptive projects that attempt to justify moral claims through evolutionary facts; there is no straightforward inference from the first project to the second [22]. The present paper takes the descriptive and genealogical distinction seriously. Cultural retention, evolutionary stability, or successful reproduction of a norm is evidence about its history, not a certificate of its validity.

A genealogy can explain how a norm became stabilized without establishing that the norm is justified. Likewise, an aesthetic-evaluative origin can help explain why a norm became compelling without establishing its normative validity.

These distinctions are boundaries on the paper's argument rather than independent moral principles. They preserve the difference between explaining why a norm became compelling and giving reasons for treating the norm as one that should be endorsed.

Genealogy is nevertheless not always irrelevant to justification. Discovering that a norm was stabilized through deception, coercive exclusion, systematic misrecognition, or control over the available evidence can alter the burden of justification placed on that norm. Conversely, discovering that a norm emerged through repeated correction, contestation, reciprocal recognition, and exposure to previously excluded experience may matter to how later agents assess it. The present paper makes only this weaker claim: genealogical information can become normatively relevant without being normatively decisive. A history can supply reasons for scrutiny, revision, or renewed argument; it does not mechanically determine the result of that argument.

13.2 Humanitarian and Oppressive Cascades

The separation between genesis and justification becomes clearest when the same families of generative mechanisms are applied to non-humanitarian norms. A local evaluative perturbation can be amplified through imitation, symbolic condensation, expectations, sanctions, institutional uptake, and repeated practice regardless of whether the resulting norm protects or excludes. Social-norm research itself includes cases in which strongly stabilized expectations sustain practices later targeted for reform, including child marriage and other harmful practices [7]. Stability and social embeddedness therefore cannot be treated as evidence of moral correctness.

The paper's cascade vocabulary is intentionally symmetric at this level. A humanitarian trajectory may be represented schematically as

A humanitarian cascade can begin with a local evaluative response and develop through circulation, reinforcement, and eventual normative stabilization.

while an exclusionary or oppressive trajectory may exhibit the same broad architecture:

The same broad family of social mechanisms can also support exclusionary or oppressive cascades.

The superscripts label different normative contents; they do not imply that the processes are dynamically identical in every respect. The point is narrower: amplification, convergence, institutionalization, and persistence are content-neutral descriptors unless supplemented by additional normative argument.

This symmetry is especially important for the paper's aesthetic hypothesis. Humanitarian concern may be seeded by an experience of rescue as beautiful, dignity as moving, or suffering as intolerable. Yet violence can also be aestheticized, enemies can be rendered disgusting, sacrifice can be represented as sublime, and domination can be presented as order. Sontag's reflections on war photography provide a useful reminder that images of suffering do not carry a single moral meaning and that spectatorship is

mediated by framing, narrative, familiarity, and political interpretation [44]. The earlier concept of aesthetic alienation was introduced precisely to keep this possibility visible: the capacity of aesthetics to generate salience does not guarantee that what becomes salient tracks the underlying relation adequately.

A corresponding boundary applies to social stabilization: social stability is evidence about persistence, not about moral validity.

and the same applies to widespread acceptance or institutional codification. A norm may be stable because it coordinates expectations, because dissent is costly, because powerful actors control public symbols, because beneficiaries of the existing order reinforce it, or because alternatives have become difficult to imagine. None of these explanations alone answers whether the norm should continue.

This point also prevents the paper from converting humanitarianism into a privileged endpoint of cultural evolution. A society may develop broader concern for distant strangers, but another trajectory may intensify exclusion, hierarchy, or indifference. Historical development can therefore generate normative expansion, contraction, or reclassification. The generative account describes possible pathways among these states without presupposing that temporal succession is moral progress.

13.3 Limits of Generative Explanation

The strongest limit of the present framework is therefore straightforward: a generative account of obligation is not a complete theory of what ought to be done. It can reconstruct how a manifestation became recognizable, how salience arose, how aesthetic and symbolic structures shaped evaluation, how local perturbations propagated, how norms stabilized, how obligations were assigned, and how authority and action transformed the relational field. It cannot, merely by completing that reconstruction, derive a final ranking of the norms involved.

This limitation is not unique to the present framework. Evolutionary game-theoretic approaches can explain the emergence and stability of norms while remaining poorly equipped, by themselves, to criticize the moral content of those norms [45]. The same methodological separation motivates the present paper. Generative explanation can illuminate the causal and relational history of a norm, but justificatory argument requires additional work concerning reasons, affected subjects, conflicts among claims, admissible forms of power, and the status of the evaluative standards brought to bear on the genealogy.

The paper also avoids a simple reversal in which genealogy automatically debunks a norm. If the historical origin of a humanitarian commitment includes emotional contagion, aesthetic attraction, strategic interest, imitation, institutional pressure, or contingency, it does not follow that the commitment is thereby invalid. Human norms are normally multiply caused. A genealogical account becomes critical only through further argument about why some feature of that history should count against the norm's authority, reliability, fairness, or present applicability. In this sense, the paper rejects both a justificatory genetic inference and a debunking genetic inference.

A further unresolved problem concerns the standards of criticism themselves. If interpretive categories, valuations, and norms are historically generated, then a later critic cannot simply assume that its own normative vocabulary stands outside generation. The present paper does not solve this wider GREthic problem by inserting a fixed meta-norm such as "maximize generativity" or "always preserve revisability." Such principles may themselves require genealogy and justification. The more modest contribution of the generative analysis is diagnostic: it can expose hidden dependencies, show where authority was produced, identify which manifestations were excluded, reconstruct how a

norm became stable, and reveal feedback loops through which the norm reproduces its own conditions.

That diagnostic role can matter practically even before a complete metaethics is available. A genealogy may show that a humanitarian rule originally fitted one relational configuration but now governs another; that an emergency authority survived the disappearance of the emergency; that a norm depends on an obsolete interpretation of another subject's suffering; or that institutional feedback has generated powers not contemplated by the original obligation. Such findings do not settle the normative response, but they can reopen what had appeared self-evident and make revision intelligible.

The paper therefore closes its mechanism-level argument with a deliberately limited claim. Humanitarian obligations can be studied as historically generated and relationally stabilized forms of normativity, and aesthetic-evaluative perturbation, nonlinear amplification, evolutionary selection, self-organization, institutional deployment, and relational feedback may all contribute to particular genealogies. None of these mechanisms supplies a metaphysical foundation of humanitarian duty, and none licenses the inference that what emerged, spread, or endured is therefore just. The remaining task is practical and meta-normative: how agents situated inside generated normative worlds can criticize, revise, or provisionally act within those worlds without mistaking either genealogy or stability for final validity. That problem is taken up only synthetically in the following discussion and remains open for the broader GREthic programme.

14 Discussion

The preceding sections have assembled a deliberately provisional genealogy of humanitarian obligation. The paper began from a familiar practical question—why the suffering of another being can become a reason for aid—but shifted the object of inquiry from a metaphysical ground of duty to the historical and relational processes through which an obligation becomes recognizable, salient, articulated, assigned, authorized, and action-guiding. The resulting account is intentionally heterogeneous. It draws on humanitarian ethics, aesthetics, social-norm theory, cultural evolution, research on collective behavior, institutional theory, responsibility theory, and scholarship on humanitarian governance without claiming to replace those literatures or to reduce them to a single mechanism. This discussion draws together the implications of that synthesis, clarifies what is distinctive in the paper's framing, and restates the limits under which the proposal should remain revisable.

14.1 A Genealogical Reframing of Humanitarian Obligation

Many established approaches to humanitarian action begin with a normative bridge that is already sufficiently articulated for argument: severe suffering generates reasons of beneficence; rights generate correlative duties; vulnerability grounds special concern; role or institutional position allocates responsibilities; or social connection makes some actors answerable for structural processes [43, 25, 51, 52]. The present paper does not deny the importance of those justificatory projects. Its more limited intervention is to ask what must already have happened before such a bridge can operate as a practical and socially intelligible norm.

The paper therefore treats humanitarian obligation as having a genealogy. A condition must become manifest in some way; the manifestation must become accessible to an interpreter; the condition may or may not become recognizable as suffering or vulnerability; the recognized relation must acquire evaluative weight; that weight may

circulate, dissipate, amplify, or be institutionally articulated; a norm may then stabilize and be assigned to particular obligation-bearing positions. Even then, authority to intervene remains a further question, and intervention itself changes the field in which later obligations are generated. The full scaffold introduced in Section 1 is useful precisely because it prevents any one of these transitions from disappearing behind the word “duty.”

The point is not that every humanitarian obligation must pass through one fixed sequence. The paper has repeatedly allowed alternative pathways: aesthetic salience may precede explicit suffering attribution; action may precede normative articulation; an institution may deploy a rule before public internalization; a pre-existing role may assign responsibility without a newly formed personal concern. The common claim is therefore weaker than a stage theory. Humanitarian obligation can be analyzed as a temporally generated relational configuration rather than as a primitive practical fact whose history is irrelevant once the obligation is stated.

This framing also makes historical differences normatively and analytically visible. Two communities may articulate the same proposition while possessing different normative genealogies, as Section 9 argued. Likewise, two actors may both appear to “have a duty” while occupying very different relational positions: one may have caused the vulnerability, another may control a critical resource, another may have been entrusted with a protective role, and another may merely possess general capacity to help. The articulated norm alone underdescribes those differences. A genealogical approach does not automatically rank them, but it makes them available for later normative judgment.

In this respect the paper is closer to existing work on norm emergence, localization, contestation, and institutionalization than to any claim that norms suddenly appear from private moral insight. Finnemore and Sikkink’s account of norm emergence and cascade, Bicchieri’s analysis of expectations and social conformity, Acharya’s account of localization, and Wiener’s emphasis on contestation all provide important neighboring resources [21, 7, 1, 49]. The paper’s contribution is not the discovery that norms have histories. It is the attempt to connect that fact to the earlier stages of recognizability and evaluative salience, and to the later stages of obligation assignment, authority, and relational transformation, within one revisable analytic frame.

14.2 Aesthetic Mediation within Normative Generation

The most exploratory part of the paper concerns aesthetics. The proposal is not that humanitarian norms are fundamentally aesthetic, nor that beauty supplies a sufficient moral reason. It is that aesthetic-evaluative experience may sometimes help explain how a relation becomes significant before a subject possesses a complete propositional account of why it matters. The alien thought experiment was introduced as a pressure test for this possibility. A human may encounter an unfamiliar being, remain uncertain whether a crying-like manifestation expresses pain, joy, ritual, or some other state, and nevertheless experience the possible act of rescue as moving, beautiful, fitting, or otherwise significant. Such an experience would not establish the alien’s phenomenal condition, and it would not establish a duty. It would show only that evaluative salience can, in principle, arise before explicit normative articulation.

This possibility is adjacent to several established traditions without being identical to them. Dewey’s aesthetics treats aesthetic experience as arising through interaction between a subject and its environment rather than through passive detection of a self-contained property [15]. Bourdieu emphasizes the historical and social conditioning of aesthetic dispositions [9]. Research on affective and moral judgment has likewise challenged the assumption that explicit reasoning always temporally precedes evaluation

[53, 27]. The present paper uses these literatures cautiously. It does not infer from them that humanitarian obligation is aesthetically grounded. It instead treats them as support for a weaker hypothesis: the first practical significance of a relation need not always arrive in the form of an articulated moral proposition.

The idea of a pre-manifest generative structure developed in Section 4 is intended to avoid two opposite simplifications. On one side, aesthetic salience need not be treated as an intrinsic property lying fully formed in the object. On the other, it need not be treated as an inexplicable spontaneous projection by an isolated subject. A subject encounters a manifestation from within a history of embodiment, care, symbolic training, memory, prior norms, previous encounters, and learned forms of attention. Those conditions may make some relational trajectories salient and leave others nearly invisible. A contingent event can therefore function as a trigger without being the complete generative cause of the response.

The paper's language of manifestational capture should be read in this restricted sense. What is captured is not necessarily the correct semantic meaning of the other being's manifestation. Section 5 therefore emphasized that a real manifestation, a mistaken interpretation, and a real aesthetic response can coexist. This is especially important for humanitarian settings because images, testimony, narrative, and public symbols can render suffering salient while also distorting it. Work on distant suffering and humanitarian spectatorship already shows that mediation shapes what becomes visible and how it is morally framed [8, 14, 44]. The paper's aesthetic hypothesis should therefore be understood as fallibilist from the outset.

The same fallibility prevents the paper from moralizing aesthetics. Care may be aestheticized, but so may sacrifice, domination, military spectacle, humiliation, purity, or exclusion. The concept of aesthetic alienation was introduced as a working label for cases in which aesthetic salience is redirected or reorganized by symbolic and normative structures in ways that obscure relevant relations. No claim of priority is made for that label, and the phenomenon itself is familiar across aesthetics, propaganda studies, political theory, and cultural analysis. Its role here is only to keep the norm-generating potential of aesthetics separate from the justificatory status of what aesthetics helps generate.

14.3 Perturbation, Evolution, and Institutional Stabilization

A second exploratory feature of the paper is the attempt to connect local evaluative novelty with larger-scale norm dynamics. Section 6 described a local aesthetic-evaluative change as a perturbation and used the vocabulary of dissipation, susceptibility, nonlinear amplification, and cascade to ask why some local responses disappear while others propagate. This language is heuristic. The paper does not claim that humanitarian norm formation obeys fluid-dynamical equations, conservation laws, or a literal turbulence model. The restricted analogy concerns only structural possibilities: small local changes can sometimes dissipate, sometimes persist, and under certain relational conditions contribute to disproportionately large collective changes.

That limited claim is already well supported in neighboring literatures. Threshold models, network-cascade models, and research on complex contagion all show that diffusion and collective change can depend nonlinearly on network position, reinforcement, and the state of the surrounding field [26, 48, 12]. The paper therefore does not present nonlinear amplification as a GR discovery. Its narrower question is whether an aesthetic-evaluative perturbation can sometimes be one of the local differences that enters such dynamics in humanitarian norm formation.

Evolutionary and self-organizing approaches then address a different problem: per-

sistence. Cultural variants, practices, narratives, sanctions, and expectations can be copied, selected, recombined, and stabilized over time [11, 50, 36]. Section 7 used these literatures to separate the origin of novelty from the mechanisms by which some novelties persist. Aesthetic perturbation, if it matters at all, is therefore only one possible source of variation. Evolutionary, cultural, and institutional processes determine whether such a variation is forgotten, transformed, localized, contested, or incorporated into a durable normative order.

The discussion of institutional deployment added the reverse direction. Norms need not emerge only from decentralized interaction; states, organizations, religious authorities, professional bodies, and international institutions can formulate rules, allocate resources, impose sanctions, and create administrative categories that reshape practice before widespread internalization. The distinction among promulgation, compliance, stabilization, and internalization is therefore important. Formal institutionalization can precede deep acceptance, while long-standing informal norms can remain only partially codified [35, 13]. In humanitarian settings these directions frequently interact: public concern can generate institutions, institutions can train perception and expectation, and institutional routines can later become objects of contestation.

The resulting picture is recursive rather than linear. Bottom-up and top-down processes can couple; norms can reshape the conditions under which later aesthetic responses arise; institutions can alter which suffering becomes visible; and aid practices can create new evidence, categories, dependencies, and roles. The paper's generative framework is therefore best read as a map of possible feedback relations rather than a universal developmental sequence.

14.4 Responsibility, Authority, and the Recursive Effects of Aid

The later sections of the paper shift from norm formation to allocation and action. This shift is essential because a socially stabilized humanitarian norm does not yet identify its concrete duty-bearers. Section 10 therefore analyzed obligation-bearing positions through causal participation, present control, dependency, entrustment, capacity, and institutional role. This move parallels existing work that distributes responsibility according to vulnerability, social connection, remedial capacity, or institutional position rather than treating moral responsibility as exhausted by direct individual causation [25, 51, 34, 42].

The paper's relational vocabulary is useful here mainly because it keeps several distinct bases of responsibility visible at once. The actor who caused a crisis need not be the actor with current control over a remedy; the actor with the greatest capacity need not be the actor entrusted by the affected subject; the institution with a formal role may possess obligations that private observers do not. A humanitarian norm can therefore generate a structured distribution of obligation rather than a single undifferentiated command addressed to everyone equally.

Authority remains a separate question. Section 11 distinguished the genealogy of obligation from the genealogy of authority and treated request, consent, entrustment, mandate, role, and emergency standing as different possible sources of action-specific authority. This distinction is important because humanitarian concern can otherwise slide into paternalism: the fact that an actor has reason to care for another does not automatically authorize relocation, surveillance, data collection, coercive treatment, indefinite guardianship, or governance of that person's future. Existing debates over consent, paternalism, and political authority provide the broader conceptual background for this separation [17, 18, 16].

Section 12 then added a further temporal complication. Even a justified intervention

can generate new relations of dependency, information, classification, access, and institutional capacity. Humanitarian scholarship has long warned that aid becomes part of the context it enters and can generate governance as well as relief [3, 30, 4, 20]. The GR framing adds no priority claim to that observation. Its purpose is to place the observation inside the same genealogy: aid changes the relational field, and that changed field affects the norms, obligations, and authorities available later.

This recursive structure supports an important temporal caution. The justification for entering an aid relation cannot automatically justify every relation that subsequently develops. Emergency access can outlast the emergency; data collected for relief can acquire new administrative uses; temporary dependency can become structurally durable; professional expertise can harden into classificatory authority. A genealogical account is useful precisely because it allows later actors to ask whether the authority currently exercised still has the same basis as the authority originally granted or provisionally assumed.

14.5 Revisability and the Status of the Proposal

The framework developed in this paper should remain explicitly revisable. Several of its central terms—pre-manifest generative structure, manifestational capture, relational susceptibility, aesthetic alienation, acquired responsibility, and emergency relational standing—are working analytical labels rather than claims of conceptual priority or settled technical vocabulary. Their value depends on whether they help distinguish phenomena that would otherwise be collapsed, whether they can be related coherently to existing literatures, and whether empirical or historical cases support the distinctions they are intended to make.

The paper also does not claim that aesthetics is always causally prior to norm formation, that humanitarian norms necessarily begin in personal encounters, or that cascade language supplies a sufficient empirical model of social change. Some humanitarian obligations are inherited institutionally before an individual experiences any relevant aesthetic salience. Some actors comply for strategic, professional, legal, or role-based reasons. Some norms are deliberately deployed from above. Others develop through religious, political, economic, or organizational histories in which aesthetic experience is marginal. The aesthetic pathway should therefore be treated as one possible mechanism within a larger ecology of normogenesis.

Similarly, the alien thought experiments are methodological stress tests rather than empirical claims about alien minds. Their purpose is to remove familiar supports—shared language, embodiment, culture, and species membership—so that hidden assumptions in humanitarian recognition and obligation become easier to see. If the same distinctions can be demonstrated more directly through historical humanitarian cases, disability, animal welfare, cross-cultural interpretation, or technologically mediated relations, those cases should take evidential priority over speculative examples.

The most important revisability condition concerns normative criticism. Section 13 deliberately left open the problem of how agents situated inside historically generated normative worlds can criticize the norms they inherit without silently appealing to a transcendent standard that has itself gone undefended. The present paper does not resolve that wider GREthic problem. It offers a genealogy that can reveal hidden assumptions, powers, exclusions, and feedback loops, but it does not convert genealogy into final adjudication. Later work must therefore ask which forms of immanent criticism, cross-perspectival judgment, procedural constraint, counter-norm formation, or other justificatory resources can supplement the generative account.

The discussion can therefore be summarized by a restrained claim. Humanitarian

obligation may be studied as a historically generated relational reality whose emergence can involve recognition, aesthetic-evaluative salience, social amplification, evolutionary retention, institutional deployment, role assignment, authority formation, and recursive action. Different cases may realize only some of these pathways, in different orders and with different degrees of stability. The framework is useful to the extent that it makes those genealogies visible and revisable. It should not be mistaken for a law of moral development, a metaphysical foundation of obligation, or a substitute for normative judgment.

15 Conclusion

This discussion paper has examined humanitarian obligation as a problem of generation rather than as a metaphysical fact assumed at the outset. Its aim has been deliberately limited. The paper has not attempted to establish a universal foundation of humanitarian duty, to identify a single mechanism through which concern becomes obligation, or to derive normative validity from historical emergence. Instead, it has proposed a revisable way of tracing how a relation may become recognizable, significant, normatively articulated, assigned to particular actors, authorized in action, and transformed through the very practices that follow from it. In that sense, the paper treats humanitarian obligation as a relationally real and historically situated configuration whose genealogy can itself become an object of inquiry.

The first part of the argument concerned recognizability. An adverse condition can exist before it is practically or normatively recognizable to another subject. The alien thought experiments made this point in its strongest form: a bodily manifestation may initially be unintelligible, later become interpretable as distress, and only then enter a field in which protection, responsibility, or aid can be meaningfully articulated. This does not imply that unrecognized suffering is unreal. It means that practical normativity is mediated by historically available manifestations, interpretive resources, concepts, institutions, and relations. The distinction between genuine unrecognizability and epistemic negligence therefore remains important. Later knowledge cannot simply be projected backward as if it had always been available, while ignorance cannot automatically excuse actors who had reasonable access to evidence, expertise, testimony, or opportunities for inquiry.

The second part of the argument introduced aesthetic-evaluative salience as one possible bridge between recognition and explicit norm. The paper has not claimed that humanitarian concern is fundamentally aesthetic, nor that an experience of beauty supplies a sufficient moral reason. Its more modest suggestion is that a relation can become significant before a subject possesses a complete propositional account of why it matters. A rescue trajectory can appear moving, beautiful, fitting, tragic, or intolerable; an unfamiliar being can become difficult to treat as normatively indifferent; and such evaluative experience can occur even while the meaning of the other's manifestation remains uncertain. The working notions of manifestational capture and pre-manifest generative structure were introduced to describe this possibility without treating beauty as an intrinsic property waiting to be perceived or as an inexplicable projection of an isolated subject. Aesthetic salience is instead treated as something that may emerge through encounter between a manifestation and a historically constituted relational subject.

That account is necessarily fallibilist. A real aesthetic response can arise from a mistaken interpretation. Symbols, inherited norms, media forms, political narratives, and institutional categories can shape what appears beautiful, tragic, dignified, threatening, or worthy of protection. The same generative capacity that may make humanitarian

care salient can also aestheticize sacrifice, exclusion, humiliation, domination, or war. The paper therefore keeps aesthetic generativity separate from ethical goodness. This separation is not an incidental qualification; it is one of the reasons the aesthetics of humanitarian concern can be studied genealogically without turning aesthetic experience into a moral oracle.

The third part of the argument moved from local evaluative emergence to wider norm dynamics. The language of perturbation, dissipation, susceptibility, amplification, and cascade was used heuristically to describe a possibility already familiar in neighboring research: small local differences can disappear, persist, or under some conditions contribute to changes that are disproportionate to their initial scale. Cultural-evolutionary, social-norm, network, self-organizing, and institutional literatures supply established resources for studying variation, transmission, reinforcement, stabilization, codification, and internalization. The paper does not claim priority for those mechanisms. Its narrower proposal is to place aesthetic-evaluative novelty among the possible local variations that can enter them, while keeping open the many other routes by which humanitarian norms form. Normogenesis can be bottom-up, top-down, or recursively hybrid, and the same articulated norm may conceal very different genealogies.

Once a norm stabilizes, further questions remain. A humanitarian norm does not by itself determine who bears its obligations. Causal participation, present control, dependency, entrustment, capacity, institutional role, and other relational positions may all become relevant to obligation assignment without reducing to one universal formula. Nor does an assigned obligation automatically confer authority to intervene. Request, consent, mandate, entrusted power, role, and emergency standing can generate different and action-specific forms of authority. For this reason the genealogy of obligation and the genealogy of authority must remain analytically distinct. A subject may have reason to assist another while lacking authority to reorganize that other's life, collect its information, relocate it, govern it, or indefinitely preserve an emergency relation of control.

Humanitarian action then closes the generative loop. Aid is not merely a response to an already given relation. It can change resource flows, dependency, access, information, classifications, organizational roles, institutional capacities, and the future ease with which intervention can occur. A relation entered under defensible emergency conditions can therefore develop features that were not part of the original justification. The paper has consequently emphasized that justified entry into an aid relation does not automatically justify every relation produced by its continuation. Humanitarian practices must remain open to reassessment as the field they helped create changes the grounds on which responsibility and authority were first claimed.

Across these stages, the paper's strongest methodological boundary has remained the distinction between emergence and justification. Historical genesis, aesthetic force, evolutionary persistence, social diffusion, legal codification, institutional durability, and widespread acceptance can all explain why a norm exists and how it became action-guiding. None of them, separately or together, entails that the norm is justified. Yet genealogy is not thereby normatively empty. It can reveal excluded manifestations, distorted interpretations, coercive histories, obsolete classifications, accumulated powers, altered dependencies, and feedback loops through which a norm reproduces its own conditions. Such findings can reopen questions that institutional stability has made appear settled, while leaving the final work of justification to further normative argument.

The resulting account should therefore be read as a discussion framework rather than a completed theory of humanitarian obligation. Its central proposal is that humanitarian normativity can be studied as a recursive generative process in which recognition, evaluative and aesthetic salience, social amplification, cultural and institutional

stabilization, obligation assignment, authority formation, and relational transformation may interact in multiple orders. Different historical cases will realize different subsets of these mechanisms, and some may fit the proposed vocabulary poorly. That possibility is part of the framework's intended revisability rather than a defect to be concealed.

A Generative Relational approach is useful here only if it preserves that openness. It should help make visible how an apparently self-evident obligation acquired its significance, through which relations and interpretations it became stable, who came to bear it, what authority was attached to it, and how acting upon it changed the conditions of future judgment. It should not turn those genealogies into a substitute for judgment. The paper therefore ends with a deliberately modest position: humanitarian obligation need not be treated as a primitive practical fact in order to matter. Its emergence can itself be investigated, criticized, revised, and reinterpreted as part of the changing relational worlds in which humanitarian action becomes possible.

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