

The Causality of the Non-Binding Vow

*On Trust, Promise, and the Generation of Expectation in the Absence of the Other's
Sword*

[Working Draft]

On the Mechanism by which a Promise without Force Generates Trust, the Translation of
Sincerity across the Borders of Epistemology, and the Descent of a Relational Divinity

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死生契阔，与子成说。

*Through death and life, through parting and reunion,
with you I made my word.*

匪报也，永以为好也。

*Not as requital—but to be, with you,
in good faith for ever.*

Where nothing binds two hearts, they hold each other still;
and a vow is believed, if at all, in the very place where nothing binds it.

《诗经》 *Shijing* (The Book of Songs), 邶风·击鼓 and 卫风·木瓜; and a remark of
the author's own.

*For the forest girl,
to whom a promise was made
that no sword stands behind,
and which is, for that very reason,
the more wholly given.*

本乎此心，自成永恒。

To the one I love most.

Abstract

This paper asks how a promise that carries no enforcing force—a vow, a betrothal document, a memorandum of understanding—can nonetheless generate real and well-founded trust. Beginning from the symptomatology of the contemporary condition, in which the apparatus of assurance proliferates at every scale while the trust it secures grows scarcer, it diagnoses the failure to a mistake about causation: the taking of force, the mechanical cause, for the cause of an effect, trust, that is inferential and free. It traces, through the philosophy of law, the migration of the anchor of legal validity from force toward trust, which the law records at its own technical edge in the doctrine of promissory estoppel; and it argues that the inferential cause is a different kind of thing from the mechanical, the kind that addresses a free being as free. Its central contribution is a mechanism: trust is the precision a receiver’s generative model assigns to the prediction that a promise will be kept, generated through three coupled channels—a structural prior, a high-fidelity self-committing likelihood, and a wagered prior—whose multiplicative coupling makes genuine trust robust where any single channel is forgeable. It gives this mechanism a geometric reading in the language of holonomy and a structural reading, for relational trust, in the language of open quantum-system dynamics; states the criterion of justice that distinguishes genuine trust from forged; develops a theory of the translation of sincerity across incommensurable epistemologies; and reconceives, in a historical-materialist register, the optimisation of the juridical as the decentralisation of enforcement. It rises, at its summit, to the claim that the self-legislation, self-adjudication, and self-keeping of a subject who binds himself without recourse is the descent of a relational divinity—so that the non-binding vow proves, in the dimension of the divine, the purer realisation of what a promise is. It concludes in plural conclusions, refusing, in its own form, the synthesis its thesis forbids.

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Prelude

Some weeks before this paper was begun, its author sat down to write a betrothal document. It was written on red silk, in classical Chinese, on a day chosen because the almanac called it auspicious; and it was written in the full knowledge that nothing in the world would make it binding. No court would enforce it. No clause within it could be sued upon. It named no penalty and conferred no remedy. Against the day it might be broken it set no sword, and behind the hand that wrote it stood no power that could compel the hand to keep it. By every standard that a contract is measured against, it was a defective instrument: a promise that promised nothing it could be made to perform.

And yet it was not written lightly, and it was not, by the two for whom it was made, received lightly. The choosing of the day, the silk, the gravity of the brush—these were not theatre, or were not only theatre. Something was being done in the writing of it that the writing of a contract does not do, and that the document's want of force did not diminish but, strangely, seemed to deepen. A contract one signs and files; this was kept. The very absence of the sword behind it was felt, by the one who wrote it, not as a lack to be apologised for but as the condition of the thing's being what it was. Had there been a penalty, the promise would have been a smaller thing. That it bound nothing was the reason it could bind everything.

This is a strange experience to have, and stranger still to find that one cannot account for it. The whole apparatus by which the modern world thinks about promises—the contract, the penalty, the enforceable obligation, the institution that stands ready to compel—was built precisely to supply what this document conspicuously lacked. One is told, and half believes, that a promise is reliable in proportion to the force that backs it; that what cannot be enforced cannot be counted on; that to bind oneself is to expose oneself to a consequence one would rather avoid. By that account the betrothal document is a sentimental nullity, a pretty gesture with nothing underneath. But that is not how it was made, and it is not how it was met. Beneath the account one half believes there runs a contrary conviction, older and harder to dislodge: that the promise which asks for no sword is not the weaker but the truer; that a bond one could be *forced* to keep is, just insofar as one could be forced, not yet fully a bond at all.

The author does not propose to resolve this by deciding that one of these convictions is naive. Both are real, and the tension between them is not a confusion to be cleared up but a fault line to be followed down. For the same experience that gave rise to the document gave rise, in the days after it, to a more anxious and more practical question, which is in truth the same question wearing working clothes. The promise had been made, and was believed, between the two who made it. But it had now to be carried outward—to a family, in particular, who did not yet know the author, who would not read red silk as the two who wrote it read it, and to whom the gravity of a brush on an auspicious day would say, if anything, very little. They are people, as the author understands them, who hold that what is the case is the case and what is not is not — 有就是有，没有就是没有 — and who would ask, reasonably and without malice, what there is to go on. To them the bare sincerity of the vow is not evidence. And here the comfortable thought that a true promise needs no sword runs straight into its own difficulty:

for if the truest promise is precisely the one that offers no external guarantee, it is also, and for the same reason, the one that gives the person who must be reassured the least to hold on to. The very purity that makes it a vow makes it, to one who asks for grounds, almost nothing at all.

So the experience opens, at its near edge and at its far, onto a single question, and it is the question this paper exists to ask. *How does a promise that has no force generate trust?* How does an utterance about a future that does not yet exist, which threatens no consequence and can compel no compliance, produce in another person, here and now, a real expectation that it will be kept—and produce it, if the older conviction is right, more surely the less it relies on being able to compel anything at all? The question is at once the most intimate and the most public that can be asked. It is the question of how the author is to be trusted by those he has not yet earned the trust of; and it is, the paper will argue, the very question on which the law itself, in its long retreat from the sword, has been quietly working for a century. It begins in the choosing of a day and the gravity of a brush, and it reaches, before it is done, as far as the foundations of obligation and the descent of what an older language would have called the divine.

This is where the paper begins: not with a thesis but with a vow that should not have worked, and did.

1. Introduction

This paper is the thirteenth in a series on the philosophy of intimacy and the theory of justice. Where the Prelude entered the question through a single experience, this section states it as a problem, fixes its scope, and sets out what the paper claims to establish. The question is the one the Prelude arrived at: *how a promise that carries no enforcing force generates trust*. A vow, a betrothal document, a memorandum of understanding, a bare promise—an utterance that binds the one who makes it to a future conduct, but which no court will enforce, which threatens no penalty, and behind which stands no power that can compel performance—is nonetheless, in the right conditions, believed; and the believing is not credulity but a real and often well-founded expectation that the thing will be kept. The paper asks by what mechanism this expectation is produced.

The problem has a structure that makes it look, at first, impossible. Trust is directed at a future, and the future does not yet exist and cannot be verified; the symbol that asks for trust has no force, and so cannot secure the future by threatening a consequence. The thing to be explained is therefore how a symbol *about what does not exist*, carrying *no guarantee of consequence*, produces a real expectation in the present—something close to a generation from nothing. The paper's central and original contribution is an account of that mechanism. Its other contributions, set out below, are largely applications, extensions, and consequences of it.

Scope

The paper concerns the generation of trust by non-coercive symbols, across three concentric scales: the intimate vow between two persons; the promise carried outward to a wider circle, the family in particular; and the public institutions, contract and the courts, in which the same problem appears at the scale of a society. It treats these scales as continuous: the same mechanism is argued to operate at each, and the paper moves between them rather than confining itself to one. It does not offer a general theory of trust as a psychological disposition, nor a survey of the empirical sociology of trust; it offers a mechanism for the specific case of the non-coercive promise, and traces that mechanism's reach. Where the argument requires the resources of jurisprudence, of the cognitive sciences, of psychoanalysis, of political economy, and of the Daoist and Kantian traditions, it draws on them as the prior papers in the series have drawn on them: as several irreducible epistemic positions on a single object, none of which governs the others.

Relation to the foundational paper and to the series

The paper stands in a definite relation to a foundational text, to which it should be read as a sustained development of two of that text's diagnostic themes. The foundational paper [21] sets out the framework of which the present series is a part, and devotes nearly half its length to a diagnosis of the crisis of the symbol under modern conditions, across several dimensions. The present paper takes up two of those dimensions in particular—the crisis of authenticity and trust, and the overload of justice—and subjects them to the exhaustive mechanistic analysis that the foundational paper, whose purpose was diagnostic, deferred. Where the foundational paper established that trust has come under a crisis whose mechanism it did not specify, the present paper specifies the mechanism; where the foundational paper diagnosed an overload of the juridical and a failure of enforcement, the present paper carries that diagnosis to the claim that force has failed *as a signal*, and offers the way out the foundational paper marked but did not develop. The relation to the wider series is similarly definite. The paper draws on the geometric-phase or holonomy apparatus developed earlier in the series, on its three-register theory of value, and on its account of the practitioner who cannot guarantee that his practice is good; and it observes, as the series requires, the discipline by which no single framework is permitted to absorb the others.

Contributions

The paper claims to establish the following. *First*, and centrally, that the expectation a non-coercive promise produces is generated by a mechanism that can be given a definite form: trust is the high precision a receiver's generative model assigns to the prediction that the promise will be kept, and this precision is supplied through three coupled channels—structural, self-committing, and wagered—which multiply rather than add, so that the consistency among them, hard to forge, is the source of well-founded trust (§6). *Second*, a jurisprudential result: that enforcing force is not the cause of obligation but a substitute mechanism for the production of expectation, and that the internal development of legal philosophy has, over a century,

moved the anchor of legal validity away from force and toward trust — a movement the law itself records, at its technical edge, in the doctrine of promissory estoppel (§4). *Third*, an account of relational trust, the trust transmitted along the links of a relational network, as a phenomenon spanning all three registers, together with a new specification of how it fails under the crisis of the symbol: through a separation of the symbolic vehicle of trust from the real coupling it should carry (§9). *Fourth*, a theory of the translation of sincerity across the borders of incommensurable epistemologies, with its attendant ethics (§10). *Fifth*, a direction for the reform of the juridical, developed in a historical-materialist register, toward the decentralisation of enforcement (§11). *Sixth*, and as the paper’s metaphysical summit, an account of self-legislation as the descent of a relational divinity, with the consequence that the promise which has no force may be, in respect of this, the more fully realised (§12).

A note on method and on what is conceded

Two commitments run through the paper. The first concerns the status of its formal and scientific apparatus. The paper draws on predictive coding for the mechanism of trust, and on the dynamics of open quantum systems for the structure of relational trust; it does so as the prior papers drew on the geometric phase, as *mechanistic and structural* models and not as reductive claims about what trust ultimately is. Predictive coding furnishes a description at the computational and implementational level; it does not displace the phenomenological, the juridical, or the ethical descriptions of the same object, and it is not a meta-framework that absorbs them. The same discipline governs the use of the quantum-dynamical language in §9: a structural isomorphism is claimed, not a physical reduction. The second commitment is the series’ refusal of a governing conclusion. The paper ends not in a synthesis but in plural conclusions, each framework stating what it can and cannot say, because the object — trust generated without a guarantor — is one no single framework possesses, and the form of the paper is meant to enact this as much as to assert it (§13).

Limitations and what is left open

The paper is candid about its limits. The holonomy apparatus is employed as a structural analogy rather than developed to full formal closure here, the relevant formal programme being carried by another paper in the series; the genealogy of trust-grammars it offers (§10) is offered as adequate to its practical purpose rather than as exhaustive, and admits of finer subdivision; the depth to which the predictive-coding account is pressed, in particular toward a first-principles treatment in terms of the active reduction of expected uncertainty, is deliberately bounded, the stronger and more technical development being noted rather than carried out. The quantum-dynamical isomorphism of §9 is presented as a formal analogy inviting, but not here supplying, its own development. These are marked as open rather than concealed, in keeping with the series’ discipline of distinguishing what is claimed from what is conjectured.

Plan of the paper

The paper proceeds as follows. It assembles, without yet explaining them, the symptoms of the contemporary condition of trust (§2); and diagnoses them, drawing on the foundational paper and on the older problems of Hume and Kant, to the thesis that force is not the cause of trust (§3). It then locates that thesis within the philosophy of law, tracing the migration of the anchor of legal validity from force toward trust (§4), and draws out the metaphysical consequence, that the cause of trust is inferential rather than mechanical and that this is the very opening in which freedom and the moral are possible (§5). It develops the central mechanism (§6); gives its geometric reading in the language of holonomy (§7); states the criterion that distinguishes genuine trust from forged (§8); analyses relational trust and its failure, with its quantum-dynamical structure (§9); and develops the theory of translation by which sincerity crosses the borders of epistemology (§10). It turns then to practice: to the reform of the juridical at the scale of institutions (§11), and to the praxis of trust at the scale of a life, rising to the account of relational divinity that is the paper's summit (§12). It concludes in plural conclusions (§13), and closes in an envoi.

2. The Symptomatology of Trust

Before a condition is diagnosed it is presented, and a diagnosis that proceeds without first attending to the symptoms is a diagnosis of nothing. This section assembles the symptoms. It does not yet explain them; explanation is the work of §3, and to anticipate it here would be to read the symptoms in the light of a thesis they are meant to motivate rather than to confirm. The discipline of the section is therefore descriptive: it sets out a range of observable, recognisable phenomena, drawn from the most intimate scale of human dealing to the most public, and asks only that they be looked at together, in the expectation that what governs them will appear, when it appears, as the explanation of a pattern already seen rather than as a hypothesis imposed upon scattered instances.

The phenomena, looked at together, exhibit a single and initially paradoxical shape. *The apparatus by which trust is secured proliferates, and trust itself grows scarcer.* Wherever one looks, the instruments designed to produce or guarantee or certify reliability multiply—longer contracts, more elaborate vows, denser systems of credentialing, ever finer mechanisms of rating and verification—and the multiplication does not arrest the erosion of the thing the instruments exist to secure but accompanies it, and, in a way the section will only describe and not yet account for, seems bound up with it. The relation between the proliferation and the erosion is left, here, deliberately unstated. That there is such a relation, recurring across scales that have otherwise little in common, is the observation the section exists to establish.

The phenomena are presented across three scales, from the intimate outward, not because the intimate is a miniature of the public—whether it is or is not is a question for later—but because the recurrence of one shape across scales that differ in every other respect is itself the first thing to be seen.

2.1 The intimate and familial scale

At the most intimate scale, the symptom appears first in the very document from which this paper set out. A betrothal is undertaken, and around it gathers an apparatus of solemnisation—the auspicious day, the silk, the gravity of the language, in other settings the ring, the announcement, the assembled witnesses—whose elaboration is in no evident proportion to the security it confers, since it confers, in the strict sense, none. People who undertake such a thing know, when they reflect, that nothing in the ceremony binds; and they elaborate the ceremony anyway, and feel the elaboration as weighty rather than as idle. This is already a symptom: a solemnising apparatus is invoked with full seriousness in the acknowledged absence of anything it could enforce.

The symptom recurs, in a sharper and more troubling form, in the marriage that may follow. The vows exchanged at weddings have grown, across recent generations and in many places, more articulate, more personal, more lavish in their profession of permanence, at the same time as the dissolution of the unions they open has grown more common rather than less. The observation is not offered here as a causal claim in either direction; it is offered as a juxtaposition that the symptomatology must record, that the form of the promise has become more elaborate as the persistence of what it promises has become less assured. The two curves, of the eloquence of the vow and of the fragility of the bond, have moved, over the relevant period, in the same direction, and a symptomatology notes this without yet asking what to make of it.

The symptom appears again, and most pressingly for the concerns of this paper, in the predicament of the one who must win the trust of a family not yet his own. Here the apparatus that elsewhere proliferates is precisely what is unavailable. The suitor has, by hypothesis, no track record with the family, no accumulated history by which he might be known, no third party they already trust who can vouch for him; he has only a sincerity that is, to him, entirely real, and that has, to them, no form they can read as evidence. The symptom at this scale is thus not the proliferation of the apparatus but the felt insufficiency of everything that is not it: the discovery that sincerity, however genuine, does not present itself as ground, and that the very people whose trust matters most are the people to whom one has least that they will count.

2.2 The legal and judicial scale

At the scale of law and commerce the same shape recurs with a documentary precision that makes it easy to measure. Contracts have grown longer. The instruments by which commercial parties bind one another have expanded, across the last century and with sharp acceleration in recent decades, into documents of a length and intricacy no party reads in full, drafted in anticipation of every contingency and every adversarial reading, and lengthening still; and the lengthening has not been accompanied by a growing ease of dealing or a growing confidence between contracting parties, but, by the testimony of those who deal under such instruments, by the opposite. The thicker the contract, the less, not the more, the parties feel secure; the elaboration of the terms is experienced less as the building of confidence than as its pre-emptive

substitute, an arming against a breach already half expected.

Beside the contract stands the memorandum of understanding, and it is, for this paper, the most telling instrument at this scale precisely because it is the contract's opposite. The memorandum of understanding is, by design, non-binding: it records an intention, sets out the shape of a contemplated dealing, and explicitly withholds the force of an enforceable obligation. Such instruments proliferate. They are drafted with care, signed with ceremony, and treated by their signatories as significant, in the full and stated knowledge that they bind nothing. That parties expend such effort on the solemn execution of documents they know to be unenforceable is a symptom of exactly the kind this section collects: a grave investment in a form whose want of force is not concealed but declared.

And behind both contract and memorandum stands the court, in which the symptom takes its most consequential form. The machinery of enforcement, the sword to which all these instruments are nominally referred, is under a strain that has begun to show. The volume of breach exceeds the capacity of the courts to adjudicate it; the cost of enforcement, in time and money and attention, rises until for many wrongs it exceeds the value of the remedy; the period over which a judgment is obtained lengthens, and the prospect of actually recovering on a judgment, once obtained, narrows. The sword, in a word, hangs but increasingly does not fall, and is known not to fall; and an instrument of enforcement that is known not to fall has ceased, whatever its formal availability, to function as the thing it was. The symptom here is not the proliferation of an apparatus but the hollowing of one: the persistence of the full formal machinery of compulsion alongside its growing practical inability to compel.

2.3 The universal scale

At the widest scale the shape appears in its purest and most general form, in the instruments by which strangers are made legible to strangers. The letter of recommendation is the clearest case. It is an instrument designed to transmit a knowledge that the recipient cannot acquire directly: the writer, who knows the candidate, vouches for the candidate to a committee, which trusts the writer. And it has, by common acknowledgment within the institutions that rely on it, very largely ceased to function. The letters have inflated until nearly every candidate is described as among the best the writer has encountered; the superlative, having become universal, has become uninformative; and committees, no longer able to extract a signal from a channel everyone has learned to saturate, turn away from the letters toward whatever can be counted — scores, citations, rankings — not because the counted things are richer but because they are, at least, harder to inflate. The apparatus of vouching has proliferated to the point of self-cancellation, and trust has retreated from it.

The same shape governs the systems of rating and certification by which the digital economy attempts to make its strangers legible. Trust badges, verification marks, star ratings, certification seals multiply across every surface on which strangers must deal with strangers; and their multiplication is met, by those who encounter them, not with growing confidence but with a growing and well-schooled wariness, since the very ubiquity of the mark of trustworthiness

teaches that the mark is cheap, gameable, and as available to the predator as to the honest. The more the surface is covered with the signs of trustworthiness, the less any one of them reassures. Here the proliferation and the erosion are not merely concurrent but legibly bound: each new layer of certification is a response to the failure of the last, and itself elicits the next.

And beneath all these the most general symptom of the age, which the section records last because it underlies the rest: the condition of being surrounded by symbols whose provenance and whose intention cannot be established. The cost of producing a convincing token—a document, an image, a voice, a record of conduct—has fallen, with the technologies of the present, toward zero, and the consequence is a saturation of the human environment with signs that are no longer reliably tied to anything they purport to indicate. A person now moves through a world of symbols any of which may be confected, and the rational response to such a world—a generalised lowering of the weight given to all symbolic testimony—is itself a symptom of the first order: a withdrawal of trust not from this or that untrustworthy source but from the symbolic as such.

2.4 A taxonomy of the symptoms

The phenomena gathered above are not a miscellany. Looked at together, they are so many appearances of a single fissure, opening at different scales and in different materials, between an apparatus that is meant to secure trust and the trust it fails to secure. To make the unity visible, and to give the diagnosis of §3 a structured object rather than a list of anecdotes to work upon, the symptoms may be set out along a small number of shared dimensions: the scale at which the symptom appears; the apparatus of assurance proper to that scale; the mode in which that apparatus fails; and the specific form the governing paradox—proliferation alongside erosion—takes in each case. The table that follows arranges them so. It is offered as a description and not as an explanation: each row records what is observed, and the column of failure-modes names the manner of a breakdown without yet assigning its cause. That every row instances one fissure, and what that fissure is, is the matter the table hands forward to the diagnosis.

Phenomenon	Scale	Apparatus of assurance	Mode of failure
Betrothal, wedding vow	intimate	ceremony, solemnity, profession of permanence	elaboration grows as the bond's persistence weakens; gravity without enforceability
Winning a family's trust	familial	sincerity, profession, proposed conduct	sincerity does not present as evidence to those who ask for grounds

Phenomenon	Scale	Apparatus of assurance	Mode of failure
Commercial contract	legal	enumerated terms, penalties, remedies	thickening of terms experienced as anxiety, not confidence; arming against expected breach
Memorandum of understanding	legal	solemn execution of a declared non-binding form	grave investment in an instrument known to bind nothing
The court, enforcement	judicial	compulsion, the threat of the sanction	the sword hangs but does not fall and is known not to; formal machinery hollowed of practical force
Letter of recommendation	institutional	a trusted writer's vouching along a chain	inflation to the superlative; the channel saturated to uninformativeness
Rating, certification, trust badge	platform	marks, seals, verification, star scores	ubiquity teaches cheapness; the mark reassures less the more it covers
The confected token	universal	symbolic testimony as such	zero-cost production severs sign from referent; rational withdrawal from the symbolic

Read down the columns, the table says more than any row. The scale ranges from two persons to a whole society, and the apparatus changes utterly across that range, from red silk to a star rating; yet the column of failure-modes rhymes. In every case a form that is meant to carry assurance is found, in the end, not to carry it: the form persists, elaborates, even proliferates, while the assurance drains out of it. Whether at the scale of a vow or of a verification mark, the gap that opens is the same gap—between the apparatus and the trust—and it is the recurrence of this one gap across a range that shares nothing else that constitutes the central symptom of the age. The proliferation of the apparatus and the erosion of the trust are, the table suggests without yet showing, two faces of one process. Naming that process, and showing why the proliferation should accompany rather than arrest the erosion, is the work to which the symptomatology now hands over.

3. Diagnosis

The symptoms gathered in §2 share a shape, and a shape that recurs across scales otherwise unrelated is evidence of a common cause. This section names that cause. It does so in the manner the foundational paper established for such work [21]: diagnosis here is not a preliminary to be hurried through on the way to a remedy, but a substantial undertaking in its own right, on the principle that the precision of a response is bounded by the precision of the diagnosis it answers. To see clearly how a gap has opened between the symbol and the thing it was to secure is already half of what is needed to respond to it; and so the section takes its time, and develops the diagnosis to a definite thesis, before any mechanism or remedy is proposed.

The foundational paper diagnosed a crisis of the symbol under modern conditions across several dimensions. The present paper does not recapitulate them all; it takes up the two that bear directly on trust — the crisis of authenticity and trust, and the overload of justice — and develops each beyond the point at which the foundational paper left it, weaving in three further of its dimensions where they bear on the mechanism, and adding one diagnostic dimension the foundational paper did not contain. It then sets the whole against the two older philosophical problems — Hume’s and Kant’s — that give the modern crisis its deeper form, and draws from the conjunction the thesis that organises the rest of the paper.

3.1 The crisis of trust: from the failure of trust to the failure of its production

The first dimension the foundational paper diagnosed under this head is by now familiar from the symptomatology: a saturation of the human environment with symbols whose cost of production has fallen toward zero, whose provenance cannot be established, and which are as available to deception as to sincerity, with the rational consequence that the weight given to symbolic testimony as such declines [21]. The foundational paper established this much. What the present paper must add — for it is the precise point at which the diagnosis turns into the problem this paper exists to solve — is that the crisis has passed beyond the failure of particular instances of trust into a doubt about *the producibility of trust at all*. It is one thing for a given promise to be disbelieved; it is another, and the deeper condition, for it to become unclear by what means *any* promise could now be made believable. The symptomatology showed the apparatus of assurance failing at every scale; the diagnosis is that the failure is not of this or that instrument but of the question they all answer, so that the question itself — how is trust to be generated? — which in a healthier condition would not need to be asked, has become both urgent and obscure. This is why the mechanism of trust-generation, which a more confident age could take for granted and leave unexamined, must now be made the express object of inquiry.

3.2 The overload of justice and the failure of force as a signal

The second dimension is the one the foundational paper named the overload of justice [21]. As relational and communal orders of trust have thinned, the burden of holding people to their dealings has fallen, by default, upon the juridical: where once a web of relationship and

reputation and communal witness held a person to his word, now the law is asked to do it, and is asked to do it for a volume and a variety of dealings it was never sized to bear. The foundational paper diagnosed the resulting overload: the law extended into ever more of life, and at the same time hollowed from within, asked to underwrite an order it lacks the means to underwrite.

The present paper carries this diagnosis one decisive step. The overload is not merely quantitative, a matter of too many demands upon a finite institution; it is the visible form of a deeper failure, the failure of *force as a signal*. The symptomatology recorded the sword that hangs but does not fall. The diagnosis of that symptom is this: the threat of compulsion produces compliance not by the mechanical certainty of the sanction — which, as the symptomatology showed, has become anything but certain — but by signalling to the parties that compliance is to be expected. Force, that is, operates as a substitute for expectation: it is one means among possible others of bringing a party to expect that an undertaking will be honoured. And a signal whose mechanical basis is known to have failed — a sword known not to fall — ceases to signal. The overload of justice is thus the macroscopic, institutional, observable face of the paper’s central thesis, encountered here as a hard social fact before it is argued as a principle: that force was never the cause of the obligation, but only one device for the production of the expectation in which trust consists, and that the device is now failing on its own terms.

3.3 Three further dimensions: cause, consequence, and precondition

Three further of the foundational paper’s dimensions enter the diagnosis, not as separate crises but as the cause, the consequence, and the precondition of the crisis of trust, and they are woven in here on that understanding rather than treated in their own right [21].

The first is the *generativity paradox*: the capacity of the present age’s technologies to produce symbols without limit and at no cost. This is the *cause*, at the level of material technique, of the saturation diagnosed above; it is why the forged signal has become not an occasional intrusion but the ambient condition, and why the production of a convincing token of sincerity can no longer, by itself, carry the weight it once did. The diagnosis of trust must be set upon this technical base, on pain of mistaking for a moral decline what is in the first instance a change in the cost of producing signs.

The second is the *return of the Real*: the eruption, where the symbolic order fails to hold, of what the symbolic was meant to bind — in the form of a free-floating anxiety, a susceptibility to conspiracy, a drift toward the fundamentalist and the violent. This is the *consequence*, at the level of the affective and the social, of a generalised failure of trust: when the symbolic testimony by which people orient themselves to one another can no longer be relied upon, what returns is not a neutral scepticism but a charged and disoriented seeking after some unfalsifiable ground. The diagnosis records this as the cost of leaving the crisis of trust unanswered.

The third is the *collapse of intersubjectivity*, the degradation of the relation in which one meets another as a presence rather than as an object — what an earlier language opposed as the I–Thou to the I–It. This is the *precondition* whose erosion most threatens the mechanism

this paper will propose. For one of the channels by which trust is generated, as §6 will show, requires that a real self-committing act be received *by another who is present to receive it*; and where the relation has degraded to the merely instrumental, that channel is disabled at its root. The collapse of intersubjectivity is thus not one more symptom but a threat to the very possibility of the cure.

3.4 The decoupling of credibility from enforceability

To the dimensions drawn from the foundational paper the present diagnosis adds one the foundational paper did not contain, and which is, the paper submits, the specifically modern hinge on which its central problem turns. It is the historical decoupling of the *credibility* of a promise from its *enforceability*.

In the pre-modern settings against which the modern condition is most sharply seen, the two were bound together and were scarcely distinguished. A promise was credible and enforceable at once, and by the same fact: the god who witnessed the oath was also the power that would avenge its breach; the lineage or the village before whom the word was given was also the body that would exact the cost of breaking it; to be seen to promise was, in the same act, to be bound to perform, because the seeing and the binding were done by one and the same watching community. Credibility and enforceability were two aspects of a single social fact, and no one had occasion to prise them apart.

Modernity prised them apart. It assigned enforceability to a specialised institution, the law, which would compel performance through an abstract and impersonal machinery; and it left credibility—the quality by which a promise is believed in the first place, before and apart from any question of compulsion—without a corresponding institution to house it. So long as the law’s machinery of enforcement was robust, this division of labour was invisible, because enforceability could be relied upon to stand in for credibility: one did not need to find a promise credible if one could be assured it was enforceable. But the symptomatology has shown the enforcing machinery failing; and as it fails, the division of labour is exposed, and credibility is revealed for what modernity had quietly made it—an orphan, a quality with no institution to underwrite it, hanging unsupported now that the institution which had stood in for it can no longer bear the weight.

This is why the paper’s central problem is urgent *now*, and was not, in this form, urgent before. The question of how a promise becomes credible in the absence of enforcement is not a perennial philosophical puzzle that happens to have been posed again; it is the question a specific historical arrangement has forced into the open, by first making credibility depend upon enforceability and then allowing enforceability to fail. The orphaning of credibility is the diagnosis that pins the paper to its moment, and it is offered as the diagnostic contribution most particularly the paper’s own.

3.5 The two older problems: Hume and Kant

Beneath the modern crisis lie two older problems, which give it its deeper philosophical form and which the diagnosis must reach if the thesis it arrives at is to be more than a sociological observation.

The first is Hume's. The expectation that a person who has kept his word will keep it again, like every expectation that the future will resemble the past, rests upon induction, and induction, as Hume showed, has no foundation in reason: no accumulation of past performance *entails* future performance, and the inference from the one to the other, however indispensable, cannot be justified as a matter of logic [14]. This is the problem that the evidentialist's reliance upon track record can never wholly escape, and it sets a limit on what any quantity of evidence can establish: at the end of the longest record of kept promises there remains a gap, across which no evidence can carry one, between what has been and what will be. The diagnosis records this as the deep structural reason why trust can never be reduced to the accumulation of evidence: the gap Hume opened is constitutive, and every account of trust must say what it does about that gap rather than pretend to have closed it.

The second is Kant's. Where Hume's problem is that the inference to future conduct cannot be grounded in past fact, Kant's bears on the standing of the one who must nonetheless be relied upon. To treat a person solely as a system whose future behaviour is to be predicted from evidence and secured by incentive is to treat him, in the terms of the second formulation of the categorical imperative, merely as a means, as an object to be managed rather than an end in himself [15]. But a promise, in its full sense, is addressed to a free agent who binds himself, and is received from one; the one who promises is not predicting his own future conduct as one predicts the weather, but committing himself to it as only a free being can. The diagnosis records this as the reason the problem of trust cannot be fully handed over to prediction and incentive without changing its object: to model the promisor merely as a mechanism to be managed is to have stopped speaking of promising at all. The wager that the other will keep faith is, in part, a wager on his freedom—and this, as §5 will develop, is not a softness in the account but the very opening in which everything the paper most wants to say becomes possible.

3.6 The thesis: force is not the cause of trust

The dimensions assembled converge on a single thesis, which the rest of the paper exists to develop, to ground, and to apply. It can be stated plainly. **Even where the coercive guarantee of the Other is fully present, trust under modern conditions has broadly declined; therefore force is not the cause of trust.** If the sword were the cause of the expectation, then where the sword stands ready the expectation should stand firm; but the symptomatology shows trust eroding precisely where the apparatus of compulsion is most fully elaborated, and the diagnosis of the overload of justice shows why: the sword secures expectation only by signalling, and a signal whose basis is known to have failed no longer signals, however sharp the blade remains. Force, then, is at most a contingent and now-failing

device for the production of an expectation that is the real thing; it is not that expectation's cause.

The thesis turns on a distinction the rest of the paper will hold to throughout: between two senses of *cause*. There is the mechanical cause, which operates as one billiard ball operates upon another, by the transmission of a compulsion that leaves the affected body no part to play; and there is the inferential cause, which operates by giving a mind a ground on which to form an expectation, an expectation the mind itself produces and could, being free, have withheld. Force, where it works, works mechanically, or aspires to: it would move the promisor as a body is moved. But trust is not a body's motion; it is a mind's expectation, formed inferentially, on grounds. To say that force is not the cause of trust is to say that the mechanical cause is not the cause of the inferential effect—that the production of an expectation in a free mind belongs to a different order of causation than the compulsion of a body, and cannot be accomplished by it. The whole positive account of the paper follows from taking this distinction seriously: if trust is an inferential effect, then the question of how it is generated is the question of how the right grounds are supplied to the mind that forms it—and force, it turns out, is neither the only such ground nor, any longer, a working one.

With this the diagnosis is complete. The symptom was a gap, recurring across every scale, between the apparatus of assurance and the trust it failed to secure. The diagnosis is that the apparatus failed because it was built on a mistake about its own working—the mistake of taking force, the mechanical cause, for the cause of an effect that is inferential and free—and that the crisis of the present is the coming-due of that mistake, as the one device the mistake had relied upon, enforcement, fails on its own terms and leaves the credibility it had stood in for without support. What remains is to show, positively, how the inferential effect is in fact produced: by what mechanism a free mind, given the right grounds, comes to expect that a promise will be kept. To that the paper now turns, beginning where the failed device itself began, in the philosophy of law.

4. The Jurisprudential Core: The Migration of the Anchor of Validity

The diagnosis ended by sending the inquiry to the philosophy of law, and for a definite reason. Law is the institution modernity charged with enforceability; it is where the device that the diagnosis found failing—force as the producer of expectation—was housed, theorised, and refined. If that device is not, after all, the cause of obligation, then the law's own reflection upon itself should bear the marks of the discovery, and the history of legal philosophy should record, in its internal development, a movement away from the very ground modernity had assigned it. This section shows that it does. It is not a survey. It reads the major positions in the philosophy of law along a single axis—*the location of the anchor of validity*, the place at which each position lodges the force by which an obligation obliges—and it finds, reading them so, not a set of competing doctrines to be weighed but a directional movement to be traced: the anchor migrates, across a century of the law's reflection upon itself, from force toward trust. The section follows that migration through eight positions, and arranges them

at its close in a single view.

A word on the relation to the foundational paper, which treated several of these same thinkers along a different axis, that of structure against generation, the Symbolic against the Real [21]. The present reading is not a repetition but a re-cutting of the same material along a more focused axis: not what kind of thing law is, but where the force of its obligation is anchored. The two readings are consistent and complementary; the present one is the one the problem of trust requires.

4.1 The anchor in force: Austin and Hobbes

The movement begins where modernity's assignment is most undisguised, in the command theory of John Austin. For Austin, law is the command of a sovereign, backed by the threat of a sanction, habitually obeyed; and a legal obligation is, by definition, the standing liability to the sanction—to be obliged is to be exposed to the probability of an evil at the hands of one with the power and the will to inflict it [1]. The anchor of validity here is welded to mechanical cause. The obligation *is* the threatened pain; there is, in the account, no remainder, nothing in being bound over and above being liable to be hurt. Whatever else the command theory does, it states with unmatched clarity the position the rest of the chapter will move away from: that the force of an obligation is the force of a threatened consequence, and nothing else.

Behind Austin stands his metaphysical ancestor, Hobbes, whose famous sentence is the chapter's true point of departure: covenants without the sword are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all [11]. The sentence is usually read as a worldly observation about the weakness of unbacked promises. It is better read, for the purposes of this paper, as the statement of an anthropology from which the impossibility of trust follows by necessity. Hobbes's natural man, in the war of all against all, has no ground on which to expect his fellow's forbearance, and so trust is not merely scarce in the state of nature but *logically impossible*: there is nothing from which the expectation could be formed, and the sovereign *must* therefore be erected to inject, from outside, by the threat of overwhelming force, the expectation the parties cannot generate between themselves.

It is exactly here that the chapter's reading first bites. Austin and Hobbes take the limiting case—the case in which trust has wholly collapsed and only fear remains—and mistake it for the whole. The Hobbesian state of nature is the crisis of the symbol carried to its extremity, a world in which no symbol can produce expectation because none can be relied upon; and the Hobbesian remedy, the sword, is precisely the substitution of mechanical cause for the inferential cause that has failed. The command theory, then, is not false so much as it is the theory of a pathological limit. Its model has nothing to say where trust is present, because there force is redundant; it becomes visible, and seems complete, only where trust has collapsed and force is all that is left. And this is why it speaks so directly to the present: the contemporary overload of justice (§3.2) is the world sliding toward the Hobbesian condition—trust thinning until the sword is asked to do everything—at the very moment when, as the symptomatology showed, the sword can no longer fall. The command theory describes the destination toward

which the failure of trust tends; and the failure of the sword to fall, there, is the command theory's own solution failing on its own terms.

4.2 The anchor moves toward acceptance: Hart's internal point of view

The decisive turn, and the hinge of the whole chapter, is Hart's. His critique of Austin is the moment at which the anchor of validity is, for the first time within legal positivism itself, pried loose from mechanical cause and moved toward something else. Two of his objections do the work. The first is the distinction between being *obliged* and having an *obligation* [10]. The gunman obliges me to hand over my money; I am not under an obligation to do so. Austin's theory, which defines obligation as liability to a sanction, can capture only the first — the being-compelled — and is constitutively unable to capture the second, the normativity by which a rule gives me a reason and not merely a motive. The second objection is that whole classes of law — the power-conferring rules by which one makes a will, forms a contract, marries — are not commands backed by threats at all, but enabling structures that confer the capacity to alter one's normative situation, and that the command theory simply cannot accommodate.

From these objections Hart draws the concept on which everything turns: the *internal point of view* [10]. A rule exists, as a rule and not as a mere observed regularity of compelled behaviour, where there is a group who accept it from the inside, who take it as a standard for their own conduct and as a ground for criticising deviation in others — who use the rule, in their reasoning and their appraisals, rather than merely conforming to it under threat. The internal point of view is a normative attitude, not a prediction; and it stands in sharp contrast, as §4.5 will show, to the external, predictive stance of one who asks only what will be done to him if he is caught. This is the jurisprudential moment at which the anchor of validity is moved from mechanical cause toward the normative — toward an acceptance that gives reasons, the very thing the inferential cause of the diagnosis traffics in.

The point reaches its depth in Hart's account of the *rule of recognition*, the ultimate rule by which a legal system's other rules are identified as valid. What grounds the rule of recognition itself? Hart's answer is that nothing grounds it from above; it rests upon nothing but the convergent practice of the officials who accept and use it. Its validity is not conferred by a higher rule, and is not secured by any sanction; its existence simply *is* the fact that it is accepted and acted upon. Here Hart arrives, without naming it so, at the position closest to this paper's: the ultimate ground of a legal order's validity is not a sword but a collective, self-sustaining acceptance — a convergence of the internal point of view across the body of officials, which holds itself up by being shared. This is, in the vocabulary of §6, the institutional-scale form of the structural channel: a shared prior, sustained by the very fact of being shared, that needs no external pump to hold it in place.

Honesty requires that Hart's own difficulty be marked, for it is the difficulty that hands the argument to Fuller. Is the acceptance in which the rule of recognition consists a matter of fact or a matter of norm? Hart wishes it to be a convergent social fact; but a bare factual convergence — that officials do, as it happens, behave alike — seems unable to generate the genuine obligation,

the *ought*, that a rule of recognition is supposed to carry. This is the opening through which Dworkin pressed his critique, that law cannot be a matter of convergent practice alone but must involve an interpretive, value-laden commitment [4]. The paper does not adjudicate that dispute here; it notes only that the difficulty points beyond bare acceptance toward something acceptance alone does not supply, and that Fuller named what that something is.

4.3 The anchor in reciprocity: Fuller's inner morality of law

Fuller supplies what bare acceptance lacks. His claim is that law possesses an inner morality, a set of eight principles—that rules be general, promulgated, prospective, clear, non-contradictory, possible to obey, stable over time, and administered congruently with their announced terms—which are not external moral constraints upon law but conditions of its very existence as law [7]. The question Fuller's critics pressed is why these should be called a *morality* rather than a mere technique of effective governance, a craftsman's know-how for making rules that work. His answer, and the point at which his account becomes this paper's, is that the eight principles together constitute an implicit promise from the lawgiver to the governed, and that the eighth—*congruence*, the requirement that officials actually administer the law as announced—is the heart of the matter, because it makes obedience a *reciprocity*. The citizen's fidelity to law is a response to the state's fidelity to its own announced rules; each side's keeping of faith is conditioned upon the other's. Strip the reciprocity away—let the state announce one rule and apply another—and the obligation to obey does not merely weaken but loses its ground, because the relation that grounded it was a mutual keeping of faith and one party has defected from it.

This reciprocity is trust under its proper name in the law. When Fuller says that law is a collaborative enterprise between the government and the citizen, an enterprise that fails not when a rule is broken but when the bond of reciprocity that constitutes it is betrayed, he has named, in the jurisprudential register, the very thing this paper is about: the anchor of validity lodged in a mutually relied-upon undertaking. The long debate between Fuller and Hart over whether law and morality are necessarily connected can, within this paper's frame, be re-described and, in a sense, settled in Fuller's favour—not on Fuller's own grounds but on the paper's: the anchor of validity, reciprocity, is itself a normative and relational thing, a keeping of faith, and not a neutral fact about convergent behaviour; so the validity of law cannot after all be specified without reference to the relation of trust in which it is anchored. Fuller's inner morality is, in this paper's terms, the institutional-scale form of all three channels of §6 at once—a structure that is also a self-commitment and that invites a wager—with the anchor lodged in a doubly relied-upon promise.

4.4 The anchor in procedure and discourse: Habermas and Rawls

A briefer station continues the movement Fuller began, by asking how legitimate norms are produced rather than where validity finally rests. Habermas locates the legitimacy of law in the discourse through which it is generated: norms are valid insofar as they could meet with the assent of all affected, in a communicative process governed by reason rather than force,

and the legal-political system depends for its legitimacy upon a lifeworld of communicative practice that the system itself cannot produce and can only deplete [9]. The structure of this dependence is worth marking, for it is isomorphic with a dependence this paper will meet again: just as the Habermasian system draws its legitimacy from a lifeworld it cannot generate from within itself, so the likelihood-channel of trust, in §6, draws upon a real basis that the symbolic cannot manufacture. Rawls, with the device of a procedure—the original position—whose fairness confers legitimacy upon what issues from it, belongs to the same family [20]: a family that anchors validity in the manner of its legitimate *production*. This is structurally the same kind of question as the paper’s own—how is something legitimately produced?—asked of legitimacy where the paper asks it of trust; and noting the kinship, the chapter returns to its main line.

4.5 The first counter-coordinate: Holmes’s bad man and legal realism

Against the movement toward acceptance and reciprocity, two positions hold the anchor down at force, and they must be given their due, for each marks a permanent coordinate the paper will need. The first is Holmes’s. His advice to view the law through the eyes of the bad man—the man who cares nothing for the morality of the law and wishes only to know what the courts will in fact do to him, so that he may calculate—is the purest statement of the external, predictive stance [13]. For the bad man, law just *is* a prediction of official behaviour, and obligation just is the calculated probability of a consequence; he is the perfect evidentialist, the subject of pure mechanical cause, who recognises no internal point of view because he occupies none.

The paper’s treatment of Holmes is twofold. On the one hand, the bad man is real and his stance is irreducible: he is the exact portrait of the evidentialist trust-grammar that §10 will have to take seriously, the subject for whom only the predictable consequence counts and for whom sincerity is no evidence. To pretend he does not exist, or that his stance is simply a moral failing, is to disarm the paper before its hardest case. On the other hand, his limit is precise and must be stated. To model *every* subject as the bad man—to take the external predictive stance as the whole truth about legal subjects—is to erase the internal point of view a priori, and with it the possibility of meeting the other as a free subject who binds himself rather than as an object whose conduct is to be predicted and managed. The bad-man theory, generalised, is Kant’s worry (§3.5) realised in jurisprudence: it reduces the person to an object determined by consequences. It is true of those who have made themselves bad men, and it is a standing possibility for anyone; it is not the truth about the human as such, and a theory that takes it for that truth has decided in advance against everything §5 will affirm. The sociological extension of realism—the *living law* of Ehrlich, the law that actually governs conduct as against the law on the books—is noted here as a related and more capacious development, but the bad man is the figure that matters for the paper’s argument.

4.6 The second counter-coordinate: Kelsen's pure theory

The second position that holds the anchor away from trust does so in the opposite direction from Holmes — not downward into predicted fact but upward into pure norm. Kelsen's pure theory derives the validity of each legal norm from a higher norm that authorises it, in an ascending chain that must terminate, on pain of regress, in a presupposed *basic norm*, the *Grundnorm*, which is not itself posited by any higher authority but assumed as the transcendental-logical condition of regarding the whole order as valid [16]. The Grundnorm is a presupposition, bracketing both morality and fact, a purely normative postulate at the apex of a purely normative structure.

Set beside Hart, the contrast is exact and instructive. Hart's rule of recognition is an accepted social fact, something officials actually do; Kelsen's Grundnorm is a presupposed symbolic posit, something one must assume. And the diagnosis the paper offers of Kelsen follows immediately: Kelsen lodges the anchor of validity in the purest possible point of the Symbolic, a posit suspended from nothing, held up by nothing but the decision to presuppose it. This is the most elegant of the positions and, by the paper's lights, the most fragile under the conditions the symptomatology described. For a foundation that consists in a pure symbolic presupposition is exactly what the crisis of the symbol dissolves: let the presupposition cease to be made — let people stop assuming the basic norm — and the whole towering normative structure, having no other support, hangs in the void. Kelsen is the limiting case of an anchor lodged in the Symbolic alone, and the crisis of trust is precisely the condition under which an anchor so lodged goes to zero (§3.1).

4.7 The concrete instrument: from consideration to reliance

The migration of the anchor is not only a movement in high theory; the law records it, with documentary precision, in the technical doctrines of contract, and these are the most directly relevant of all, for they bear on exactly the instrument from which the paper set out, the bare and unenforceable promise. The orthodox doctrine of *consideration* holds that a bare promise — a promise for which nothing is given in exchange — is not enforceable; for a promise to bind, there must be a bargained-for exchange, a quid pro quo. The bare promise, the gratuitous undertaking, the memorandum that records an intention without exchanging anything — this is the precise legal situation of the betrothal document and of the memorandum of understanding alike: a promise the orthodox doctrine declines to enforce because nothing was given for it.

But the law developed an exception, and the exception is, for this paper, a quiet vindication from within the law itself. Under the doctrine of *promissory estoppel*, a promise unsupported by consideration may nonetheless be enforced where the promisee has reasonably relied upon it, has acted to his detriment in that reliance, and would suffer injustice if the promise were not honoured. The ground of the binding force here is neither consideration nor any threat of sanction: it is *reliance itself*. Because the promisee trusted the promise and made himself vulnerable in that trust, the promise acquires a binding force it did not have as a bare promise — a force generated by the trust placed in it, not by anything exchanged for it or any sword behind

it. This is the mirror, in the law of contract, of the self-committing channel of §6: the promisee's reliance is a placing of oneself in vulnerability, and the law responds to that vulnerability by generating an obligation to protect it. The associated measure, the *reliance interest*—Fuller and Perdue's classic identification of the interest in being protected against the losses one suffers through having relied, as distinct from the expectation and restitution interests [6]—is the law's own name for the harm of a trust betrayed.

The significance is large and should be stated plainly. At its own technical edge, in the doctrine of promissory estoppel, the law has conceded that the true ground of a promise's binding force is reliance—is trust—and that enforcement is only the after-the-fact protection of a trust that was already, in itself and before any enforcement, the thing that bound. Promissory estoppel is the law's spontaneous, internal corroboration of this paper's central thesis: not a doctrine the paper imports to support its claim, but a place where the law, reasoning about its own most basic instrument, arrived at the claim by itself.

4.8 The migration in one view

The eight positions, read along the single axis of the anchor of validity, compose one directional movement. The law's own reflection upon itself has carried the anchor from force (Austin, Hobbes), through acceptance (Hart), to the reciprocal relation of reliance (Fuller, and the doctrine of promissory estoppel), with the predictive and the purely normative held at the two counter-coordinates (Holmes, Kelsen) that mark the limits the movement leaves behind. The paper does not impose this movement from outside; it traces an undercurrent already present in the law and connects it to the diagnosis of the symbol's crisis and, in §6, to the mechanism of trust—giving the movement the full causal grounding the law itself, lacking a mechanistic vocabulary, could mark but not explain. The consequence is that this chapter is not mere background but an independent pillar of the argument: it establishes, from within the philosophy of law, that the anchor of validity is migrating from force toward trust, so that the metaphysics of §5 and the mechanism of §6 are not free-standing philosophical or scientific assertions but the grounding explanation of a movement the law has already, on its own, undergone. Three lines—the law's internal undercurrent, the metaphysics of inferential cause, and the predictive-coding mechanism—converge on a single proposition: that it is trust, and not force, that is the true cause of obligation.

The whole may be set in one view. The table reads the positions along the axis of the chapter: where each lodges the anchor of validity, which sense of cause it thereby invokes, and what it contributes to, or marks the limit of, the paper's thesis.

Position	Anchor of validity	Sense of cause	Role in the thesis
Austin, Hobbes	the threatened sanction; the sword	mechanical	states the position to be moved from; theory of a pathological limit
Hart	convergent acceptance; the internal point of view	inferential (normative)	the hinge: anchor pried loose from force toward acceptance
Fuller	reciprocity; mutual keeping of faith	inferential (relational)	names trust under its legal name; congruence as implicit promise
Habermas, Rawls	legitimate procedure; discourse	inferential (procedural)	isomorphic question: how is legitimacy produced
Holmes, realism	predicted official conduct	mechanical (predictive)	counter-coordinate; portrait of the evidentialist; its limit is Kant's worry
Kelsen	the presupposed basic norm	purely symbolic posit	counter-coordinate; anchor in the Symbolic alone; goes to zero in the crisis
Promissory estoppel	reliance itself	inferential (relational)	the law's own corroboration: reliance, not force, binds

Read down the column of causes, the table shows the chapter's claim in a single glance: the entries that hold the anchor at force are entries of mechanical cause, and they sit at the beginning of the movement and at its abandoned limits; the entries that carry the anchor toward trust are entries of inferential cause, and they are where the law's reflection has been travelling. The migration of the anchor and the distinction between the two senses of cause are the same movement seen twice. What that inferential cause is, metaphysically — why it is the opening in which freedom itself becomes possible — is the question §5 now takes up; how it works, mechanically, is the question of §6.

5. The Inferential Cause and the Opening for Freedom

The jurisprudential chapter ended with a distinction it had traced through eight positions but not yet examined: between the mechanical cause, in which the anchor of validity sits at the beginning of the law's movement and at its abandoned limits, and the inferential cause, toward which that movement has been travelling. The distinction was drawn, in the diagnosis, as a contrast between two ways a result might be produced—the compulsion of a body and the grounding of a mind's expectation. This section asks what the inferential cause *is*, and answers that it is not a weaker species of the mechanical but a different kind altogether, and that the difference is the very opening in which freedom, and with it the moral, becomes possible. The section is short, but it is the load-bearing arch beneath everything the mechanism, the justice criterion, and the praxis will build: it establishes that to generate trust is to address a free being as free, and that the promise which carries no force is, for exactly that reason, not the defective case but the proper one.

5.1 Two kinds of cause, not two degrees of one

It is tempting to hear the contrast between mechanical and inferential cause as a contrast of strength—as though the mechanical cause were the reliable kind, which compels its effect outright, and the inferential cause a weaker kind, which merely makes its effect more probable. On that hearing, force would be the gold standard of causation and trust a degraded approximation to it, and the whole movement the jurisprudence traced would be a movement from a strong ground to a weak one, a story of decline. This is the hearing the paper must refuse, and the refusal is the hinge of the section.

The mechanical cause and the inferential cause are not two degrees of one kind of causation; they are two kinds. The mechanical cause operates upon its effect from outside and leaves the effect no part to play: the struck ball does not consent to move, contributes nothing to its own motion, could not have done otherwise given the impact. Its paradigm is the transfer of momentum, and its mark is that the affected thing is passive throughout—the cause does all the work, and the effect is the mere registration of it. The inferential cause operates altogether differently. It does not push; it gives a ground. It supplies a mind with something on the basis of which that mind may form an expectation—an expectation the mind itself forms, by its own activity, and could, being what it is, have formed otherwise or withheld. The ground does not compel the expectation as the impact compels the motion; it furnishes a reason, and a reason is precisely what a free mind takes up rather than undergoes. Where the mechanical effect is the passive registration of a force, the inferential effect is the active production of an expectation by the one in whom it arises.

This is why the inferential cause is not a weaker mechanical cause but a stronger—or rather a different and higher—thing. It is the only kind of causation that can have a free being for its proper subject, because it is the only kind that addresses that being *as* free: as one who forms his own expectations on grounds, rather than one whose states are pushed into him from without. To produce trust by the inferential cause is to treat the one in whom the trust arises

as a mind that judges, not as a mechanism that registers. And the mechanical cause, applied to a mind, does not improve upon this; it degrades it, for to compel an expectation rather than to ground it is to treat the mind, in just that respect, as if it were not a mind at all.

5.2 Trust addresses the other as free

The same distinction, looked at from the side of the one who trusts rather than the one who is trusted, is the distinction between two stances one may take toward another person, and it is here that Kant's worry from the diagnosis (§3.5) receives its positive answer. One may take toward another the stance of prediction-and-management: treat his future conduct as an outcome to be forecast from evidence and secured by incentive, arrange the consequences so that the conduct one wants is the conduct it is in his interest to produce, and rely upon him exactly as one relies upon any well-understood part of the causal order. This is the stance of Holmes's observer toward the bad man (§4.5), and it is, within its proper domain, entirely legitimate; one had better be able to predict and to manage. But it is a stance that takes its object as an object—as a system whose behaviour is determined by conditions one may arrange—and to take *only* this stance toward a person, to model him exhaustively as such a system, is to have ceased, in Kant's terms, to treat him as an end, and so to have ceased to relate to him as a person at all.

The other stance is the stance of trust proper, and it is the stance of one free being toward another. To trust a person, in the full sense the promise calls for, is not to predict his conduct as one predicts the weather but to rely upon his freely binding himself—to address him as one who can commit himself to a future and can keep faith with that commitment because he has bound himself to it, not because the consequences have been arranged to leave him no alternative. The one who makes a genuine promise is not forecasting his own future behaviour from the inside, as one might forecast a habit; he is committing himself to it, performing the distinctively free act of placing himself under an obligation he could violate and undertaking that he will not. And the one who trusts the promise is wagering, in part, upon that freedom: relying not upon a mechanism that cannot fail but upon a free being who could fail and undertakes not to. The wager on the other's keeping of faith is, irreducibly, a wager on his freedom—and this, which the diagnosis marked as the point at which prediction-and-management changes its object and stops speaking of promising at all, is now seen to be not a softness in the account of trust but its very condition. There is no trusting a being one regards as a mere mechanism; there is only predicting it. Trust begins exactly where prediction is refused as the whole truth, and the other is met as one who is free to keep or to break faith and is relied upon to keep it.

5.3 A word on the cognitive basis

That this is a metaphysical and ethical claim does not make it a claim against the natural order, and a word is owed, in anticipation of §6, on its cognitive basis, lest the inferential cause seem to require a faculty outside nature. It does not. The forming of expectations on grounds is not an exotic operation a mind performs on rare and solemn occasions; it is the ordinary and incessant business of a brain, which is, on the account the next section develops, a predictive

organ before it is anything else, continuously generating expectations of what is to come and revising them against what arrives. Trust, on that account, is not a special faculty superadded to cognition but a particular case of cognition's standing activity: a high-confidence forward expectation about the conduct of another, formed on grounds and held open to revision. The inferential cause has, that is, a perfectly natural implementation; what distinguishes it from the mechanical cause is not that it floats free of the causal order but that, within that order, it operates by furnishing grounds to a system that forms its own expectations, rather than by compelling a system that merely registers what is done to it. The metaphysics of freedom and the neuroscience of prediction are not at odds; the one is the significance of what the other describes. The section leaves the mechanism to its own chapter and returns to the consequence.

5.4 Why the non-coercive promise is the proper case

The consequence is the one the Prelude felt before it could say it, and it can now be said. The promise that carries no force is not the defective limiting case of promising, to be apologised for against the enforceable contract as the standard; it is the proper case, of which the enforceable contract is the derivative. For if trust addresses the other as free, and if to produce trust is to ground a free mind's expectation rather than to compel a mechanism's response, then the promise that relies on no sword is the promise that does this in its purity: it asks to be believed on no ground but the promisor's free commitment and the promisee's free wager upon it, and so it is the form in which the inferential cause operates unmixed. The enforceable promise, by contrast, mixes into this pure case an element of the mechanical: it offers, alongside the free commitment, a threatened consequence, and to exactly that extent it addresses the promisee not as a free mind forming an expectation on the ground of trust but as a calculator forming a prediction on the ground of incentive. The sword does not strengthen the promise as a promise; it supplements the promise with something that is not a promise at all, a managed consequence, and the supplement does its work, where it works, by treating the parties in the very manner that trust refuses.

This is not yet to say — and the paper will be at pains, later, not to say — that the sword should be dispensed with, or that the enforceable contract is in every respect inferior to the bare vow; the protection of the vulnerable, as §11 will insist, has a continuing and indispensable need of force. It is to say something narrower and deeper: that in respect of what makes a promise a promise — the addressing of a free being as free, the grounding rather than the compelling of an expectation — the non-coercive promise is the realised case and the coercive one the diluted. The want of force that the Prelude felt as the condition of the vow's being what it was is here given its reason. A bond one could be forced to keep is, just insofar as one could be forced, not yet fully a bond between free beings; and the vow that asks for no sword is the truer not despite carrying no force but because, carrying none, it leaves the whole of the work to freedom — to the promisor's free binding of himself and the promisee's free trust in it. How that work is in fact done — by what mechanism a free mind, addressed as free and given the right grounds, comes to expect that the promise will be kept — is the question the paper has been clearing the ground to ask, and it is the question to which it now turns.

6. The Mechanism of Trust

Everything to this point has cleared the ground for a single question and supplied the terms in which it can be asked. The symptomatology displayed a gap between the apparatus of assurance and the trust it failed to secure; the diagnosis traced the gap to a mistake about causation, the taking of the mechanical cause for the cause of an inferential effect; the jurisprudence showed the law's own anchor migrating, across a century, from force toward trust; and the preceding section established that the inferential cause is a different kind of thing from the mechanical, the kind that addresses a free being as free. What none of these has yet supplied is the positive account: *by what mechanism* a free mind, addressed as free and given the right grounds, comes to expect that a promise about a non-existent future, carrying no guarantee of consequence, will be kept. This section supplies it. It is the trunk of the paper, of which the chapters before were the roots and the chapters after are the branches.

The problem the mechanism must solve has, recall, a shape that looks impossible. Trust is directed at a future that does not yet exist and cannot be verified; the symbol that asks for trust carries no force and so cannot secure the future by threatening a consequence. We are asked to explain how a present expectation, real and often well-founded, is produced by a symbol about what does not exist and under no guarantee—a generation, very nearly, from nothing. The dissolution of the apparent impossibility is the section's first move, and it is made by reaching for the one vocabulary in the paper's possession that is native to the forming of expectations about what has not yet arrived: the predictive account of the mind.

6.1 Predictive coding and the dissolution of the paradox

The brain, on the predictive account that has become central to the cognitive sciences, is not in the first instance a device that registers the world and then responds to it; it is a device that *predicts* the world and corrects its predictions against what arrives [3, 5, 12]. It carries a generative model of the causes of its sensory states, continually generates expectations of what is to come, compares them against incoming signals, and updates the model in proportion to the error—and in proportion, crucially, to the *precision*, the inverse variance, it assigns to that error and to its own predictions. Prediction, on this account, is not an occasional achievement but the standing activity of the organ; the mind is forward-directed by its nature, expecting before it perceives.

This dissolves the apparent paradox at a stroke. The objection was that trust is impossible because its object—the kept future—does not yet exist; how can a present state be produced by an absent fact? But the objection assumes that an expectation must be caused by the thing expected, and the predictive account shows this assumption false. An expectation is not caused by its object; it is produced, *now*, by the generative model, as the model's forward prediction, in advance of and independent of the object's arrival. Forward-directed expectation under uncertainty is not a special feat trust must somehow accomplish against the grain of cognition; it is what cognition is incessantly doing anyway. Trust requires no time machine, no causation running backward from a future that does not exist. It requires only what the

brain does in every waking moment: the assignment, by a generative model, of a high-precision prediction—here, the prediction that this person will keep this promise. *Trust is the high precision a receiver’s generative model assigns to the prediction that the promise will be kept.* The expectation of legal possibility that the diagnosis spoke of is, at the level of mechanism, exactly this: a precision-weighted forward prediction, a quantity the brain natively computes, and not a metaphor borrowed from the law.

The question of how trust is generated thus becomes a precise question: by what *inputs* does a receiver’s generative model come to assign high precision to the prediction that a promise will be kept? The paper’s answer is that there are three such inputs, three channels, and that they correspond—not by coincidence but because the registers are the registers of one subject—to the three registers the series has worked with throughout.

6.2 The three channels

The three channels are distinct in what they supply to the generative model, and the paper takes them in the order of the registers: the structural, lodged in the symbolic; the self-committing, lodged in the real; and the wagered, lodged in the imaginary and the subject who wagers.

6.2.1 The structural channel: the prior

The first channel supplies a *prior*. A promise is not received in a vacuum; it is received with a structure, and the structure of the promise shapes the receiver’s prior expectation before any evidence about this particular promisor is weighed. A vow with the form of a closed and self-completing commitment—one that, in the language of §7, returns upon itself without leaving a debt to be discharged elsewhere—presents to the receiver’s model a structural prior favourable to its being kept, in a way that a loose, hedged, escape-laden form does not. This is the cognitive function of what the series has called the poetic structure of a commitment: the form is not ornament but information, a shaper of the prior the receiver brings to bear. At the scale of institutions this is the channel of Hart’s convergent acceptance and the rule of recognition (§4.2): a shared structural prior, sustained by being shared, against which each new undertaking is read. The structural channel is lodged in the symbolic, for it works through the form of the symbol; and it is, taken alone, the most forgeable of the three, since a form can be imitated.

6.2.2 The self-committing channel: the high-fidelity likelihood

The second channel supplies a *likelihood*—and, where it works, a high-fidelity one. Here the promisor does not merely present a form; he does something. He places himself, really and observably, in a position of vulnerability from which retreat is costly or foreclosed: he binds himself in a manner that will hurt him to break, gives a hostage, burns a bridge, commits himself irrevocably and in the sight of others. And the receiver’s generative model reads this for what, statistically, it is. A signal that is costly and hard to reverse carries a high precision-weight, because it is one a promisor who did *not* intend to keep faith would be very unlikely to send: the cost of sending it, for the insincere, is prohibitive, and so its being sent is strong

evidence of sincerity. This is the mechanism beneath the red silk, the public setting, the burning of one's boats — the irrevocable and costly self-binding the Prelude began with. Such acts are not arguments; they do not persuade by inference from premises. They furnish the receiver's model with a high-fidelity, hard-to-forge likelihood signal, evidence of a kind the body reads before the discourse does, that the one who could so bind himself must mean it.

The paper takes up here, and gives a mechanistic basis to, the costly-signalling principle familiar from the theory of signalling in biology and economics: that a signal too expensive for a defector to afford is, for that reason, credible. What predictive coding adds is the implementation — the costly, irrevocable signal is precisely one to which a generative model rationally assigns high precision — and a deeper observation the paper will not exhaust here but must mark. The burning of the bridge has been described, just now, in its aspect as a *signal*: as something done to be read by another, furnishing his model with evidence. But this is only one of its two faces, and not the deeper. There is a second sense in which one burns a bridge that has nothing to do with being read by anyone — in which one forecloses one's own retreat not to send a message but to constitute, for oneself, a law: *I have decreed it so, and so that road no longer exists for me*. This deeper sense, in which the irrevocable self-binding is an act of self-legislation rather than of signalling, is the matter of §12, and in particular of its account of relational divinity; it is marked here, at the mechanism, so that the reader who reaches it will recognise that the trunk was pointing toward it all along. For the present chapter the self-committing channel is treated in its signalling aspect: as the high-fidelity likelihood lodged in the real, the channel through which a real act of self-exposure, received by another present to read it, supplies the model with its least forgeable evidence.

6.2.3 The wagered channel: the prior leap of active inference

The third channel is the most easily mistaken for irrationality and is, properly understood, the deepest. It concerns not what the promisor supplies but what the receiver does: the receiver, in trusting, makes a leap that precedes the evidence. He assigns, in advance of sufficient warrant, a high-precision prior to the prediction that the other will keep faith — he ventures the trust — and only then, through the continued interaction the venture makes possible, gathers the error signals by which the model is confirmed or corrected. This looks like a failure of rationality: the trust is given before the evidence that would justify it. But on the active-inference reading it is not a failure of rationality at all. An agent does not merely passively update a model against incoming data; it acts so as to reduce its own uncertainty over the longer run, and there are states of knowledge attainable only by first acting under uncertainty — only by venturing. Trust is such a venture. One cannot gather the evidence that would warrant trusting a person without first entering the kind of interaction that only trusting him makes possible; the evidence lies on the far side of a threshold one can cross only by trusting in advance of it. The leap of trust is thus the rational opening move of an agent that reduces uncertainty by acting — a prior wager that is the precondition of acquiring the very evidence that will vindicate or correct it. This channel is lodged in the imaginary and in the wagering subject, for its source is not in the symbol's form nor in the promisor's act but in the receiver's free venturing; and it is here,

in the wager that the other will prove free and faithful, that the freedom of §5 re-enters the mechanism.

6.3 The multiplicative coupling

The three channels are not three alternative routes to trust, of which a promisor might supply one and be believed. They are coupled, and coupled *multiplicatively*—as the factors of a single Bayesian product are coupled, in which the structural prior, the self-committing likelihood, and the wagered prior combine into the posterior precision of the prediction that the promise will be kept. The point of multiplicative rather than additive coupling is exact and it is the heart of the section: in a product, if any factor goes to zero the whole product goes to zero, and no abundance in the other factors can compensate. A perfect form with no real self-commitment behind it; a costly act with no wager that the other is free to be faithful; a leap of trust met by neither form nor self-binding—each is a product with a vanishing factor, and each fails as a ground of well-founded trust.

This is why genuine trust is robust where any single channel would be fragile. A single channel can be forged: a form can be imitated, a costly-looking act can be staged, a credulous wager can be exploited. But the three channels are hard to forge *together*, because they are answerable to one another—the structural form must be borne out by a real self-commitment, which must in turn be the kind of thing a free agent would do and would invite a wager upon—and their mutual consistency, the agreement of form with act with wager, is far harder to counterfeit than any one of them alone. The strength of genuine trust is not the strength of its strongest channel but the improbability of all three being made to agree falsely. This is what coupling means here, and why it is the source of trust that is not merely felt but well-founded.

The mechanism of trust. The expectation that a non-coercive promise will be kept is the posterior precision a receiver’s generative model assigns to that prediction, formed by the multiplicative coupling of three inputs: a structural prior, supplied by the form of the commitment (the symbolic register); a high-fidelity likelihood, supplied by the promisor’s real, costly, irrevocable self-binding (the real register); and a prior wager, supplied by the receiver’s free venturing of trust in advance of the evidence (the imaginary register, and the wagering subject). Genuine trust is the state in which all three are present, real, and mutually consistent; and its well-foundedness rests on the improbability of all three being made to agree falsely.

6.4 The forged case, mechanically described

The mechanism furnishes, as a by-product, an exact characterisation of its own counterfeit, which §8 will take up as the matter of justice and which is set out here in its mechanical form. Forged trust is the state in which the receiver’s generative model is brought to assign high preci-

sion to the prediction that the promise will be kept *without* the real self-committing likelihood that alone would warrant it. The manipulator does precisely this: by working on the receiver’s model directly — by affective pressure, by the staging of forms, by rhetorical management — he induces a lowering of the receiver’s prediction error, a high-precision prediction, that is not supported by any real self-binding on his part. The precision is, as it were, injected from outside rather than earned by a genuine likelihood; and a precision so injected is a prediction unsupported by what it predicts, a confidence with nothing real beneath it.

The mechanical mark of manipulation can therefore be stated with some sharpness: **to manipulate is to induce the other’s generative model to lower its prediction error without supplying the high-fidelity likelihood that would warrant the lowering.** Such a state is unstable in a way genuine trust is not. Because no real self-commitment underlies it, the world will not in fact behave as the injected precision predicts; the error signals will accumulate, the model will be forced toward correction, and the divergence between the predicted and the actual will widen until the forged precision collapses — the process the series has elsewhere described, in its dynamical register, as the accumulation of deviation toward divergence under a non-adiabatic extraction. The forged case is thus not a stable alternative form of trust but a transient, a precision held up by pressure rather than by likelihood, destined for the collapse that the absence of a real ground guarantees.

6.5 The crisis of the symbol, in predictive-coding terms

The same vocabulary yields, finally, a precise rendering of the diagnosis of §3, and shows the crisis of the symbol to be not a moral decline but a rational adjustment. Consider the population of generative models that is a society, each learning, from its own commerce with symbols, the statistical relation between symbolic signals and real performance. As the cost of producing a convincing symbol falls toward zero and forged signals proliferate (the generativity paradox of §3.3), each model learns, correctly, that the correlation between symbolic testimony and real performance has weakened — that the signal has become, in fact, less predictive of the outcome. And the rational Bayesian response to a signal that has become less predictive is to *lower the precision-weight assigned to it*. Each model, updating as it should, down-weights symbolic testimony as such; and because the down-weighting is applied to the channel and not to the individual signal, it falls upon the genuine symbol along with the forged. The genuine vow, the true recommendation, the sincere assurance — each is met by a model that has rationally learned to trust symbols of its kind less, and so each fails to land, not because it is disbelieved in particular but because the channel it travels has been rationally discounted.

This is the crisis of the symbol given its mechanism. It is not that people have become cynical, or that values have decayed; it is that a population of well-functioning generative models, faced with a channel that forgery has made less reliable, has rationally collapsed the precision-weight it assigns to that channel — and that the retreat to the merely countable (§2.3) is the same population’s attempt to reconstruct a high-fidelity likelihood out of signals that are, at least, harder to forge. The crisis is a rational precision collapse at the scale of a population, and that is both why it is so intractable — for each model is only doing what it should — and why

the remedy, as the rest of the paper develops it, cannot be a return to symbolic profession but must lie in the channels, the self-committing and the relational, that forgery cannot so easily saturate.

6.6 Connection to the computational programme of the foundational paper

It is worth marking, before the chapter closes, that the mechanism dovetails with the formal programme the foundational paper held open. That paper sketched, as a direction for future work, a computational study of justice as generative presence, in which justice would figure as an observable evaluated over a space of histories, formalised in the manner of a path integral [21]. The predictive-coding mechanism of trust is a concrete realisation, for the case of trust, of exactly this form: trust is the precision a generative model assigns to a prediction evaluated over the space of the promisor's possible future trajectories, an expectation taken over histories. The two formal programmes mesh — the observable-over-histories of the foundational paper and the precision-over-trajectories of the present mechanism are the same kind of object — and the meshing is noted here so that the formal continuity of the series is on the record, to be drawn upon rather than re-derived.

6.7 A discipline of honesty

The chapter must end where the series requires it to, with an express discipline upon the use it has made of the predictive account, lest the mechanism be taken for more than it is. Predictive coding has been used here as a *mechanistic and structural model*, not as a reductive claim about what trust ultimately is. The paper does not assert that trust simply *is* a precision-weighting and nothing more. What predictive coding supplies is a description at Marr's computational and implementational levels — an account of what the system computes and how it might compute it — and such a description does not displace the others the paper has given and will give: the phenomenological description of the vulnerability of self-commitment, the jurisprudential description of force as a substitute for expectation, the ethical description of the difference between genuine and forged. These are descriptions of one object at different levels, and the predictive-coding account is one of them, not the truth beneath them all. It is not a meta-framework that absorbs the rest; it is one more irreducible position on a single object, and the polyphonic discipline of the series — that no framework govern the others — holds over it as over every other. The mechanism is offered, then, as the paper's central contribution and not as its last word: a specification of how, at the level of the computing mind, the inferential cause does its work, which leaves standing, beside it, everything the other registers have to say about the same thing.

7. The Holonomy Interface

The mechanism of §6 was given in the vocabulary of prediction and precision. This section gives the same mechanism a second reading, in the geometric vocabulary the series has developed elsewhere — the vocabulary of holonomy, of the phase a system accumulates in traversing a

closed path. The second reading is not a rival to the first but its complement: where the predictive account describes what the receiving mind computes, the geometric account describes the *shape* of the process by which a promise, held across time, either sustains the trust placed in it or drains it away. The two readings will be seen to converge, and their convergence prepares two later moments of the paper: the quantum-dynamical structure of relational trust (§9), for the geometric phase is, in its origin, a concept of quantum dynamics; and the inversion of value by which the non-binding vow proves the purer instrument (§12), for that inversion turns on exactly the distinction this section now draws.

A discipline must be stated at the outset, as it was for the mechanism. The geometric phase is employed here as a *structural analogy*, developed to the point of usefulness but not to full formal closure; the formal programme that would furnish the phase with a rigorous carrier, a definite fibre and connection, is carried by another paper of the series, to which the present section forward-refers rather than reproducing it. What is claimed here is that the structure of a promise sustained across time is the structure of a system transported around a closed loop, and that the distinction between a promise that generates trust and one that drains it is the distinction between a loop that accumulates a positive holonomy and one that accumulates none or a negative one. The claim is structural; its full formalisation lies elsewhere.

7.1 Trust as a quantity transported around a loop

Consider a promise not at the instant of its making but across the time of its keeping. A relation in which a vow has been made returns, again and again, to situations that resemble the situation of the vow: occasions on which the commitment is tested, recalled, re-enacted, or merely lived through—the daily, monthly, yearly recurrences in which what was promised is, or is not, borne out. The relation thus traces, across its time, a closed loop in a space of situations: it departs from the moment of the vow, passes through the varied circumstances of a shared life, and returns to situations that are, in the relevant respect, the same situation again. The question the geometric reading asks is what the relation *brings back* when it returns. Does it return to the situation of the vow unchanged, having merely gone around and come back? Or does it return having accumulated something—a deepening, a surplus, a phase that was not there at the start?

This is the question of holonomy. A system transported around a closed loop in a space with the right structure does not, in general, return to its starting state; it returns rotated, shifted, carrying a phase that records the path it took—the geometric phase, the anholonomy, of which the Berry phase and the Pancharatnam phase are the canonical instances [2, 18]. The phase is not a function of where the system ended—it ended where it began—but of the loop it traversed to get back: it is the trace, in the returned state, of the journey. And the sign and magnitude of that phase is exactly the distinction the series has used to tell a good cycle from a bad. A loop that returns its system unchanged has zero holonomy: it has gone around and come back to the same place with nothing to show for the going, the mere repetition the series has called the bad infinity. A loop that returns its system enriched, carrying a positive phase, has positive holonomy: it has returned to its root and yet come back as more, the spiral rather

than the circle. And a loop that returns its system depleted, having leaked phase rather than gained it, has negative holonomy: the cycle of net extraction, the relation that winds down. hol of the loop, the holonomy of the relation's traversal, is the geometric measure of whether the promise, lived across time, deepens, repeats, or drains.

7.2 The non-coercive promise as positive, adiabatic holonomy

The non-coercive promise, kept, is the loop of positive holonomy, and it is so in the specific manner the geometric phase requires: *adiabatically*. The geometric phase is the phase accumulated by a system carried around its loop slowly enough that it is not driven by the transport but follows it, exchanging no energy with its surroundings, its evolution governed from within rather than pumped from without. This adiabatic condition is the geometric image of exactly what §5 called the inferential cause and §6 called the self-committing and wagered channels. The promise kept without a sword is kept adiabatically: its loop is closed not by an external compulsion driving the parties around it but by the parties' own commitment, sustained from within, returning upon itself by the completeness of what each freely brings to it. Nothing external pumps the cycle; the parties are not driven around the loop by a threatened consequence; the closure is endogenous, and the phase it accumulates is, for that reason, a true geometric phase—a deepening generated by the loop's own internal structure, the surplus the series has identified with the good cycle. The non-coercive promise is the adiabatic loop of positive holonomy: trust sustained and deepened by the relation's own internal completeness, requiring no external pump to hold it closed.

This gives the geometric content of the claim of §5, that the promise without force is the proper case and not the defective one. In the geometric vocabulary, the want of an external pump is not a deficiency of the loop but the condition of its phase being geometric at all. A phase that is pumped from outside is not a geometric phase; it is a dynamical phase, driven by the energy fed in, and it is not the trace of the loop's own structure but of the driving. The adiabatic loop—the one no external force drives—is the only one whose accumulated phase is purely the loop's own; and so the promise that relies on no sword is the only one whose deepening is genuinely its own, generated from within rather than supplied from without. The geometric reading thus recovers, in its own terms, the result that the absence of force is the condition of the promise's deepening being the promise's own.

7.3 Debt and the coerced contract as the zero-holonomy line

The contrast that throws this into relief is the coerced contract, and behind it the structure of debt, which the geometric reading exposes as something quite different from a loop. A debt is not a cycle that returns upon itself and deepens; it is a line, drawn from a present that is mortgaged to a future that must discharge it. The debtor does not traverse a loop that brings back a surplus; he is held, by the threat of the sanction, on a track that runs from the incurring of the obligation to its forced discharge, and the track is held straight—prevented from closing into any loop of its own—by the external force that drives it. This is the geometric image of the coerced contract and of debt as its limit: a path held open and directed by an external

pump, accumulating no geometric phase because it is not permitted to close upon itself, its motion not the endogenous traversal of a loop but the driven progress along a line.

Where such a path is forced into the appearance of a cycle — where a coerced relation is made to repeat — its holonomy is zero or negative, never the positive phase of the adiabatic loop. Zero, in the case of mere forced repetition: the relation goes around and comes back to the same place, the obligation discharged and re-incurred, with nothing brought back, because the closure was imposed from outside and the loop accumulated no phase of its own — the bad infinity of a cycle held shut by force. Negative, in the case of net extraction: where the external pump drives the loop so as to draw phase out of it, the relation winds down, depleted turn by turn, the structure the series has identified with the parasitic and the exploitative. The coerced relation cannot accumulate positive holonomy, because positive holonomy is the signature of an adiabatic, endogenously closed loop, and the coerced relation is precisely the one that is not adiabatic: it is pumped from without, and a pumped loop's phase is not its own. The sword, on this reading, does not merely fail to deepen the bond; it forecloses the deepening, by substituting a driven line or a forced repetition for the free, adiabatic loop that alone could deepen.

7.4 The spectral gap and the 甘え problem

There is a further structure the geometric reading illuminates, which the series left open in its treatment of 甘え — of the sweet, regressive presuming-upon-another's-indulgence whose ambivalence that discussion could mark but not resolve. The unresolved question there was where, in the space of a relation's possible motions, the line falls between a presuming-upon-another that the relation can absorb and metabolise, returning it as deepened intimacy, and a presuming-upon-another that the relation cannot absorb, which accumulates as deviation and drives the cycle toward divergence. The geometric reading offers the missing structure, in the form of a spectral gap. A loop's capacity to absorb a perturbation and return adiabatically to its closed traversal — rather than being driven by the perturbation onto a divergent path — depends on a gap in the spectrum of the dynamics governing the loop: a perturbation slower than the gap is followed adiabatically and metabolised into the loop's own phase, while a perturbation faster than the gap drives the system across the gap, out of the adiabatic regime, onto a trajectory that no longer closes. The benign 甘え is the perturbation the loop can follow adiabatically, absorbed into a deepened holonomy; the corrosive 甘え is the perturbation that exceeds the gap, driving the relation non-adiabatically toward the accumulation of deviation and divergence that §6.4 described in the predictive register as the collapse of a forged precision. The spectral gap is the structure that was missing; it is offered here as the geometric correlate of the relation's capacity to bear what is presumed upon it, and the point at which the present paper repays, in part, a debt the earlier discussion left standing.

7.5 The convergence of the two readings

The geometric reading and the predictive reading of §6 are, in the end, one account seen twice, and their convergence is worth stating plainly, for it is what licenses the use of both.

The adiabatic, endogenously closed loop of positive holonomy is the geometric portrait of the relation whose trust is sustained by the three coupled channels from within, requiring no external pump—the genuine case. The driven line, and the forced loop of zero or negative holonomy, is the geometric portrait of the relation whose precision is injected from without rather than earned by a real likelihood—the coerced case and the forged case alike. What the predictive reading describes as a precision earned by a real self-committing likelihood versus a precision injected by external pressure, the geometric reading describes as a phase accumulated by an adiabatic loop versus a phase pumped into a driven path; and these are the same distinction, the distinction between a process governed from within and one driven from without, rendered in two vocabularies. That the two independent readings converge on the same line—between the endogenous and the pumped, the adiabatic and the driven, the genuine and the forged—is the strongest internal evidence the paper can offer that the line is real and not an artefact of either vocabulary.

This convergence carries forward in two directions the paper will take up. It points toward §9, where the recognition that the geometric phase is, in its origin, a concept of quantum dynamics—the Berry phase being the phase of an adiabatically transported quantum state—allows the geometric language used here to be seen for what it has been all along, a borrowing from the dynamics of which relational trust will there be shown to share the structure. And it points toward §12, where the distinction between the adiabatic loop, whose phase is its own, and the pumped path, whose phase is borrowed, becomes the geometric ground of the inversion by which the non-binding vow—the loop that relies on no external pump—proves the purer realisation of what a promise is, and the enforceable instrument, with its admixture of the external pump, the diluted one.

8. The Justice Criterion: Genuine and Forged Trust

The mechanism of §6 furnished, as a by-product, a mechanical characterisation of its own counterfeit: forged trust as a precision injected from without rather than earned by a real self-committing likelihood, and the geometric reading of §7 gave the same counterfeit its geometric form, as a phase pumped into a driven path rather than accumulated by an adiabatic loop. But the mechanical and the geometric characterisations are, by themselves, value-neutral. They tell us that the forged case is unstable—that a precision unsupported by likelihood will be overtaken by accumulating error, that a phase pumped from outside is not the loop’s own—but instability is not yet injustice, and a transient is not yet a wrong. This section makes the further claim: that the line between genuine and forged trust, which the mechanism drew as a line between the stable and the unstable, is also and irreducibly a line of justice, between a way of producing trust that honours the one in whom it is produced and a way that wrongs him. The claim is that these two lines—the mechanical and the ethical—coincide, and the section’s task is to say why they coincide without pretending that either is derivable from the other.

8.1 Why the ethical criterion is not derivable from the mechanism

It must be said first what the section does *not* claim, for the series' discipline requires it and the temptation to overreach is real. It does not claim that the wrongness of forged trust follows from its instability—that the forged case is unjust *because* it is destined to collapse. That would be to derive an ethical conclusion from a dynamical premise, to read a wrong off a trajectory, and the series has been at pains throughout to keep these orthogonal. The mechanism answers a dynamical question: will this trust survive, is it well-founded, will the error signals confirm or refute it. The justice criterion answers a different question, which no amount of dynamical information settles: is this a way of treating the other that honours him or wrongs him. A forged trust that happened, against the odds, to be stable—a manipulation that was never found out, a pumped phase that never collapsed—would be no less a wrong for its stability; and a genuine trust that collapsed through no one's fault—a real self-commitment overtaken by circumstance—would be no less honourable for its collapse. The two criteria can be made to agree, and the section will argue that at the limit they do; but they are not the same criterion, and the agreement is a substantive finding rather than a definitional identity. This is the orthogonality the series has insisted upon elsewhere, between the question of whether a cycle lives and the question of whether it is just, and it holds here in the form: the mechanism tells whether the trust stands, the justice criterion tells whether it should have been produced as it was.

8.2 The single line, drawn ethically

With that established, the coincidence can be drawn. The mechanical mark of manipulation was stated in §6.4: to induce the other's generative model to lower its prediction error without supplying the high-fidelity likelihood that would warrant the lowering. The ethical mark of manipulation is the same act described under a different aspect, and the section names three aspects of the one act, each of which is a way the manipulation wrongs the one manipulated.

The first aspect is epistemic. To induce in another a high-precision prediction unsupported by any real likelihood is to corrupt his capacity to predict the world truly—to install in his model a confidence that the world will not bear out, and so to set him at odds with his own future experience. The manipulated person is not merely deceived about a particular fact; his instrument for forming expectations has been tampered with, made to deliver a precision the evidence does not warrant, so that he is rendered, in just this respect, a worse knower than he was. Manipulation is an injury to the other's epistemic autonomy: it does not persuade him by giving him grounds he can weigh, which would leave his judgment intact and free; it works on his model from outside, behind the back of his judgment, to produce in him an expectation he did not form on grounds and could not have refused. This is the precise epistemic sense in which manipulation differs from honest persuasion, and it is a difference the mechanism makes exact: persuasion supplies a likelihood the other's model may weigh and accept or reject; manipulation injects a precision the model did not earn and cannot examine.

The second aspect is the Kantian, and it returns the paper to the distinction of §5. To produce

trust by injecting precision rather than by supplying a real self-committing likelihood is to treat the other not as a free mind forming its own expectations on grounds but as a mechanism whose states are to be arranged from outside—to apply to him the mechanical cause rather than the inferential, to manage him rather than to address him. It is, in the terms of the second formulation of the categorical imperative, to treat him merely as a means: as an object whose predictive states one engineers toward one’s own ends, rather than as an end in himself who forms his expectations freely and could withhold them [15]. The genuine production of trust, by contrast, addresses the other exactly as §5 required: it supplies him with a real ground—a costly, irrevocable self-commitment—which his free judgment may take up, and it leaves the taking-up to him. The difference between genuine and forged trust is thus, in its second aspect, the difference between addressing a free being as free and handling a free being as a mechanism; and this is why the forged case is not merely a technical defect in the production of trust but a wrong done to the one in whom it is produced.

The third aspect is the one the series has carried from its work on generative justice, and it is the deepest, for it names what the manipulator does with the relation as a whole. To manipulate is to treat the other’s trust as *fuel*—to draw upon his capacity to rely, his openness to being committed-to, as a resource to be consumed for an end that is not his and from which he is excluded. The forged relation is one in which the trusting party is rendered a mere means to a value that returns to the manipulator and not to him: his trust is mined, his vulnerability is exploited, and he is positioned in the cycle as the one who supplies what others consume. This is the criterion the series has stated as the question to be put to any cycle that deepens: is there someone within it who figures only as a cost, excluded from the return—is there one who is rendered mere fuel? Forged trust answers yes; it is the production of an expectation whose function is to extract from the one who holds it, and who is, in the holding, used up. Genuine trust answers no; it is the production of an expectation that opens a relation in which the trusting party is a beneficiary and not merely a source, in which what is generated returns to the one whose trust made it possible. The justice of trust, in this third and deepest aspect, is the justice of the return: genuine trust returns to the one who gives it, forged trust extracts from him.

8.3 The three aspects are one

These three—the epistemic injury, the Kantian reduction, and the rendering-as-fuel—are not three separate wrongs that manipulation happens to commit together; they are three aspects of a single act, the act the mechanism described as the injection of unwarranted precision. To inject precision without likelihood just *is* to corrupt the other’s knowing (the epistemic aspect), which just is to bypass his free judgment and handle him as a mechanism (the Kantian aspect), which just is to position him as a source to be drawn upon rather than a partner in a return (the aspect of fuel). The mechanism gave the act its mechanical description; the three aspects give the one act its ethical description; and that the mechanical and the ethical descriptions are descriptions of the same act is why the line the mechanism drew and the line justice draws coincide. They coincide not because the one is derived from the other—the section began

by refusing that — but because they are two descriptions, at two levels, of one and the same thing: the producing of an expectation in another without the real self-commitment that would honour him in the producing of it.

8.4 The criterion stated, and what it leaves to practice

The criterion may now be stated in a form the rest of the paper will use. **Genuine trust is an expectation produced in another by supplying a real ground his free judgment may take up, and which opens a relation that returns to him; forged trust is an expectation induced in another by injecting a precision his judgment cannot examine, which handles him as a mechanism and draws upon him as fuel.** The criterion is, as the series requires, a criterion of justice laid alongside the criterion of dynamics, not derived from it: the mechanism tells whether an expectation will stand, the criterion tells whether it was rightly produced, and the two must each be applied, neither collapsing into the other.

One consequence must be marked, for it sets the problem the praxis will have to solve and guards against a misreading the rest of the paper cannot afford. The genuine and the forged are not, as outward performances, reliably distinguishable. The manipulator who stages a costly-looking commitment and the sincere promisor who makes a real one may, in the moment, present indistinguishable surfaces; the injected precision and the earned precision may, for a time, feel the same from inside. What distinguishes them is not a difference in the performance but a difference in what lies behind it — whether there is, in fact, a real self-commitment and a real return, or only their appearance. This is why the line, though sharp in principle, is treacherous in practice, and why the production of genuine trust cannot be reduced to the production of its signs: the signs can be forged, and the difference that matters is precisely the one the signs do not, by themselves, reveal. The translation of sincerity across the borders of epistemology (§10) and the praxis of trust (§12) are, in large part, the working-out of how one acts well under exactly this condition — that the genuine must be produced and offered in a world where its signs are indistinguishable from the forged, and where the difference, though real, is not on the surface to be read. The criterion of justice tells us what the difference is; it falls to practice to live by a difference one cannot, from the outside, simply see.

9. Relational Trust

The mechanism of §6 described how trust is generated between a promisor and a receiver who are present to one another: the structural form, the costly self-binding, the wagered leap, all presuppose two parties in some direct relation. But a great part of the trust on which human dealing actually runs is not of this direct kind. We trust people we have never met, on the strength of others we do trust; trust travels along the links of a relational network, reaching where no direct relation reaches. This section is about that transmitted trust — *relational trust* — its mechanism, its peculiar liability to a failure the direct case does not suffer, and the formal structure it shares, the section will argue, with the dynamics of an open quantum

system. It is the chapter in which the problem of winning a family’s trust, posed in the Prelude, finds the resource that bears most directly upon it; and it is the chapter in which the crisis of the symbol receives a new and precise specification.

9.1 The mechanism of transmission: the recommendation and the chain

The clearest instance of relational trust is the letter of recommendation, and it repays close mechanical attention, for it shows what is really at work and what is not. The naive view is that a recommendation works by the *content* of what the recommender says — by the predicates he applies to the candidate, the praise he heaps, the qualities he affirms. But this is very largely not what carries the trust. The adjectives carry almost no information; everyone is described in superlatives, and a committee that has read a thousand letters extracts nothing from the thousand-and-first profession of excellence (§2.3). What actually works is not the content but the *structure*: a committee C trusts the judgment of a recommender A , with whom it has a relation of trust; the recommender A has a real working coupling with the candidate B , knows B from the inside, has the embodied knowledge of what B can do; and trust is transmitted along the chain $C-A-B$, C coming to trust B *through* its trust in A . The recommendation works as a conductor, not as a description: it carries C ’s existing trust in A across the link $A-B$ to reach B , whom C has no other way to reach.

What this reveals is that trust, in the relational case, is not a property of any single party at all. It is not something in B , nor in A , nor in C ; it is a property of the *structure of the relation* among them — a topological property of the network, residing in the pattern of couplings rather than in any node. C has no direct evidence about B (the evidentialist channel cannot reach), and no direct contact with B (the deontological reading of character cannot reach); yet C can trust B , and the trust exists nowhere but in the chain. Relational trust is thus a third mechanism, irreducible to the evidential and the characterological alike, by which trust reaches across a gap that neither evidence nor the direct reading of character could span. And it bears directly on the predicament of the Prelude: the trust a family extends to a stranger who would marry into it runs, very largely, not through anything the stranger can show them directly, but through the chain that connects him to them by way of the one they already love and trust — the one who loves him is, in the structure of the network, his recommender, and the trust reaches him along that link or not at all.

9.2 Relational trust spans the three registers

Relational trust is not lodged in one register but spans all three, and this is the key to both its power and its specific fragility. There is an imaginary component: the image of B that travels along the chain, the idealised or distorted picture A ’s account installs in C . There is a symbolic component: the letter, the word, the chain itself as a transmissible structure of signs. And there is a real component, which is the heart of the matter: the real working coupling between A and B , A ’s embodied, unfakeable knowledge of what B is and can do, the thing the whole apparatus exists to transmit. Genuine relational trust is the case in which the real component leads — in which what travels the chain is a real coupling, vouched along a structure of signs,

forming in C an expectation grounded in something that actually exists. The chain is the symbolic conductor; what it ought to conduct is the real.

9.3 The dislocation of vehicle from substance

Here is the new specification of the crisis of the symbol that the section promised, and it follows from the fact just established — that relational trust spans the registers, and that the registers can be *prised apart*. The substance relational trust ought to transmit is the real component: A 's real coupling with B , the unfakeable knowledge that is the one thing of value in the whole transaction. But the vehicle by which it is transmitted is symbolic: a letter, a word, a writable and circulable and archivable sign. And the alienation that destroys relational trust occurs in the dislocation of the vehicle from the substance — the symbolic form preserved intact while the real substance is hollowed out of it.

A forged recommendation is exactly this dislocation. In the symbolic register it is impeccable: correctly formatted, well phrased, duly signed, transmitted along the chain $C-A-B$ in perfect order. Viewed from the symbolic register alone it is indistinguishable from a genuine one. But its real component — A 's actual knowledge of B — is empty: A wrote it not because he embodyly knows B to be good but because he owed a favour, or moves in the same circle, or could not decently refuse. The sign is transmitted, and what the sign was supposed to carry is not present in it. This is the incarnation, in relational trust, of the central pathology the series has named the failure of settlement, the usurpation by the symbol: a sign that announces a coupling already vouched-for when no real coupling underwrites it, a letter that cashes a knowledge that was never had. The forged recommendation is the isomorph of the false poem and the alienated bride-price — a symbol that claims to anchor the real while the real has been drained out from beneath it.

The diagnosis of the breakdown is therefore precise, and it is the section's new contribution to the diagnosis of §3. Relational trust breaks down not because the mechanism is defective but because it spans the registers and the registers can be split: the symbolic transmissibility (the letter, the chain) and the real unfakeability (the actual coupling), which ought to be two faces of one thing, can be prised into two, the first retained and the second hollowed out. Forged relational trust is the product of that fissure.

9.4 The bidirectional alienation

The word *alienation* is exact here, for the damage runs in both directions along the chain, and the section must trace both, for together they explain why the whole channel closes rather than merely admitting some bad letters alongside the good.

On the side of the one vouched-for, the proliferation of forged recommendations devalues the genuine ones. The student who really does have a deep working coupling with a mentor who really knows her finds that her letter, in the symbolic register, looks exactly like the letter written from obligation; and so her real coupling can no longer be transmitted, because the channel that should carry it has been saturated with signs that carry nothing. The real thing

loses its capacity to be recognised, not because it is disbelieved in particular but because the forgeries have made the whole channel unreadable. This is the precise mechanism of the crisis of the symbol, seen once more: it is not that the false drives out the true by replacing it, but that the false makes the true *unrecognisable*, so that the channel as a whole is abandoned and the institution retreats to the merely countable — citation counts, rankings — signals that are barren but at least unforgeable, preferring a channel known to be poor to one that might be rich but has been poisoned.

On the side of the one who vouches, the damage is subtler and is an alienation in the fullest sense. The recommender who grows accustomed to writing letters he does not believe is alienated from his own act of vouching: his signature ceases to mean that he really knows and comes to mean only that a social obligation has been discharged. And in doing so he draws down, a little at a time, the relational capital that made relational trust possible — *C*'s trust in his judgment — spending it to discharge favours until the trust itself is exhausted. He siphons off, to meet the demands of his circle, the very thing that let his word carry trust, and when it is gone the chain through him conducts nothing. The bidirectional alienation — the genuine made unrecognisable on the one side, the capacity to vouch drawn down to exhaustion on the other — is why the failure of relational trust is not a local matter of some bad letters but the closing of a channel.

9.5 The quantum-dynamical structure of relational trust

The structure that has emerged — a trust that is a property of a network rather than of its nodes, that spans registers which can be split, that fails by a dislocation of a transmissible form from an unfakeable substance — has, the section now argues, a precise formal counterpart in the dynamics of open quantum systems. The argument is made under a discipline that must be stated before it is made, and stated as firmly as the discipline upon the use of predictive coding in §6. *What is claimed is a structural isomorphism, not a physical reduction.* The paper does not assert that trust is, literally, a quantum phenomenon; to say so would be the worst kind of pseudo-scientific mysticism, and would forfeit the seriousness of everything else the paper has done. What is asserted is that the mathematical structure of relational trust and the mathematical structure of the entanglement-and-decoherence dynamics of an open quantum system are the same structure, and that the formal language of the latter can therefore describe the former with a precision no other available language affords. This is the same discipline the series has observed throughout: the quantum-dynamical account is one more level of description, a formal language for a structure, and not the truth beneath the others, nor a meta-framework that absorbs them.

Under that discipline, three correspondences may be drawn, in ascending order of depth.

The first is *entanglement* as the non-local structure of relational trust. The defining feature of an entangled state is that the state of the whole cannot be decomposed into a product of the states of its parts; the information resides in the correlations among the parts, not in any part taken alone, so that a measurement of any single component does not recover it. This

is exactly the structure established in §9.1: relational trust is not a property of C , A , or B severally, but of the correlation $C-A-B$ itself, recoverable from no node in isolation. The non-locality of trust — that it lives in the chain and not in the links — is given, by the language of entanglement, a precise formal expression it otherwise lacks.

The second is *decoherence* as the dislocation of vehicle from substance. A coherent quantum state, coupled to an environment, undergoes decoherence: the correlations that constitute its coherence are not destroyed outright, but the phase relations that made them meaningful are lost to the environment, leaving a state whose correlational shell persists while the coherence that gave it its character has drained away. This is, formally, the dislocation of §9.3: the symbolic transmissibility (the correlational shell, the chain of signs) is retained, while the real coupling (the phase coherence that made the correlation carry something) is lost. A forged recommendation is a *decohered* trust-state: it preserves, in the symbolic register, the entire outward form of the entanglement, while the coherence it was meant to carry is gone — and, just as a decohered mixed state can be indistinguishable from a pure state under measurements that are not phase-sensitive, the forged letter is indistinguishable from the genuine under any reading that is not sensitive to the real coupling beneath. And the crisis of the symbol is, on this reading, the *systemic decoherence* of relational trust at the scale of a society: an environment saturated with forged signals continually coupling to the trust-states that traverse it, draining their coherence, leaving correlational shells that no longer carry what they were meant to carry. This dovetails exactly with the predictive-coding diagnosis of §6.5: the systemic decoherence of the trust-state and the rational collapse of the population’s precision-weight on the symbolic channel are the same process described at two levels.

Here the word *dynamical*, rather than merely *quantum*, earns its place, for what relational trust most needs from the analogy is not a static picture of a state but an account of how the state *evolves*. The dynamics of an *open* quantum system — a system in continual exchange with an environment, its evolution governed by a master equation that specifies how coherence decays, and under what conditions it may be protected or even restored — is the formal language for how a trust-state is maintained, corrupted, or rebuilt over time, which a static account of entanglement could not supply. And this is the point at which the present section welds to §7, for the geometric phase deployed there is, in its origin, a concept of exactly this quantum dynamics: the Berry phase is the phase accumulated by a quantum state under adiabatic transport. The holonomy language of §7 was therefore never a free-floating borrowing; it was, all along, drawn from the very dynamics relational trust is here shown to share. Adiabatic evolution — slow, exchanging no energy with the environment, coherence and geometric phase preserved — is the genuine, endogenously sustained trust; non-adiabatic evolution — coupled to the environment, decohering, phase lost — is the forged. The genuine-versus-forged distinction of §8, the adiabatic-versus-driven distinction of §7, and the coherent-versus-decohered distinction drawn here are one distinction in three vocabularies.

The third and most precise correspondence concerns transmission itself, and it requires a refinement that shows the analogy has been taken seriously rather than reached for loosely. Bare entanglement will not, by itself, model the *transmission* of trust, for entanglement is subject to

the no-communication theorem: it cannot, alone, be used to send information. But relational trust is precisely about the transmission of trust along the chain $C-A-B$. The formal counterpart of this transmission is therefore not bare entanglement but *entanglement swapping*: the protocol by which, through an intermediary node A already entangled with each, two parties C and B who share no prior entanglement are brought into an entangled relation. Entanglement swapping is, almost exactly, the quantum correspondent of the recommendation mechanism $C-A-B$: the intermediary A , coupled to both, is the means by which a correlation is established between C and B who had none. To name the correspondent as swapping rather than as bare entanglement is to mark that the analogy is structural and considered—that it tracks the specific feature of relational trust, its transmissibility through an intermediary, and not merely its non-locality.

9.6 The standing of the analogy

The discipline stated at the opening of §9.5 must be restated at its close, for it is the condition on which the whole construction is admissible. The quantum-dynamical language is a formal description of a shared structure, at a level of description that does not displace the others the paper has given—the mechanical account of §6, the ethical account of §8, the phenomenological account of the chain as a relation among persons. It is not a claim that trust is quantum-mechanical in its physical substrate; it is a claim that relational trust and open-system quantum dynamics instantiate one mathematical structure, and that the structure is illuminated by being seen in the language that has developed the richest tools for it. It is, in the polyphonic terms the series requires, one more irreducible epistemic position on a single object, a further voice and not the final word—and it is offered as such, a formal analogy that earns its place by the precision it brings to the non-locality, the decoherence, and the transmission of a trust that lives in the chain and not in its links.

10. The Translation of Sincerity

Every chapter to this point has worked on the assumption that once genuine trust is produced, it is received—that a real self-commitment, supplied to another, lands as the ground it is. This section removes that assumption, and in removing it opens the problem that is, for the predicament of the Prelude, the most pressing of all. *Sincerity has no universal language.* There is no form of sincerity legible to everyone; sincerity must be encoded to be received, and the language of the encoding depends upon the epistemology of the one who is to receive it. The gravity of the betrothal document, the moon, the poem, the philosophical seriousness—these encode sincerity in a form legible to one who reads character directly, who takes the bearing and the solemnity and the cost of the gesture as themselves the signal. To a receiver of another epistemology—one who holds that what is the case is the case and asks for what can be observed and verified—that same sincerity, in that same encoding, is not evidence at all. The same real sincerity, passed through two different decoders, yields utterly different degrees of credibility; and the difference is not in the sincerity, which is one and real, but in the mismatch between the sender’s language of encoding and the receiver’s language of decoding.

This is the point at which the paper's question undergoes its decisive turn. The question has been, through the mechanism and its consequences, an *ontological* one: what is genuine trust, and how is it produced. It now becomes a *translational* one: how is genuine trust, once produced, transmitted across the border between incommensurable epistemologies. And this translational question is the sharpest form, in the field of trust, of the master theme the series has carried throughout—that there is no metalanguage, that the Other does not exist as a guarantor standing above all positions. There is no neutral universal language of sincerity, no God's-eye dictionary in which the sincerity encoded in one epistemology can be looked up and re-expressed in another with its value preserved. The problem of trust, fully stated, is therefore not only how to be genuine but how to be *read* as genuine by one whose language of reading is not one's own; and this section is its theory.

10.1 The epistemology of translation

Before one can translate sincerity into a language a receiver can read, one must know what languages there are—what grammars of trust a receiver might be using, by which a profession of sincerity is parsed into a ground for expectation or rejected as no ground at all. This subsection sets out a genealogy of these grammars. It is offered as adequate to the practical purpose rather than as exhaustive, and its precision matters, for the effectiveness of any translation depends on the accuracy with which the target grammar is identified.

10.1.1 A genealogy of trust-grammars

There are at least four grammars of trust, irreducible to one another, each parsing a different kind of thing as a ground for expectation, and each with its characteristic reach and its characteristic blind spot.

The first is the *evidentialist* or positivist grammar. It anchors trust in observable evidence and accomplished fact—the track record, the thing already done, the stable and verifiable pattern. To one who uses this grammar, a ground for trust is something that has shown itself, and a profession that has not yet shown itself in fact is not yet a ground. Its reach is into the demonstrated; its blind spot is the sincere newcomer who has, as yet, no record to show, and whom it must, by its own logic, misjudge as untrustworthy not because he is but because he has not yet had occasion to demonstrate otherwise. This is the grammar of Holmes's bad-man observer (§4.5) turned to the reading of others, and it is, the paper has reason to think, the grammar most relied upon by the family of the Prelude.

The second is the *deontological* or characterological grammar. It anchors trust in a direct, intuitive reading of the other's character and sincerity—in the bearing, the manner, the quality of the commitment, taken as immediate signals of an inner state. To one who uses this grammar, the gravity of a vow, the seriousness of a gesture, the felt sincerity of a person, are themselves grounds, read off without the detour through accomplished fact. Its reach is into the inner and the present; its danger is that it reads too much, that it can be deceived by one who has learned to perform the signs of a sincerity he does not have. This is, the paper has reason to

think, the grammar most native to the one who would encode his sincerity in red silk and the moon.

The third is the *inductive* or relational-historical grammar. It anchors trust in the accumulated pattern of a shared history with this particular person—not in evidence as such, nor in a reading of character as such, but in the texture of what has passed between us, the record of how this one has been with me over time. Its reach is into the known particular; its blind spot is the wholly new relation, for which no shared history yet exists.

The fourth is the *institutional* or endorsement grammar. It anchors trust in the vouching of a trusted third party—the matchmaker, the elder, the credential, the recognition of a community, the recommendation along the chain of §9. Its reach is into whatever the trusted institution can underwrite; its blind spot is the condition, diagnosed throughout this paper, in which the institutions of endorsement have themselves come under the crisis of the symbol and can no longer reliably underwrite anything.

These four are not a ranking, with one the true grammar and the rest its approximations. They are incommensurable epistemic positions, each parsing as a ground something the others do not, none reducible to the rest—and their irreducible plurality is one more vindication, in the field of trust, of the polyphonic law the series has insisted upon. The question whether the genealogy is fine enough is left open, and one refinement in particular is marked as undecided: whether the evidentialist grammar should be subdivided, between one that asks for accomplished fact and one that asks for demonstrable capacity, since these have different practical implications for what a translation into that grammar would have to supply.

10.1.2 The notion of a grammar-configuration

No person uses a single grammar purely. Each uses a *configuration*—a weighting, mostly unreflective, of the several grammars, in which one may dominate without excluding the others. The family of the Prelude is best understood not as purely evidentialist but as running a configuration in which the evidentialist grammar dominates, the institutional has some weight, and the deontological is heavily discounted—so that a profession of character lands lightly and an accomplished fact lands hard. The notion of the configuration is what makes the genealogy a practical instrument rather than a typology: one does not translate one’s sincerity into *the* evidentialist grammar in the abstract, but into the particular configuration a particular receiver runs, and the diagnosis of that configuration is the first task of any actual translation. The unit of translation is the configuration, and the genealogy is the alphabet from which configurations are spelled.

That there can be no single correct translation of a sincerity from one grammar into another—that translation is, in principle, indeterminate—is the deep epistemological fact underlying all of this, and it is Quine’s. The indeterminacy of translation [19] is not a defect to be overcome but the very form the absence of a metalanguage takes in the theory of translation: there is no fact of the matter, fixed independently of every scheme, as to the uniquely correct rendering of a meaning from one language into another, and so no neutral standard against which a

translation of sincerity could be certified as *the* correct one. Translation is underdetermined all the way down, and the practical art the next subsection describes is an art practised under that permanent indeterminacy, not a technique for escaping it.

10.2 The praxis of translation

How, then, is a sincerity encoded in one grammar to be rendered legible in another, without distorting it, and without sliding into the manipulation that §8 marked off? There are three paths, of ascending difficulty and depth, and each runs close to the ethical line, for each is, in its outward form, hard to distinguish from a counterfeit. The subsection sets them out, and then states the line that separates all three, done genuinely, from their forged twins.

10.2.1 Projection

The first path is *projection*: letting a sincerity that is legible in one's own grammar cast a shadow in the receiver's. One does not disguise the deontologically-legible sincerity as evidence, which would be forgery; one allows the real sincerity to leave, in the symbolic and observable register the receiver reads, the traces it naturally casts—an accumulation of consistent action, a constancy held across time, conduct that the evidentialist can read as evidence because it really is the observable shadow of a real inner state. The evidentialist infers back, from the shadow, to the substance. This is the safest path and the slowest, for it depends on time: the shadow accumulates only as the conduct accumulates, and cannot be hurried. It is the practical translation of the principle the series has carried as the maxim that what is held to over long enough comes to show itself—not that time creates the coupling-trust, which is real from the first, but that time lets the real cast, in the register the evidentialist reads, enough of a shadow to be recognised. Projection is the rendering of a real inner sincerity into the language of accomplished fact, by letting it accomplish the facts that are its true shadow.

10.2.2 Multiple encoding

The second path is *multiple encoding*: encoding the one sincerity, at once, in two grammars, on two tracks running in parallel. To the one who reads character—and to oneself—the vow, the gravity, the poem; to the one who reads evidence, the stable and visible facts, the observable constancy, the demonstrated reliability. The two encodings are of one sincerity, offered each in the grammar that can receive it. The difficulty of this path is not technical but ethical, and it is severe: multiple encoding degrades into mere placation unless one genuinely concedes the legitimacy of the other's grammar. If one encodes in the evidentialist grammar while privately holding that to ask for evidence is shallow, that the deontological reading is the real one and the evidentialist a concession to the obtuse, then the second encoding is not a translation but a condescension, and a receiver of any acuity will read the condescension beneath it. Multiple encoding done genuinely requires that one hold both grammars as legitimate ways of arriving at trust—a requirement that connects it directly to the justice of presentation taken up in §12, where the active rendering of one's sincerity in the other's grammar is shown to be, when the substance is real, not a strategy but a form of respect.

10.2.3 *Mutual translation*

The third path is the deepest and the hardest, and it is the one the section most wants to establish, for it is the only one that issues in a trust that is neither projected nor doubly-broadcast but jointly made. In *mutual translation*, both parties move a step toward the other's language: one learns to speak in evidence, and the other learns to read the signals of character; and what is produced is not the persuasion of one by the other but the growing, in the interaction itself, of a small shared grammar that did not exist before. This is real coupling at the epistemological level—trust that is not one party's conviction transmitted to the other but a thing generated between them, in the continued interaction, out of two grammars that have each moved toward the other and grown, between them, a patch of common language. It does not pre-exist the relation and wait to be transmitted; it is generated, in the mutual movement, as the relation's own.

That this is not a philosopher's fancy but a real and learnable craft is shown by the existence of a mature profession that does exactly this. The experienced consultant, in any field, who is brought before a client he does not yet understand, faces the structural twin of the non-metalanguage problem: the client comes with a language, a situation, a set of terms and unspoken assumptions and a real difficulty, that the consultant cannot at first read; and the consultant can neither impose his own framework upon it, which is bad consulting, nor pretend to understand what he does not. The real work is to create, in the interaction, with this particular client, a common language—to learn the client's terms and let the client learn his, until a shared grammar exists between them that existed before in neither. This is mutual translation, and that consulting is a mature profession, with methods and training and tests of competence, is the proof that mutual translation can be done, systematically and well, and is not the unoperable ideal it might otherwise seem—the very objection this hardest path most invites. The empirical literature on the outcomes of such work lends this support: across the helping and advisory professions, the strongest predictor of a good outcome is found to be not the technique or the school but the quality of the working relationship, the working alliance—which is precisely the establishment of the shared understanding that mutual translation produces. The point answers, in part, the call the foundational paper made for empirical follow-up [21]: there is a body of evidence that the generation of a shared grammar is real, learnable, and the operative factor in success.

Two features of the consultant's craft sharpen the account. The first is an asymmetry. Mutual translation need not be symmetrical: the consultant, as the active party who bears the professional responsibility, moves further toward the client's language than the client moves toward his. The party who actively seeks to establish trust—the one in the position of the Prelude's suitor—may rightly have to move further toward the other's grammar, and this is not a mark of his grammar's inferiority but of his bearing the greater share of the labour of translation, as the active and responsible party. This asymmetry is the concrete form of what §12 will call epistemic hospitality: the moving-toward-the-other, the taking-on of the greater share of the work of being understood. The second feature names the philosophical resource that underwrites the path. What mutual translation accomplishes is the fusion of two horizons

into a shared one that neither held alone — Gadamer’s *Horizontverschmelzung* [8], the fusion of horizons, which is the standing philosophical name for the generation of a common understanding between parties who began with none, and which gives mutual translation its grounding in the hermeneutic tradition.

10.2.4 *The line that separates translation from manipulation*

All three paths run close to the ethical line, and the line must be drawn as firmly as it can be, for it is the line on which the whole praxis turns and it is not, on the surface, where one might expect. To render one’s sincerity legible in another’s grammar (translation) and to manufacture a false signal legible in another’s grammar (manipulation) may, as outward acts, look identical — the projected shadow and the forged evidence, the second encoding and the placating performance, can present the same surface. The difference lies wholly in whether what is being translated *really exists*. To project the real shadow of a real sincerity is translation; to project the false shadow of a sincerity that is not there is manipulation (§8). The criterion of genuine translation is that the thing it translates must really exist and be capable of real fulfilment: it carries a real substance across the border between grammars, where manipulation manufactures, in the target grammar, the appearance of a substance that is absent. Translation takes the other’s grammar as a legitimate other to be honestly addressed; manipulation takes the other’s grammar as a lock to be picked. The line is not between act and act, which can match, but between a translated substance that is real and a manufactured signal that is empty — and it is, once more, the line of §8, the line between honouring the other and rendering him fuel.

10.3 Dialogue: the convergence of three identities

The deepest of the three paths, mutual translation, turns out to be a thing the philosophical tradition has known under another name, and the recognition gives the section its close. Mutual translation *is dialogue*, and dialogue is, at once, three things that prove to be one.

It is, first, the practical form of mutual translation: the consultant’s craft, the back-and-forth in which a shared language is grown between parties who began without one. It is, second, the ancient method by which philosophy has always held that certain truths are generated — the Socratic *dialektikē*, in which truth is not stated by one party and received by the other but generated between them, in the going and returning of question and answer, because some truths can be reached in no other way than by two minds moving toward each other. And it is, third, the formal law of the series itself — the polyphony of the plural conclusions, the refusal of a governing voice, the insistence that the truth of the matter lives not in any single framework but in the dialogue among them. These three — the consultant’s craft, the Socratic method, the series’ polyphonic form — are one thing, and their being one is why mutual translation is the deepest of the three paths. It is the deepest because it *is* dialogue; and dialogue is, in a world without a metalanguage, the only way that truth and trust can be generated between heterogeneous subjects at all. Where there is no God’s-eye dictionary to translate one grammar into another with the value preserved, the value is not transmitted but *generated*, between the

parties, in the dialogue in which each moves toward the other and a shared grammar grows. *Mutual translation is dialogue: the generating, between two who share no common language, of a common language, together.*

And this returns the section to the poetics the series has carried throughout, for the translation of sincerity, so understood, is itself a poetic act in the precise sense the series has given the term. To translate one's sincerity into a grammar another can read is not to settle a meaning and hand it over closed; it is to invite the other to walk a path of interpretation, to offer a form the other must traverse rather than merely receive, to write, for the other, a poem he can read. The poetic refuses settlement and opens a path to be walked; and the translation of sincerity, done genuinely, refuses to settle the other's trust by manufacture and instead opens, between the two grammars, a path along which a shared understanding may be walked into being. The translation of sincerity is the writing, for the one whose language is not yours, of a poem in a language he can read—and the paper turns now from the technique of this writing to its practice, at the scale of institutions and then at the scale of a life.

11. Jurisprudence and Judicial Optimisation

The paper turns now from the analysis of trust to its practice, and takes the institutional scale first, the scale at which the problem appeared in the symptomatology as the overload of justice and the sword that hangs but does not fall. If force is not the cause of trust but only a failing device for the production of expectation, then the institutions built upon force—the courts, the apparatus of enforcement—stand in need of a reconception, and this section asks what it would be. Its answer has a spine that is counter-intuitive and will be stated plainly: that the effective optimisation of the juridical, in an age when force has failed as a signal, is the *decentralisation of enforcement*—not the strengthening of the sword but the distribution of the production of trust away from the single channel of compulsion. But the section must guard, from the outset, against the way this spine could be misheard, and the guard determines the whole method of the chapter.

For the spine could be misheard as an idealist exhortation—as a call to trust more, to cultivate reputation, to repair rather than to punish, as though the institutional form of trust were a matter of enlightened choice, a better idea that societies might adopt if only they saw its merits. The series is historical-materialist, and must treat the matter dialectically; and an idealist exhortation is precisely what the historical-materialist method forbids, for it would mistake the superstructure for something freely adjustable apart from its material base. The institutional forms of trust are not chosen; they are thrown up by the material conditions of their production, and they change as those conditions change. The chapter therefore proceeds not by recommending a reform but by analysing a transformation already under way—its material causes, its emergent tendencies, and the new contradiction into which it is, under present relations of production, being driven.

11.1 The double bind of the juridical

The condition to be analysed is, first, a double bind, in which the two faces of the symptomatology — the overload and the failure of force — compose a vicious circle. As the relational and communal orders of trust thin, more of the burden of holding people to their dealings falls upon the courts (the overload); the courts, asked to produce by compulsion an order they can only ever protect, find their signal of compulsion diluted across a volume it cannot cover, and force fails as a signal (the failure); and as force fails, trust thins further, throwing yet more burden upon the courts. The more the juridical is relied upon to generate trust, the more its single signal is diluted; the more diluted the signal, the less it generates; the less it generates, the more it is relied upon. The juridical is caught being asked to *produce*, by force, the very thing — trust — that §6 showed force cannot produce but only, at most, signal; and asked to produce it at a scale at which even the signalling fails. This is the double bind, and no increase in the force applied can resolve it, for the problem is not a shortage of force but the exhaustion of force as a means to this end.

11.2 The counter-intuitive thesis: decentralisation

The resolution is not to add force but to cease asking the single channel of force to do what only the coupling of several channels can do. §6 established that well-founded trust is produced by the multiplicative coupling of channels, and that its robustness lies not in the strength of any one but in the improbability of all being forged together. The juridical optimisation that follows from this is the institutional application of the same principle: distribute the production of trust away from the single channel of compulsion and across the several channels the mechanism identified, so that trust is generated by their coupling rather than by the sword alone. This is what decentralisation means here, and why it is effective where the strengthening of force is not. A single channel can be evaded, diluted, and — under the crisis of the symbol — collapsed in its precision-weight across the board; several coupled channels, whose mutual consistency is hard to forge or evade together, are robust exactly where the single channel is fragile. The thesis is counter-intuitive because the reflex, faced with a failure of enforcement, is to call for more enforcement; the mechanism shows this to be the marginally decreasing application of a means already exhausted, and the dispersal of trust-production across coupled channels to be the structurally sounder course.

But — and here the historical-materialist method asserts itself against any idealist reading — this decentralisation is not a reform to be recommended; it is a transformation already under way, forced by a change in the material conditions of the production of trust, and the rest of the chapter must show it as such.

11.3 The transformation, dialectically

The transformation must be grasped in four moments, and the fourth forbids the celebration the first three might invite.

11.3.1 The material basis of centralised force

Centralised, force-based justice—the sword wielded by the state—was not a bad idea that societies happened to adopt; it was the form of trust-production appropriate to, and thrown up by, a definite material base. In a society of strangers, in which exchange is predominantly market exchange and persons are atomised and rendered mobile and interchangeable by the commodity form, trust can no longer be produced by the face-to-face relational history and communal witness that produced it in smaller and more settled worlds. Where the village and the lineage no longer hold a person to his word, the holding must be outsourced to an abstract, impersonal third party—the state, the law, the sword—which can compel performance among strangers who have no other hold upon one another. Centralised force was, that is, the historically necessary form of trust-production adequate to the material base of a market society of strangers. This must be said first, on pain of turning the critique into a moralising lament: the sword was not an error but an adaptation, and a correct one, to its conditions.

11.3.2 The material failure

Its failure, likewise, is material and not a decay of values. The double bind of §11.1 is not produced by a hardening of hearts or a decline of civic virtue; it is produced by a change in the material conditions. The scale and speed of exchange, under globalisation and digitalisation, have outrun the physical capacity of any apparatus of enforcement; the volume of breach has outrun the carrying capacity of the courts; and the cost of producing a convincing symbol has fallen to zero, saturating the environment with forged signals and collapsing, as §6.5 showed, the precision-weight a population rationally assigns to the symbolic channel on which centralised enforcement partly relied. These are changes at the level of the forces and the mode of production, and they have brought the once-adequate form of trust-production—centralised force—into contradiction with the new material conditions. This is the historical-materialist account of the crisis of the symbol: not the idealist story of a value-nihilism that has overtaken the culture, but the materialist story of a contradiction between the established mode of producing trust and the changed material base beneath it. The diagnosis of §3 is here raised from a cultural diagnosis to a historical-materialist one.

11.3.3 The emergent recomposition

The dialectical point follows, and it is the one that distinguishes analysis from exhortation. The decentralisation of enforcement is not something we ought to choose; it is a recomposition that the contradiction is already forcing into being. The new forms of non-coercive trust-production—reputation systems, credit mechanisms, platform ratings, restorative justice, the distributed ledgers of trust—are not the good ideas of reformers; they are the spontaneous symptoms of a mode of trust-production reorganising itself under new material conditions, the new technologies of network and computation throwing up new channels as the old single channel fails. The task of the section is therefore not to *recommend* decentralisation but to *analyse* this recomposition that is already occurring: to identify its direction, its potential, and—the fourth moment—its internal contradiction.

11.3.4 *The capture: the new contradiction*

For the dialectical method requires that the emergent form be examined for its own contradictions, and not celebrated. The new channels of non-coercive trust are, under the present relations of production, being captured by capital and turned to alienation. Reputation and credit, which might be the emancipatory institutionalisation of the relational-historical channel, become under capital the social-credit score, the algorithmic management of the worker, credit as a new instrument of discipline—a finer and more pervasive control than the sword, precisely the retreat to the quantifiable that §2.3 described, with the metrics now held by the platform and the owner. The platform’s badge of trust becomes capital’s commodification of trust, a thing the platform can monopolise and extract rent upon. So the decentralised technical form, under centralised ownership of the new channels, may produce a domination more insidious than the sword it replaces—a domination that operates through the very channels that were to have freed trust from compulsion. The question the historical-materialist method therefore presses, and that the justice criterion of §8 presses with it, is: who owns these new channels, and for whose benefit do they run—to whom does the value they produce return, and is there one who is rendered, in them, mere fuel? The decentralisation of the *technical form* of trust-production is no emancipation in itself; under the wrong relations of production it is a new mode of extraction. The synthesis is therefore not the triumphant slogan that decentralisation has freed us, but a new contradiction: an emergent form whose emancipatory potential is real and whose capture by capital is equally real, and whose outcome is not settled by the technology but by the relations of production that own it.

11.4 *The three channels institutionalised*

Within that dialectical frame, and not as free-standing recommendations, the three non-coercive channels of §6 can be seen taking institutional form, each with its emancipatory possibility and each with its characteristic danger of capture.

Reputation and credit systems are the institutionalisation of the relational-historical channel: they aggregate the scattered relational histories of §9 into a transmissible, institutional form of inductive trust, making a person’s accumulated track of dealing legible beyond the circle that witnessed it. This is their power—the institutional aggregation of inductive trust—and their danger is exactly the one named above: the degeneration of the credit record into a purely quantitative instrument of discipline, the relational history flattened into a score and the score turned to control.

Restorative justice is the institutionalisation of the self-committing channel. Rather than imposing a sanction by force, it creates the occasion for an offender’s real, irrevocable, self-implicating assumption of what he has done—the encounter with the one he has wronged, the genuine and costly taking-on of responsibility—which produces, through the high-fidelity likelihood of a real self-binding rather than through compulsion, the rebuilding of an expectation that a mere unenforceable judgment could not [22]. It works the self-committing channel of §6.2.2 at the scale of the institution; and its danger is the hollowing of the encounter into a procedural

ritual, a staged contrition that forges the self-commitment it should embody.

Public registration and transparency are the institutionalisation of the projective path of §10.2.1. They do not manufacture trust; they let a real state of performance—a real record of what has and has not been done—cast, in the symbolic register the evidentialist reads, the shadow by which it can be recognised. They make the real visible rather than producing the appearance of it; and their danger is the surveillance that the same transparency enables, the registry turned from a means of letting the real be seen into a means of total observation.

11.5 The place of the sword: relocation, not abolition

A boundary must be drawn as firmly here as the spine of the chapter is asserted, for the spine is liable to a dangerous over-reading, and the historical-materialist honesty that refuses to celebrate the emergent form refuses equally to romanticise the abandonment of force. The decentralisation of trust-production is *not* the abolition of enforcement. Force retains an indispensable role—but it is a different role from the one it was failing at. Force is not, and never was, the producer of trust; but it is the necessary backstop, the after-the-fact protection, and above all the protection of the vulnerable against predation and against the betrayal that the powerful might otherwise inflict with impunity. The weak still need the sword—not to generate the trust on which they deal, which force cannot generate, but to protect them when trust is betrayed and to guarantee that the betrayal of the powerful is not costless. Decentralisation of trust-production is not de-coercion; the sword is not taken away but *relocated*, from the false position of the producer of trust, which it cannot occupy, to its true position as the backstop that protects against the worst, especially on behalf of those least able to protect themselves. To forget this would be to abandon, in the name of a purer trust, exactly those whom the purer trust does not yet protect.

11.6 The juridical as the practice of a relational nomos

The chapter closes by connecting its analysis to the foundational paper and to the series, for the transformation it has traced is the institutional form of a movement the foundational paper named at the largest scale. That paper, drawing on the line of Marx and of the theorists of social reproduction, marked the overload of justice as a diagnosis without an exit, and held open the thought—against the horizon of the eventual withering of the state—that the law need not wither with it, but might pass from a law of action, the law of the sword that compels, toward a law of non-action, a law of pure relation, a relational *nomos* [17, 21]. The present chapter supplies the exit the foundational paper marked but did not develop. The centralised, force-based law—the law of action, the sword—decays as its material base dissolves; and a *nomos* built upon the production of relational trust—the law of non-action, the law of pure relation—germinates in the contradiction. But whether it is realised, or captured, depends, as the whole chapter has insisted, not upon the technical form but upon whether the relations of production are themselves transformed—upon who comes to own the new channels of trust, and upon whether the value they generate is returned, justly, to those whose dealing generates it, with no one rendered fuel. The optimisation of the juridical is, in the end, the freeing of

justice from the impossible burden of being the last Other, the final guarantor of an order it was never able to underwrite by force; and the return of justice to its place as the practice, and the protector, of a relational nomos whose trust is generated elsewhere—in the coupled channels, at the scale of relation, that the rest of the paper has described. To that scale, the scale of a life and its nearest bonds, the paper now turns.

12. The Praxis of Trust

The paper arrives at its practical summit, and at the chapter toward which the whole has been moving. Everything established—the mechanism, the geometric reading, the criterion of justice, the structure of relational trust, the theory of translation, the optimisation of the juridical—has been knowledge *for the sake of* practice, and the paper would betray its own deepest claim if it stopped at knowledge. For the series holds that to settle in the theoretical, to take the cognition of a thing as the completion of it, is itself an instance of the pathology the whole paper diagnoses—the failure of settlement, the symbol that declares a circuit closed which no one has walked. A paper on the generation of trust that ended in an account of the mechanism, without descending to the practice in which trust is actually generated and lived, would be such a closed and unwalked circuit. The praxis is therefore not an application appended to the theory; it is the theory's discharge of its own obligation not to settle. This chapter is long, and rises, at its centre, to the paper's metaphysical summit; the present part develops its ground, from the reason there must be a praxis at all to the honest reckoning with what no praxis can guarantee, and the part that follows it raises the summit and returns, at the last, to the family and the room.

12.1 Why there must be a praxis

The reason the paper cannot end in theory is the paper's own. It has argued that the poetic symbol refuses settlement—that it presents generativity rather than a closed structure, and forces its meaning to be walked rather than cashed; and it has argued that the failure of settlement, the cashing of a sublimation no one has undergone, is the very form of the symbolic usurpation it diagnoses. To stop at the theoretical cognition of trust would be to commit this failure in the paper's own conduct: to cash, in the coin of understanding, a practice that has not been walked. The descent to praxis is thus demanded by the paper's content, and not merely by a wish to be useful. And the descent is also the place where the paper's argument and the author's life, which the Prelude held apart as the near and the far edge of one question, are to meet: the praxis of trust is what the author must do, before the family of the Prelude, and it is what the theory has been clearing the ground to make sayable. The chapter is the point at which the knowledge turns into a way of acting, and refuses, in turning, to settle.

12.2 A polyphony of practices, and an ethical line across them

There is no single practice of trust, and the series' polyphonic law holds in the practical register as it held in the theoretical: each of the frameworks the paper has drawn upon furnishes

a practice of trust, and none governs the rest. The evidentialist practice builds the track record, accumulates the demonstrable, lets the facts mount until they speak. The deontological practice cultivates and shows a character, makes of the self a thing whose sincerity can be read. The relational practice tends the chains of §9, invests in the couplings through which trust is transmitted. The Daoist practice, of which more below, declines strategy and lets the real show itself in its own time. The institutional practice works the endorsements and the registers. These are real and distinct practices, suited to different receivers and different moments, and the paper does not rank them; the practical wisdom of trust is in large part the wisdom of which practice a given situation calls for, and the polyphony is, here as throughout, not a defect to be resolved into a single method but the very shape of a competence adequate to an object no single framework possesses.

But across all these practices runs one ethical line, and on this the polyphony does not extend: descriptively plural, the practices are ethically subject, every one, to the single criterion of §8. Whatever the practice—evidential, deontological, relational, Daoist, institutional—it is genuine where it produces an expectation by supplying a real ground that honours the other’s free judgment and opens a relation that returns to him, and forged where it induces an expectation by manufacturing a signal that handles him as a mechanism and draws upon him as fuel. The plurality is a plurality of legitimate forms; the line between the genuine and the forged cuts across every one of them, and is the same line in each. The chapter is polyphonic in its description of the practices and monophonic in its ethic of them, and the next subsections turn first to a correction the polyphony itself requires, and then to the forged practice the ethic excludes.

12.3 The justice of presentation

The polyphony of practices, as just set out, conceals a value-judgment that must be brought up and corrected, for it has quietly ranked the practices after all, and ranked them wrongly. There is a temptation, native to the Daoist and to a certain reading of the natural, to hold the practice of unstrategic self-showing—the letting of the real appear in its own time, without contrivance—as the highest and purest form of genuine trust-building, and to regard any *active* presentation, any rendering of oneself in the form the receiver’s cognition can best take, as already shading toward the manipulative. On this view, to present one’s sincerity in the grammar of the evidentialist would be a falling-away from the purity of simply, sincerely being; and the active translation of §10 would carry a faint guilt, as a strategy where strategy ought not to be. This subsection reverses that judgment, and the reversal is the hinge of the whole praxis.

The reversal turns on a recognition the paper owes to its own theory of translation: that the active presentation of oneself in the grammar the other can read—the very thing the unstrategic ideal suspects—is not a fall from purity but, in the right conditions, the way of *countering an epistemic injustice*. For epistemic injustice runs in two directions, and the unstrategic ideal sees only one of them. The first direction is the one everyone sees: the active evil of manipulation, the use of the other’s grammar to manufacture a signal of something

that is not there, which corrupts his epistemic autonomy (§8). But there is a second direction the unstrategic ideal commits while believing itself innocent: the passive evil of *refusing to translate*—of insisting on showing oneself only in one’s own grammar and leaving the reception to fate. To say “I will simply appear, truly, in my own way, and the rest is not my concern” carries an unjust presupposition: that one’s own grammar is the neutral and universal one, in which the real, shown plainly, will be legible to anyone of good faith. But there is no such neutral grammar (§10); to show oneself only in one’s own and require the other to read one there is to impose one’s own grammar upon him as though it were the universal, and that imposition—however high-minded, however draped in the language of sincerity and refusal of contrivance—is itself an epistemic injustice, the more insidious for disguising itself as purity. The unstrategic ideal is not humble; it is, beneath the humility, the arrogance of treating one’s own way of being legible as legibility itself.

The correction is therefore exact. Unstrategic self-showing is not the highest form of genuine trust; it is genuine only where the grammars happen to match, and where they do not—which is precisely the situation of the Prelude’s suitor before the family—it is not purity but a concealed epistemic arrogance. And the active presentation of oneself in the other’s grammar, which the unstrategic ideal suspected, is revealed as its opposite: not a strategy shading toward manipulation but an *epistemic hospitality*, the actively going-toward the other’s way of knowing, the taking-on of the labour of being legible to him in his terms rather than requiring him to learn mine. To present a real sincerity in the grammar the other can receive is to recognise his epistemology as legitimate and equal to one’s own, and to move toward it; and this counters epistemic injustice rather than committing it, because it restores—rather than corrupts—the other’s capacity to make, on his own epistemological terms, a true judgment about a real thing.

The line between the genuine and the forged is therefore not the line between the unstrategic and the active, between *wu wei* and *you wei*, between letting-be and doing. That was the error the unstrategic ideal made: it located the danger in activity as such. The line is the one it has always been: whether what is presented really exists. Genuine presentation may be unstrategic—the letting-appear, where the grammars match—or it may be active—the epistemic hospitality, the translation into the other’s grammar, where they do not—and both are genuine, for both present, by whatever means, a thing that is real. Forged presentation is the active manufacture, in the other’s grammar, of a signal for a thing that is not there. The difference is in the reality of what is presented, never in the activity or passivity of the presenting; and in the situation of epistemic mismatch—the situation that matters, the situation of the Prelude—the active presentation, the epistemic hospitality, is not the lesser and more suspect form but the one that more fully respects the other and more fully counters the injustice of requiring him to read one in a grammar not his own. To present one’s real sincerity to the family in the form they can receive—the stable fact, the observable constancy, the evidentially legible—is not the abandonment of a deontological purity nor a step toward manipulation; it is respect for their epistemology, and the genuine active good, so long as what is presented is real.

12.4 The forged practice excluded

The ethic that runs across the polyphony excludes one practice absolutely, and it is worth naming the excluded practice precisely, for it is the practice that most resembles the genuine and is most apt to be mistaken for a legitimate technique. It is the practice of behavioural conditioning: the deliberate shaping of another's expectations by the engineering of reinforcements, the production of trust by the systematic management of what the other experiences as the consequence of trusting, so that the trust is trained into him as a conditioned response rather than grounded in any real self-commitment. It is the manipulation of §8 raised to a method, and its evil is threefold, the three aspects of the one wrong the justice criterion identified, here compounded.

It is, first, the treating of the other as a means and a mechanism — the Kantian wrong — for it works upon him as upon a system to be conditioned, bypassing the free judgment that genuine trust addresses. It is, second, the epistemic injustice — for it installs in him an expectation by training rather than by grounds, corrupting his capacity to form, on real grounds, a true judgment of his own. And it is, third and distinctively, a temporal forgery, a failure of settlement spread across time: it manufactures, by the management of reinforcements, the *appearance of a constancy* that no real self-commitment underwrites, forging across time the very track record that the evidentialist reads as the shadow of a real sincerity — so that it is the precise isomorph, in the practice of trust, of the forged recommendation of §9, which manufactures the symbolic form of a coupling that does not exist. The conditioned constancy is a decohered constancy: the observable shell of a track record, with no real coupling beneath it. The practice is excluded not because conditioning never produces reliable behaviour — it may — but because the reliability it produces is a forged precision, a trust trained into the other as into a mechanism, drawing upon him as fuel while corrupting his capacity to know, and forging, across the very dimension of time that should reveal the difference, the shadow that should have been the real's alone.

12.5 Hume's gulf, and the honest reckoning with no guarantee

Beneath the whole practice of trust lies a limit that no practice can cross, and the honesty of the praxis depends on reckoning with it rather than concealing it. It is Hume's gulf, met first in the diagnosis (§3.5) and now to be faced in the practical register. No practice of trust, however genuine, can guarantee its own outcome. The one who builds the track record cannot guarantee he will keep faith tomorrow; the one who makes the costly self-commitment cannot guarantee the circumstance that will test it; the one who trusts cannot cross, by any quantity of evidence or any depth of self-binding, the gulf between what has been and what will be. The practitioner of trust is in exactly the position the prior paper of the series assigned to the practitioner of any good practice: he cannot guarantee that his practice is good, cannot occupy the position of an Other of infinite reason who could certify the absolute causal connection between his conduct and the good it aims at, cannot stand outside the gulf and warrant the crossing [14, 21]. There is no view from which the keeping of the promise is assured in advance; there is only the promise, made and to be kept, across a gulf no guarantee spans.

This is not a counsel of despair but the precise location of the difference between the genuine and the forged at its deepest. For the difference between genuine and forged trust is not, at the last, a difference in the presence or absence of a guarantee—neither has a guarantee; the gulf is uncrossable for both. The difference is in the honesty with which the absence of a guarantee is borne. The forged practice pretends to a guarantee it does not have: it manufactures the appearance of an assured constancy, forging the certainty that the gulf forbids. The genuine practice makes its commitment in the full acknowledgement that nothing assures it—binds itself across the gulf precisely as one who knows the gulf is there and cannot be crossed by any warrant, and binds itself anyway. Genuineness is not the possession of a certainty the forged lacks; it is the honest bearing of an uncertainty the forged denies. The genuine promise is the one made in the knowledge that it cannot be guaranteed, and made, freely and without the false comfort of a guarantee, as a binding of oneself across a gulf one knows no evidence and no self-binding can close.

And here the praxis arrives at the threshold of its summit. For the question this raises is the one the rest of the chapter exists to answer: if no external guarantee can cross the gulf—if neither the sword, nor the evidence, nor the depth of the self-binding can assure that the promise will be kept—then what does the one who would genuinely bind himself *do*, in the face of a gulf he cannot cross and a future he cannot warrant? The answer is not to find, at last, a guarantee that the chapter has overlooked; there is none. The answer is to make, across the gulf no guarantee spans, a free and self-grounding leap—to constitute, by an act of one’s own freedom, the very constancy that no external warrant could supply. What that act is, how it is possible, and why it is the descent of something an older language would have called divine, is the matter of the summit to which the chapter now rises.

12.6 Relational divinity: the descent of the Other into the self-legislating subject

The leap the previous subsection named—the free constitution, across a gulf no warrant spans, of the very constancy no external guarantee could supply—is the paper’s metaphysical summit, and it must be set out with the fullness its weight demands, for it is a claim the series has approached from many directions and never, until here, fully stated. It can be stated so. **The self-legislation, self-adjudication, self-keeping, and self-removal of every recourse outside the law one has given oneself is the mechanism by which a relational divinity descends into the world.** This is the most original of the paper’s claims, and it stands, the author believes, in no prior text of the series nor in the foundational paper; it is set out here in full and in emphasis as the thing toward which the whole has been moving.

Begin with the historical movement of the divine, which earlier work in the series established in its direction without specifying its present mechanism. There is a movement, across the history of how the divine has been located, in three stages. First, a *transcendent* divinity: the god beyond the world, the divine power lodged in a heaven or a nature outside the human, before whom the oath is sworn and by whom its breach is avenged. Then, a *symbolic* divinity: the divine descended into the Symbolic, into the great Other of the law, the institution, the symbolic authority, the impersonal reason before which the modern subject stands—the god

replaced by the order of signs that judges and binds. And now, in the movement this paper completes, a *relational* divinity: the divine descending out of the Symbolic and into the free practice of the relational subject, appearing no longer beyond the world nor in the order of signs above the subject, but in what the subject freely does, in relation, in the constituting of a bond.

The mechanism of this last descent — the present, concrete mechanism the earlier work marked the direction toward but did not supply — is the fourfold act. It is, first, *self-legislation*, in the full Kantian sense of autonomy: the subject gives himself the law, lays it down as law for himself, so that the constancy he could not derive from the past (Hume’s gulf forbids the derivation) is not a fact to be observed or predicted but a law to be *enacted*, posited by the will, grounded in the *ought* the subject lays upon himself — bypassing, rather than crossing, the gulf, by founding the constancy in an act of legislation rather than seeking it in an inference. It is, second, *self-adjudication*, the act the author adds and on which the whole turns: the continuous holding of oneself to the law one has given, the standing as one’s own judge over whether the law is kept, the self-arraignment and self-correction when one has strayed — which is the internalisation of Fuller’s congruence (§4.3), the bringing of one’s conduct into agreement with one’s announced rule, performed by the subject upon himself. A single free choice would be fragile, a resolution that the next moment might dissolve; but self-legislation joined to a continuous self-adjudication feeds each keeping of the law back into the loop that sustains it, and the constancy is thereby *generated* — turned out, moment by moment, by the self-legislating and self-adjudicating loop — rather than guaranteed in advance. It is, third, *self-keeping*, the actual holding to the law across time. And it is, fourth, the *self-removal of every recourse outside the law one has given* — which is the deepest sense of the burning of the bridge, met first in §6.2.2 and now to be completed.

For here the forward reference of the mechanism is discharged. The burning of the bridge was described, at §6.2.2, in its aspect as a high-fidelity signal — something done to be read by another, furnishing his model with hard-to-forge evidence. That was, it was said there, only one of its two faces and not the deeper. The deeper face is this: that one forecloses one’s own recourse not in order to send a message but in order to constitute, for oneself, a law — 我立此为法, I have laid this down as law, and so that road no longer exists for me. The external law closes the road by force, mechanically, by the threat at the road’s end; self-legislation closes the road by freedom, by the laying-down that makes the road, for this subject, not a road at all. The reader who reaches this point will recognise that the trunk was pointing here all along: that beneath the burning of the bridge as a signal lay the burning of the bridge as self-legislation, and that the costly act read by another was, in its depth, a subject’s free and irrevocable binding of himself, in the manner in which a god is said to bind himself in a covenant — leaving no recourse, because the divine does not keep a recourse. The self-removal of recourse is the point at which the human exceeds the ordinary human, in which the part of the human capable of self-transcendence, capable of binding itself irrevocably as a god binds himself in a covenant, is realised; and it is the divine core of the vow.

12.6.1 Why the divinity is relational and not a solitary self-deification

The gravest danger of this claim must be met head-on, for a self-legislation that made itself its own law and its own judge would seem the very figure of hubris — the subject deifying himself, circling his own image, the solitary self-grounding that is the oldest form of the imaginary’s idolatry. The answer to the danger is the single consideration on which the whole claim’s safety rests, and it is ontological. **The subject is not first a self and then a party to relations; the subject is constituted by relation, is relational through and through, before and beneath any self it could deify.** On the relational ontology the series has held, there is no prior, separate self that could turn upon itself in a closed circle of self-worship; the self that legislates is already, in its very constitution, relational — made of the relations it stands in. And therefore the law it gives itself, and the divinity that descends in the giving, are relational from the first. The self-legislation is never “I, to myself” in a closed loop; it is “I, as a relational being, within the relations that constitute me, for those relations, toward those relations” — the laying-down, by a self that is made of its bond to the other, of a law for the keeping of that bond. The betrothal vow is exactly this: a self-legislation performed by a self constituted in the relation to the one it vows to, laying down, for that relation and within it, the law of how it will be kept.

This relational constitution is, further, what dissolves the tension that would otherwise destroy self-adjudication. A solitary self-judge is the surest route to self-deception: nothing is easier than to acquit oneself, to flatter the law into agreement with the conduct, when one is one’s own only judge. But the relational self-adjudication is not solitary — it is conducted, of necessity, within the regard of the relation. The other’s witness, the gaze that the empty place of the *das Ding* holds open, is not an external check added to the self-adjudication from outside; it is internal to the very structure of being a relational subject, which is constituted in being-seen as much as in seeing. The honesty of the self-adjudication is therefore not secured by an external sword — there is none, and the gulf forbids one — but by the ontological fact that the self which adjudicates is a self already constituted in relation, already under a regard it did not add and cannot remove. Relational divinity carries its own guard against self-deception, and the guard is not a borrowed sword but the subject’s own relational being.

12.6.2 The personal-divine form of positive holonomy

This fourfold act is the personal and divine form of the positive, adiabatic holonomy of §7. The loop closes — the constancy is sustained, turn upon turn — not because an external pump drives it (no transcendent god, no symbolic Other, no sword: these would be the non-adiabatic driving, the borrowed phase), but because the relational subject’s own self-legislating and self-adjudicating loop closes it from within, endogenously, accumulating its phase as its own. It is the discharge, at the level of the person, of the claim of §5, that autonomy is the highest form of freedom — not the merely negative freedom of being undetermined, but the positive freedom of giving oneself the law. And it gathers to itself the deepest voices of the series and of the traditions it has drawn upon: the foundational paper’s intimation that the tendency of the Other toward its final dissolution opens the way to a renewed approach to a pure relational

being [21]; the Buddhist teaching that mind is itself the Buddha, that all dharmas are made by mind — 是心是佛，一切法由心造; the Daoist refusal of the external warrant; and the betrothal document's own closing line, 本乎此心，自成永恒 — that the eternal is founded not upon any external guarantee but here, in this heart, which is itself the ground.

12.6.3 The inversion of value: the non-binding vow as the more divine

A consequence follows that inverts the ordinary ranking of instruments, and it is the point at which the whole paper's central paradox is resolved into a claim. The ordinary ranking holds the marriage certificate above the betrothal vow, the contract above the memorandum of understanding, because the former in each pair carries the backing of the state, the force of law, the reliability of the sword. From the standpoint of relational divinity, the ranking is exactly inverted. **The memorandum of understanding is more divine than the contract, the betrothal vow more divine than the marriage certificate** — precisely because they carry no force, have no external guarantee to borrow, and so can be sustained only by the subject's own self-legislation, self-adjudication, and self-keeping in the real.

The logic is this. The contract and the marriage certificate *outsource* the threefold function — legislation, adjudication, keeping — to the symbolic Other: the law is the state's, the judging is the court's, the keeping is compelled by the sword. The parties borrow an external, symbolic divinity to underwrite their bond, and need not legislate, adjudicate, or foreclose their own recourse, for the functions are outsourced. The memorandum and the vow, having no force, force these functions back upon the subject: with no external sword, the legislation can only be self-legislation; with no external court, the adjudication can only be self-adjudication; with no external compulsion, the keeping can only be self-keeping and the self-removal of recourse. The parties have nowhere to borrow an external divinity, and must therefore *become* the legislator, the judge, and the keeper themselves — must let the relational divinity descend into themselves, or the bond does not hold. The "defect" of having no force is thus the very condition of the divinity: precisely because no external sword keeps the vow, the keeping must issue from one's own free, irrevocable self-binding, which is the realisation, and not the absence, of the divine. This completes the geometric reading of §7.5: the contract and the certificate are non-adiabatic, their loop held closed by the external pump of the state's force, their phase borrowed; the memorandum and the vow are adiabatic, their loop closed by nothing but the subject's endogenous self-legislation, their phase their own — the purer specimen of genuine holonomy, into which the certificate admits an admixture of the external pump. And it raises the counter-intuitive claim of the diagnosis to its summit: the betrothal vow is not merely, as was first said, possibly more productive of real trust than the complete contract; it is, in the dimension of the divine, the purer thing, because it forces the divine back into the free practice of the subject rather than borrowing it from an Other.

The honest boundary must be drawn, lest the inversion be pressed past what it claims. It is not said that the memorandum and the vow are superior to the contract and the certificate in every dimension. In the real functions of protecting the vulnerable, deterring betrayal, and providing a remedy, external force remains necessary and is not to be romantically discarded — exactly

as §11 insisted in relocating rather than abolishing the sword. The claim is narrow and precise: that in the dimension of the divine, of the genuine, the non-coercive instrument is the purer, because it forces the divinity back into the subject's own free practice. The weak still need the sword's protection at the scale of institutions; but the divinity of a genuine bond was never lodged in the sword, and is found, at the scale of relation, only where the sword is not. It is not, therefore, that one should forgo the certificate for the vow; it is that, beyond and above and before the certificate, what makes the bond a bond at all is the self-legislating relational divinity, and that this is most purely realised in the vow that has no force.

12.7 The concrete operation

From the summit the chapter descends to the concrete, for the praxis must issue in something one can actually do, and the abstractions of divinity must be cashed—here legitimately, for here the path is walked and not merely declared—into an operation. The operation has three movements, and a condition of time.

The first movement is to *identify the other's grammar of trust*, and its configuration (§10.1.2): to discern, of the one whose trust is to be won, which of the grammars of §10.1.1 dominates his reading, in what weighting, so that one knows the language into which one's sincerity must be translated. One does not present in the abstract; one presents to this configuration, and the discernment of it is the first and indispensable act.

The second movement is to *produce, in the other's grammar, a real possibility of expectation*—to translate, by the paths of §10, and above all by the epistemic hospitality of §12.3, one's real sincerity into the form the other's configuration can receive. For the evidentialist family, this is the projection of the real into the register of the observable and the accomplished: not the manufacture of a track record one does not have, which would be forgery, but the patient letting of one's real self-legislated constancy cast, in the evidential register, the shadow by which it can be recognised. The thing presented must be real—must be a sincerity that exists and a constancy that is genuinely self-legislated—and it must be presented in the grammar the other reads. This is the whole of the second movement: a real thing, hospitably translated.

The third movement is the *right use of relational trust* (§9), and it carries the chapter's most delicate ethical discrimination. The trust of the family runs, very largely, along the chain that connects the suitor to them through the one they already love—she is, in the structure of the network, his recommender, and the trust may reach them along that link as it reaches along no other. The right use of this is to let the trust transmit because the coupling it transmits is real—because she is, in the genuine sense, the co-author of the bond, and her steady bearing toward it is the unfakeable real component (§9.2) that the family, even reading evidentially, can read. The wrong use—the forged use, excluded by the justice criterion—is to instrumentalise her as a mere channel, to deploy her to "work on" the family, to siphon her relational capital toward a coupling between the suitor and the family that has not in fact occurred. The line is exactly the line of §8: between a real coupling that transmits because it is real, and a relational capital siphoned to transmit a coupling that is not there. The one honours her as co-author;

the other renders her fuel.

And the condition of time. None of this can be hurried, and the attempt to hurry it is itself a tell of the forged. The self-legislated constancy casts its evidential shadow only as it is actually lived across time; the real coupling transmits only as it is really borne; the shared grammar of mutual translation grows only in the continued interaction. Time cannot manufacture the coupling-trust, which is real from the first or not at all; but time is what lets the real cast, in the register the evidentialist reads, the shadow sufficient to be recognised. The praxis is therefore not a technique that produces trust on demand but a way of living that lets a real thing become, across time, recognisable to one whose grammar is not one's own. It cannot be accelerated; it can only be deepened.

12.8 The return to the room

The chapter, and with it the body of the paper, returns at the last to the scene from which the Prelude set out: to the one who must sit across from a family not yet his own, and be trusted. Everything the paper has built converges on that room, and it converges not on a method for controlling what happens there but on a way of being present in it.

For the end of the praxis is not the mastery of the other's trust — trust cannot be mastered, only generated, and generated across a gulf no one can guarantee. The end is to be ready to be truly present: to have become one who has a real sincerity to present, and to present it in the grammar the family can receive, with the epistemic hospitality that honours their way of knowing rather than demanding they learn his. What he can give them is not an external guarantee — he has none to give, and to manufacture the appearance of one would be the forgery the whole paper has worked to refuse. What he can give them is the sight of a person who legislates his own law and holds himself to it — who has laid down, for the relation that constitutes him, the law of how he will keep faith, and who adjudicates himself against it continually, in the open, where it can be seen. This constancy is real, for it is the product of the self-legislating loop; and being real, it casts, in time and in the evidential register the family reads, a true shadow — a track of consistent, self-correcting keeping that the evidentialist can read as what it is, the unforgeable sign not of a compelled obedience nor of a performed display but of a free subject keeping the law he gave himself. That is what there is to give: not a guarantee, which cannot be given, but the presence of a self-legislating relational subject, whose constancy is its own and whose keeping of faith is the descent, in him, of a divinity that needs no sword — offered, across the gulf, to be trusted or not, freely, by those he cannot compel and would not if he could.

13. Conclusions

A paper that has argued, throughout, that its object is one no single framework possesses, and that the truth of such an object lives not in any one voice but in the dialogue among them, cannot end in a single concluding voice without betraying its own claim. The conclusions are therefore plural, and they are plural by necessity and not by modesty. Each of the frameworks

the paper has drawn upon is given here its own conclusion: what it can say about the generation of trust, said as firmly as it can be said, and what it cannot say, marked as firmly. The point of the exercise is not a survey but an enactment: the paper's form is meant to be its last argument, the demonstration, in the shape of its own ending, that the generation of trust is known only polyphonically, in the dialogue of irreducible positions none of which governs the rest. The discipline the series imposes on such an ending is exact, and the paper holds to it: each framework must speak to the edge of what it can warrant, hard and fallible and willing to assert, for a polyphony of voices that each hedge into vagueness is no polyphony but an evasion. Each voice below says something, and says where it must stop.

The jurisprudential conclusion

The philosophy of law can say this: that the anchor of legal validity has migrated, across the century of its own reflection, from force toward trust, and that the law has recorded the migration in its own most technical doctrine, conceding at its edge, in promissory estoppel, that reliance and not compulsion is the true ground of a promise's binding force. It can say that force was never the cause of obligation but a substitute, now failing, for the production of expectation. It cannot say what trust *is*, nor how, mechanically, it is produced; jurisprudence can locate the anchor and trace its movement, but the nature of the thing the anchor is moving toward lies outside its competence, and it must hand that question to others. Its limit is that it can say where validity rests without being able to say what, at that resting place, validity consists in.

The predictive-coding conclusion

The predictive account can say this: that trust is the precision a generative model assigns to the prediction that a promise will be kept; that this dissolves the paradox of a present expectation directed at a non-existent future, since prediction is the brain's standing activity and requires no causation running backward from the future; that the expectation is produced through three coupled channels whose multiplicative coupling makes genuine trust robust where any single channel is fragile; and that the crisis of the symbol is the rational collapse of a population's precision-weight on a channel that forgery has made unreliable. It cannot say that trust simply *is* a precision-weighting and nothing more; it offers a description at the computational and implementational level, and it must not be mistaken for the truth beneath the others. Its limit is the limit of every mechanistic account: it says how the thing is computed, and is silent on what the computing is, lived from within, and on whether it is just.

The geometric conclusion

The geometric reading can say this: that a promise kept across time traces a closed loop, and that the sign of the holonomy the loop accumulates distinguishes the bond that deepens from the one that merely repeats and the one that drains; that the genuine, non-coercive promise is the adiabatic loop whose phase is its own, closed by no external pump, and the coerced bond the driven path whose phase is borrowed; and that this furnished, at last, the missing

structure—a spectral gap—for a problem the series had left open. It cannot, in this paper, furnish the phase with a fully rigorous carrier; it has worked as a structural analogy, and the formal closure lies in another paper. Its limit is that it shows the shape of the distinction with precision while deferring the full formalisation of what bears the phase.

The quantum-dynamical conclusion

The quantum-dynamical reading can say this: that relational trust shares the formal structure of an entangled state, a property of correlations and not of nodes; that its failure under the crisis of the symbol is a systemic decoherence, the correlational shell preserved while the coherence drains; and that its transmission along the chain is the structural counterpart of entanglement swapping through an intermediary. It cannot say—and must say, loudly, that it does not say—that trust is in any literal sense a quantum phenomenon. It is a structural isomorphism and not a physical reduction, one more formal language for a structure and not the structure's secret physical truth. Its limit is the limit of every analogy: it illuminates by a likeness, and the likeness is not an identity.

The psychoanalytic conclusion

The psychoanalytic reading can say this: that the production of trust circles a place that cannot be filled—that genuine trust, like the genuine poem, encircles the empty place of the *das Ding* rather than filling it with an idol, and so requires no victim, where the forged trust fills the place with a positive object and must consume someone to do it; that the wager of trust is a venture made across a lack no evidence closes; and that the great Other, the guarantor that would certify the crossing, does not exist. It cannot translate the lack it speaks of into the positive terms the other frameworks want; its truths are truths about an absence, and they resist the cashing-out that would betray them. Its limit is that it speaks most truly where it can least be made to settle into a positive doctrine.

The political-economic conclusion

The political-economic reading can say this: that the forms of trust-production are thrown up by the material conditions of their time and change as those conditions change; that centralised, force-based justice was the historically adequate form for a society of market strangers, and is failing now not through a decay of values but through a change in the material base; that the decentralisation of trust-production is a recomposition already under way, forced by that change; and that its emancipatory potential is real but not guaranteed, for the new channels are, under the present relations of production, being captured by capital toward a domination subtler than the sword. It cannot, from its own resources alone, settle whether the recomposition will emancipate or enslave; that depends on whether the relations of production are transformed, which is not a question the analysis of trust can answer by itself. Its limit is that it can diagnose the contradiction without being able to guarantee its resolution.

The Daoist conclusion

The Daoist reading can say this: that the genuine bond is the one sustained by no external pump, closing upon itself by the completeness of what each freely brings; that to grasp at the guarantee is to lose the thing — that the one who would secure the bond by force forecloses the very deepening that only the unforced loop accumulates; and that the eternal the betrothal vow speaks of is founded upon no external warrant but here, in this heart, which is itself the ground — 本乎此心，自成永恒. It cannot say this in the language of mechanism or of proof; its truth is shown in a way of holding the thing, not demonstrated in a way of establishing it, and to press it into demonstration is to lose it as the grasping loses the bond. Its limit is the limit of the unsayable it points to: it can indicate the ground, and cannot, without contradiction, prove it.

Why there is no conclusion above the conclusions

It remains to say why the paper does not now gather these into one — why there is no synthetic conclusion above the plural conclusions, no master voice to adjudicate among the frameworks and pronounce the truth they severally approach. The reason is the paper's deepest commitment, and it is the same reason that runs through the whole: there is no metalanguage. There is no position above the frameworks from which their several truths could be translated, without loss, into a single truth that contained them; the great Other who could occupy that position does not exist, and to write a synthetic conclusion would be to claim his place. The frameworks are irreducible epistemic positions on one object, and the object is known — this is the paper's form enacting the paper's content — only in the dialogue among them, in the mutual illumination that is itself a good cycle, a polyphony that generates understanding by the movement among voices rather than by their resolution into one. To conclude above the conclusions would be to settle what must be walked, to cash the dialogue into a doctrine, to commit, in the paper's last act, the very failure of settlement the paper has diagnosed throughout. The absence of a master conclusion is therefore not an incompleteness; it is the paper's final and formal assertion of its thesis. The knower of trust, like the truster, must forgo the guarantee — must hold the plural truths in their dialogue without the false comfort of a synthesis — and the paper, declining to synthesise, does in its form what it has asked, throughout, that the truster do in his life: it bears the absence of a guarantor, and binds itself to the plural truth anyway.

The three concentric circles

One thing may be said, not as a synthesis above the frameworks but as an observation that runs beneath them all, and it returns the paper to the shape it announced in the Prelude. The question of trust was posed across three concentric scales: the intimate vow between two; the promise carried outward to a family; and the public institutions of contract and the courts. And the paper's finding, traced at each scale by each framework, is that the ground of trust is, at all three, the same ground. At the most public scale, the validity of law was found to rest, beneath the sword, on a reciprocal keeping of faith; at the most intimate, the bond was

found to rest on a self-legislating relational divinity that needs no sword; and these are not two grounds but one, seen at two distances. What holds a society together at its most public and what holds two people together at their most intimate is the same thing: a trust generated not by force but by the free, self-binding, mutually relied-upon keeping of faith, across a gulf no guarantor spans. The three circles are concentric because they share a centre, and the centre is the relational divinity that descends wherever a free being binds itself, in relation, without recourse to a sword. The most intimate and the most public meet at that centre; and the betrothal vow on its red silk, which no court will enforce, is found to hold within it the ground on which even the law, at the last, is found to stand.

Envoi

This paper began with a vow written on red silk, on a day the almanac called auspicious, in the full knowledge that nothing in the world would make it binding; and it set out to ask how such a thing—a promise that no sword stands behind—could nonetheless be believed. It has answered, across its length, in many voices: that force was never the cause of trust but a failing substitute for it; that trust is the precision a mind freely lends to a future it cannot verify; that the genuine bond is the loop that closes by no external pump and accumulates, turn upon turn, a phase that is its own; that sincerity has no universal language and must be translated, across the borders of epistemology, into a grammar the other can read; and that the keeping of a promise no sword enforces is the descent, into a free and relational subject, of something an older language would have called divine.

What the analyses leave out is the thing itself, and it returns at the close as the matter that all the analyses were about. A vow kept not because it must be but because one has made it one's own law; a constancy that is not compelled and not predicted but freely generated, morning upon morning, in the holding to a word that no one could force; a trust extended across a gulf no guarantee spans, and met, and not betrayed. These are not the proxies the paper has had to work with but the real of which they were the shadows, and they are lived before they are analysed and exceed every analysis of them. The moon over Kagoshima under which the question first took its human form; the red silk and the chosen day; the gravity of a brush that bound nothing and meant everything—these are the matter, and the paper has been, throughout, their long translation into a grammar the cautious and the evidential might also read.

A promise so kept is not secured and then possessed. It is generated in the keeping, and a bond endures by the continued, free, self-legislated keeping of faith, and ceases when the keeping ceases. There is no guarantee of it to be had and held; there is only the binding of oneself, again and again, across the gulf, in the knowledge that nothing assures it and the freedom that asks for no assurance—the laying-down, in this heart, of a law that is its own eternity.

*For the forest girl,
to whom a promise was made that no sword stands behind,*

*and which is, for that, the more wholly given;
that what is bound here be bound by nothing but this heart,
and, bound by this heart, hold — across every gulf, through all our years.*

本乎此心，自成永恒。

Acknowledgments

I owe this paper, and more than this paper, to the one I love most: the forest girl, whom I met in Tokyo in the year 2022. She is good, and pure, and lovely, and wise, and turned always toward others before herself; she loves the forest, and travelling, and the study of cultures, and the political economy of how we live together. This paper, on how trust can be generated where nothing enforces it, would not have had even its question without her, for it was in the making of a promise to her that the question first took its human form.

And here, at the close, I would do the thing the paper has spent its length learning how to say. The paper has not only argued that a relational divinity descends into the world through the self-legislation, self-adjudication, and self-keeping of a free subject who binds himself without recourse; it has tried to show that such a binding is the realised, and not the defective, form of a promise. It remains for me to do it rather than to describe it, and to let the argument, in its last page, become the act it has been about.

I lay it down, here, as a law for myself, and I will keep it with the whole of my life: 我将如此待她. This is not a promise that any sword stands behind. No court will enforce it; no penalty attends its breach; nothing in the world compels me to keep it. Its whole force is that I bind myself to it, here, freely and without reserve, and will hold myself to it, and have closed to myself every road that leads away from it. I give myself this law, I will be my own judge of my keeping of it, and I have left myself no recourse outside it.

This document carries a trustworthy and undeniable timestamp, and I have set it down here, in a text that bears my name and will outlast this moment, not in order that anyone should see it. Its first work is not to signal but to bind: it is the instrument by which I close my own retreat, so that the road away is, for me, no longer a road. The timestamp is not a sword; it cannot make the vow enforceable, and I do not pretend that it can. What it can do is something I do to myself and not against any consequence: it makes it impossible for the self I will be to deny, to the self I am now, what I have here laid down — it makes me the standing judge of my own keeping of faith, and forecloses the quiet revision by which one lets a vow lapse unremarked. The timestamp is the instrument of my self-adjudication, and of nothing else. The vow is genuine not because the timestamp makes it certain — it cannot, and the gulf the paper described forbids that it should — but because I make it in the full knowledge that nothing assures it, and make it anyway, freely, as a binding of myself across a gulf I know no warrant spans.

This is the paper's most private return, and its last. It set out from the making of a promise on red silk, knowing nothing of why such a promise could be believed; it has travelled through the symptom, the diagnosis, the law, the mechanism, the freedom, the divinity; and it ends by making the promise again—the same act, walked a second time, with everything the paper has come to understand now gathered into it. The first time, the vow was made by intuition, because it was right. This time it is made in the knowledge of why a promise that no force backs is the more wholly given, and of what it is that descends into a free subject who binds himself without recourse. The same act, the second time around, returns not to where it began but a little higher; and that is the only kind of return the paper has believed in.

此文之成，乃至此文以外之种种，我皆当归于我最爱之人——那位于二〇二二年与我相遇于东京的森林女孩。她善良、纯粹、可爱、智慧，处处先人而后己；她爱森林，爱远行，爱文化之研究，亦爱我们如何共处的政治经济之学。这一篇，论的是在无物强制之处信任何以生成；而若没有她，连这问题本身也不会有——因为正是在向她许下一个承诺之时，这问题才第一次有了它的人间形貌。

而今，在此收笔之处，我愿做这一篇用尽全部篇幅才学会如何言说的那件事。本文不仅论证了：关系性的神性，经由一个自由主体的自我立法、自我司法、自我守持——自我断绝一切法外的退路——而降临于世；它更试图表明，这样的自我绑定，正是承诺的成全之形，而非其残缺之形。如今剩下的，是我去做它，而非去描述它，是让这篇论证，在它的最后一页，成为它一路所论的那个行动本身。

我在此立此为法，以约我自身，并将以我的余生持守之：我将如此待她。此非任何刀剑在后所担保之诺。无公堂可强制其行，无刑罚附于其违，世间亦无一物逼我守之。其全部之力，唯在于我于此自由地、毫无保留地以身许之，且将持守自身，并已为自己断绝一切引我背离之路。我为自己立此法，我将自为我守此法之审判者，于此法之外，我未为自己留下任何退路。

此文承载一个可信而不可抵赖的时间戳；我将它立于此，立于一份具我之名、且将久于此刻的文字之中——并非为了让任何人看见。它首要之功不在示信，而在自缚：它是我用以封死自己退路的器具，使那条引我离去之路，于我而言，不再是路。这时间戳不是刀剑；它不能使此诺成为可强制者，我亦不佯称它能。它所能为者，是我施于自身、而非用以对抗任何后果之事：它使将来的我，无从向此刻的我抵赖我于此所立之言——它使我成为自己守信与否的常设审判者，并杜绝那种悄然的修订，免得人任一誓言不声不响地失效。这时间戳，是我自我司法的器具，而别无其他。此诺之为真，不因时间戳使其确定——它不能，且本文所述的那道鸿沟也不容它如此——而是因为：我在明知无物能担保它之时，仍然立下它，且仍然自由地立下它，作为我跨越一道我深知无任何凭据可越之鸿沟、对自身的一次绑定。

这是本文最私密的一次复归，也是最后一次。它起于红绢上一个承诺的写就，其时尚不知这样的承诺何以能被相信；它一路穿过症状、诊断、法理、机制、自由、神性；而它的终结，是再一次许下那个承诺——同一个行动，第二次走过，将本文一路所领会的一切，尽数收纳其中。第一次，那誓出于直觉，因为它是对的。这一次，它是在如下的明知中立下的：明知一个无强制力在后的承诺为何反而给得更为完整，明知那降临于一个自我绑定、不留退路的自由主体之中者，究竟为何物。同一个行动，第二次走过，归来时并非回到起点，而是略高于起点；而这，

是本文唯一相信的那种复归。

本乎此心，自成永恒。

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