

Salience, Manipulation, and Control — A Structural Account

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Abstract

This paper develops a structural account of salience and examines how manipulation and control operate through salience without bypassing, replacing, or overriding agency. Working strictly downstream of Informational Ontology (Rev 5), salience is treated as a pre-interpretive constraint that conditions which informational transitions become available for valuation and action. Manipulation is analyzed as restructuring salience rather than inducing deception or altering preferences, and control is characterized as constraint shaping rather than authorship replacement. The account shows how action spaces may be narrowed or closed without negating agency, and why responsibility attribution must be addressed at downstream regimes. Common collapse attempts—equating salience with value, manipulation with deception, or control with executive override—are blocked structurally rather than rhetorically.

1. Structural Scope and Regime Commitments

This paper concerns the structural role of salience within awareness and its consequences for manipulation and control. It operates strictly downstream of Informational Ontology (Rev 5) and presupposes the regime ordering

$$\Delta \rightarrow R \rightarrow I \rightarrow A \rightarrow V \rightarrow M \rightarrow P.$$

No psychological, normative, or intentional notions are load-bearing in what follows. Where such notions are commonly associated with the terms under discussion, they are treated as downstream interpretations rather than as explanatory primitives.

The analysis is structural rather than evaluative. It specifies how constraints operate, not how they ought to operate, nor how they are experienced.

Structural description in this paper should not be read as moral neutralization. Describing how salience, manipulation, and control operate as constraint structures does not imply that all such operations are morally equivalent or normatively inert. It specifies the conditions under which moral distinctions become intelligible by separating causal explanation from evaluative judgment, rather than collapsing the latter into the former.

2. Salience as Pre-Interpretive Constraint

Within awareness, informational structure may admit multiple potential transitions. Salience denotes the structural conditions under which some of these transitions become *available for valuation at all*.

Salience does not weight informational states. It does not rank, prefer, or evaluate them. Instead, it constrains the field over which valuation may later operate. In regime terms, salience operates within awareness and conditions the inputs to value; it does not itself perform valuation.

This distinction is enforced by regime order: valuation presupposes availability, but availability does not presuppose valuation. Any account that collapses salience into value would thereby violate the $A \rightarrow V$ ordering and is therefore structurally inadmissible.

Salience thus determines neither outcomes nor preferences. It determines which informational differences can function as candidates for either.

3. Manipulation as Salience Restructuring

Manipulation, as analyzed here, consists in altering the salience structure of an agent's awareness. It operates by modifying availability conditions — through constraint shaping, temporal compression, or saturation — rather than by introducing false representations or competing selection mechanisms.

Because salience operates prior to meaning, manipulation need not involve deception. Because it operates prior to valuation, it need not involve preference alteration. Because it operates through constraint, it does not require an intervening executive.

An agent subject to manipulation continues to generate its own transitions. What changes is the structure of the field within which those transitions are reachable.

Any moral assessment of manipulation is therefore downstream of the present analysis. The account offered here is silent on permissibility, blame, or legitimacy, because those assessments presuppose regimes (value, meaning, purpose) not invoked in the explanation itself.

4. Control Without Authorship Replacement

Control is often described as if it entailed substitution of agency. This paper rejects that description as structurally inaccurate.

Control operates by shaping constraints, not by selecting outcomes. A system exerts control when it narrows, biases, or closes the space of reachable transitions for another system, without generating the transition on that system's behalf.

Agency is preserved so long as the transitioning system remains the locus of state change. Freedom may be absent; authorship is not transferred.

This distinction mirrors the separation between closure and selection developed in Resolution Under Degeneracy. Control produces closure; it does not introduce a chooser.

5. Responsibility as Regime-Relative (and Therefore Excluded)

Responsibility attribution presupposes regimes of value, meaning, and purpose. Because this paper operates upstream of those regimes, responsibility is neither denied nor analyzed here. This exclusion is structural rather than evasive. To assess responsibility at the level of salience or constraint shaping would be to import evaluative criteria prior to their conditions of applicability.

Importantly, the present account does not imply that actions shaped by salience, manipulation, or control are immune from moral or legal evaluation. On the contrary, distinguishing structural constraint from authorship is a precondition for non-distorted responsibility attribution. How responsibility scales with constraint, bias, and closure is addressed in downstream work and is not re-argued here.

6. Implementation Neutrality

No part of this account depends on psychological mechanisms, cognitive architecture, or phenomenological reports. Salience is defined in terms of constraint on availability, not in terms of attention, experience, or mental effort.

Human psychological phenomena may instantiate salience, but they do not define it. The same structural relations apply to non-human systems wherever awareness and constraint operate.

Conclusion

Salience conditions availability without valuation. Manipulation restructures salience without deception. Control shapes constraints without replacing agency.

These distinctions are not terminological preferences, but consequences of regime order. Once those orders are respected, common collapse attempts fail structurally rather than rhetorically.

What changes under salience, manipulation, or control is not *who acts*, but *what can be acted upon*.