

# THE TELIC WAY

Authorship, Responsibility, and Structural Coherence Across Democracy,  
Capitalism, Law, and Artificial Intelligence

H. R. Easton

hamiltoneaston92@gmail.com

## Introduction: Rationality at Institutional Scale

Human beings reason within short biological horizons.  
Institutions do not.

Countries, corporations, and legal systems persist across decades and centuries, long after the individuals who founded them, governed them, or profited from their actions have exited the scene. A framework that treats short-term success as rational while allowing long-term degradation is therefore not merely unethical; it is incoherent.

An individual who repeatedly sacrifices future capacity for present gain is judged irrational. The same standard must apply to institutions. Where a society, a state, or a firm behaves as if only the next election, quarter, or product cycle exists, it is functionally acting without a future.

The Telic Way begins from this premise: rationality at scale requires coherence across time. That coherence depends on preserving authorship—keeping power legible, responsibility owned, and long-horizon consequences present at the point of decision. When authorship dissolves, systems may continue to operate, but they no longer govern themselves; they drift.

The Telic Way is grounded in Resolution Theory, a broader framework developed elsewhere for analysing agency, responsibility, and decision-making under uncertainty. Resolution Theory treats agency not as behaviour, optimisation, or intelligence, but as the act of resolving—closing uncertainty through a decision—by an agent who remains exposed to the downstream consequences of that decision across time. This paper does not develop the full theory. It adopts its core structural distinction—between evaluation and resolution—in order to analyse how authorship and responsibility should be preserved in large-scale institutions.

## I. The Core Problem: Power Without Authors

Modern societies increasingly produce outcomes that harm individuals and degrade collective capacity without any clear author. Decisions are fragmented across

bureaucracies, committees, algorithms, and market mechanisms until responsibility dissolves into procedure. Everyone participated; no one can be named.

This is not primarily a moral failure but a structural one. Where power operates without authorship, systems accumulate noise, moral hazard, and long-term fragility.

Who resolved to proceed under uncertainty, and who retained authority to intervene?

## **II. Resolution and Authorship**

A resolution is the legally and institutionally relevant closure of uncertainty into authorised action. It is a temporal and structural event, not a metaphysical one.

An author is the agent or office that, at the moment of resolution:

- 1 Participated in the decision to proceed,
- 2 Possessed authority to halt, alter, or escalate the course of action,
- 3 Wrote that resolution into the world by committing others downstream.

Authorship is not limited to physical execution. It includes those who authorise systems, define incentives, constrain oversight, ignore warnings, waive safeguards, or choose to proceed despite recognised risk.

Authorship signifies stewardship over risk, not intent to cause harm. Unforeseeable outcomes do not convert authorship into intentional wrongdoing, but they do fix who must answer, respond, and repair.

## **III. Democracy: Authorship of Collective Constraints**

Democracy allocates authorship of collective constraints, not authorship of individual acts.

Citizens author the bounds of authority. Officials author decisions within those bounds. Democratic legitimacy explains why power may be exercised; it does not dissolve responsibility for how it is exercised.

Legal and institutional authorship terminates at the highest office with concrete decision power, not at abstract collectives or “the public.” The public remains politically responsible; legal responsibility remains institutional and personal.

Because electoral cycles are short and institutional memory is fragile, democracy is especially vulnerable to short-termism—spending tomorrow’s stability to win today’s argument. Telic Democracy therefore requires structures that keep the long horizon present at the point of resolution: durable constitutional constraints, independent audit and risk offices with real escalation authority, and explicit authorship records for high-stakes decisions.

The aim is not to depoliticise governance, but to prevent the system behaving as if it has no future.

## **Populism and Authorship Bypass**

Attempts to bypass institutional authorship through emergency powers, informal authority, or personal mandate do not dilute responsibility; they concentrate it. Where established escalation and review channels are overridden, the actor exercising that override becomes the author of both the decision and the risk created by bypassing those constraints. Democratic mandate may explain political permission, but it does not dissolve the requirement for authored responsibility. Where procedure is bypassed, escalation tightens.

## **IV. Corporations, Agency, and Exposure**

A corporation is not a moral agent.

It has no consciousness, no exposure, and no capacity to suffer or take responsibility in the human sense. It does not deliberate, resolve, or experience consequences. Moral and legal responsibility always belongs to natural persons.

However, corporations are not inert. They are agent-like structures: coordinated systems that act in the world through delegated authority, decision hierarchies, capital allocation, and procedural rules. They initiate projects, shape incentives, and generate effects far beyond the reach of any single individual.

The distinction is strict:

- Agency belongs only to humans.
- Corporations act through humans.
- Responsibility attaches to the humans who author resolutions within the structure.

Corporations may bear financial burden—fines, damages, remediation costs—but they do not bear personal stake. Financial exposure without personal exposure is not responsibility; it is a pricing mechanism. Treating corporate penalties as sufficient accountability allows responsibility to dissolve into balance sheets.

To say “the company decided” is shorthand. What occurred is that identifiable individuals, occupying defined offices, exercised authority to resolve uncertainty and commit the organisation to a course of action. The corporation is the vehicle; authorship lies with those holding the steering wheel at the moment of resolution.

## **V. Telic Capitalism**

Markets are coordination tools, not moral authorities. Capitalism allocates resources inside constraints authored elsewhere—democratically and legally.

Profit is legitimate only where authorship and exposure remain aligned. Limited liability may function as a managed distortion to encourage investment and innovation, but it cannot dissolve responsibility entirely. Responsibility-free capital produces short-term efficiency and long-term fragility.

A telic firm does not treat the next quarter as the only real time. It accepts that some choices—slower rollouts, higher safety budgets, tighter audits—reduce short-term profit but preserve long-term capacity.

This is not moralising against profit. It is a claim about rational upside.

Well-priced risk compounds trust.

Badly priced risk produces a sugar-high and a crash.

## **VI. Telic Justice**

Law is a telic system: it exists to secure viable coordination across time.

Proximate justice addresses harm as experienced now, preserving legitimacy through proportionality and restraint. Telic justice secures the system over the long horizon by fixing authorship and preventing responsibility from dissolving into abstraction.

Just as an individual is incoherent when their actions predictably undermine their future agency, a society is incoherent when its legal and economic systems permit unauthorised harms that degrade collective future capacity.

Responsibility abhors a vacuum. Where no author is identified at the operational level, responsibility escalates by default. This is not punitive; it is stabilising.

## **VII. The Principle of Top-Down Investigation**

Investigations into harm, failure, or systemic risk begin at the top.

This is not a presumption of guilt. It is a presumption of authorship visibility.

The guiding question is not “Who touched the system last?” but:

**Who had the authority to prevent this?**

Responsibility tracing proceeds downward only where authority genuinely did.

- 1 Initial Attribution: Responsibility is provisionally assigned to the highest office or body with recognised authority over the domain in which the harm occurred.
- 2 Downward Decomposition: Investigation moves downward only where authority to halt, alter, or escalate was explicitly delegated and contemporaneously documented.
- 3 Termination Condition: The investigation terminates at the lowest level where genuine resolution authority existed. Executors without discretion are not authors.

Ambiguity does not move responsibility downward.

Missing documentation does not move responsibility downward.

Complexity does not move responsibility downward.

**Power without legible delegation carries responsibility by default.**

## **VIII. Artificial Systems, Evaluation, and Non-Delegable Responsibility**

Artificial systems excel at evaluation. They model risk, forecast outcomes, compare alternatives, and optimise across complex parameter spaces. In many domains, these capacities already exceed unaided human performance.

Evaluation, however, is not agency.

Agency in the morally relevant sense requires resolution: the authorised closure of uncertainty through commitment to action, where the same system remains exposed to the downstream consequences of that commitment across time. Artificial systems do not meet this condition.

Artificial systems possess no consciousness, no exposure, and no personal stake. They may incur performance penalties, be retrained, reset, or shut down, but these are imposed modifications, not consequences borne by a continuous subject.

Artificial systems therefore exhibit, at most, agent-like behaviour. Collapsing evaluation into agency is the primary mechanism by which responsibility is laundered.

Where a human or institution retains authority to deploy, approve, override, or rely upon an artificial system, that authority constitutes resolution. A human “in the loop” who merely rubber-stamps an output does not cease to be the author. Procedural thinness does not relocate responsibility; it aggravates blame.

Emergent behaviour does not create a new author. It reveals where authorship already lies.

An unauthored system cannot go rogue.

Responsibility for artificial systems is therefore non-delegable. Capability may scale; responsibility does not migrate with it.

### **Note on Artificial Consciousness**

Speculation concerning artificial consciousness or moral standing does not alter the responsibility structure outlined here. Whether or not future systems could satisfy conditions for moral agency is a separate question, to be examined in dedicated work. Until such conditions are demonstrated, governance must proceed on non-speculative, structural grounds: artificial systems evaluate; humans resolve.

### **Conclusion**

The Telic Way is an architectural constraint. Where power outruns authorship, systems decay. Where authorship is preserved, responsibility remains legible, risk remains owned, and societies remain governable across time.

This is not a moral appeal.

It is a coherence condition for any system that intends to survive its own success.

This paper forms part of an ongoing research project. The framework presented here is subject to refinement and extension. Critical responses, objections, and alternative formulations are welcomed.