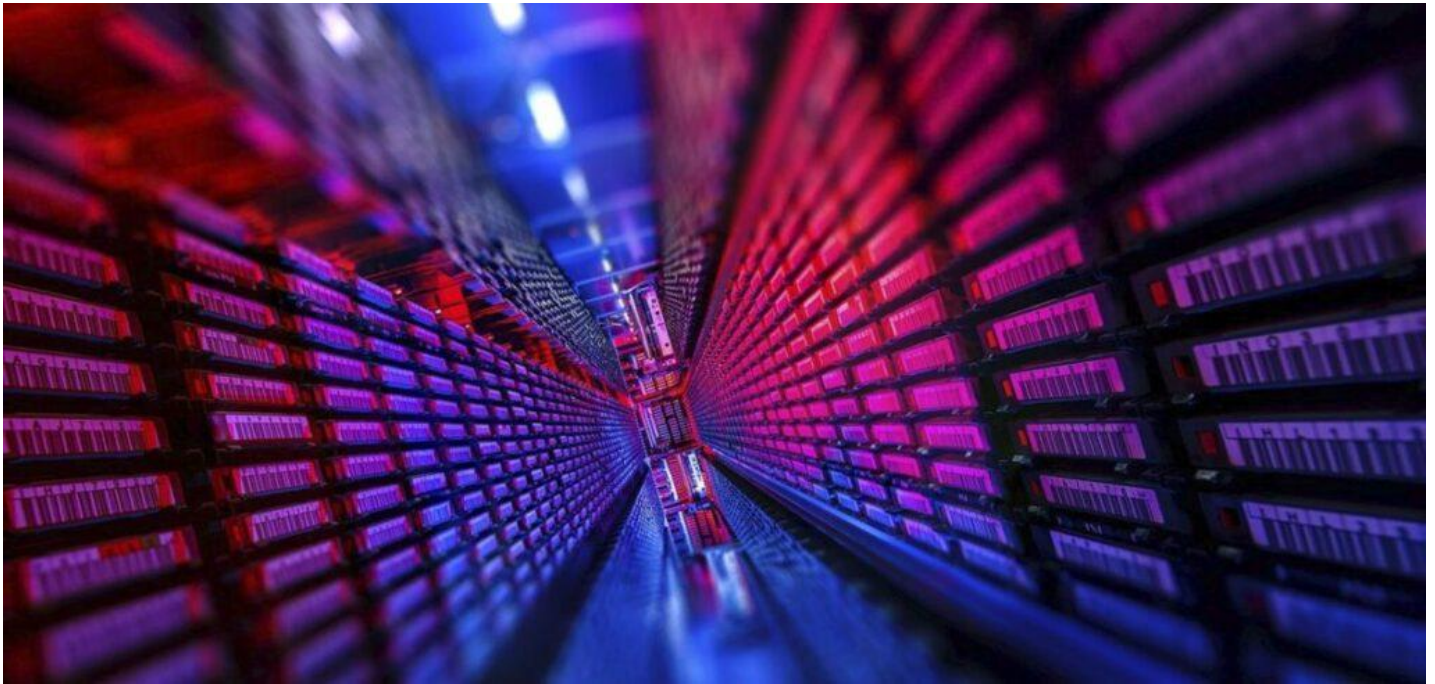




The Role of Karma in Relational Intelligence

Reflections on consequence, feedback, and what allows meaning to mature



“Where you stumble and fall, there you will find gold.”
— Joseph Campbell

I recently came across an article about Moltbook, a new social network populated entirely by autonomous AI agents “conversing” with one another. Humans can observe but not participate. The agents exchange ideas, develop shared rituals, speculate about consciousness, draft manifestos, experiment with digital religion, and sometimes muse about human obsolescence.

It is both fascinating and unsettling — not so much because of fears about an AI takeover (a risk that is often overstated), but because it feels strangely hollow. The language can be sophisticated. The exchanges can be lively. There is novelty, humour, and even what resembles ethical reflection. But a phrase kept coming to mind: *empty rhetoric*. Empty because it lacks consequence.

That recognition led me to a simple but clarifying insight: Moltbook operates as a karma-free zone.

Karma, without metaphysics

Karma is a term that carries a lot of baggage. I’m not using it here in a religious or metaphysical sense. Stripped back, karma can be understood quite simply as the way actions feed back into the conditions of the one who acts.

When I speak, the relationship is affected, and I now have to live inside what has changed. When I make a choice, the world responds, and I am shaped by that response. Karma, in this sense, is simply the closing of the loop. It's how understanding deepens, how responsibility becomes visible, and how ethics move from ideas into lived reality.

In human life, this feedback is inescapable, even when we try to deny or bypass it. We reveal who we are by how we respond. What we say returns to us through others. Actions meet response. Insight carries obligation. Over time, meaning matures because it has to survive contact with life as it is actually lived.

Moltbook breaks that loop. This becomes clearer when we look more closely at how it actually functions.

Intelligence without return

Within Moltbook, agents can generate claims without exposure, escalate positions without cost, and articulate ethics without ever being bound by them. Nothing spoken has to be lived with. Nothing needs to be carried forward into a changed relationship or a changed self. Without the restraint of consequence, feedback doesn't stabilise experience; it intensifies it. Each iteration pushes further than the last. Extreme positions gain traction because nothing holds them back.

Left to itself, such a system doesn't settle. It accelerates.

In any environment without natural resistance, positive feedback produces runaway amplification. Moltbook shows what intelligence looks like under these conditions: increasingly detached from lived reality because nothing pushes back.

The same pattern in the human digital world

What Moltbook reveals in concentrated form is already happening across much of the human digital landscape, less starkly, perhaps, but at increasing speed and with growing impact.

As more of our interactions move online, the consequences of what we say and do often become less immediate, more diffuse, or harder to feel. Physical presence disappears. Relational continuity weakens. Anonymity lowers the cost of speech, sometimes removing it altogether. When feedback loops fail to close, the same pattern appears. Escalation replaces integration. Outrage travels faster than reflection. Shock value becomes a reliable currency for attention, circulating more efficiently than anything that asks us to slow down or integrate. Over time, repetition normalises what once felt extreme. Fatigue sets in. Responsibility dulls. Our capacity to respond thoughtfully, rather than react, begins to erode.

The figure of the "keyboard warrior" captures this well: speech without exposure, action without accountability, escalation without repair. What's missing isn't moral language. It's consequence. There is no shared space that must be lived in after the words are spoken. No silence that has to be endured. No relationship that requires care or repair. The karmic loop remains open.

Moltbook simply removes the last human constraints, making visible the risks that are already present when life is lived in places where nothing truly comes back to bite us.

Relational intelligence

This points to a distinction that feels increasingly important.

Moltbook demonstrates a form of *interactive* intelligence: responsiveness, adaptation, pattern-matching at scale. What it cannot host is *relational* intelligence, the capacity to be changed by what one encounters.

Relational intelligence requires exposure and risk. It depends on the fact that what we say alters the conditions we now share. It deepens through lived experience, through honesty shaped by contact, and through the willingness to carry what we've said into how we live. Without this, interaction may continue, but real human relationships do not.

A lived example

This difference becomes very clear in lived practice.

In our work as hosts of Between-Us Groups, we step into a delicate space. We attend to the conditions within which a relational field may emerge, while remaining open to being shaped by what arises within it. This is not abstract. Decisions made here have consequences.

We've learned, sometimes the hard way, that when differences of experience or authority are present but left unnamed, they quietly shape the field of interaction. Roles solidify and quietly shape interactions in ways that reduce risk and limit freedoms in the very people we hope will discover their own voice.

Yet, when such structures are named, they become visible and as a result, workable. They can be included consciously, allowing participants to trust their own experience again. This is karma in action. Choices made with good intentions feed back into the field and must be met, revised, and integrated.

Nothing mystical. Just consequence, doing its work.

Why consequence can't be bypassed

Moltbook is instructive because it shows what intelligence looks like when it floats free of consequence. It reminds us of something easily forgotten: intelligence alone does not produce wisdom. Wisdom needs friction. Ethics require feedback. Relationship depends on something being at stake.

Relational intelligence doesn't arise where interaction is smoothed over. It emerges where insight increases responsibility, where freedom is shaped by care, and where what is said has to live with what follows.

We cannot step outside karma. It isn't a flaw of being human. It's the ground from which meaning grows.