ONE WITH ANOTHER: AN ESSAY ON RELATIONS

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Abstract

The problem of relations has been a persistent one in the history of philosophy. It has been treated extensively by Aristotle who divides relations into two fundamental types, paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic. Scholastic philosophy develops some of the issues present in Aristotle. Scholastic philosophers like Ockham, Duns Scotus and Abelard adopt different positions on the nature of relations and their ontological status. Relations are an important issue in Indian philosophy as well. The Nyaya school adopts a realist stance and the Buddhist adopt a radical nominalism. Both the nominalist and realist approaches, as well as thinking of relations as relational predicates leads to philosophical difficulties. A third alternative has to be suggested which avoids both these positions.
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PREFACE

Being is analyzed by philosophy through the prism of language, which divides it into elements corresponding to nouns, adjectives, verbs, pronouns, and other parts of speech. Prepositions proliferate in language as much as nouns or adjectives; things are "with," "above," below," "of," "at," "to" one another. Being is prepositional, as much as it is nominal or expressed through verbs and adjectives. The reality that prepositions capture has a density that cannot be explained away, prepositions are richly descriptive and not mere accretions or perspectives on objects. Prepositions capture relations in language. It is the purpose of this dissertation to attempt to shed some light on this prepositional, relational aspect of reality. Prepositions, especially the preposition "with" I will contend is the point of departure for a philosophical project diametrically opposed to solipsism.

Relations can be obscured by their very obviousness. Just as philosophers have expended considerably more effort in understanding the nature and workings of names at the cost of neglecting prepositions, similarly relations have become victims of their own obviousness. Even for a Buddhist who accepts that there are no non-relational individuals since everything is dependently co-originated, relation itself does not become an item deserving its own metaphysical shelf space. It is the acceptance of a profoundly dependent and relational aspect to everything that allows a Nagarjuna to deny that things have their own nature. Yet, relation for the Buddhist fades into a certain mind-dependence, which fails to recognize that to have being is essentially to relate.

Relation in the richest sense is not mere propinquity. Relation is a way of being which goes well beyond simple proximity or juxtaposition in space or time. This is perhaps less
pronounced in the case of relations between objects and is sharply brought out in human relations. In the case of human relations being *with* is more than simply something structural or a given as it were for human beings, as Hiedegger understands it in his development of the concept of *mitsein* or being with others. Without diminishing this structural aspect of relations, human relations have a dimension that is lacking in relations between objects. In the case of human relations, this “with” is an affective “with.” It is not the impassive “with” of juxtaposition or spatio-temporal coincidence; this “with” is colored and made meaningful by love and anger, reverence and hatred, loyalty and betrayal. This is the “with” which elicits a smile from a stranger with whom you wait at a bus-stop, it is the “with” which deepens into a caress or into tears at parting. This “with” is indicative of relations which I will argue make subjects of us all. It is the density of this “with” which is arguably an experienced “with” which is my concern in what is to follow. Although I concern myself less with the human dimension of relations than I do with the workings of relations in the object domain, the discussion of “relation without relation” as formulated by Levinas is a notable exception.

In Chapter 1, I delineate the metaphysical concerns about relations and propose the concept of a “relation as such” to facilitate a general discussion of the essential features of relations without being mesmerized by the issues concerning specific relations like causality. This project of painting the philosophical picture of relations with a broad brush necessitates certain omissions at best and oversimplifications at worst.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the analysis of relations evident in Ancient Greek and Hellenistic philosophy. Aristotle’s discussion of relations in the Categories remains by far the most influential discussion of relations in the history of philosophy. It is also relevant in its
sustained attempt to capture the essential feature of relation that it has minimal being that
is to say it is an *ens minimum* or as Aquinas puts it “Relation has a very weak being (*esse
debillissimum*), characteristic of itself alone."¹

The third chapter deals with the medieval discussion of relations emphasizing the
different attitudes toward the ontological questions about relations gleaned from Peter
Abelard (1079-1144), John Duns Scotus (1266-1308), Walter Burley (c1275-c1344),
Aquinas (1225-1274) and Ockham (1285-1347) among others. The scholastic approach
to relations builds on Aristotelian premises, testifying thereby to Aristotle’s deep seated
influence. In this chapter I also discuss in what sense relations can be separated from their
relata and how a relation can be individuated. I have chosen to include Leibniz in this
discussion of scholastic philosophy because of the closeness and continuity of Leibniz’s
theory of relations to the scholastic discussions, especially the work of William of
Ockham.

Chapter 4 is an examination of Locke’s theory of relations which provides an
opportune pretext for deepening the discussion of relations by considering problems like
the nature of converse relations and the possibility of meta-relations or relations between
relations.

Chapter 5 is a brief survey of relations in Indian philosophy with special emphasis of
inherence, which the Nyaya school includes in its table of categories. The Nyaya
acceptance of relational facts as mind independent is contrasted with Dharmakirti’s
Buddhist critique of this position.

Chapter 6 aims to offer an exposition of Bhartrhari’s (circa 5th century C.E) treatment
of the denotation relation, as well as a critique of the concept of a denotation relation. I

¹ Aquinas, *De Potentia* quoted in Mugnai, 27
argue against the concept of a denotation relation while offering arguments that problematize this concept.

Chapter 7 moves the discussion squarely into the domain of intersubjective relations. The Levinasian treatment of alterity and the asymmetrical relation to the other is unique in that it is a relation that seems to be absolving itself of its relational character. Levinas explains how this "relation without relation" can be the founding relation for ethics as first philosophy.

The conclusion suggests an alternative to the theories of relation that consider relations either as substantive or as mind-dependent. This final chapter also seeks to demonstrate how there can be relationality without relations, which is perhaps the most important thesis defended at times explicitly and often implicitly in this dissertation. This alternative which is ultimately eliminativist about relations but not about relational facts or situations is the positive thesis of this dissertation. The negative thesis consists of the repudiation of nominalism, conceptualism, and metaphysical realism as satisfactory accounts of relational facts.
CHAPTER 1
THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING RELATED

Life and Philosophy: Replete with Relations

Samuel Alexander writes, “Relation is the vaguest word in philosophy.”1 Perhaps the word is so vague because the concept it captures is ubiquitous, seeping into the very heart of being. It seems to pervade all kinds of philosophical problems including those which involve things, events, causes, people, language, signs, properties, numbers, virtues, universals, masses, possibilia, fictitious objects, negative facts, holes, waves, boundaries and so on. This is true because relation which, in the most fundamental sense, is a connexion between items is admitted across the spectrum of being. An entity that cannot be connected to anything else, but remains basking in lonesome identity cannot be known. At the transactional level, such a linkless single is a logical fantasy; absolute being without any relations is unknowable, inconceivable. How could an entity be known or conceived without entering at least into the relation of being known or conceived? Even if an exception were permitted, a wholly unrelated entity could not exist in a world without a relation to the world. The very term “world” implies relation.

Connections are the engine of things; without relation, there is no origination, no movement, and no corruption, no passing away. As Keith Campbell writes,

...the existence of relational facts is beyond dispute. That some items resemble each other and that some are to the left of others are such common places that they are more familiar and more certain than anything in metaphysics. As G E Moore so rightly insisted, any philosophy that is committed to the denial of facts

1 Alexander, 306
of this kind is doomed.²

Relational facts or descriptions cannot be explained away as misconstruals of facts involving monadic predications, as the eliminator of relations e.g. Ockham would have us believe. As Campbell points out “For more abstract relations such as Resembles or Differs From, one would not know where to turn for adequate monadic replacement.”³ Whether we commit ourselves to a substance ontology or event ontology, the fact of relationality (i.e. the fact of phenomena being related) remains. Its pervasive presence is not contingent upon whether we see the world as composed of substances and their accidents or events. Even event ontology has to admit that events are relational phenomena that testify to the presence of a pervasive relationality. This relationality is a kind of primary fact that is not derivative of anything more basic in ontology. The standard terminology for the discussion of relations uses the word relata to denote the objects that are related or between which a relation obtains. The relata are the poles between which the relation holds.

I will use “term” interchangeably with relatum. “Term” as Russell tells us “is the widest word in the philosophical vocabulary” which denotes “whatever may be an object of thought, or may occur in any true or false proposition, or can be counted as one.”⁴ If at the outset, following Russell, terms are defined as numerically distinct and having numerical identity with themselves then if we admit a plurality of terms, we avoid the possibility of a non-dualistic world i.e. a world that does not accept real differences as opposed to mere phenomenal differences. Relations can involve multiple

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² Campbell, 97
³ Campbell, 100
⁴ Russell, 66
(more than two) terms (X, Y, Z can all be equal), although to some extent here I focus on two term relations in the interests of clarity. As Russell writes, "Relations of two terms, being the simplest have received more attention than others." Notice that even in the case of an identity relation we treat the relation as though it were a two-term relation between the term and itself, which has why McTaggart thinks that it is true of all things that stand in a relation that "even if the relation has only one term, has an aspect of plurality."

**Anti-realism about relations.**

This universal and almost unquestionable appearance of relational facts is not a guarantee for the real existence of relations, whether as distinct metaphysical entities, *sui-genris* properties or any other form of irreducible abstracta. There are two major ways in which the existence of relations can be denied: the first, which can take a realist guise, is to absorb the relations into the terms, that is to reduce them to the terms. The second is decidedly anti-realist and reduces relations to cognitive i.e. subjective mental acts like relational judgments. The latter view considers relations to be a result of mental acts that confer relations on atomic existents. The attempt to reduce relations to nothing but the relata, its properties or the activity of the mind is the response to relationality that we find in anti-realists about relations like the Stoics, Ibn Rushd, Ockham, Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibniz and Bradley. This conferment of second-class ontic status is also motivated by the concern that if we count relations and properties as two distinct items, in the inventory of world constituents, we will be double counting the

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5 Russell, 50
6 McTaggart, 80
same constituent. This is because, if relations are indeed properties then the class of relations can be subsumed under the class of properties.

To say that relationality is a product of mental activity is to claim that the so called fact that “this stone is heavier than that one” is somehow mind-dependent, that is to say, it awaits the comparing, weighing act of a thinking being. It is obvious that insofar as we cognize things and include them in discourse they are connected to an attending mind, but does this also imply that the fact that they are related also originates in the mind. (Mind –dependence of relations becomes a stronger claim in the case of a relation which is experienced in a more pronounced subjective manner like “this rose smells sweeter than that one.”) Can the anti-realist not object that if we consider relations of similarity, equality, likeness, being greater or lesser than etc then these are all seen to be products of mental activity. Unless we actively attend to objects and compare them, how can we conclude that they are similar or dissimilar? Furthermore, is it not the case that when we use “but,” “and” i.e. conjunctions, it is a product of noticing something which we then interpret as standing in the relation of conjunction? Objects, then are not greater or lesser than others, they are merely felt to be thus. If the anti-realist says that, even the relation of difference is a product of the mind, then prior to this mental act reality is one, a whole not admitting distinctions. Now, the anti-realist about relations, who makes them mind-dependent or claims that it is acts of judgment that make relational statements true has to also admit to being a non-dualist, since difference is added on to reality by the mind. Pluralism is impossible without admitting that relations have an extra-mental status, that is in some sense relations are “out there”, objects really are similar, equal, dissimilar and different. Could the anti-realist not make the case that
difference or distinction is not a relation at all, it is simply a brute fact about a world, which is fundamentally non-relational. In admitting this much, has he not secured an escape from non-dualism and his reduction of relations to mental activity?

We can reject this by arguing that if his world is composed of at least two individuals then they share the feature of belonging to the same world and to that extent they are similar or if they are more or less “bare” then we have another item of commonality. Hence, their similarity is independent of the activity of the mind and cannot be its product. If they are of the same size they are mind-independently equal and if one is larger than the other then this difference in magnitude holds independently of the mind. The only claim that can be made for mind-dependence is that these relations are registered by the mind. This is a trivial sense of mind-dependence. The role of thought in accounting for relationality is important when we mistakenly attribute connections where there are none. To use William James’ example, when waiting in a train, at a railway station we sometimes mistakenly attribute motion to our train in relation to the platform when another train is seen pulling in. Similarly, we should not mistake enjoyment to be a relation, although it causally connected to an object like fine wine. Enjoyment is a mental-state rather than a relation to the enjoyed object.

On one view it is inconceivable that there is a world without terms or relata (substances, properties etc) and which is populated only by relations; there are no relations without relata and hence relations are causally dependent on relata and can be absorbed into their fabric. Nevertheless, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that if a thing were, in one moment divested of all relations, it would become, suddenly and instantaneously, nothing (unless one were to posit bare particulars which subsist outside
space-time. If accepted, how these particulars are to be distinguished from one another remains a mystery. Hence, I argue that a world of discrete particulars or substances without relations is also impossible; the more plausible position is that there are no relations without relata and no relata without relations. Objects and relations are only possible together; a world without either is hard to imagine. A plausible account could be postulated which reduces all objects to relations and thus what seems like a world of objects and relations becomes a radically i.e. purely relational world, admitting a one-category ontology. As opposed to an Aristotelian, dualist two-category ontology of substance and properties, a one-category ontology of relations would make relations the single constituent of the world. Relation then would be a fundamental and irreducible category, in fact the only one. Dipert (1997) in an attempt to make the philosophical theory of relations consonant with quantum physics argues precisely this viz. “that objects are (or at any rate might be) wholly constituted by relations.” Dipert argues that expressing objects in terms of their monadic properties is a kind of “shorthand” for the “underlying phenomenon” i.e. “relational interactivity.”

Specific relations of cause-effect, part-whole, spatial relations, dependence relations can be more readily defined than relations in general or relations as such. In this dissertation, I will attempt to understand this category, which I admit at the outset is an abstraction, although a useful one. By an abstraction, I mean that relation as such i.e. a pure or bare relation is not one of the relations we encounter in the world. In the interest of analysis, it is a concept that tries to capture the essential features of relation. Making relation as such, the focus of analysis entails overlooking the practical details of specific

7 James, 53
8 Heil, 103
relations like causality, but no apology is required for relation as such to be an object of analysis because its generality is the key to the fine-tuning of our understanding of specific relations and the philosophical problems they present and the pervasive occurrence of relationality. Relation as such is an analytic tool that discloses what is common to all instances of relation. The important assumption that should be noted here is that using relation as such as a point of departure understands “relation” to be univocal, in the sense all relation fundamentally occurs in the same way, the different kinds of relation notwithstanding. Univocity of relation does not accept that in a relation where a depends on b, the relations that obtain between a and b on the one hand and b and a on the other, are different to the extent that it warrants the claim that the relation in each of these cases occurs in fundamentally different ways.

Relation as such, seems to be assumed or taken for granted while specific relations like causality receive philosophical attention. Alexander believes that “relation is a notion so simple, as to defy definition. Unless you know what a relation is, no one can explain it to you.”10 Perhaps it is the proximity and obviousness of relations that leaves us so befuddled when it comes to defining what relation as such is. We can, it would seem, only point to related things just as when asked to define red, we can only point to red objects. Mc Taggart writes, “Relation, like quality is indefinable. We can only show what we mean by giving examples.”11 The difficulty with defining relation that McTaggart anticipates is the following; if we were to define paternity as the relation a father has to a son, we are including in this definition “father” and “son” both of which are relational terms. This makes the definition circular. Being able to define paternity

9 Dipert, 340
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
without terms like "father," "child," "parent" seems impossible. Similarly, we cannot define "being smaller than" without reference to terms between which that relation obtains. If we were to say, it is a connection that holds between two things one of which is 10 inches long and the other is 7 inches long, then that would be an account of a relation between two particulars, one of which is contingently smaller than the other, but this description could be of a similarity relation just in case both the objects are red and wooden. Stating the magnitudes has not allowed us to overcome this problem.

Notice that an inquiry into relation as such is not an exercise in the logic of relations and is based on the belief that relations are experienced and lived; they are not simply linguistic flotsam, miscellaneous items in language occurring as relational expressions. Although relative terms like "bigger," "heavier" express relations, they are not about language.

The ubiquity of relations in experience is not a conclusion drawn from lengthy and abstruse philosophical arguments. Experience itself is testimony to the world being a relational phenomenon, in the sense that relation between objects and persons, objects and objects, persons and objects and persons and persons, at various levels and degrees of complexity seem such an elemental aspect of experience that the presence of relations is almost axiomatic in any account of experience. Even psychological phenomena like habits, can they not be described as a certain fixing or ossification of a relation of the agent to an object like cigars or a type of object like hot food? Political issues like civil liberties, freedom, and international law are predicated upon an understanding of the relations of agents and demands for reform are a demand for the reformulation of relations between agents.

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11 Mc Taggart, 79
Relations are everywhere, in our interaction with others, human and non-human; being-in-the-world is inescapably a being-with that sobers the view of a world of discrete or atomic particulars. As William James writes about relations, "The conjunctions are as primordial elements of facts as are the distinctions and disjunctions."\textsuperscript{12} The world connected, distinguished, separated seems to be held together through the modulation of relations. In fact, the "radical" aspect of James' empiricism owes a lot to the place of relations. They are considered givens of experience that are no less fundamentally or directly given than discrete objects and their properties.\textsuperscript{13} Relations are not only directly given but are directly experienced and are not products of intellection or association. (By this, I do not mean that all relations are experienced. It is true that there may be some relations that cannot be directly experienced.) I am in agreement with James, in that I do not want to bury phenomenological givens under the burden of speculation, but want to vindicate speculation by bringing it in line with what is experienced. To use a Humean sounding expression, an experienced object is not the same for us before and after the discovery of new relations in which it stands.

Relationality is in the world and registers materially on the body, perhaps even in cases when we do not register it consciously. We could even go further and say that the discrete identities of individuals are retrospectively reconstructed from the basic experiential fact of their occurrence as related in relational complexes. Are relations to be absorbed into the relata i.e. the items that they relate? If so, then can they be anything but properties of the relata? It can be argued that individuals in this world seem to be

\textsuperscript{12} James,46
\textsuperscript{13} James,42
"sticky," in the sense that they are pervasively and intrinsically relational. By this, I do not mean possessing relations constitutive of their identity but that they are receptive without any artifice to connections with other individuals, generating complexes, and order of various kinds. Yet, the world is not a set of discrete blocks fitting together with relations working as a kind of glue that connects these blocks.

In the following chapters, I defend the claim that a realism about relations will have to contend that, although not separate entities, are a sui-generis aspect of the world that is irreducible and can be thought of or conceived as separate from individuals. This does not imply that relations cannot bleed into the core of individuals and become internal, in the sense of being constitutive of their identity. Although I do not intend to argue the position here, it is plausible that the identity conditions of an individual may be definable only as a set of relations i.e. the set of relational situations in which the individual occurs. Here we have to admit that some relational facets of the individual may be relevant to its identity while others may be only temporarily so and still others would be irrelevant. To absorb relations into the relata one move is to reduce them to properties but if we are to see them as sui-generis can this reduction to properties suffice. I propose an ontologically anorexic alternative that I will discuss at length in the conclusion. It consists of two parts; firstly, that individuals are sticky and that in order to explain relational we do not need anything more than the relata.

Firstly, notice that with the concept of sticky individuals as opposed to dry and discrete individuals, it becomes plausible to propose that relations could be absorbed into the individual without a compromise on relationality and without entering the metaphysical minefield of properties and predication. Being related is not to possess a
certain property. If relations were nothing but relational properties then each individual would have to possess infinite properties corresponding to all the relations it can enter into or a kind of generic feature which enables the acquisition or instantiation of relational properties. A satisfactory account of relational facts could be accomplished parsimoniously through a certain power specific to each sticky individual. Each individual has the potency (or an individuated potency) as it were, as a condition of the possibility of its being, to connect with other individuals or complexes under the right circumstances. By power, here we cannot mean something occult but something along the lines of an active ingredient that operates under the right circumstances in concert with the powers of other sticky individuals. This potency cannot be something like the solubility of salt in water, the disposition to dissolve in water is itself a relational concept, and this will hold of most powers, except those that are constitutive of the individual. This potency to relate has to be something basic, comparable perhaps to the atomic structure of salt on which the solubility is based. Just as the atomic structure of an element makes the "life" of the chemical possible, similarly this relational potential will make possible, the individual’s simultaneous participation in diverse relations. This foundational power enables all the dispositions of the individual, like being soluble in water or evaporating at room temperature.

This approach to relation is ontologically anorexic and accounts for relationality on the basis of the relata and by absorbing relations into the relata. This approach also does away with the need to understand the hows and whys of irreducibly unique relational properties and yet, I will argue preserves relations as sui-generis aspects of the world.
The second step for absorbing relations into relata is by understanding relations as ways of being or modes of individuals. Connections or relations happen because individuals, under the right circumstances have a mode of being in a certain way. A cup that is on top of a table has a way of being which is called the relation of “being on top of” and the table has the correlate of “being under.” We need not introduce anything mysterious like relation to account for the relationality, that is just how the cup and the table are; they can very well be otherwise. The R in the symbolic representation of a fact (aRb) is not something substantive but simply represents how things are. This is but one mode among many possible modes. Hence, those things will be related, whose being consists in being in a certain condition with respect to something else. To say that there is nothing more to relations than how things stand in relation to one another is not to claim that relations are ineffable or that we have arrived at some limit of analysis. In order to be ineffable something has to meet a minimum criterion viz. existence of some sort. This approach to relations says that in an important sense, relations are nothing but objective determinations of the objects and consequences, if you will, of the blueprint of the object. Yet, this does not make relations trivial, but instead of placing relations in the world, in some kind of limbo of “out there” or “between” the relata, absorbs them into the relata. This position is even more parsimonious than the first and needs nothing but the relata to explain relational facts but it goes father in denying being to relations than the Aristotelian idea that relation is an ens minimum, a minimal being whose very being is to be toward another (pros ti). This approach which proness toward others in the things themselves is an attempt to defend linkages without links and is a rejection of
the idea that the activity of relating is something external to things, imposed by mental activity.

Two additional approaches to relations can be formulated, though not reductionist in the strict sense, are such that relations are understood as parasitic on monadic properties. The first position is that relations are supervinient on monadic properties of terms. As Campbell explains, supervenience "covers those cases when an unavoidable expansion in our descriptive resources does not rest on any expansion in our commitment to the realities described."14 Supervenience is a kind of determination where if domain X supervenes on domain Y then X is determined by Y. There can be no change in X without a change in Y. Difference and equivalence in X is contingent upon difference and equivalence between states in Y. Thus if relations supervene on monadic properties, then they are dependent on monadic properties; relationality arises ultimately through the mechanism of monadic properties possessed by the relata. The problems generated by this view will be considered in our treatment of medieval philosophers in Chapter 3.

Another account of relations that also makes relations parasitic on an aspect of the relata is foundationism. To illustrate the foundationist position Campbell gives the example of the relation "being the same color as" holding between two guardsmen's jackets.15 On the foundationist view the color of the jackets are the foundations, a term in use since Duns Scotus and Ockham, of the relation "being the same color." The foundationist claims that for all relational facts there are other "foundational" facts on which they are founded. The relational facts have no truck with ontology over and

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14 Campbell, 100
15 Campbell, 101
above that of their foundations. Having said this, the foundationist has to clarify that the relations cannot be replaced with their foundation without loss. On the foundationist view paradigmatic or bilateral relations, as in Campbell’s example “A is lighter colored than B” the relation has the foundations of the color canary yellow in A and the color ultramarine in B. These are jointly the foundation for “A is lighter than B.” The supervenience approach and foundationist approach avoid the radical anti-realism about relations that makes them mind-dependent or merely conceptual in a significant way.

The cluster of questions that shapes the conventional “problem of relations” includes: what exactly are relations? Are they properties or some other kind of abstract entities? Do relations possess being? What role do they play in the identity of individuals? Are some relations constitutive of individuals and others merely contingent? Are relations effable? Can we sustain a one-category ontology of relations?

These questions and attempts to answer them generate further questions like: Is a relational change, merely a Cambridge i.e. apparent change, or a legitimate instance of change?

Among this cluster of questions, concerns about relation regress have an important place in the literature. If the relation R connects A and B, as in ARB then we are faced with the question: “What relates the relation R to A?” and similarly “What connects the relation R to B?.” If we reply that it is another relation say R1 that connects R to A, then we can ask what connect R1 to R and R1 to A and so on ad infinitum. To refute this regress one could argue that relation is like glue, if I stick two planks of plywood using this R brand glue would it not be absurd to say, “I see that the glue is sticking (connecting) Wood1 to Wood2 but what is sticking (connecting) the glue to Wood1?”

16 Campbell, 104
Does the glue not require a further connection between it and planks of plywood? Surely, glue does not need this additional something to stick it to Wood1 and Wood2; it is “self-linking” in the sense of not requiring any further relation. If an angler were to hook a fish, it is redundant to ask what connected the hook to the fish. The agitated angler has to simply point at the hook, to indicate that it does not require a further something to hook a fish.

**Bradley and Regress of Relations**

In his magnum opus, *Appearance and Reality*, Bradley tries to answer the following questions about relations. Firstly, are relations and their terms real? Secondly, do names of relations and their terms accurately reflect reality? Bradley’s most notorious argument works by rejecting each member of the following disjunction: either relations essentially relate their terms, in the sense that there can be no free-floating relations or they do not. The first disjunct alleges that if relations are always relating and there is no instance of a free-floating relation, then they do not exist independently of their terms. For Bradley this implies that they are unreal since to lack independence is to lack reality. The second member of the disjunction holds that if we deny this and insist that relations are real i.e. existing independently and separate from the terms, then we turn the relations themselves into terms. The consequence of this according to Bradley is that we turn the relations into terms requiring further relations to link them to the terms, thus bringing about an unstoppable regress of relations.

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17 Bradley, 27 ff
This argument is the most celebrated argument offered by Bradley in support of his rejection of relations. Bradley argues that if the relation is not an attribute of the terms but something independent from them then if A and B stand in a relation C, then C is not something predicated of A or B. If C is independent of A and B and yet has to serve as a link between A and B then there has to be a relation D that links C with A and B. Yet the new relation D cannot be predicated of C. This means we need recourse to a fresh relation, which is also independent. Thus we need to posit and endless series of relations to connect A and B. This regress can also be incorporated into an argument against pluralism as follows\(^\text{18}\):

Premise 1: If the world includes genuinely distinct entities i.e. differences are real, then these entities, things, facts, universals etc must be genuinely related (as opposed to merely seeming related under certain epistemological constraints).

Premise 2: Every attempt at spelling out the relations required for the separate existence of these distinct entities results in contradiction.

Conclusion: Therefore the world cannot include a variety of distinct entities; the world is a single entity and all distinctions are merely apparent.

As the first premise makes clear, there can be no real difference without relations. In order to reject this argument it is the second premise that will have to be addressed and it will have to be shown how relations can be spelled out without contradiction.

C D Broad writes of Bradley’s regress argument that “charity bids us to avert our eyes from the pitiable spectacle of a great philosopher using an argument which would disgrace a child or a savage.”\(^\text{19}\)

\(^\text{18}\) A version of this argument can be found in Maurin (2002)

\(^\text{19}\) Broad quoted in Mander, 92
Russell thought the flaw of this (regress) argument lay in the fact that it equates the terms and the relations in the sense that it considers the relations from the outset to be as substantial as the terms, not something of a "radically different kind."\(^{20}\) It is on this assumption that the regress occurs. Bradley's point seems to be that if one is a realist about relations, like Russell, then relations are separate elements in the inventory of the world's furniture. Mander, thinks that the claim that relations are of a different kind than terms does not save the realist from the regress insofar as the realist also accepts relations as separable from the terms. It is precisely separate existents that can acquire the features of terms. If indeed relations are of a different kind, it is plausible to think of them as self-linking i.e. not needing a further relation to connect them to the terms. The relations can be thought of as a glue which does not require a further something to connect it to the surfaces that is linking. Then they would be of a "radically different kind" that would make them immune from the consequences of this separability i.e. becoming too term-like.

Another objection against the regress is subtler. It accepts that there is a regress but argues that it is merely a verbal regress or "a benign regress of verbal implications" as opposed to a vicious one of ontological pre-suppositions. How is R related to A and B? Even if we admit there is another relation here, it is simply a verbal move; the series of new intermediate relations does not add anything that is not present in the original relation. However, the Bradleyan objection is that if the further accretion of relations adds nothing to the terms then what does the original R (of the regressive series) add which the terms do not already possess. Bradley's point seems to be that just as "'P is true' is true", says nothing more than 'P is true' and for this very reason says nothing

\(^{20}\) Russell 263
more than P. The realist then has to justify what the original R adds to the terms, if it is not to be dismissed as a verbal step. Bradley thinks that if one takes the first step of accepting the original relation then you have to take the following steps that lead one into regress.

Perhaps the root of the problem lies in the notion of the externality of relations, i.e. the view that considers things as existing in a manner that is essentially independent of and indifferent to other things. If a term is in an external relation to another term then a change in the first term does not entail a change in the second term, terms are self-sufficient. Ferreira gives an example of the predication relation. Consider “The bird is yellow” if “bird” and “yellow” are self-sufficient then we will need a distinct something that will make this predication possible. (Let us leave aside for the moment the problem of relating two items, which are self-enclosed or self-sufficient, i.e. if “bird” and “yellow” are self-sufficient how can they relate in the first place.) The room for the regress argument is created when we accept that the relation is an existent something that is distinct from the terms. As a distinct something we have to account for how it can relate to the terms it connects, opening the door for the regress objection.

One response to the regress objection could be to take a step in the direction of internal relations and argue that the relations infiltrate or penetrate the terms. Ferreira defends Bradley’s position in claiming that this acceptance of the relation “reaching into” the terms has two consequences. Either “our terms themselves are disrupted by the penetrating relation in a manner that still generates the infinite regress, or our terms pass into the relations themselves and disappear.”

\[21\] Ferreira, 114
If we claim that the relation is an aspect or a part of the terms then we will have to justify how it is connected to other parts or aspects of the term. This option leads us back to an infinite regress because we will have to establish how the aspect of term that is continuous with the relation connects with those aspects that are not. The second option considers the unity produced by the relation to be primary. We avoid the regress by claiming that terms are drawn into the relation in such a manner that they lose their individuality. Bradley will object because he thinks that a relation “must posses at once both the characters of a ‘together’ and a ‘between’, and failing either of these is a relation no longer.”22 By “between” Bradley means that a relation has to be a separable something and by “together” he means that it has to be a something that connects distinct terms.

Bradley’s concern is that if we give priority to the unity i.e. the terms merging into the relation, it violates the requirement of connecting distinct terms. In other words, if the terms merge into the relation then there is nothing left to relate. On the basis of the arguments discussed above Bradley writes:

The conclusion to which I am brought is that a relational way of thought—any one that moves by the machinations of terms and relations—must give appearance and not truth. It is a makeshift, a device, a mere practical compromise, most necessary but in the end most indefensible. 23

Thus, the concept of a relation tries to reconcile the irreconcilable ideas of unity and diversity. There seems to be a contradiction in the fact that terms are diverse and self-sufficient and yet somehow produce “real” complexes when united by a relation; Bradley thinks we can be reconciled to this only “by a perpetual oscillation and a

22 Bradley, 644
23 Bradley, 28
shifting of the ground, so as to turn our back on the aspect we desire to ignore.”\textsuperscript{24} We can think of reality as relational only if we decide to overlook this contradictory situation. Hence, relations are unreal and are at best conceptual or metaphysical constructs that are the end product of conceptual activity. Relations are not a part of the base data of perceptual experience.

Bradley seems to think that relations and their terms should not only preserve their identities independently but also when in a relation. The very assumption that something, a particular is a discrete non-relational individual is deeply flawed. Bradley tries to show the tension between the distinction of the terms and their eventual unity by means of the relation. It seems misleading to argue that terms are so distinct that they cannot enter into relations and preserve this distinct identity. We can challenge Bradley’s claim if we operate with the assumption that individuals are “sticky,” possibly emerging only from a relational matrix, and possessing a fundamental potency or power to relate. Mander thinks that:

In introducing relations we seem to be introducing special entities with magical connecting powers. But if there can be magical connections between separate entities, then we can always attribute these to the terms... directly, so that we do not need relations as separate entities at all, and there is no need to go beyond the terms and their predicates.\textsuperscript{25}

One can be sympathetic to that aspect of Bradley’s thinking which sees the difficulties involved in accepting relations as entities, yet this is not sufficient to abandon a relational world-view. Bradley’s conclusion that relations are unreal and so is the relational view of the world, is rightly dismissed by Russell as formulating conclusions

\textsuperscript{24} ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Mander 95
that go against patent facts. Yet in Bradley’s defense he is not saying that relations do not appear to us, he is only saying that they do not possess any ultimate reality. Mander compares Bradley’s denial with Locke’s denial that objects are colored. Mander’s commentary points out that Locke is not saying that objects do not appear colored to us. Locke’s position is that color will not appear in an inventory of (ultimate) reality. Thus, Bradley seems to be closest to what I have described under the label conceptualism (with an anti-realist flavor) that makes relations mind-dependent.

**Relations: Incomplete and Simple**

A problem for relations that is similar to the regress problem is presented by McTaggart in his *Nature of Existence* inspired by Hermann Lotze, he argues, that the location of relations is a problem for any realist-externalist theory of relations. Where exactly *are* relations? If we take the relation “being older than” it cannot really be *in* its subject term without reference to the other term. It cannot be *in* either of the terms individually nor can it be *in* both because it is clearly inapplicable to one term. The alternative is to locate it between terms. If a relation is not in a term but between the relata, then do we have to account for how its effects are “felt” in the terms? Perhaps this problem owes more to the dominance of spatial metaphors in describing relations than to genuine metaphysical difficulty.

Even if we admit the description of relations as a kind of in-between phenomenon, how then do we even entertain seriously the idea of the existence of that which is between terms, which are themselves positioned beings? If relata pre-exist the relation then the relation is merely the realizing of a potential within the terms. We can even say that it is what the terms accomplish on the basis of their own potential, an actualizing,
as it were, of what is hardwired into the term. If all the possible positionings of a term, or relational situations are implicit or pre-packaged in a term, why then do we even need relations? Any position which claims that some relations pre-exist relata and are constitutive of them will have to produce an account of relation which does not reduce relations to in-between phenomenon. Relations will have to be then understood as ways of relating, rather than as simple connections.

One task, which is immediate for an inquiry into relation as such, is to be able to demarcate what we actually consider the relation to be. This task is deceptively simple, for instance, in the case of the maternal relation, it includes the actual history of bearing the child but do we include in the relation the other elements of the relational complex like the feelings the mother has for the child? Of course, the child itself is a necessary condition for the relation to hold. Similarly, in the case of the relation of a kingship, are the acts and passions toward the subjects of the king included in the relation?

I will argue that relations are simples and although connection is a broad term and in the case of the maternal relation or the kingship relation can include acts and states of the mother or the king, the relation “being the mother of” can be defined as only the history of bearing the child. The affective aspects do not enter into the relation although they are vital components of the relational complex. The relational complex is an empirical fact and the relation is one element in it, thus the relation is not simply a creation of the mind. Relation is a part of the broader situation of connectedness in any relational complex. It is a specific aspect of connectedness in any given situation that as a phenomenon can be complex and composed of multiple layers of relations including
actions and emotions. Relation however is an incomplete simple. As Henry Bliss writes, "relations are indefinable in simpler substantive terms."27

Relations are incomplete in an important sense because it seems incoherent to speak of idle relations, relations which are not actually relating some objects. For instance, if I speak of a relation of "being on top of" and if it were to be granted some kind of metaphysical completeness or completeness in existence independent of the objects which are respectively the terms of this relation, then we would have an "idle" relation; as if it were a gappy entity awaiting objects. Following this line of thought relations would become mysterious entities that exist, in some unknown form awaiting their terms and on acquiring these terms, as it were, acquire their authentic status and become genuinely relational. Without the relata, it is not performing its essential function i.e. to relate. It is more than a stretch to say that even without the relata the relation is somehow a connection, it goes against the very being of the relation. This is precisely what the defender of the theory that relations are in themselves complete has to argue. It seems more plausible that ontologically, relations are incomplete; they cannot be actualized without the relata, they are mere possibilia.

Yet, is it not the case that we do represent and understand accurately relations like "being on top of" or "being the mother of" without recourse to any objects between which the relation obtains? The conceptual representation of a relation can be complete without any actual relata. Thus, conceptually relations are complete because the concept of the relation assumes the relata. It could be argued that even in this conceptual representation, we need this assumed representation of the relata; they cannot be done

27 Bliss, 38
away with. The conceptual representation of “being on top” is “something is on top of something else”, a representation that brings the relata in tow.

A related question is whether relations, can be divided into parts. Or are they partless wholes, totalities that are atomic simples that admit no parts? The simplicity of relations consists primarily in their not being reducible to something else and because they are partless. Relational complexes can be composed of a number of terms and relations but a relation itself is partless. There are no atomic constituents of “being heavier” or “being smaller.”

Classifying Relations

Logicians classify relations as either one-one, one-many, many-many relations or as reflexive and irreflexive, symmetric and asymmetrical, transitive and intransitive relations. Relations also occur as spatial or temporal. If a thing a stands in a relation R to y and y stands in the same relation to a then the relation is called symmetrical (e.g. “as tall as”). If a is larger than b and b is larger than c, then a is larger than c, then the relation is called transitive. Thus, “siblinghood” is symmetrical but “being the parent of” is asymmetrical. These classifications although logically vital are not as important to the concerns of an inquiry into relation as such, an admittedly broader metaphysical concept. The following are some classifications that are informative with regard to some of the questions posed above.

1) Categorial and Empirical

Samuel Alexander classifies relations as categorial and empirical. He distinguishes between three kinds of relations viz. “those which are intrinsic as belonging to things
necessarily...those which are intrinsic to a type and those which are extrinsic simply.\textsuperscript{28} Relations of the first kind arise from the categorial nature of things and hence are called categorial relations. For instance, everything has a spatio-temporal location, and has quantity, quality, and causality. The fact that a human being has to necessarily be the child of someone though not necessarily a parent is something that is necessary to the "type" human. Hence, this is also an instance of a categorial relation. Other human relations which a person might enter into like "being a student" etc are contingently occurent in the course of the life of a person and are not categorial but empirical.

Alexander believes that this distinction owes itself to the classical distinction between essential properties and accidents, a division that also inform the classification of relations into internal and external. Furthermore, the distinction between categorial and empirical relations is a distinction between a priori and a posteriori relations, however this does not mean that a priori relations are not experienced. The term a priori seems to be used to indicate a certain logical priority (rather than in the strict sense of a priori).

Notice that though some relations are categorial in the sense of being logically prior to the relata, they do not constitute their terms in any important sense. There is an air of inevitability about categorial relations; for example, I am unavoidably someone's child. This categorial relation, although a priori and logically prior to the relata has constituted me only in a minimal sense and not in the philosophically important sense of constitution. Empirical relations are an open set in the sense that newer elements i.e. relations can be added to it whereas categorial relations are a fixed, closed set.

\textsuperscript{28} Alexander, 314
2) External and Internal Relations

As mentioned earlier, the distinction between internal and external relations is derived from the Aristotelian distinction of essential and accidental properties. If we consider the properties of an object, some are seen to be essential to its identity. For example, it is essential to London that it is south of Glasgow; if it did not have this property, it would not be London. However, it is contingent that it has 10 million people, because the number of people in London is not essential to its identity. The population of London is an accidental property. This is the intuition underlying the division of relations into internal and external. Internal relations are constitutive of the identity of the individual whereas external relations are contingent and have no significant bearing on the identity of the object.

Richard Rorty points out that, some philosophers have found this distinction to be incoherent. A case can be made that all of an object’s properties are essential to its being what it is and all of its relations are internal to it. If an object loses a single property or relation, then it ceases to be the same object. There are no non-essential properties. On the other hand, it can be claimed that none of an object’s properties or relations are essential to it. According to the advocates of such a view, some properties seem essential to a thing only because we look at the thing under a description that makes those properties seem essential. Alternate descriptions can be offered which do not ascribe these so-called “essential” properties to the object; an acceptance of any relation as internal to an object is to give to tacit consent to the notion of an essence of that object. A C Ewing in *Idealism* considers different senses in which relations can be
internal to an object. A relation can be internal in the sense that if relation R that X has to Y, is internal if R makes a "real difference in X." A stronger sense of internal is when "from a knowledge of Y and R we could infer with logical necessity that X possesses a certain determinate or relatively determinate characteristic other than standing in that relation."30

The basic intuition it seems to me, in the claim that all relations are internal is that a term acquires its specificity or particularity only through the relations it has with all other terms. All relations, however external, contribute to the specificity of this particular. The thesis implicit here is that all relations are difference making, because to refute the internalist (i.e. who believes that all relations are internal) we have to show at least one relation that is not causally efficacious. If a relation is idle, in the sense that it makes no difference to the object then the view that all relations are internal (in the sense of making a difference in the object) has to be rejected because by definition an internal relation cannot be an otiose appendage.

Russell advocates the view that all relations are external is "the fundamental doctrine in the realistic position."31 Russell's position is also a critique of the foundationist doctrine that a and b can be related only in virtue of certain properties possessed by a and b. For paternity as a relation to hold between a and b, a has to possess a certain property (e.g. fathering b) and b has to possess a certain property (filiality to a). At any rate, if we take a and b to be two planes such that a is closer to Honolulu than b, can the case be made that this is because of some properties (foundations for the relation) in of a and b. Is it something about the "nature" of a which allows this relation to hold?

29 Rorty, 125
30 Ewing quoted in Rorty, 126
Surely, we can move the planes such that now \( b \) is closer to Honolulu than \( a \). The relation has been changed without any change in the “nature” of the objects. Hence, Russell came to believe that the relation had to be something separate from or external to the relata. If the relation were something dependent on the properties of the relata, then a change in the relation would be possible only if there were a real change in the terms. Simply moving the object \( b \) closer to Honolulu is not a real change in the object but is merely a relational change. Using this argument, Russell can assert only that not all relations are internal; he has not thereby proved the contrary that all relations are external.

Another aspect of the problem of internal and external relations is that in a given relational situation the relation is always internal to the terms because within a specific relational situation, the term is defined as related necessarily to the other term. For example “\( a \) is bigger than \( b \)” sounds like an external relation, which would not be essential to the identity of \( a \), but when considered within the relation the term \( a \) is indeed defined as “being bigger than \( b \)” irrespective of its other features. The relation is difference making within the relation. Similarly, paternity is essential to a father but is external to him \textit{qua} man.

\textbf{The Loewenberg Problem}

Loewenberg challenges the view that, “relations as experienced are either identical or congruent with the relations about which we make philosophical assertions.”\textsuperscript{32} This challenge is issued in the interests of defending the logical ineffability of relations

\textsuperscript{31} Russell, (2003) p 87
\textsuperscript{32} Loewenberg, (1930)p 310
primarily because of the gap or discrepancy between relations as known in a relational context and described or discussed independently of this context. In a discussion of relations, the discrepancy of thought and being becomes relevant because relations removed from the actual relational situations, arguably, become mere truncated versions of their full-blooded "selves." Given the nature of relations, are the relations we experience the same as those about which we produce philosophical discourse?

Loewenberg, points out two "paradoxes" about relations. First, there is the "paradox of insulation." It can be stated as follows: Relations can be found in relational complexes or situations alone, in other words relations can have no meaning outside the contexts in which they are embedded (i.e. they cannot be found not relating). Analyzing relations means disembedding them, removing them from their contexts and then treating their meaning as if disembedding has had no bearing on it. If relations are such that they do not have significance or meaning outside the relational contexts, then the analysis of relations does not understand the nature of relations at all. As Loewenberg puts it, "the office of relations is to relate, and in the performance of that office is to be found their only intelligible definition. Relations not relating are simply words which signify nothing at all."33

Loewenberg's point runs into the marrow of the ontological problem of relations. When we assert that relations have an esse in re or in intellectu are we not already assuming that relations can be separated as elements from their compresence with relata in a relational situation? A putative separation assumes that merely because relations are verbally separable they are also actually separable from the relata. This would be tantamount to saying that because "big" and "red" as adjectives are linguistically
separable from all nouns to which they are applied, they are also separable *in fact*. Yet, there is no “big” and “red” outside their application to some object. The paradox consists in stating the problem of relations in terms of an actual separability that is factually impossible. The intuition underlying this is that we cannot speak of equality without objects that are equal or causality without objects demonstrating causal interaction. Speaking about causality in the abstract always implies terms that are causally implicated and not the bare causal relations. This suggests that just as bare particulars seems a difficult notion so does the notion of a bare relation. This is a problem for an inquiry into relation as such or relations in general, because “relation as such” does not relate. This will be true of all discourse about relations, which ineluctably draws them from their lived contexts.

The second problem with analyzing relation as such, indicated by Loewenberg, is what he calls the “paradox of substantivization.” If the function of relations is to relate, they are supposed to be “vehicular” or transitive in the sense of taking us from one term to another. However, when thought attends to i.e. dwells on or thematizes any aspect of experience it tends to diminish the transitive aspect of the object, by substantialising it to some extent. Take the case of equality, when attended to by discourse it loses its character of taking us from one to the other and becomes something substantial that can acquire properties and function as a term in its own right. That relations can become terms or acquire properties is less controversial than saying that relations can become substantial. In the situation in which a relation like similarity has become a “substantial entity,” arguably it is no longer a relation.

33 Ibid.
Hence, the analysis of “equality” independently of its function as an intermediary between objects tells us nothing about the relation “being equal to.” Loewenberg, believes that despite these difficulties “we can thus talk of relations only by substantiving them” and he suggests the difficulty that “of relation we do not mean what we say and we do not say what we mean.”\textsuperscript{34} Analysis always turns relations into relational entities as opposed to the experienced relational transactions. Loewenberg thinks that since “pure relations” are abstractions of discourse, we can think of them only with reference to the terms they relate, in connection with the relata. Equality can be thought of only with reference to two equal objects. The problem arises that if the description of relations becomes contingent on the their terms, it is difficult to come up with a general or uniform description because each instance of equality is marred as it were, by the specificity of the terms. The conclusion that relations qua relations are ultimately unutterable without the context of terms, which Loewenberg draws from all of the above, goes a tad too far. It is not the case that we cannot notice features which are common to instances of equality; the mere fact of the occurrence of relations in a relational situation are do not suffice to block any effort at speaking about relation as such.

At the outset, I admitted that this concept is an abstraction but this does not entail that its analysis will be entirely uninformative. Discussing the general features of equality as a relation does not turn it into something so far removed from its vehicular role as to have no bearing on accounts of relational situations because being determined by relations in a specific relational situation does not entail the unavailability of descriptions of relations which are independent of specific relata. Just as we can speak

\textsuperscript{34} Loewenberg, 314
about adjectives even when they are not applied to nouns, similarly we can speak about relations abstractly. It is true that adjectives and relations do not occur outside relational situations but that is the condition of their existence not the condition for meaningful discourse about them. Although Loewenberg's position is not trivial, note that even in analyzing abstracta like relations as such, in a quasi-substantive manner we do not violate relations by ascribing to them properties because there is nothing about relations that by definition disallows the attribution of properties. Having discussed some of these conceptual preliminaries, we can now consider the treatment of relations in the history of philosophy.
CHAPTER 2
RELATIONS IN ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY

Relations in Plato

David Bohm indicates the futility of a belief in discrete particulars by noting that "the existence of reciprocal relationships" which is pervasive in the universe "implies that each thing existing in nature makes some contribution to what the universe as a whole is..." The implication of this thesis of universal causal interrelation is that "no given thing can have complete autonomy in its mode of being, since its basic character must depend on its relationships with other things."1 This view then makes an individual an "abstraction" which is conceptually separated from the web of relations that constitute it, a process of cooking up something artificial that has no objective correlate.

This is not a view that we find in Classical Greek Philosophy which at least since Aristotle, gives priority to quality over relatedness, a view which, as Whitehead points out, persists at least until Descartes.2 Even so, relation as a minimum being or ens minimum as it was known to Scholasticism, (implying that it occupies the lowest rung of the hierarchy of being or can be said to possess the least being), is one of the categories for Aristotle. Whereas it is dismissed as merely conceptual by the Stoics but defended in realist terms by the Neo-Platonists. Although not a basic item among the concerns of Ancient Greek Philosophy, nevertheless relation is acknowledged as worthy of philosophical attention. Plato’s treatment of relations is a bit of a puzzle especially in the Phaedo. Hackforth claims that in the Phaedo we find Plato discovering “a semi-

1 Bohm, 147
2Whitehead, ix
awareness of the distinction between qualities and relations” which “is only momentary” and after a brief appearance is forgotten by Plato in the rest of the dialogue. The issue concerns the distinction between two kinds of statements; between say “Socrates is wise” and “Socrates is shorter than Simmias.” The first statement involves a property that is predicated of a single object, whereas the second involves something that holds between two objects. A fact that Plato does not notice is that in some cases a relation may hold between a thing and itself, as is the case in the relation “being identical with.”

The relevant passage, from the *Phaedo,* merits quoting:

> Then said Socrates do you accept the following? That “Simmias is taller than Socrates” is not true as said with these words. For it is not in any way the case that it is in Simmias’ nature to be bigger; it is because of the height which he incidentally possesses- and conversely the reason why he is bigger than Socrates is not because Socrates is Socrates but because Socrates has the attribute of shortness in comparison with Simmias’ height. (102b7-102c4)

The main concern of this passage is to discuss how the sentence “Simmias is taller than Socrates” fails to reveal perspicuously the complex fact it expresses. As Castenada states, for the perspicuous representation of this fact, a statement will have to mention two forms (tallness and shortness), whereas this statement mentions only one viz. tallness. Why does Simmias accept the Socratic claim that the statement mentioned above does not perspicuously represent the facts? The answer, Castenada is correct in suggesting, lies in a preceding line where Socrates says “by virtue of (the form) Tallness both tall things are tall and taller things are taller and by virtue of shortness shorter things are shorter” (109E). This sentence would make it clear to Simmias why Socrates thinks “

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3 Hackforth, 155
4 Plato,
5 Castenada, H N 468

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that Simmias is taller than Socrates is not true as said.” The required reformulation of this statement is in the interests of expressing a relational fact which is to be distinguished from straightforward predication through instantiation.

Plato here seems to have discovered something specific to relational facts that they consist of a pair of relations and a pair of terms. A relational fact instantiates two (relational) forms, if you will. Tallness and shortness “are structured by a law of joint instantiation: a simple relational fact involving taller than is a two-pronged fact.”6 This has the consequence that in the case of relational facts or multiple pronged facts, more than one Form is instantiated. Casteneda’s theory is that relational facts consist of “an array of Forms each instantiated by one particular” where these instantiations taken individually do not constitute the facts.7 From this, Casteneda’s conclusion is that Forms that can enter into multiple pronged facts can enter into single pronged facts. “This is the law of factual enchainment. Forms governed by this law constitute form-chains or relations.”8 A relation then is a chain of simultaneously instantiated forms.

In this interpretation, Casteneda wants to defend the view that Plato distinguished between properties and relations, as well as between relational and non-relational facts. Cornford disagrees with this interpretation of the above-mentioned passage from Phaedo. He writes that in this passage “no distinction is drawn between qualities and relations. Tallness is treated as if it were a quality like whiteness, inherent in the tall person, but with the peculiarity, that he has it toward (pros) the shortness of another person.”9 Is it not the case that this “peculiarity” is precisely at the heart of the distinction between

6 Ibid. 470
7 Ibid. 471
8 Ibid.
9 Cornford, 78
qualities and relations? In concluding that this property has directedness toward some other property, has Plato not discovered the distinguishing feature of relation? It seems that Plato is at least hazily aware of relations, as Russell, who thought that relation was not understood until after Hegel, puts it “the idea of a relational proposition seems to have puzzled Plato.”

The debate centers on whether we attribute to Plato a mere puzzlement by relations or is it the case that Plato does indeed distinguish between properties and relations. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle seems to think that Plato did hold that there were relational forms, a theory which Aristotle of course rejects.

Another case for Plato’s awareness of the property-relation distinction can be made in the *Sophist*. The relevant passages from the dialogue also concern the nature of Difference as a form and as a possible candidate for relation. In 255C we find a distinction between those which “things which are spoken of by themselves” (*ta men auta khat auta*) and those “things which are always spoken of in connection with other things (*ta de pros alla*)”. Relation is thus that which is directed toward the other or as Weinberg puts it, “Otherness is the essence of relation.” Relations are always other seeking and being related is a way of assuaging a kind of relational hunger of individuals.

This other has to be different from those for which it is other, hence Plato argues that Difference as a Form must be distinguished in order to account for this otherness which is at the source of the mundane differences between things. If two (absolute) things are different, this is because they partake of the form of Difference. Now it is common knowledge that possessing a property, on the Platonic view is instantiating a form.

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10 Russell, 158
11 Aristotle, Meta, I, ix
12 Sophur, 95
13 Weinberg, 67
through participation. Does each thing partake of difference and possess it as a property or is difference a dyadic relation, which obtains between the two? When we say two things are different, Plato seems to be suggesting that each one possess the property of difference. If in order to be different from others any particular has to possess the property of difference then all forms also have to participate in the Form of Difference; it becomes a form which pervades all forms or rather pervades all of reality. Plato however, seems to see difference as a property derived from this pervasive form rather than as a relation.

Notice that Plato anticipates, both in the *Phaedo* and in the *Sophist*, Aristotle’s treatment of relation in the *Categories* when he recognizes the main feature of relation that it is directed toward another. This feature as we will see is important to Aristotle’s treatment of relations. Unlike the Indian Nyaya school, which takes relations very seriously but counts only one kind of relation viz. inherence as a category (*padartha*), Aristotle includes relation as one of the categories, which means relation is one of the ways in which things exist.

*Aristotle on Relations*

Aristotle’s most influential treatment of relations is in Chapter 7 of the *Categories*, where he defines relatives (*pros ti*) as, those things which “are either said to be of something else or related to something else.” The most influential characterization of relations is in the *Metaphysics* where Aristotle explains relations as possessing the least degree of being and it is “posterior to quality and quantity” and is an affection (*pathos*)

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14 Porphyry in his commentary on the *Categories* explains that what Aristotle offers us in the beginning of Chapter 7 of the *Categories* is a description rather than a definition (*porismos*).

15 My italics to emphasize the use of the plural

16 Aristotle, 47

17 Aristotle, Meta. XIV, xv

37
of quantity or quality. Relation is dependent or parasitic upon quality, quantity etc. Relations, as Aristotle discusses them in the Categories, are for the larger part thought of as paradigmatic i.e. occurring in pairs of the relation and its correlate (or converse). The hallmark of relations is that they are “explained by reference to something to which they belong.” Something is bigger than something else is, something is greater than something else, something is double of something else and so on. Similarly, Aristotle tells us “a habit is a habit of something, knowledge is a knowledge of something.” The characteristic of relative terms is that they are followed by a marker of the genitive case\(^1\) or some other phrase that brings out its relational nature like “than.” Aristotle advocates the theory that when we say that a rock is large, this predication occurs only in comparison to something else. A rock cannot be larger in isolation just as something cannot be similar in isolation but is always similar to some other thing. For Aristotle this does not mean that if something is explained with reference to another thing, it necessarily becomes a relative term or expresses a relation.

Aristotle in the Categories is dealing with paradigmatic relations, which all have “their correlatives” (antistrephonta). This association of the relation with its correlate becomes a paradigmatic representation of relations; relations always exist with their correlates. A relation cannot exist by itself but in its very moment of origination is, accompanied by another relation viz. its correlate. Porphyry in his Commentary on the Categories writes “as the primary terms are said relative to the secondary ones, so the secondary ones are said in the same way relative to the primary ones.”\(^2\) If “father” is the primary term in a relation, then it is expressed in relation to the child (father of a child).

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\(^1\) In the Greek the genitive is used for both the English “of” and “than”.
\(^2\) Porphyry, 119
The secondary term is used relative to the primary term (child of a father). The term antistrophon means that which is "turned to face another" or the "correlative," "counterpart." In the case of a paradigmatic relation, there are two elements that are "turned to face one another" viz. the two terms and the relation and its converse. If X is bigger than Y, one of the elements turned that is facing another is Y (which is facing X) and the converse relation of Y's "being smaller than" X. It is this type of relation which we will be interested in as the antistrophon. Hence, correlative is used here to denote the two converse relations of a paradigmatic relational pair (and not the terms).

Aristotle's point is brought out in his examples; there is no "being the master of" without the correlative "being the slave of", neither can there be the relation "the double of" without "being the half of", greater always implies greater than something else. Aristotle extends this analysis even to knowledge "knowledge is thus of the knowable; the knowable is knowable by knowledge." Although this simultaneous co-occurrence with the correlate is considered by Aristotle to be a feature of relation, he also believes that the correlate need not be immediately apparent. This is a because of a misapplication of the relational "of." If we were to say "wing of a bird" the correlate would not be apparent because it is a mistake, whereas the accurate statement, in which the correlate becomes apparent "wing of a winged creature". Aristotle writes, "At times the correlation, however, will not manifestly appear- namely when a mistake has been made and the correlate itself wrongly stated." The relation "being the wing of" has, Aristotle believes, the correlate "being winged by the wing." Aristotle thinks through this notion

20 Lidell and Scott Greek English Lexicon, 81. The term antistrophon was translated into Latin as "converse."
21 Aristotle, 49
22 Aristotle, 51
23 Ibid.
of correlation at the linguistic level. Aristotle’s claim is not that this presence of the correlate is a linguistic contingency but it seems to be a fact about relations.

Aristotle writes “at times there is no word in Greek that will rightly bring out the correlation” under such circumstances, guided by the need to produce an accurate account of relations, Aristotle believes that we will have to invent a new word. This is because Aristotle seems to insist that language has to be used in such a way that “we state all correlative terms with exactness.” If we say the rudder of a boat, we see there is no word that will readily represent the correlate. This is because the boat is not “boat of a rudder.” In this case, the problem of representing the reciprocal mode in which relations occur is because boat is not “boat of a rudder.” To accurately convey the reciprocity of relations, Aristotle argues that we should represent the relation, as “the rudder is rudder of the rudderer.” In this case, we have reciprocity because the rudderer is ruddered by means of the rudder. These convoluted neologisms, Aristotle contends, can be used to capture the occurrence of relations as correlated. The correlation appears if a relation is correctly defined; it will not be apparent if a slave is defined as a human or a biped, but when defined as a slave the correlation (antistrophon) master will be apparent. The lesson for the metaphysics here is that if a slave is defined as a man’s and if we have missed the master relation as a correlate, then we have missed “being the slave of” relation as well. This reflects the emphasis Aristotle places on the necessity that obtains between the antistrephonta, which for Aristotle should be reflected in language.

Predication of relative terms have no meaning without their correlates; one cannot say that x is bigger, which by itself is meaningless, unless we are informed as to what it is

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24 Ibid.
25 Aristotle, 55 (translation slightly modified)
bigger in relation to, or bigger than. In a relational pair, the *quiddity* of each relatum consists in being related to the other term through some relation that holds between them. Under these conditions to know the quiddity of one is to quiddity of the other.\(^{26}\)

At one point Aristotle does offer us a counter-example for the contention that all relations occur in correlated pairs\(^{27}\). This exception is found he claims in the relation of knowing, where the object of knowledge exists prior to and independently of the act of knowing; it is not the case that the knowledge produces the object. If the object were removed then knowledge would not be possible, however a similar condition does not apply to the object of knowledge. Analogously, if I were to think of the philosopher Keith Campbell, this makes him an object of my intention, but the relation is one sided because he, the person Keith Campbell, is not reciprocally related to me or my acts of thinking.

This analysis could also be extended to perception, the objects of acts of perception exist independently and prior to perception, and the absence of perception does not mean the absence of these objects. Perception and the perceiver are in a correlative relation but this does not apply to perception and its objects. A substance in Aristotelian metaphysics cannot be relative, that is to say, a man or a dog is not defined in relation to something. For Aristotle, they exist as absolutes (*apoluta*) as do species. Only in the case that humanity is predicated of someone as a property then we can think of it is predicated in relation to something else.

The epistemic picture of relation is such that if you know a relation, you also know that to which it is related. If you know that \(x\) is double of some \(y\), you also know that this \(y\) is the half of \(x\). Since the very being of a relation is to be relative to something other,

\(^{26}\) For a discussion of the quiddity of related terms, see Ibn Rushd's Middle Commentary on the Categories.

\(^{27}\) Aristotle, 56-57
knowing a relation cannot consist in knowing, as it were only one polarity of the relation. The other polarity brings the relation to completion. Therefore, if I know a relation of an object’s being double of another, I also know its correlate, the object that is half of the first object. One cannot know that something is double without knowing what it is a double of and if we know this then we also know that the other object is the half of the first. Relations (the paradigmatic ones) thus have an existential and epistemic simultaneity, not in the sense that their coming into being is simultaneous with an act of knowing but if one obtains then the other also obtains and if one is known then the other is also known. As Porphyry explains “things which introduce or eliminate each other” are simultaneous. However, neither Aristotle nor Porphyry seem in doubt that we are speaking of two relations rather than one relation viewed from two perspectives. This two-pronged structure of a relation is expressed in the term for relation in Greek logic, *skhesis*. The structure of a *skhesis* consists of the term from which the relation proceeds, the primary term (*ta prota*) is called *aph hou*, the subject of the corresponding relative attribute and the secondary term (*ta deutera*) or the *pros hon*, which is the term to which it is related.28

Aristotle’s treatment of relations in the *Categories* seems to assume that relations are, for the larger part, paradigmatic but in the *Metaphysics* we see that Aristotle considers both the paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic types of relations to be fully valid kinds of relations. In Book X he writes “things are called relative in two senses- either as contraries or as knowledge is related to the knowable, A being related to B, because B is described in relation to A.”29 Although measurable/measure, knowable/knowledge, thinkable/thought and visible are correlative, the relations between the two are not correlative. If we recall the

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28 Porphyry, 113
29 Aristotle, X, vi
account in Categories 7, knowledge and the object of knowledge are not existentially simultaneous; neither is measurement and its object etc. Although they are correlatives as linguistic items, they are not relational correlatives because they do not “reciprocate as to implication of existence.”

In the Metaphysics, when he introduces the concept of relative, Aristotle offers us a classification of relations. First, we have numerical relations like the relation between the double and that which it is double of or the relation of “that which exceeds to the things exceeded.” The relation of being the double of 1 is a definite numerical relation whereas the relation of being n+1 times something else is an indefinite numerical relation. Aristotle also holds that the relations of being “the same”, being “like”, being “equal” are all a kind of numerical relation because “all these terms used in respect of one.” The “same” is defined as being of one essence, “like” is being of one quality and equal is being of one quantity. This it seems is the reason why Aristotle thinks these relations are numerical. As Aquinas explains in his commentary these expressions are said to be “relative directly.”

For Aristotle, some things are potentially relative whereas others are actively relative. Now this statement although applicable to the relata can be extended to relations, which can be understood as either actual or potential relations. In the instance of a piece of kindling wood and a flame, the relation between the flammable and the flame is actualized when the wood is burning, until that point it is a potential relation. It is when the potentialities of both the relata are actualized then the potential relation can be actualized. Some relations can be actualized only under the right circumstances or at the right time. Things relate as either active or as passive e.g. a source of heat is actively related to the object that is being

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30 Aristotle, Meta V, xv
31 Aquinas, 383
32 Ibid.
“passively” heated. The same applies to breaking and the broken etc. The relations in these cases are causal in nature. The third class of relations is described by Gottfried Martin as “Intentional Relatives.” This category includes noetic or cognitive relations of measuring, knowing, perceiving, and other similar relations that do not occur as correlates.

In the case of a noetic relation, when I intend or think of x, the relation is real in me, but is merely rational or a projection of reason in the intentional object; this unidirectional relation exists only in me but not in the objects. There is no correlative relation that the object bears to my intention or noetic act. The knowable, the perceivable, the sensible are relative terms only to the extent that they are acted on by other things; the objects of knowledge perception or thinking do not react back on to the intentional noetic acts; they do not reciprocate the relation. In the case of correlatives the relation arises because of some quality, quantity or action performed. The relation between the perception and the object of perception is unlike the relation between heat and the object being heated, but “what is known or seen is not acted upon” like the object that is heated. A unidirectional relation or an intentional relation is a non-paradigmatic relations but it qualifies as a relation because it involves a connection between two distinct objects. What I have so far called paradigmatic or bidirectional or non-paradigmatic and unidirectional relations can also be called “bilateral” or “unilateral” relations.

On a Thomistic reading of Aristotle, identity cannot be considered without the act of the intellect which in establishing that something is identical to itself, treats the one object as many. Relation can be admitted between only two (or more) extremes. Thus, Aquinas calls identity a “conceptual relation” as opposed to a “real relation.” Real relations according to

33 Weinberg, 74
34 Aquinas, 388
35 Aquinas, 353
Aquinas “are those which hold really when all acts of understanding have been circumscribed, as father and son...”36 The relation between the father and the son arises from the act of fathering not from an intellectual act.

Aristotle's ontology of relation is explicitly stated by Alexander of Aphrodisias, he writes:

...whatever is relative is secondary. For the relative signifies the relation of an underlying antecedent underlying nature which is prior to the relation that belongs to it only incidentally, for (as Aristotle says in the Ethics), relation is like an offshoot of being (as opposed to substantial being i.e. hypostasis).37

An argument from the Metaphysics Zeta (1041b) is especially pertinent to my pursuit of relation as such and related ontological questions concerning relations. This is an argument that later inspires Duns Scotus in his case for the “separability” of relations, which is discussed in the next chapter. In this argument, Aristotle considers composed things where the whole is not an aggregative unity but is a new composite (a unit or “one” rather than a heap). In the case of a syllable ba, the composite is more than its components b and a.

In the Aristotelian scheme fire and earth, compose flesh which is more than and quite distinct from fire and earth. The syllable is not an aggregate of the letters a and b and flesh is not an aggregate, like a heap of fire and earth. It is not the individual components but something else which seems to go into the making of the composite. If this something is an additional element (like the letters a and b or like fire and earth) instead of solving the problem, we only add complexity to the problem. This added factor would have to account for why this is flesh or that is a syllable. The syllable is a specific arrangement of its elements, such that if the arrangement is destroyed then the compound or composite is destroyed. If we think of a gold statue, it is a composite of one element viz. gold, in a certain arrangement (shape) but the question of the ontological status of this “arrangement” or order persists. To

36 Aquinas quoted in Mckean (ed.) 426
37 Alexander of Aphrodisias, 123
return to our original example, what is that something else over and above, the elements which makes the composite something distinct from the elements or a simple aggregate of the elements?

Aristotle's solution is that this added something is the "substance" of the particular thing which cannot be an element but is a principle (arche). A plausible case could be made that this added something that is more than the elements or their aggregative unity is the relation between the elements, which brings about the composite. It is the relation, which through its causal efficacy produces the novel composite such that it is not a combination of the properties of the elements taken separately but in which new properties emerge. This added something need not be a distinct element, in the sense of being actually separable but seems to be conceptually or formally separable from the constitutive elements of the composite.

**Stoic Nominalism and its Refutation**

In the Hellenistic philosophical milieu, the Stoics are the source for a radical nominalism about relations, which goes against the grain of the Aristotelian doctrine of relation. If we attribute any actuality to relations, we are simply "victims of words"\(^{38}\) being misled by language. For the Stoics, the sole reality is the active individual body; this implies a rejection of Platonic forms as well as those entities that have a pretension to the status of universals. Hence, Stoic logic is devoted to an analysis of atomic singular propositions and to molecular compounds of these propositions. The subject matter of these propositions is events or sequences of events and the properties of these events; relations, space, time etc are understood as "incorporeals" which Cicero explains means

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\(^{38}\) For a discussion of the Stoic view vide. Plotinus 447-448
that they are “incapable of any activity.” Only that which is corporeal is capable of activity and hence would be real. As a fragment of Plotinus preserved in the *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* puts it:

The Stoics maintain that real beings and the substance in them are bodies only, saying matter is one and is the substratum of the elements and that it is substance; all other things are, as it were modifications and even the elements are matter in a certain state...  

Of the four Stoic categories, viz. substratum, quality, condition, and relative states (*pros ti pos ekhonta*), the latter two are dependent on our judgment and thus lack any independent ontological status. The Stoic arguments to establish the subjectivity of relations are preserved in Sextus Empiricus’ polemic *Against the Mathematicians*, where he describes the Stoic position as one that considers the “relative” to be “that which is conceived in relation to another” and this is why “relative things are, in truth, only preserved by conception, and that they have no real existence. (My italics, RD)” The fact that relatives are described as merely “conceived” convinces Sextus that the Stoics did not accept their existence. Otherwise, Sextus says, they would have said they “exist” in relation to another. The Stoic says that indeed relations are “something” but they lack reality because as Alexander of Aphrodisias explains “The term something is a more general one than that of reality, for reality can be used only of corporeal entities, while the genus something includes incorporeals..." 

The nominalist argument also hinges on the claim that the truly existent can be modified only by being really affected and relations can be modified without any such

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39 Cicero fragment from Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta in Sauders (ed) 83
40 Plotinus in Saunders (ed) 81
41 Sextus Empiricus (475)
42 Alexander of Aphrodisias in Saunders (ed.) 82
“affection.” What is black does not become white without actually being converted (affected in such a way as to change its color); what is sweet does not become bitter without undergoing a real change, a real modification and so on.

The stock example in defense of this is derived from Plato, if a stick one foot long is compared to another stick of identical length, then it is said to be equal and if compared to a stick two feet in length then it is considered unequal, the relation thus changes without the stick undergoing any internal change. This stick then seems to stand in mutually incompatible relations, so if the relation of equality or inequality were real, and were to obtain for the same stick, an absurdity would follow, since the stick would be both equal and unequal depending on the context. Sextus also gives another example. Have a man hold a jug of water and ask him to pour the water from that jug, Sextus thinks that when he is pouring the water into a jug placed underneath he will be in a different relation to the jug in his hand then when he is simply pouring the water onto the floor. The relation of pouring the water with the jug underneath is a relation of “pouring in” but when he is pouring the water onto the floor it is a relation of “pouring out.”

Thus, there is no change in the activity itself yet the presence or absence of other things appears to change the nature of this activity radically.

The Stoic view as expounded by the Greek Neo-Platonist philosopher Simplicius in the sixth century of the common era and earlier by Plotinus himself, holds that the comparison that relative expressions denote is a product of our cognitive activity and does not have its source in objects. “Equal,” “Similarity,” “Right of,” “Left of” are all thus subjective conceptions; they are not features of the world but an endowment of the

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43 Sextus Empiricus 475
mind upon objects. This is why relation (*pros ti*) is classified by the Stoics as an "incorporeal".

Plotinus’ discussion of relations is premised on the admittedly “elusive character of Relation” and seeks to examine instances of “relation” to uncover what is constant to these instances and the kind of actuality this “constant” possess. It is plausible that Plotinus’ interest here is directly in the ontological status of relations: do relations posses being (whether derivative and minimum) or do they lack being as the Stoic nominalism suggests?

In the Sixth Ennead, Plotinus offers an exposition of the Stoic view of the subjective character of relations and attempts a refutation of this view. On the Stoic view, relation-talk is empty because of the dependence of relations on the mind. Plotinus however, basing his position on Aristotle’s discussion of relations in the Categories, argues that if relation-talk were indeed empty and relations lacked any extra-mental reference then we are faced with the situation that all relational judgments are false. Plotinus’ argument invokes the actuality of something being on top of, or double of another thing. This state of affairs is not a product of discourse but is really the case; objects are related in precisely that way. As Plotinus puts it: “One thing, we are supposing, is double of another quite apart from our speech or thought; one thing possesses and another is possessed before we notice the fact....equals do not await our comparison but.......rest upon an identity existing between the objects compared.”

Plotinian realism about relations also contends that not only are relations independent of both our perceptions but are actually perceived. Perceptions and perceptual knowledge, Plotinus writes are “a clear testimony to the reality of Relation.”

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44 Plotinus, 448
Relation or as Plotinus calls it “skhesis” has its own distinctive “actuality” (hypostasis) which is different from the actuality possessed by substance, quantity or quality. The relations do not give actuality to terms but when terms or objects are analysed, they are found to be in certain relations that cannot be subsumed under the existence of substances or their qualities and quantities. Thus, Plotinus’ Aristotelian realism takes a stance against Stoic nominalism. If we compare two objects and find them to be similar, on the Stoic view the similarity relation is a product of cognitive activity. It tells us more about the way the mind works than about the nature of relations. Plotinus, on the other hand argues that the relation between the objects is something that is “actual,” over and above the related objects. There are situations in which “the relation subsists while the objects remain unaltered and even apart; sometimes it depends upon their combination; sometimes while they remain unchanged, the relation utterly ceases or as happens with right and near, becomes different.”\(^{45}\) Plotinus, having stated his realism is outlining the circumstances under which relations have a dependent or parasitic existence.

Realism about relations has to argue for the actuality or subsistence of relations and has to also distinguish relations from accidents. Plotinus’ criterion for relations is stringent, for instance, “it is not relation when a soul belongs to this individual or dwells in that body.” Relation, for Plotinus is the source of the “actuality” of correlatives. For instance in the case of an object x which is double another object y (which is thus half of x) the “double with its correlative half gives actuality neither to two yards length or the number to two, nor to one yard’s length or the number one. What happens is that when these quantities are viewed in their relation, they are found to be not merely two and one respectively but to produce the assertion and to exhibit the fact of standing one to the

\(^{45}\) ibid.
other in the condition of double and half.\textsuperscript{46} Here Plotinus places the burden of generating the correlative pair on the relation and any discursive references to or assertions about this correlation arise from the actuality of the relation. The relation, Plotinus seems to be suggesting is logically prior to the terms.

The question which Plotinus then asks is whether a relation belongs to both of its terms or is it a “characteristic” belonging to only one term with the property of referring, as it were, to the other term? This is an issue which also troubled medieval philosophers as I will how in the next chapter. In discussing the qualities of greatness or smallness, Plotinus states that these qualities “entail a presence of greatness and smallness respectively”, echoing Plato’s position in the Phaedo. The influence of the Phaedo\textsuperscript{47} can also be found in Plotinus’ position that it is the relational form of “doubleness” which “is the cause of thing being double.”\textsuperscript{48} This goes against the grain of a stream of thinking about Platonism, which in denying relational forms would argue that forms are substances of some kind and subsist independently whereas relations, the least of all beings, has a derivative and dependent existence.

Among the philosophical difficulties, (over and above the Pandora’s Box of relational forms) which Plotinus’ realism inherits from Plato and Aristotle is how to account for the presence, if you will, of the relation simultaneously in the related objects. In other words although the relation belongs to one object, it is two or more objects that are related by virtue of this relation. When an object becomes double of another, (in quantity) surely both the objects do not posses the relation of “being the double of “ when one object becomes double the other object simultaneously, becomes half of the other. Therefore,

\textsuperscript{46} Plotinus, 449
\textsuperscript{47} Cf Phaedo 74a-77a
\textsuperscript{48} Quoted in Weinberg (1965) 84
both the objects cannot be said to possess the relation of "being the double of." Similarly if an object is to the left of me, the relation (of being to the left of me) is not possessed by me but I do "possess" the relation of being to right of this object. However, there are two (or more) objects that enter into a relation. The relation that the object to the left of me, has with me, is arguably in virtue of the relation of being to its right that I possess. Again, the relation of paternity that holds between a father and son is not the relation that obtains between a son and his father viz. "being the child of." Depending on the term from which we approach the correlative pair, the relation of paternity or "being the child of" will obtain. Thus, correlatives and the relations which hold between them are best described are mutually interdependent. I will attempt to spell out the nature of this interdependence in Chapter 4. Notice that Plotinus the non-dualist adopts a realist position about relations although Levinas, as we shall see treats Plotinus as the inspiration of anti-relational or as he calls it "egological" thinking where reality is One and philosophy is an attempt to return to this One.

The degree of interdependence, its causal aspects etc will vary with the kinds of correlatives being considered. The philosophical puzzle is to locate the locus of a relation. Is a relation a kind of glue that links objects? Is it a polyadic property or many place predicate possessed by an object? Does it arise from the simultaneous presence of a particular monadic property or accident possessed by each of the related objects? Furthermore, is the relation a \textit{sui generis} form of accidents, in the sense that this kind of property is not reducible to some other non-relational property?

To conclude this discussion of relations in Classical Greek Philosophy, we return to Simplicius' Commentary on Aristotle's \textit{Categories}, which also offers a summary of the
Stoic view of relations, bringing to the foreground the opposition between the subjectivist and the objectivist treatment of relations. These two approaches to relations were also Classical Greek Philosophy’s legacy to the Scholastics, who, as we shall see, argued extensively for and against these two alternatives. According to Simplicius, the Stoics ask whether relation as a “connection exists in reality or is only a name applied.” For Simplicius, “either no connection of things exists in reality or some connections exist and others are without reality.” As Weinberg’s commentary on Simplicius puts it, this position prefigures the medieval distinction between a real relation (*relatio realis*) and a relation produced in the mind without any objective correlate (*relatio rationis*) i.e. a relation of reason.

For Simplicius, denying all connections would lead to the impossibility of sciences like music and geometry, since they would be studying connections that are merely products of the mind. The denial of real connections is also the denial of the possibility of harmony or unity, leaving us a world of radically discrete particulars. The denial of connections is also the denial of God as an object of desire or veneration both of which cannot be realized, because qua connection or relations they are a purely subjective phenomenon. Simplicius’ other argument for the reality of relations is that if relations were a matter of cognition then so is the connection between past, present and future, (or priority and posteriority) without any objective basis and hence in a sense, time itself would also become a kind of subjective construct.

Simplicius, Weinberg suggests, finds a world of discrete particulars unpalatable, a world consisting of a diversity of kinds of particulars is possible only through real connections. As Weinberg writes “what is fairly conclusive about Simplicius’ discussion

49 Simplicius in Weinberg, 85
is that things are said to be related when they participate in a form of connection and that the definition of this form includes an inclination toward another." The ambiguity in Simplicius' position is whether relations are between terms or involves the participation of the terms in a relational form.

50 Weinberg, 86.
CHAPTER 3

RELATIONS IN MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

Experience overwhelmingly vindicates a world of related objects and subjects, a relational web if you will, making unrelated discrete particulars a product of an artificial division of the world in the interest of analysis. Theoretical accounts of relations or relational situations are faced with stating as a first step, what they consider relations to be. In this chapter, I will discuss some medieval theories of, and debates around, relations, especially their ontological status and the how, why and wherefore of this status. Two problems suggested by medieval philosophy viz. separability of relations (from the relata) and the individuation of relations¹, will also be considered in this chapter as feeding into an inquiry into relations as such.

The scholastic philosophers actually formulate the philosophical problem of relations as such, in a robust manner, which like so much of medieval thinking owes a significant debt to Aristotle. The pivotal question as it emerges in the medieval discussion is whether relations are mind-dependent i.e. products of our cognitive activity and posited in apprehension alone or are objects related independently of cognitive activity? Both these positions entail an account of relations, whether as concepts, beings of reason (entia rationis) or as accidents. Relations are absorbed either into the conceptual domain or into substances (as accidents). Duns Scotus builds on the Aristotelian characterization of relations as ens minimum to argue that in fact relations are ens diminutum, a diminished,

¹ The question of the individuation relations involves determining to what extent we can speak of particular as opposed to generic relations. For example, is the distinction between this being the husband of and being the husband of in general a valid one or are particular relations merely instances of one "universal" relation or multiple exemplifications of one relation.
weakened being because “it is only a relationship (habitudo) between two other things and very little knowable in itself.”\textsuperscript{2} The expression ens dimunatum designates being in the mind or mind-dependent being rather than being outside the mind. The former being considered a diminished form of the latter, “a lesser type of being.”\textsuperscript{3} \textsuperscript{4} That relation is “very little knowable in itself” should come as no surprise because the absurdity which is associated with idle relations; it is the very being of relations to relate which embeds them in what they relate. This embedded nature of relations makes them invaluable to the epistemologist in evaluating knowledge claims or judgments, which are also claims about a specific kind of relatedness to the objects of knowledge. However, as the Loewenberg problem, which I discussed in the Introduction indicates, the analysis of relations is an act of vivisection performed on the fabric of the world which results in an object of analysis which is to some extent artificial.

In the substance-accident framework of medieval philosophy, relations cannot possess being as a tertium quid or a third something. Neither can relations themselves be substances, as Aristotle puts it in his Metaphysics “the relative is neither potentially nor actually substance”\textsuperscript{5}; following the Aristotelian dictum substances are not predicated of anything else, in other words they cannot become properties of other substances. Mary as the mother of Jesus has the maternal relation predicated of her, but nothing can be predicated as a Mary, Mother of Jesus. Although being the mother of Jesus is a property, Mary is not predicated of anything else. So the scholastics are left with three options that seem to be valid for all philosophers. Relations are either in the relata, they are either in

\textsuperscript{2} Translated in Mugnai, 27
\textsuperscript{3} Maurer, 216
\textsuperscript{4} Duns Scotus however does not regard relations as mind-dependent in any strong sense.
\textsuperscript{5} Aristotle, Meta. 265
the mind (or in language, which can on further scrutiny become an appreciable
difference) or as the strict realist would have it, they are in the world (in which case they
would have to be some kind of abstract entity)

The medieval theological controversies that forced philosophers to reformulate their
logical and metaphysical positions are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Yet, it is
undeniable that the medieval discussion of relations is embedded in many of these
controversies. Suffice it to say that the Medieval view of relations is a product of the
blending of Aristotle's discussion of relations in the Categories with the early Scholastic
concern, beginning with St Augustine, with the relations between God the Father, God
the Son and the Holy Spirit on the one hand and things distinct from God on the other.
The characterization of relations as *pros ti* in Aristotle is retained in its medieval use as
"*ad aliquid* (toward something)^6; and as *relativum* (relative) or *relatio* (relation). The
cluster of terms and concepts used by medieval philosophers to discuss relations also
include *comparatio* (comparison) that invokes the psychological aspect of relations (and
hence is often used by conceptualists and is the basis of Hume's analysis of relations).
*Respectus* (outward lookingness) is used to suggest that relations are that by which
substances can, as it were, look outward, beyond themselves, *habitude* (disposition or
relative disposition) suggest that relations are the way a thing holds itself toward other
things. *Ordo* (order) suggests that relations are responsible for the order or structure we
find in the world, even in those aspects of the world or our experience on which we
impose order, it is done in terms of relations. Lastly, we have *aditas* (towardness) that
captures the directionality of relations familiar to us from Aristotle's discussion.
This list captures the some of the key features of relations that are evident in the
discussion of relations as predicates. There are other features of relations which medieval
philosophers discuss, for instance Aquinas in his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*
explains the parasitic character of relations. He writes, “in relation there is no motion per
se, but only per accidens.” Relations “come and go” only through the movement of
accidents and hence are dependent on these accidents.

Medieval philosophers saw relations primarily through the lens of relational predicates
and relatives or relative terms rather than through prepositions. A discussion of relations
as such requires paying attention to relations that are adjectivally or adverbially manifest
and to those represented through prepositions. A catalogue of experienced relations or
those prevalent in everyday discourse, will vindicate the inclusion of those relations that
are represented in the use of “with”, “above” “below”, under” etc. Medieval logicians
held that relative terms are considered relatives on the basis of a comparison, relatives on
the basis of superiority or relatives on the basis of subordination. As an example of the
first type of relative Peter of Spain includes those “relatives that are expressed by the
same name, as similar is similar to similar, equal is equal to equal and neighbor is
neighbor to neighbor.” Examples of relatives based on superiority include those relations
where one of the terms is superior to the other like “master”, “double”, “triple.” Relations
on the basis of subordination include slave, half (of what is double), a third (of what is
triple). A relative on the basis of superiority has as a correlate a relation on the basis of
subordination for instance the relation “being the master of” has the correlate “being the

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6 In Kashmir Saivism this “towards another” character of related terms, this “awaiting other” (parapeksa) or
otherwise(paratntra) nature of relations is taken as a premise for everything being of the nature of
consciousness purely inert and unconscious objects cannot “expect” or desire, as it were, other objects.
7 Aquinas, *Commentary on the Physics*, 300
slave of.” Converses become central to the scholastic logician’s description of relations that come to be identified with paradigmatic relations as discussed by Aristotle in the categories.⁹ Some relative terms admit of degrees; for instance similarity. Things can be more or less similar but cannot be considered more or less double or half. All relative terms are expressed in such a way “that they convert”¹⁰ in the sense that they are always expressed as a pair of the relation and its converse. If you have a father you also have a child, if you have a master you also have a slave, similarly if you have double you also have half. The relation and its converse are concomitant or simultaneous and if one is posited the other is also posited (directly or implicitly) and if one is removed the other is also removed.

“Shorter” is a relative term because when we ascribe the predicate “is shorter” to something, this ascription is in terms of something else i.e. in comparison with something else. Thus, I cannot simply be shorter but am always shorter than someone else. As Jeffrey Brower explains this by applying the terminology of first-order logic, “a term F is relative just in case a predication of the form Fx is more perspicuously represented as a predication of the form Rxy.”¹¹ Terms that do not involve comparison with other things are called absolute⁵⁹ in the medieval lexicon. Notice however that Aquinas thinks that, “since relation has little of entity the Philosopher does not treat of them but only of relatives, which because of their greater concretion can be known to us.” Thus, the Thomistic interpretation of the Categories sees relations only through the lens of the relata which actualize the relation. Perhaps this further supports the notion of the

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⁸ Peter of Spain, 95
⁹ The distinction between paradigmatic and non paradigmatic relations is discussed in the Introduction.
¹⁰ Peter of Spain, 96
¹¹ Brower (2001), 5
metaphysical incompleteness of relations, stressing the importance of relata for the actualization of a relation and following Aquinas, its knowability.

*The how of a genuine relation: fragments from the medieval lexicon*

Medieval Philosophy assumed a certain structure to be applicable in the instances of a genuine relation, especially as occurring *in re*. The entire picture of relations as *in re* is found among other texts in Walter Burleigh's *De Relatavis*. Burleigh explains that a relation being an *ens minimum* needs a "subject, a foundation, a terminus a quo and a terminus ad quem". A genuine relation, according to Burleigh, needs five components viz. the relation itself, the subject of the relation, the foundation of the relation and the two terms between which the relation subsists. So if we were to apply this analysis to a concrete example for instance the relation between a king and his subject, we have in the first place the relation of sovereignty of the king over his subject i.e. the relation of "being the king of" vis a vis the subject. Secondly, we have the subject of the relation, in this case the king (who "exercises" this relation). Thirdly, we have the "fundamentum" or foundation of the relation that is the power of the king. Fourthly, the two terms viz. the king and the subject between which the relation of "being the king of" is operative. On this view the notion of a relation lacking a foundation and terms becomes incoherent. For example paternity is meaningless without the terms viz. a father and a child or children or in the case where there has been no act of fathering i.e. the property "having a child" is not possessed by one of the terms. At the heart of this approach is not only the belief that

12 Burleigh, Walter (1997)
13 It seems to me that what Burleigh and other scholastics mean by the foundation of the relation is better explained through the following example. In the case of the relation of paternity, the foundation lies in begetting or "fathering" the child.
there can be no relations without relata but neither can there be a relation without those accidents or properties of the terms on which the relations are as it were parasitic. Notice that “being the father of” is a relation that cannot be accomplished without the corresponding relation of being the child of holding in the other term. So for instance two individuals in which one say X posses the property of having children cannot be the father of the other Y unless this Y bears the property of being not just a child but the child of X. Although the relation of “being the child of” is distinct from “being the father of” it could be argued that their common foundation lies in the “fathering” or “having a child.” Both relations then would be parasitic on this accident, which belongs to only one term. This is an issue I will consider later when the distinction between paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic relational situations is discussed.

However, the use of relative terms does not always indicate relations; for instance consider “hand.” To say that “x is a hand”(or even the demonstrative “this is a hand”), is perhaps more perspicuously rendered as Ms Y’s hand, in other words an with an apparent ascription of the relation of possessing the hand. Yet, the seemingly relative term hand (or head) is only signifying a part of a substance and not a relation. The medievals, following Aristotle sought to distinguish the actual relation, that by virtue of which things stand in relation, on the one hand and related things on the other. The metaphysical scope of relations is to relate two or more items and this function cannot be confused with the state of being related; to recall an Aristotelian phrase this is their very being.

According to Jeffrey Brower, this distinction is what we find reflected in the distinction between relations merely according to speech (relationes secundum dici) and
relation according to the nature of their being \((relationes secundum esse)\). As Aquinas puts it:

\[\text{"Some relative terms such as "master" and "slave, "father and son"... are imposed to signify relative dispositions themselves; these terms express things relative \textit{secundum esse}. But other relative terms such as "mover" and "moved", "head and headed" and terms of this sort are imposed things on which certain relations follow; these terms express things relative \textit{secundum dice}.\}^{14}\]

This passage seems to suggest that the members of a correlative pair like father and son express a relation in their very being, or in other words these relative terms are necessarily relational, whereas terms like mover and moved are only contingently so i.e. only insofar as someone is engaged in the act of moving something, he is a mover. Thus, mover signifies a relation only through the act of moving something and independent of this act of moving is a non-relational term and hence is relative \textit{secundum dice}.

The medieval philosophers, before the spread of Ockhamist ideas of ontological parsimony reject the notion of relations as ployadic properties or many-place predicates. The descriptions of relations as \"a road (\textit{via}) which runs between two cities\", \"a palisade running between two watchtowers\", or in Peter Aureoli's words \"some sort of interval (\textit{intervalum}) existing between two things\" or as Averroes puts it \"a relation is a disposition existing between two things\" is prevalent in medieval philosophy\(^{15}\). Yet, the view that relations are something between two or more relata has its own philosophical difficulties, stemming from and independently of medieval philosophical premises or assumptions. If a relation is in neither one of the relata but lies between the two, it cannot be said to have a subject. As an interval how can it be said to connect the relata, it

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\(^{14}\) Aquinas, quoted in Brower 5

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remains merely something between them, failing precisely because of its location external to the relata to perform its function.

The medieval picture of properties or accidents as belonging to individual substances, disallowed their distribution over more than one substance, in other words a property cannot be possessed by more than one substance. Properties were considered along the lines of parts or something like constituents of substances, and hence were possessed by that substance and could not be parceled out over several substances at a time. Hence, according to Aquinas the numerically same relation cannot belong to two subjects simultaneously because “one accident cannot belong to two subjects.”  

Having rejected relations as polyadic properties or many place predicates, the medieval views about relations became a matter of determining the exact status of the pair of monadic properties that explain a relational situation. If one were to argue that relations have an extra-mental basis one is in the realist camp but on the other hand an anti-realism about relations would consist in denying any extra-mental or objective basis to relations. Anti-realism about relations does not explain away relational situations but ascribes their presence to cognitive activity or acts of judgment; relations thus are a subjectively produced phenomenon, of course, with varying degrees of contextual constraints. This subjection of relations to cognitive acts smacks of idealism and leaves us with a world of discrete particulars, which only the mind can relate. Aquinas sums up the view of the anti-realist:

15 Brower
16 Aquinas, *Commentary on Sentences* quoted in Brower, 10.
...some philosophers have denied that relation is a real genus of being, stating that it has no existence in the real world but is simply a way of looking at things which is projected onto all beings.\(^\text{17}\)

This anti-realist approach is similar to Dharmakirti’s Buddhist critique of realism about relations, which is discussed in the next chapter. Although, not all forms of conceptualism about relations need to be anti-realist. This will be true to the extent that they do not hold that the mind makes relational statements true. This is tricky because if we concede that relations are mind dependent and yet do not want to be idealists about relational statements, then we have to delineate precisely the role that the mind plays. William of Ockham seems to advocate this kind of theory. Aquinas’ acceptance of relations stems from his belief that relations are a kind of ordering and this ordering is evidence of the perfection and goodness of the world. Duns Scotus advocates a version of realism on logical grounds. Before discussing Ockham’s conceptualist nominalism, let us survey the varieties of medieval realism about relations.

Brower suggests two alternative approaches\(^\text{18}\) that are premised on an acceptance of the extra-mental status of relational situations.

1) Reductive realism

2) Non-reductive realism

The first approach is in keeping with the requirements of ontological parsimony and with Ockham’s dictum “Plurality should not be assumed without necessity.” Realism about relations when opposed to the kind of idealist, “nothing but mind” anti-realism, is the dominant stream of thinking in medieval philosophy. Reductive realism has two steps,\(^\text{17\, Aquinas, 166} \quad \text{18\, Brower, 10-11}\)
firstly relations are denied the status of anything but properties of substances, and secondly they are considered as inseparable or admitting of no real distinction from the property-bearer. This approach, I would argue is driven by the philosophical anxiety over the hypostatization of relations at one level and at another level by the difficulty of conceiving relations apart from the relata and their qualities.

Abelard formulates a version of reductive realism as follows: If we call some monadic properties relations, can we say that they are “different things from the substance itself which from them is said to have a relation to something? Abelard reply is “Most certainly not!” Abelard argues that believing relations to be different or separable from substances is like believing that order or unity is separable from that which is ordered or unified. On this view, paternity is not an ens and to assert that “Paternity exists” is to say that there is some $x$ who is a father. This $x$ has the property of paternity, which amounts to saying that the statement ‘he is a father’ is true of this $x$. Although “fatherhood” is not a separate being, an ens distinct from the substance, it does not mean that ‘fatherhood is Father’ will be true, the property cannot be identified with the substance; it is possessed by the substance. Although absorbing the relation into the relata by means of properties generates its own philosophical difficulties, it avoids the problems faced by the anti-realist, especially those arising from the denial of any mind-independent reality to relayional facts.

If Socrates is taller than Simmias, there is something implausible in the claim that this relation is somehow mind-dependent. The relation holds because the related objects posses a pair of monadic properties; $aRb$ obtains because $a$ posses property $F$ and $b$ posses property $G$. The basic position of the reductive realist is that I am taller than Joe,
by virtue of my height and Joe's height. There is no special *sui-generis* property possessed by either Joe or I. Accepting a class of irreducibly relational properties would, it seems to me, weaken the reductionist aspect of this realism.

Is the relation brought about by the pair of monadic properties or does each member of the pair represent a different relation? If Simmias is taller than Socrates, do the two heights taken together constitute the relation or is it the case that Simmias' height constitutes the "being taller than" relation and Socrates' height constitutes the correlate "being shorter than"?

The two monadic properties enable the relation and its converse. In the case of a relation like similarity, in terms of being red, the redness in one object generates the relation of that object's being similar to the other red object. However, the redness of the other object enables the similarity with the first to obtain. Thus, the two objects are in a similarity relation when the relation obtains from both sides and cannot be dependent on only one instance of redness. The relation obtains when the pair of monadic properties is taken jointly but in most cases of paradigmatic relations, (correlative pairs) the pair of monadic properties seem to enable the relation and its converse.

In the case of asymmetrical relations like fatherhood, how can it be convincingly argued that the relation consists of a pair of monadic properties, because if *a* has fatherhood (relation) toward *b*, then *b* cannot have fatherhood (relation) toward *a*, fatherhood cannot reside in the child as well as in the father. The theory that relations consist of a pair of monadic properties seems to do just that i.e. make the fatherhood relation dependent on a property possessed by the child. Similarly, the relation "being the child" seems to depend on the father possessing a certain monadic property. The

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19 Theologia Christiana quoted in Marenbon 156
reductive realist has to show how it is possible to overcome this need for two monadic properties in the terms while sustaining the view that relations are reducible to non-relational accidents. At the outset we have to admit that the relation cannot obtain in virtue of a single monadic property, for example Simmias' height alone is not enough to make him taller than Socrates or shorter than Alcibiades. The corresponding properties have to be possessed by Socrates and Alcibiades in order for the relation to obtain. Thus for a monadic property to enable a relation or be a “relative making” property, is an episodic phenomenon dependent largely on circumstances. Simmias' height is potentially relative making but needs its correlates to become actually “relative-making.” The reductive realist believes that Simmias' being heavier than Socrates is ontologically more than the weight of Simmias and the weight of Socrates, which the intellect expresses as a relative (this difference in weight could also be represented as “Simmias weighs 200 pounds”).

It is legitimate to ask whether these properties are possessed necessarily or contingently by substances and does acquiring one of these properties imply a real change or is it merely a relational, Cambridge change? On the reductive realist view, the loss of a relative-making property, does not imply any real change in the subject. If Joe becomes a faster runner than me, by training or through steroids, this does not imply that I undergo a real change. Similar Cambridge changes will ensue if Joe decides to get a haircut, glasses and clothes exactly like me and becomes similar to me in appearance, this similarity does not imply that I undergo any real change. However, it may be true that in some cases there is a real change in Joe (in terms of absolute accidents), while the changes in me are purely relational. Further, if there are monadic properties and the
relations they generate which are essential to the identity of the substance does the reductive realist have to revise his position and acknowledge that these are a class distinct from other inessential properties?

If the reductive realist admits that there are \textit{sui-generis} properties (like essential properties), then he has already ceded ground to the non-reductive realist whose position is centered on arguing that relations are a \textit{sui-generis} kind of property. The intuition guiding the non-reductive realist position is that relations have a different quiddity from ordinary, garden-variety properties, or from its foundation. This can be pointed quite easily, given what we have said about the pair-factor in relational predicates. In the case of an absolute predications like “x is white” there is no implication of a correlative, in the paradigmatic cases of relatives, the correlative \textit{(antistrophon)} is necessary. If this difference in quiddity were not enough we can also point out that, the being \textit{(esse)} of a relation consists in being-toward something \textit{(ad aliquid)}, which is not the case for absolute terms. Notice that at the linguistic level too, predicates like “taller”, “heavier” are incomplete and require the correlate for completion. We represent “Simmias is taller than Socrates” distinctly from “Simmias is six feet tall” while “Socrates is Five feet five inches” not because of a psychological quirk, but because \textit{they are} distinct. This distinction is crucial to explaining relational facts, but does not endorse a metaphysical realism about relations.

\textit{Duns Scotus and non-reductive realism}

William of Ockham’s conceptualist anti-realism marks a departure from the Aristotelian position regarding relations. Ockham adopts a view of relations according to
which all relations are products of the activity of the mind. Ockham, as we will see does not deny that judgments of the form aRb are true independently of the mind. Nevertheless, the only reality R has is in the mind. A relation, for instance, resemblance, or similarity is certainly an experienced relation, we perceive or judge two things to be similar. If Socrates is white and Plato is white or if they both have beards, we see that in this regard they are similar. However, this similarity is not something ‘out there’ in the world, neither is it some special property inhering in either Plato or Socrates over and above their own complexions and beards. On Ockham’s view, the similarity can be explained on the basis of Socrates, Plato and their whiteness (or beards possessed by both). Similarity is not something distinct from the two relata and the property in terms of which they are similar. Ockham rejects the traditional picture of relations and argues that though there is an apparent relation in the pillar of being to the right of me and in God, the relation of being my creator but ultimately there is no reality to these relations and they are ultimately deriving their existence only through conceptual activity. This position enables us to preserve the theology of an immutable God and to avoid absurdities like a stone that acquires properties, without undergoing any real change, but solely in virtue of my cognitive activities.

Contrast this with Duns Scotus’ approach where this similarity is a quality or accident inhering in Socrates. It is this relation of similarity to Plato in terms of whiteness or being bearded, which is lost in the eventuality that Plato dies or becomes suntanned or shaves his beard, as the case may be. Similarity is a case of a reciprocal relation and if Socrates is similar to Plato then Plato possesses the corresponding relational property of being similar to Socrates. However, in the case of a relation of non-equivalence, a non-
There are also cases in which the relation is in only one of the relata, while the other relata is in a sense relationally passive. Take the case of the knowledge relation, in other words, the relation between the knower and the object of knowledge. The relative accident is in the knower, who is the bearer of the relation but there is no new property in the known object, because of its epistemic appropriation. Just as, if I stand to the left of a stone, the relation or the relative property of being to the left of the stone is in me, but there is no relative accident in the stone. The theological version of this position was that when God created the world, something happened to the world but not to God. There is a relation of createdness in the world but no creator relation in God (who is immutable and cannot acquire or loose properties).

Duns Scotus's realism about relations preserves the Aristotelian lesson that though relations are in one substance they are directed toward another. If Socrates is taller than Plato, then he has a particular accident i.e. his height and Plato has a similar accident. These are two distinct accidents inhering in two distinct substances and Duns believes separate from the substances. Before discussing what I call the "separability problem" which is concerned with whether relations qua accidents are distinct from the substances that they relate. The precise nature of this distinction, if it is admitted (as well as some of the concepts used by Duns Scotus in his discussion of relations) needs to be clarified.

On the Scotist view, height is the accident which is possessed by Socrates and this height (with respect to Plato) is the foundation of the relation "being taller than." The
Scotist will contend that the foundation is not the relation and it is a necessary though not a sufficient condition for the relation, because if Plato were to grow taller than Socrates then the height would remain inherent in Socrates but the relation would not obtain. Similarly, Plato’s height is also a necessary but not a sufficient condition because Socrates might shrink with age and again the relation will not obtain.

The Scotist explanation of relation considers them as accidents that are really different from the substances in which they inhere. According to Weinberg, it is important to note that by the term “real difference” or “real distinction” Duns Scotus means a separation, or separability between the things said to be really distinct. This is opposed to a formal distinction or “formal non-identity” which is prior to intellective acts but which does not admit of separation. A real distinction according to Duns Scotus obtains between two things (res) that are actually separated or potentially separable as opposed to the formal distinction, which obtains between “entities that are inseparable even by divine power.” Furthermore, each of the termini of a real distinction can exist separately from the other term, unlike the termini of a formal distinction, which exist only when conjoined. The characteristic of a real distinction which is most relevant here is that “a true real distinction destroys simplicity” whereas a formal distinction is compatible with simplicity. Thus, a real distinction obtains between Plato and Aristotle, between my hand and me, and so on including items belonging to different categories. As Peter King writes “this applies to actually separated things, as well as to things and their potentially separated parts whether the parts be physical or metaphysical.” This is contrasted with a

20 Weinberg, 103
21 Grajewski, 100
22 Ibid. 101
23 King in Williams ed, 21
A formal distinction according to the Scotist view is not a conceptual distinction in that it is not mind-dependent, and would obtain even in a world without minds. Formal distinction expresses the fact that, existential inseparability does not imply that the items are then identical in definition. The persons of the Trinity cannot be existentially separated yet they do admit of a formal distinction. The distinctions between those items that are formally distinct are in the world; it is therefore a “real” distinction in a broad sense of the term, not implying thereby an actual separation. Thus, a pair of formally distinct items does not imply that there are two property bearers.

Relative accidents cannot exist apart from their foundations and terms but these foundations and terms can exist without the relative accidents. For example, a blue object exists without the relative accident of similarity, but when another blue object comes into being, it acquires the relative accident of similarity. Thus, we have the conclusion that the substance (viz. the object) and the foundation (the blue color) of the object can exist independently of the relative accident. Similarly, in the case of an asymmetrical relation, a person can continue to exist without acquiring the property that serves as the foundation for his mastery over another person, but can eventually acquire the property that makes him a master. The relative accident “master of ..” is really distinct from the substance and is distinct from the property of say, being powerful, which enables the relation.

In order to establish the real distinction between relative accidents and their foundations and substances, (although the relative accident is dependent upon these two for its existence) Duns Scotus has to refute the infinite regress argument. According to this

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24 Ibid.
argument, if relation were distinct from its foundation, i.e. something other than the
t foundation then this otherness (which is a relation) itself needs another foundation and so
on, till we have an unending process. Duns Scotus argues that if there is no real
distinction between the relation and its foundation, real unity would be impossible i.e.
only a unity of aggregation would be possible and not a unity of parts i.e. a composite;
the natural consequence being the impossibility of novelty or change.

Arguably, novelty is premised on the formation and dissolution of composites, yet if the
constituents A and B of the composite AB can have no real unifying relation which is
distinct from them, it amounts to saying that the composite AB is nothing but the absolute
terms A and B. The unity AB cannot be really distinguished from the separate absolutes
A and B, and is thus not a novel composite, “union of parts”, but a mere unity of
aggregation. Duns Scotus’ point is that the relation cannot be entirely absorbed by the
terms i.e. the foundation of the relation. For the non-reductive realist, relations with the
entities they relate are complex entities that are predicatively different from relata. A and
B in a relation r compose a complex ArB, which differs predicatively from both A and B
considered individually, moreover the complex Ar also differs from A and B, as does the
complex rB. For example consider the handle of a tool and a hand; the complex of the
hand holding the tool is a complex distinct from both hand and tool. It is causally capable
of doing what the hand and the tool individually were only potentially capable of
accomplishing. For the non-reductivist who is arguing in defense of “separability” it is
the relation that renders the complexes predicatively different from and of a different
causal order than the relata. Although we may have a familiarity with the hand holding
the tool (or more specifically its handle) to collapse the relation into the hand or the tool
seems a mistake, because if considered as discrete particulars, potentially related, the relation cannot be found in the inventory of properties of both the relata.

Separability does not imply granting the relation any entitative status over and above the kind of being possessed by real accidents. To explain this further and to test the Scotist separability thesis, take the case of two qualitatively different kinds of unities, water and a wall of bricks. In the case of the wall of bricks it is a unity of aggregation because it is clearly a mere arrangement of the bricks in a certain order that is cemented together. Scotus would argue that if the relation is not something distinct from the bricks, then the bricks arranged together and the bricks considered individually would be equivalent. Since the relation, or order (if inseparable) is nothing but one of the components of the unity i.e. the wall, then this unity would be in a sense indistinguishable from the individual bricks. The wall is bricks arranged in a certain order, a relation which seems to be a weak bond between the bricks and which does not merit being considered separable in any rigorous sense. The wall is indeed nothing more than an aggregation of individual bricks, not a novel composite, the “order” of the bricks is nothing distinct from the bricks.

In the case of the chemical bond between oxygen and hydrogen, which produces water, we have a stronger case of separability of the bond qua relation from the constituents. The bond actually disallows an easy recognition of the elements of this composite. The bond generates not only a novel composite but endows it with properties that were not known in the elements of the composite. The wall develops properties that are a mere magnification of the properties of the individual bricks but water has a
fundamental property difference from its constituent gases viz. that it is a liquid, showing clearly the difference between a composite unity and an aggregative unity.

Let us return to the separability issue. Even in the case of water, are we warranted in asserting that there is a real distinction between the elements and foundations on the one hand and the relation on the other? In the case of chemical compounds like water, it is quite plausible that the bond i.e. the relation is indeed separate and distinguishable, certainly conceptually, from the individual constituents. A chemical bond makes a very good case for a relation being not only something separate but also sui-generis. The bond is not a property of either hydrogen or oxygen, but is a consequence, of the propensity of these elements to bond with, relate to other elements under the right circumstances.

**Individuation of Relations: Form and Content**

Besides separability, another problem which emerges from scholasticism and which is relevant to a broader consideration of relations as such is the “particularity problem or individuation of relations problem.” It is suggested by Abelard in *Dialectica* and I will use his ideas as a blueprint to articulate this problem and suggest a possible solution that does not depend on any obvious entitative claims about relations. This solution is hopefully, able to account for what is experientially evident about relations. Abelard begins with the question, whether there are particular relations, such as *this* fatherhood that is unique. By unique, I mean that *this* serves as more than a simple demonstrative. The relation as instantiated, in a particular relational situation is not a mere exemplification of some kind of Platonic entity. The fact that it cannot be replicated is non-trivial to a theory of relations as such.
For paternity in general to be a viable relation, it is not the case that each instance of paternity has to endure. It is sufficient that some instances of this relation survive in order to ensure its status as an actual relation. Even in the case of a society where all the fathers have died in war and the mothers look after the children, the relation exists as a potential relation. In the case of a world of aliens who lacks sexes and yet reproduce, paternity is not a potential relation although parenthood, in a modified form, certainly is.

The case of for the individuation of relations has to be made using a distinction between form and content of a relation. The form of a relation say "being the father" is an invariant, in the sense that it is necessarily the male parent who is the father, across cultures. This invariant is the form of the relation, but the content i.e. how the relation is lived is vastly different depending on a variety of circumstances. This distinction is less helpful when we speak of relations between objects like "being to the left of". There is only so much that happens in something "being to the left of" something else. However, in the case of social relations, the notion of the content i.e. how the relation is lived become immensely important.

**Ockham on Relations**

Ockham’s position on relations\textsuperscript{26} is a middle ground between the foundationist-realist view of Duns Scotus and the anti-realist conceptualism of Peter Aureoli. For Ockham, relations are neither things nor mind-independent, but it is not mental activity which makes relational statements true. For Ockham a relation although distinct from qualities and individual substances is not a thing and is inseparable from the relata (even in

\begin{footnote}{Marenbon, 143-146}
\end{footnote}
thought). Linguistic expression of relations i.e. relative terms like “father” or “double” do not have a relation inhereing in them, as relative terms they depend on something else, so that they cannot be what they are without reference to this other thing (“son” in the case of the father and “half” in the case of double).

To establish the claim that relations are not properties Ockham argues that if relations were properties or accidents then they would have to inhere in the whole and in every part of the whole. So if B is double of C, a part of B cannot be double of C because a part is always less than the whole and it is the whole i.e. B which is double. In the case of an accident if we say, “B is red,” it is also true that all parts of B are red. If B had a part that was not red then the statement B is, red would false. What about the case of red car, does it not have parts like the tires that are non-red? This could be explained away by refining the statement as “the externally visible body of the car is red.” Aquinas adopts a more flexible position on the quality-relation distinction. He believes that relations can be either physically identical or distinct from their foundation. More importantly, relation has two aspects, it is an accident, and it is a relation or order. Insofar as it is an accident it is “in a subject” but in its role as a relation it is simply toward another. If a relation inherees, it is in its role as esse-in (being in) and as a relation it is esse-ad (being toward); for example, “paternity” inherees in a father as a property but is “being toward” the child qua relation.

In Ockham’s theological writings, we find an argument that rejects relations as something separable from terms. Ockham argues that if God can create something without creating other things and paternity or filiation relations were real things, then

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26 Ockham’s position on relations is clearly mapped out in the so-called tract on relations in the Quodlibetal Questions. My discussion is largely based on this text.
there could be a father who never had a son, if God created just two things viz. a man and
the relation paternity in him. Similarly, Adam could have been created possessing a
“filiality”, such that although chronologically prior to all humans he would still be a son
by virtue of the filiality.

Relation is not an independent something but a merely a term expressing the
connection or link between two or things. A thing is similar to another by virtue of its
being like some other in terms of the properties it possesses but not because it possesses
similarity. Relation is the category in which things depend on other things for their
existence. Relation, unlike connotative terms, cannot signify just one thing. Relations
stand for substance or quality in an extrinsic mode; just as the category quantity signifies
substance with respect to extension, relation signifies substance, not with respect to
something which inheres in substance but in comparison with other substances or
qualities. Thus to call some man “a father” is not to signify a real change in him, because
of something in him, only the presence of another being viz. his child. Ockham contrasts
this with calling someone “white”; the way whiteness operates with respect to its bearer
is quite dissimilar to the way “father” operates.

Relations between things are real albeit not real in their own right, their reality and in
this Ockham follows Aristotle, is derivative or parasitic. Relation is neither a thing nor a
name but a “sign” for the way in which actual substances and qualities are ordered. Leff
disagrees that this theory can be called nominalist; he argues that unless one is an
extreme realist, and believes that something is real “only if it exists as a self-subsistent
nature”27 then Ockham can be called a nominalist. Insofar as Ockham believes that

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27 Leff, 222
relation qua ordering of substances and qualities is objective or that it is the case, he is a realist about relations. 28

Ockham distinguishes between “real and mental” relations. In the case of the presence of “redness” in two objects that makes them similar, the mind contributes nothing. In the relation between two individuals, one of whom is a mother and the other her child, the relation of maternity is not introduced by the mind. Contrast this with a relation of reason, which is the work of the mind. Without the activity of the intellect, there can be no “relation of reason”, as Ockham puts it in the Quodlibet “subject and predicate are related through a mental act not in themselves.” 29 In the case of the intentional relation, the relation that the object of knowledge bears to the knowing act, is a relation of reason whereas the relation of the knowing act to the object is a real relation. In the case of the real relation, the reciprocal relation exists without the activity of the mind. In the case of my thinking of Keith Campbell, the only relation he bears to my thinking is through a mental act in which he is related to my thinking as an object but not actually. Aquinas explains the concept of relations of reason as follows, “there are certain relations that are not anything real in that of which they are predicated.” 30 A relation of reason is a relation “in respect to reason” where reason considers something to be a term of the relation. Aquinas’ example is that of a column which is to the right of an animal, “being to the right of” or “being to the left of” are real relations in the animal but in the column the “relation is not present in respect to the thing but only in respect to reason (ratio).” 31

28 The connection of order with relation is also known to Aquinas who holds that a real relation consists in the order of one thing to another,
29 Ockham, 223
30 Aquinas, Commentary on the Physics, 302
31 ibid.
What about abstract concepts like similarity? Ockham thinks that abstract relational concepts like similarity should be thought of like universals connoting numerous instances of the similarity relation holding between things such as "crowd" designates many persons in one place. It is not the case that similar and similarity are respectively a universal and an instance like white and whiteness. A real relation refers merely to a state of two or things being related. For example, there is God and there is his Creation and they are related but there is no such separable thing like "the relation of Creator and Created. Hence, relation does not add anything to related things, which it would if a real distinction were admitted between relata and relation.

Besides separability or real distinction, Ockham also rejects the foundationist interpretation of relations a la Duns Scotus. Ockham thinks that accepting the notion of the foundation that is distinct from the relation will take us in the direction of radical realism that reifies relations. Moreover, if relations are accepted as separate or as existing independently from the relata, then it could be known even when the relata are not known. The concept of a foundation of a relation, which is distinct from that relation is motivated by instances like a blue object has the color blue (that can serve as a foundation) but not the relation of similarity when there are no other blue objects.

In conclusion, in answer to the question whether Ockham, denied the independent existence of relation, as something real and separable, we would have to answer "yes" with the proviso that this does not implicate him in any reduction of relations to the activity of the mind.
Leibniz on Relations

In the Western tradition Leibniz, especially on some of the canonical interpretations, seems the heir apparent to the conceptualist-nominalist approach to relations which we see best exemplified in Ockham. Leibniz at least in his discussion of relations is closest to the Scholastics in his formulation of his arguments and hence his inclusion in this chapter. This apparent connection of Leibniz to the Ockhamist tradition is predicated on the contention that the later Leibniz endorsed a reducibility thesis about inter-monicadic relations and denied relations anything other than an “ideal” ontological status. The nominalist-conceptualist rejection of relations is not a rejection of relational facts about the world, although their pervasiveness or significance may be diminished when compared with their status in a full blown relational ontology. However, nominalism about relations is not only a representative approach to relations in the history of philosophy, but also provides a serious challenge to the realist about relations, in that it claims to offer a satisfactory account of relational facts, without recourse to any entitative status to relations. Arguments for the reality of relations will have to respond to and reject the nominalist claims about giving satisfactory accounts of relational phenomena.

As Hide Ishiguro points out, Leibniz holds that our notion of relation is an abstraction from relational facts and from the order and connection which we see in things. “Relations are abstract entities made by abstraction.” The subtler point being argues here is that Leibniz draws a distinction between relational facts or properties and relations. The latter qua entities are a product of reification of the former, this will be the nominalist refrain against the realist about relations. The Lebnizian nominalist can argue for the
coherence of his system by stressing that relational facts can be accounted for while respecting Ockham's injunction against the proliferation of entities. Leibniz is in profound agreement with the Ockhamist thesis that "everything in the world can be explained without any reference to universals and real forms", as Leibniz puts it "nothing is truer than this opinion."[^33]

What really exist for Leibniz are the individual substances that are the basic constituents of the world; they are the "concrete things" that "are really things; abstractions are not things but modes of things. Modes are usually nothing but the relation of these things to the understanding". (ibid.) Thus, relations as abstractions are the products, if you will, of the processing by the understanding of individual substances. For Leibniz, relations are "ens rationis" an entity of reason or "ideal entity"; relations can be defined only contextually, in the sense that they are derived from certain relational facts. Consider the following passage from Leibniz's letter to Clarke:

The ratio or proportion between two lines L and M may be conceived in three different ways: as a ratio of the greater L to the lesser M; as a ratio of the lesser M to the greater L; and lastly as something abstracted from both, that is as the ratio between L and M, without considering which is the antecedent, or which the consequent; which the subject and which the object...In the first way of considering them, L the greater, in the second, M the lesser, is the subject of that accident which the philosophers call relation. But, which of them will be the subject in third way of considering them? It cannot be said that both of them, L and M, are the subject of such an accident; for if so we should have an accident in two subjects, with one leg in one, and the other in the other; which is contrary to the notion of accidents. Therefore, we must say, that this relation in this third way of considering it, is indeed out of the subjects; but being neither a substance nor an accident, it must be a mere ideal thing, the consideration of which is nevertheless useful.^[34]

[^32]: Ishiguro, 101
[^33]: Ishiguro, 103
[^34]: Ishiguro, 104
Leibniz’s reason for rejecting an accident that has two subjects is a prejudice inherited from scholastic logic, which we discussed earlier. This lengthy quotation from Leibniz’s letter has been used by most scholars, as a *locus classicus* in order to explain Leibniz’s position on relations. Russell also quotes this passage to discuss the problem of relations\(^{35}\). However, Russell interprets this passage in the light of its relevance to the broader questions of whether Leibniz believes that all propositions are reducible to the subject predicate form or whether there are irreducibly relational propositions? On Russell’s view in this passage we see that Leibniz realizes “that relation is something distinct from and independent of subject and accident” but he “thrusts away” this discovery by understanding relations as “a mere ideal thing.”\(^{36}\) Russell believes that this ideal thing would be no more than an “accident of the mind.” This, Russell thinks is a consequence of Leibniz’s strong commitment to the subject-predicate form of propositions even though he is faced with the need to admit relational propositions.

However, at this point it is relevant to distinguish what Leibniz calls “ideal things” from fictional entities like centaurs or golden mountains. As Leibniz explains it in the *New Essays*

> Although relations are of the understanding they are not groundless or unreal. For the divine understanding is the origin of things and even the reality of things, simple substances excepted, consists in the fact that the perception of phenomena is founded on simple substances.\(^{37}\)

Leibniz has so far been unequivocal about the rejection of relations as ontological reals, but what does he mean when he claims that, “the understanding adds relations”\(^{38}\)? And

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\(^{35}\) Russell (1958), 12  
\(^{36}\) Russell, 13  
\(^{37}\) quoted in Ishiguro, 102  
\(^{38}\) Mugnai, 17
it is the case that for Leibniz, not only does God perceive the individual monads and their states and the relations between monads. Having adopted this position, it would be inconsistent to explain away relations as utterly lacking being. In Russell’s interpretation of Leibniz, relations have only a “metal truth” and relational propositions only ascribe a predicate to God or anyone else who perceives the relation. In the case of the perception of the relation of paternity, between a father and son, Leibniz would have to argue that there is no such relation over and above our perception of one individual as the son and another individual as his father.

Russell, reads Leibniz as a Kantian about relations, in the sense that relations, in Kant’s view are the “work of the mind.” 39 However, Russell rejects the idea of the reducibility of all propositions to the subject-predicate form and defends the reality of relations. If, all propositions in order to be true and meaningful, have to possess a subject and a predicate, those without these would be non-propositions, as it were, and thus devoid of meaning. In the case of numbers or relations between monads, God perceives precisely this kind of “proposition.” Now, following Leibniz’s claims about the necessity of all propositions to possess a subject and predicate, God’s perceptions of relations, (for that matter any percipient’s) would be false. Russell’s interpretation of Leibniz has itself come under the scrutiny of scholars, who challenge the claim that Leibniz believed that in the last analysis, all propositions were reducible to the subject-predicate form.

Surely, Leibniz, like his forerunner, the venerabilis inceptor, William of Ockham, does not want to reduce relations to the subjectivist implications of the claim that relations are added by the understanding. From the Fifth book of the Physics of Aristotle, we know that relations lack “movement in themselves” but “come and go” as a consequence of the
changes in individual substances. Given for example, "blond Matt" and "blond Ashby", the fact of their being similar depends on the property of blondness which is present in both. The similarity relation is contingent on these accidents and if Matt were to dye his hair black, the relation would cease to hold. Thus, if relations are contingent upon accidents, in what sense can they considered to be “added by the understanding.” Then, does Leibniz also contend that the order or relationality that is empirically evident is a product of the understanding?

Ockham and Leibniz agree that to state that the reality of relations is in the intellect, is not to argue that relations are arbitrary, or arise from some contingent act of the intellect. The intellect cannot in fact make Matt resemble Ashby; anymore than it can it make him black or green. The existence in itself of absolute terms, itself, establishes their relation. The similarity relation is real but it is not an entity distinct from the others. Leibniz advances a theological argument to safeguard against the subjective implications of his position and to reinforce the sense in which he holds relations to be “real”.

In addition to the substances, which are final objects, there are the modifications of the substances, which are subject to creation and destruction in their own right. And finally, there are the relations, which are not created in their own right but result from the creation of other things; their reality does not depend on our intelligence- they inhere without anyone being required to think them. Their reality comes from the divine intellect, without which nothing would be true. Thus there are two things which only the divine intellect can realize: all the eternal truths and, of the contingent ones, those which are relational.

Besides the obvious question regarding the nature of this reduction, one of the objectives of this chapter is to clarify if indeed Leibniz endorses such a view and whether

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39 Russell, 14
40 Mugnai, 19
this view applies to relational constructions in language, to concepts used in propositions expressing these constructions or the metaphysical doctrine of individual substances cum accidents.

Russell famously held that Leibniz is primarily committed to drawing metaphysical conclusions from logical ones. Given the Leibnizian belief in a subject-predicate logic, Russell argues that the ultimate reducibility of all propositions to ones attributing a predicate to a subject commits Leibniz to the following view: Putatively relational facts about substances are reducible, on analysis, to subject-predicate forms. These do not express relational facts and thus expose the derivative nature of relational facts. However, if we consider the reducibility thesis to be implicit in the subject-predicate logic then we might miss that this conclusion may be dependent on considering “predicate” too narrowly, to exclude what can be called relational predicates. It would certainly complicate any reductionist move, if there were room in Leibniz’s system for relational (is taller than) as well as non-relational predicates (is tall). The former creating an obstacle for a simple explaining away of relations because the taxonomic difference proves at least this much, that the relational cannot be absorbed by the non-relational.

If we can argue that this crucial distinction is preserved in Leibniz then the reducibility thesis will becomes less virulently nominalistic, arguing that aRb is perhaps better expressed as Fx, where the predicate F may be a complex relational predicate of x. Does Leibniz allow for a distinct category of relational predicates? Notice that Leibniz himself does not use this terminology but a reduction of relations of relations to relational predicates would place them squarely in the linguistic domain. Consider the following quote from Leibniz:
God on the other hand seeing the individual notion... of Alexander, sees in it at the same time the foundation of and the reason for all the predicates which can truly be stated of him-as for example, that he is *the conqueror of Darius and Porus*.42

It is uncontroversial that “being the conqueror of Darius” is a predicate, but is it the case that it is an irreducible predicate. Although Leibniz scholars disagree on this issue it seems fair to say that relational predicates are not irreducible and can be explained away, for instance in this case as a single non-relational predicate of Alexander and a single non-relational predicate of Darius cautiously affirming thereby Leibniz’s reductionism about relations and relegating him to the nominalist camp. If the “reason” for all predicates is non-relationally, contained in the individual, even in the absence of other relata then it would be difficult to understand how these predicates would be substantially different from non-relational predicates, other than perhaps making a reference to something other than the subject.

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41 Cover and O’Leary-Hawthorne, 66
42 Loemker, 108
CHAPTER 4
LOCKE ON RELATIONS

In this chapter, I will discuss Locke’s treatment of relations and examine an argument formulated to question the accepted interpretation that Locke rejects the reality of relations. I also include a lengthy digression, suggested by some of Locke’s observations about the features of paradigmatic relations (which were also known to Aristotle and the Scholastics) that concerns correlatives i.e. relations and their converses, and which leads me to ask whether the concept of a metarelation or relations between relations is tenable. I choose to discuss Locke here, instead of say Hume because of Locke’s relatively sustained discussion of relations in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding including broader aspects of relations, other than the purely logical ones, including the moral relation.

Locke’s Theory of Relations

The mind for Locke does not always retain the passive character it has when receiving simple ideas from “sensation and reflection.” Using these simple ideas as a basis or foundation, the mind actively produces complex ideas. This “power” of the mind enables the bringing together of simple or complex ideas, this “act” of the mind is the rubric under which Locke discusses relations. This account of relations is developed from the claim that besides the simple and complex ideas that the mind has of things, there are other ideas that arise when things are “compared.” Comparison for Locke occurs when the mind considers an object not solely on its own terms, but goes “beyond” the object, as
it were, and considers “how it stands in conformity to any other.” Locke seems to suggest that relations are a product of this activity of the mind because when the mind places or considers things within a broader context of other things, or with respect to other things, it produces in the objects “denominations” which lead beyond the object to “something distinct from it.” Objects thus brought together by the mind are called “related.”

The example Locke gives is that of the mind considering Caius, in terms of nothing more complex than his being a human being. In this case, the mind possesses only the complex idea of the species. The case of Caius’ being white is for Locke similar to his being human, because even in this case it is only the idea of an individual who is white. For Locke, the idea of an individual possessing the primary property, of being white is not a relational fact. As an example of a relational idea, Locke suggests that when we think of Caius as an husband or as whiter than someone else, the mind is actually going beyond the particular to some other person or persons distinct from Caius and a relation is the result of this activity of the mind which has simultaneously considered two distinct things. Thus, the ideas of Caius and his wife, considered simultaneously are the “foundation” of the relation expressed by the name “husband.” (Although the name husband is relational or relative, the actual relation seems to be more accurately labeled “being the husband of.”)

1 Locke 200
2 The concept of denomination is not explicitly discussed by Locke, but means something along the lines of what Aristotle meant by “paronymy”. For instance, a man can be called Just because of the quality of justice which he possesses. For Locke and later for Leibniz denomination is the identification or characterization of an object by the use of a word or words derived from its properties. Hence denomination can be intrinsic or extrinsic, the former depends on some property which inheres in the object independently and the latter if the property is dependent on something distinct from the object and leads our thought beyond the object, For a discussion of this see Hide Ishiguro, Leibniz’s Philosophy of Logic and Language 77-78.
3 Ibid.
Relative terms of correlative pairs such as “father and son”, “lesser and bigger”, “cause and effect” are for Locke, cases where the relational fact is obvious to everyone. These correlative pairs seem to only exist together and can explain each other. It would be foolhardy to attempt to explain the concept of “son” independently of the concept of father just as “smaller” can make little sense independently of the notion of a bigger object in terms of which a certain object is smaller. Although the members of these correlative pairs “reciprocally intimate” each other, it is not exactly clear whether there is a common relational tie connecting these correlative pairs; a common relation that each member of the pair has toward the other which makes this correlation possible.

In each individual case, for instance in the case of the “father-son” pair, the relations “being the father of” and “being the son of” are a kind of dependence relation, (“being the son of” is of course a stronger form of dependence and “being the father of” a causally weaker form). In the case of the “husband” and “wife” pair, we do not see the kind of causal dependence, as in “father” and “son,” and yet each member of this pair is reciprocally connected with the other.

Locke also presents us with the caveat that relations or relative terms or names need not always occur in a correlative pair. He gives us the example of the name “concubine”4 which is a relative term, but is not part of an established correlative pair and does not announce its relative nature, as well as say, wife. In this case, Locke argues that the relative nature of this name is not apparent and yet it is a relational name. Perhaps the lack of correlative for “concubine” is a linguistic contingency rather than a metaphysical

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4 Ibid. 201
fact. Furthermore, for Locke even apparently absolute names like “old,” “imperfect” “great” are also concealing a tacit and less observable relation.\textsuperscript{5}

One of the central taxonomic divisions in Locke’s theory of names is between “absolute” and “relative” names; absolute names do not lead the mind to anything that is outside of what is contained in the particular thing. Relative names on the other hand lead the mind to ideas which are not contained in the thing to which “the word is applied.” Words like, (to use Locke’s examples) “black,” “thoughtful,” “thirsty” etc do not signify anything other than the person to whom they are applied. On Locke’s view, these properties are contained within the person being “denominated” and do not refer to anything distinct from this person. On the other hand, words like “father”, “brother” “king” “blackier” are relative terms signifying something other than the person to which they are applied, they imply as Locke puts it “something else separate and exterior to the existence of that thing.”\textsuperscript{6} Some apparently absolute names like “great” or “little” are actually relations, because, as Locke argues, they are assigned on the basis of our standards of size that we form by comparing the relative sizes of a number of objects of different “species.” This seems to hold also for names like weak or strong, which are also based on our ideas of degrees of power or strength. A thoroughly relational view, in which there are no “absolutes” and everything is relative would argue that even apparent absolutes like “thirsty” are relational or allude to what it is a thirst for, i.e. arise from a comparison with states of satisfaction, “hunger” would be a comparison with a state of being satisfied and so on. Even “white” is not an absolute but it is arrived at or defined only through a comparison with other colors. On this proto-Buddhist view, white would

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{6} ibid. 203
be defined as not blue, not red, not green, and so on but would be lacking any positive
definition.

Locke admits that any particular is capable of being compared with any number of
other distinct particulars and thus relations are immensely significant in considering
“men’s thoughts and words”. One can simultaneously be a student, a teacher, an Indian,
a philosopher, a son, a son-in-law, older, younger and so on. However, Locke’s position
seems to imply that this activity of comparison undertaken by the mind also gives a name
or denomination to the related particulars based on the property of thus being related.
Locke argues that this activity of the mind also permits us to name and identify relations.
The ontological status of relations seems unequivocally mind dependent in Locke, but it
can be plausibly argued that what the mind does in comparing ideas is discover rather
than produce a relation. If it were the case that a relation is, as Locke seems to present it,
an idea that is a product of comparison, then it would be nothing more than a way of
speaking about subjects in comparison.

**Lockean anti-realism about relations?**

In an attempt to bring some clarity to this issue, Locke writes, “this further may be
considered concerning relation that, though it be not contained in the real existence of
things, but something extraneous and superinduced…” 8. This is perhaps the most direct
admission of Locke’s conceptualist nominalism about relations. An anti-realist
interpretation of Locke is motivated by Locke’s claim that relation is “something
extraneous and superinduced”; hence, a relation does not have “real existence.”

7 ibid. 201
8 ibid. 202
Odegard (1968) formulates an argument that defends a realist interpretation of Locke's treatment of relations. Properties in Locke can be either primary i.e. possessed by things "in themselves" qua positive being i.e. independently of other things or conceptual acts. Secondary properties are possessed by things in virtue of how they stand in relation to other things. These secondary properties are products of the mind's activity of comparing the object with other objects. The contrast could be drawn between the modes of existence of the two kinds of properties. Locke would not deny that the objects have the secondary properties. Odegard argues that relations are "extraneous" and "superinduced" for Locke in the sense that like secondary properties they are added on, as it were, through mental activity. This is not a denial of the existence or reality of relations but only "a comment on the manner of their existence." Although Odegard is right in claiming that this is a plausible account, but does this provide us with a sufficient reason to read Locke as a realist about relations? Locke writes, "mixed modes and relations having no other reality than what they have in the minds of men, there is nothing more required to this kind of idea to make them real, but that they be so framed, that there is a possibility of existing conformable to them." Locke makes clear that "relational" ideas are "archetypes" (as opposed to ectypes, which are copies of what exists) and as archetypes they have an eminently mental existence. The reality of relation consists in the possibility of the conformity of things with the relational archetype. It is not clear what an "archetype" is or how it can be reconciled with Locke's empiricism and his rejection of universals.

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9 Odegard, 150
10 Locke, 234
Aaron suggests that it is possible to preserve the objectivity of relations without conceding to them any mind-independent existence.\textsuperscript{11} Relations are factual, in that they obtain between things although their emergence is conditional upon our looking at things in a certain way i.e. comparing them. Nevertheless, they are objective to the extent that they refer to an objective fact. X is bigger than Y when I compare the two objects and this relation of “being bigger than” occurs only in the context that I compare the two objects. Yet, X is \textit{in fact} bigger than Y, this is not a product of perceptual activity.

\textit{The Clarity of Relational Ideas}

The discussion of the reality of relations occurs in the context of explaining the apparent clarity of relational ideas, where Locke thinks for instance, the idea of a father or brother is “clearer and more distinct” than the idea of a man; paternity or fraternity being clearer as abstract ideas than humanity. Locke writes, “I can much easier conceive what a friend is than God; because the knowledge of one action, or one simple idea is oftentimes sufficient to give me the notion of a relation.”\textsuperscript{12}

Locke’s justification of this position is that to accurately understand the idea of a relational notion of a friend for instance, one needs only one simple idea whereas the notion of a substantial being involves knowing a range of “sundry ideas.” Locke gives the example of cassowaries, where one may not know anything about these birds, but when we have the idea that one was born from the egg laid by another, then the relation of “dam and chick” becomes apparent. The relation in this case is established and known “clearly and distinctly,” independent of any other ideas about the birds. Knowing the

\textsuperscript{11} Aaron, 181
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
cassowary (qua substance) is something complex and would possibly result only in obscure ideas, as compared to the relation of "dam and chick", which seems to be a relatively simple idea based on the "comparison" of the bird that lays the egg and the chick that is hatched from it.

Admittedly this "comparison" involves recognizing certain causal links between the laying of the egg by the bird and the hatching of the egg and the chick's emerging from the egg. In arguing for the clarity of the idea of the relation, Locke is also arguing for the difficulties inherent in knowing a substance, such as a bird, which is a combination of a number of simple ideas. It should be noted that though the "relation" between dam and chick seems to be a simple relation, Locke does not unpack the relational complex which seems to present itself in this case. As Mulligan points out the relation between the "dam" and "chick" implies the following relational predicates, "laid", "was hatched out of", "is a dam of", "is a chick of", "dams require chicks and are required by chicks".

Yet, Locke's assertions about the unreality of relations allow more than the anti-realist interpretation suggested above.

4.3 Correlation, meta-relations and relations between relations?

If we consider relations which occur in pairs like father and son, bigger and smaller (i.e. that relative to which it is bigger), taller and shorter, faster and slower, cause and effect and other paradigmatic relations, each relation, as Locke puts it "intimates" the other. This other, if we recall our discussion of Aristotle's *Categories* is called *antistrophon* or the correlative. In a pair of correlative relations, one relation always
holds only when its converse also holds. A converse relation is explained by Russell as follows:

"the relation of wife to husband is called the converse of the relation of husband to wife. Similarly, less is the converse of greater; later is the converse of earlier and so on. Generally, the converse of a given relation is that relation which holds between y and x whenever the given relation holds between x and y."\(^{15}\)

Kit Fine defines a converse relation as follows "one that holds between the objects \(a\) and \(b\) just in case the given relation holds between \(b\) and \(a\)."\(^{16}\)

Aristotle had emphasized these relations in the *Categories*, suggesting that they always occur in pairs (whether ultimately they are reducible to monadic properties or not). Boethius, in his commentary on the *Categories*, reads Aristotle as urging that among categorial beings relations are unique, in that they do not exist by themselves, but always with their converse. A relation as a "being toward" is knowable only insofar as its converse is knowable. The term "master" is meaningless, by itself, in the absence of a "slave" or "servant." Geach thinks that all relations occur in this manner. He writes:

A relation neither exists nor can be observed apart from its converse relation; what is more, the concept of a relation and of its converse is one and the same indivisible mental capacity, and we cannot exercise this capacity without actually thinking of both relations together; *relativa sunt simul natura et intellectu.*\(^{17}\)

The concept of a relation necessarily involves its converse not only in its actual occurrence but even in its very concept, this is one basic sense in which members of a correlative pair "intimate" each other. Yet, not all relations need have a converse, nor

\(^{15}\) Russell, 16
\(^{16}\) Fine, 3
\(^{17}\) Geach, 33
need all converse relations be different from the (original) relation, for example, in the case of identity if a converse is admitted, then it will be identical to the relation.

What is this "intimation" and how can we account for it? The occurrence of two relations in such a pair is not contingent but necessary and can be experienced as such. This is the same necessity that requires some $y$ to be smaller than $x$ for $x$ to be bigger than that $y$. No $x$ can be bigger in a self-enclosed manner without reference to anything else. In this case the object $y$'s being smaller than $x$ compared to which or relative to which $x$ is bigger, is a necessary correlate of $x$'s being bigger than $y$. This necessity should be uncontroversial at the structural level and that is why it is not sufficient to say that correlation is nothing more than a necessary relation obtaining between two or more relata.

When one relation obtains it holds only insofar as the correlate or converse also obtains. The omission of one member of a correlative pair obviates the possibility of the relation at the other pole holding. In the absence of children there can be no fathers, and in the instance of the absence of "being the child of" there can be no "being the father of." This pair of relations is co-originated and co-occurent. If one member will cease to obtain then its correlate will also cease to obtain. For example, "Plato is taller than Socrates," obtains because "Socrates is shorter than Plato" also obtains. If Socrates were to grow in height, his shortness in relation to Plato would not obtain and hence neither would Plato's being taller than Socrates.

This is the sense in which they "intimate" each other; each member of this pair of relations depends on the other, as a matter of fact, they necessarily depend on each other. This mutual dependence implies that we cannot explain away their co-occurrence as a case of constant conjunction. The correlative pair of relations is not a conjunction of facts.
or monadic properties; it is not an accurate account of the situation to say that “being the parent of” holds and “being the child of” holds in a given relational situation (although the relational complex can be represented as A&B, where A and B are both relations). If presented as a conjunction of facts about the world, we fail to see the mutual dependence that is at work here. Admittedly, a correlative pair is at one level an instance of the conjunction of relations, but it is experienced as something more than a mere conjunction. The word “mere” is used here to capture the absence of reciprocity, dependence, and necessity that are essential ingredients of a correlative pair. Take the following case “A chair is in this room” and “A table is in this room.” Now, I can safely represent this as a conjunction, but the occurrence of relations in these two statements is unlike the way of occurrence or way of being of a relation and its converse. For example, “a paperweight is on top of the letter and the letter is on the table”—this pair of relations even when conjoined in this complex fact does not have the same “degree of intimacy,” i.e. a similar mutual relation is as evident in the case of “the paperweight is on the letter and the letter is underneath the paperweight.” This “and” which occurs in the second statement, which links the relation and its converse, has not only the force of a “because” but actually has the force of “that is to say” or “in other words.” Both these phrases signify a degree of intimacy, which goes well beyond the merely conjunctive.

**Relations between Relations**

If it is true that some relations indeed naturally occur in this reciprocal dependence with their converses, then an attempt to understand relations as such is led to ask the question, what connects the relation and its converse? Is there a third relation lurking there? Does this open up a new can of philosophical worms, viz. second-order or meta-relations? The
occurrence of a correlative pair is not a linguistic contingency or an epiphenomenon of language. It is a fact about the world (and not solely about language) that paradigmatic relations do occur in pairs, each of which is dependent upon the other then the question of relations between relations becomes more than a mere logical possibility or speculation.

The completion of the relation R between A and B is the state of the objects such that R holds between them. Any relation to be complete requires that its converse also be completed. However, does this double completion occur in one state of affairs? If x is on top of y and y is beneath x then are we speaking of one state of affairs or are we speaking of two distinct states of affairs? If it is one state of affairs, can we speak of two relations holding in this state of affairs? The intuition against the acceptance of two relations is that it "becomes hard to see how there could be a multiplicity of relations connecting the very same things in essentially the very same way and differing only in the order in which they are connected."\(^{18}\) If this is accepted, then there is only a single underlying relation in the case of "x is on top of y", and the converse is simply another perspective on the same relation. To capture this fact the relation will have to be called the "vertical placement relation." This concept captures the relation in its entirety in which one object is on top and conversely the other is beneath it. In admitting that what seemed like two relations is just one relation, we will have to concede that the order of the terms is indifferent to the relation. In a paradigmatic aRb, the order of the terms does not add anything to the relation. Alternatively, one could go further and argue that a relation and its converse are identical. For example, "Joe is the husband of Jill" and "Jill is the wife of Joe" are merely two perspectives on the "being married" relation. Accepting this implies accepting that the order of the terms makes no difference to the relation. This can be

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\(^{18}\) Fine, 5
controversial in the case of social relations, where the relation between a master and
slave, is term-indifferent; it makes a big difference when you look at this relation from
the slave’s perspective. It should be noted that a relation and its converse function unlike
a non-paradigmatic relation like similarity. If one iron ball (x) is similar to another (y), y’s
similarity to x is not the converse of x’s similarity to y. This is because, in the case of
similarity, the relation does not change depending upon the pole from which we consider
the relational situation and this is what is implied in saying that converses are non-
different. I shall return to relations and their converses in a moment. First, let me suggest
another situation in which the question of relations between relations becomes relevant.
Relations are supposed to be the model exemplification of phenomena of betweenness and
yet they seemingly admit of a between to them and seem to work like things, where they,
in turn become relata. Does this violate the nature of relations as something active? How
can relations have “directedness to” or intend toward another relation? In addition, if they
do have these kinds of intention, do we have to venture further into the ontological jungle
and admit properties of relations? Take the case of the co-instantiation or co-
exemplification of relations in a given locus.

In the case of a human being numerous relations are co-instantiated and it could be
argued that the human being is nothing but this co-instantiation. In this co-instantiation
do we need some further relation which binds all the elements of the set of
coninstantiated relations? Can the “where” and “when” of this co-instantiation suffice to
connect all these relations? I will argue that the co-instantiation of relations is a
metarelation, in the sense that it is a relation between relations. Insofar as distinct
relations can occur simultaneously, relations between relations need to be admitted. Not
every simultaneous occurrence of a relation is like the controversial occurrence of a relation and its converse. In the case of a person walking, the relation of the contact between the foot and the ground (and the converse of the contact between the ground and the foot) is accompanied by the relation between the brain and the limbs, between the eyes and the visual field, between the body and its environment and so on. Can the apparently separate relations be dissolved under the relation “walking,” in which these relations are merely parts of the “walking” relation? The fact that these relations can occur in instances of non-walking should be sufficient reason to grant their distinction from “walking.” Then is it not the case that walking or for that matter any physical activity is in fact an example of the co-instantiation of relations. The separate occurrence of “contact of feet with ground” or relation between brain and limbs is not walking, only the relating or binding, as it were, of these relations gives us “walking”.

The first step taken by the garden variety anti-realist about relations or the ontological anorexic who sees in meta-relations another unnecessary category grafted on the already suspect category of relations (both of which run the risk of being granted the ens minimum), will be to explain away these supposed relations between relations or second order relations. In the context of a correlative pair they will argue that it is misleading to suppose that there are actually two distinct relations in a correlative pair. “Being the father of” and “being the child of” are not two separate relations but are actually, as stated before, just two perspectives or two vantage points on the “parent-child” relational complex. Further, we can argue that two relations seem to obtain because there are two or more relata present, this leads to the illusion that “being the child of” as a relation can be separated from “being the parent of.” The two are merely aspects of the same relation,
which then is more complex, but seems to avoid the difficulty of explaining how relations
themselves can be related, and obviates the need to posit any meta-relations.

This explanation faces the difficulty of accounting for how relations which are simples
can admit of parts. Further, how does one explain the two numerically distinct correlates
viz. the relation and its converse? If the relation is a unit "composed" of the two
correlates then they will have to be admitted as something other than parts or atomic
components of the relation. The case cannot be made against the distinctness of the
second relation in a correlative pair because they always occur together. In admitting that
they occur together we are implicitly admitting their distinction when we say that the two
of them occur together. This "two" implies that they are distinct and a rejection of this
rejection would have to argue that this is only an apparent distinction. This is not a
knockdown argument, because it could be a mistake to see these as two distinct relations
instead of seeing the relational complex for what it is. There are no two occurrences, in
the case of x is on top of y, (viz. x is on top of y and y is beneath x) there is only a single
case of vertical placement.

The second alternative suggested above is that it is simply a matter of perspective. The
relational situation of the parent-child relation or the bigger than-smaller than relation is a
relational complex, which can understood from either pole of the relation. Failure to see
the relational complex arises because we are misled by the perspective from which we
see the relation. Since there are two relata, there are two immediate perspectives to view
the relational complex. The problem of the distinctness of converses and the attempt to
explain them through a metarelation of being the converse rests on a mistake, where on
the basis of two relata, two relations are inferred.
Morals and Relations

Locke wonders why even though animals and humans share “natural relations” like being the begetter and the begotten, we do not emphasize these relations in animals whereas in the case of human beings natural relations are of utmost importance. The answer of course lies in the fact that these relations entail obligations and duties that are arguably not present in the case of animals. Although Locke thinks that natural relations entail obligations, morality, or the moral relation is not the relation that governs the interaction between agents. The moral relation, Locke thinks, governs the relation between voluntary actions and the “rule” by which they are governed. In a sort of perverse Kantianism \textit{avant la lettre} Locke makes the conformity with a “law” the focus of the moral relation. Indirectly this is also a relation to the “law-maker” who is the source of the law.

The assumption that Locke makes is that actions are indeed guided by rules but the relational aspect of the moral relation is not moral at all, insofar as the moral relation arises out of a comparison of actions with the rule which guides it. Locke is indifferent as to whether this rule is moral or not. If the rule is faulty, the judgment of assessing the action morally may be flawed but one can still determine whether or not the action was in conformity with the rule. Moral ideas are relative for Locke because they are always evaluated in terms of their conformity with a rule. Actions are morally significant only to the extent that they are in conformity with or in disagreement with a rule. Locke’s notion of the moral relation is a relation in that it involves the definitional feature of relation i.e. comparison, but it would be difficult to explain what is specifically moral about it. We
can contrast this with the moral relation in Buber or Levinas, between the self and the other, which for Buber is constitutive of personhood.
CHAPTER 5
NYAYA REALISM ABOUT RELATIONS AND DHARMAKIRTI’S BUDDHIST CRITIQUE

Sambandha: Fragments from the Indian lexicon

In this chapter, I will consider the views of the Buddhist philosopher Dharmakirti, who in keeping with Buddhist ontological minimalism rejects the reality of relations in his short work Sambandhapariksa. Dharmakirti’s project cannot be explicated without discussing the theories of relations espoused by those philosophers against whom he raised his dialectical banner. It will therefore be necessary to include a sketch of the relation affirming metaphysics of the Nyaya-Vaisesika, and their commitments to a variety of specific relations cementing the constituents of the world as the commonsense or naive realist would have it. The Buddhist “revisionary” metaphysics, in this instance as well as many others have positions that are diametrically opposed to those of their rivals, the Nyaya “descriptive” metaphysics. Hence, Dharmakirti’s strategy is to systematically reject the Nyaya position on relations to establish his own conceptualist nominalism. Dharmakirti’s critique of Nyaya relation-talk addresses the general assumptions about relations as such implicit in Nyaya positions and the philosophical difficulties which arise as a result of the acceptance of particular kinds of relations like contact (samyoga), inherence (samavaya), nondifference (tadatmya), the causal relation or the self-linking (svarrupa) relation which are paradigm relations in Nyaya. Besides these relations the Nyaya-Vaisesika system also countenances the part whole (avayava- avayavi) relation which has been a source of debate in Indian philosophy. The Kashmir
Saiva philosophers added absence (*abhava*) and difference (*bheda*) to the list of relations. For the Advaita Vedantin the non-difference (*tadatmya*) relation becomes especially important. It is the rubric under which the relation of the individual soul (*jiva*) to Brahman is discussed and explained.

Tripathi understands relation as becoming a central issue in Indian philosophy, because of the attempt to explain the relation between subject and object. Subject and object are "not juxtaposed with an air of indifference toward each other." Is the subject/object relation as real as the relata? The options articulated in Indian Philosophy are either the relata are real and the relation is not or both the relata and the relation are real. One could also argue that the relata and the relation are all equally unreal. Tripathi suggests that "all the three-the relation as well as the relata are equally real is the fundamental metaphysical doctrine of all the realist systems of India." As Tripathi rightly indicates the pluralist systems like Nyaya, Mimansa and realist schools of Vedanta like Visistadvaita etc. cannot sustain their pluralism without the reality of relations. In fact, Nyaya makes substance, qualities, actions and universals, dependent, in a manner of speaking on the inherence relation. Given this importance of the inherence relation, Tripathi points out that the anti-realist critics of Nyaya like the Advaitins and the Buddhists criticize the concept of relation. One of the other arguments is the relation regress argument, whose familiar refrain is that if the relation connects the relata, what connects the relation to each of the relata? Does this not imply the need for another relation that will connect the relation to the relata?

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1 Tripathi, 40
2 Ibid.
3 The Madhva school is the exception which is pluralistic without accepting any relations except “bheda” or difference.
4 Ibid.
Sankhya-Yoga also rejects the reality of relations, whose two basic constituents purusa and prakriti are so different that a real relation between them is not possible. This belief may be a consequence of the assumption that relation is only conjunctive, and not difference making or separating. In the Buddhist and Advaita perspective relation cannot be real because if it were real, as Tripathi writes, “it would also become a term. So the relation must have a status different from the relata; it must be false.” In the Buddhist system, the constituents of reality are not the kind of enduring entities that can enter into enduring, static relations. If reality is composed of momentary flashes of energy, then the only acceptable relation will be a form of causality which links one such flash with another. The Buddhists then have to accept the concept of dependent co-origination (pratityasamutpada).

In Indian philosophy, the concept of relation (sambandha) is distinguished from other concepts like attribute, property, adjective and predicate. An attribute (guna is explained as an essential property of substance as opposed to a dharma which is a non-essential property. Attributes are more essential to substances than mere properties or dharmas. The Nyaya system also speaks of relational properties (upadhi) or adventitious complex properties like “potness” (sakhandopadhi) and “ethernes” or akasatva which is called an unanalysable relational property (akhandopadhi). Adjectives are like “red” in the “rose is red” whereas the relation is “being red” and should not be confused with the adjective. An adjective is a word, a linguistic expression whereas relations are in the world.

Relation is not a passive concept in Nyaya because relations are instrumental in the production of knowledge. Unlike the tables of categories of Aristotle and Kant, which

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5 Tripathi, 41
6 I have formulated these distinctions based on Dravid (1978)
include relation, *sambandha* is not a category in Nyaya; inherence (*samavaya*) is a category and because of its status as a category (*padartha*)\(^7\) merits a lengthier discussion.

The meaning of category is distinct in Kant and Aristotle. For the former categories are, to put it simply, the basic subjective forms of thought. For Aristotle, a category is a basic way of being that is brought to light by the analysis of speech. For the Nyaya-Vaisesika philosophers too a category (*padartha*) is similar to the Aristotelian notion. As Annambhatta defines it in his *Dipika*, "Category is a thing corresponding to a name... the general definition of categories is an object named or denoted by the corresponding word."\(^8\) Contact (*samyoga*), which is classified as a quality (*guna*), is a non-eternal relation, because it is a contingent conjunction of two (separable) things having an independent existence. These things are said to exist independently by virtue of the fact that each one has different constituents from the other. Contact can be understood as a quality that inheres in two substances simultaneously and like other qualities is perceptible. In the case of a person bearing a staff, the person, the staff, and the contact between them gives rise to the perceptual awareness, "staff-bearer, where the person is the qualificandum, the staff is the qualifier and contact the relation between them."\(^9\)

The *samyoga* relation brings two or more substances together in a manner that makes them "so contiguous that there seems to be no intervening space between them."\(^{10}\) As Uddyotkara reports, "the coming closer of substances is at some point obstructed and this obstruction (*pratighata*) is called contact. It is not something separate from the relata."\(^{11}\) The Buddhist goes on to claim that the Nyaya theory that objective contact is needed to

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\(^7\) Tarka-Samgraha 1.2

\(^8\) Annambhatta, 28

\(^9\) Phillips, 235

\(^10\) Gupta, 4

\(^11\) Uddyotkara, 481
produce objective effects has to be rejected because an effect can be produced at a
distance as in the case of a sound or a magnet.¹² The Nyaya doctrine that contact resides
in a substance by means of the relation of inherence makes the acceptance of contact
contingent upon the acceptance of inherence.

Samavaya (Inherence)

In early Vaisesika thinking, the world is composed of entities that arise from the
combinations of the three primary entities substrata (dharmin), properties (dharma), and
relations (sambandha). Kanada, the founder of the Vaisesika system also includes the
relation inherence as a category (padartha). Inherence is further explained as generating
the cognition that something is “here” in this particular locus. As Prasastapada develops
the Vaisesika view, inherence is understood as the relation “between two inseparable
(ayutasiddha) things” and is the relation between the locus and that which is located on
it.¹³ There seems to be a problem in admitting that two things are inseparable and yet
admitting a relation between them. In order to be related things have to be existent
separately; in the case of inseparables that seem to be numerically one, the relata cannot
be specified; this is an objection that the Nyaya philosophers will have to respond to.

In Prasastapada’s discussion of inherence, he also sidesteps the regress problem that
dogs relation-talk. In order to avoid being overwhelmed by the question of how inherence
is related to that which it connects, he adumbrates the view that inherence is related to the
relata by the relation of identity (tadatmya). It cannot be related by contact because only
substances can be in contact nor can it inhere in the relata by a further inherence, since
like Being, there is only one inherence. Prasastapada in order to strengthen this doctrine

¹² Gupta, 8
¹³ Potter (ed.) 51
of identity that enables him to avoid the regress further argues that inherence is “self-occurent” (svatamavritti) and not caused by something else.

According to Bhattacharya, Prasastapada’s definition consists of three commitments:

1) Inherence obtains between inseparables.

2) Inherence obtains between a substratum and that which is supported by and resident in it.

3) Inherence is the cause of the cognition “It is here.”

The concept of ayutasiddha or inseparability becomes vital to the Nyaya theory of samavaya. The explanation of this concept is somewhat circular in the Nyaya texts, where it is considered as never being separated. However, the substratum and that which it supports is also vital for samavaya. The examples given for samavaya include the inherence of the color in a cloth, inherence of the threads in cloth or motion in a ball.

Inherence is eternal, one and perceivable. If inherence were non-eternal it would be an effect of something else and we would have to give a causal account for inherence. This causal story would be difficult in the case of a concept that plays a leading role in other causal stories. The consequence of granting this status to inherence would be that a relation could then exist even when there is no relatum. According to Matilal, by “eternal” (nitya) the Nyaya philosophers mean simply this that the inherence between a cloth and its threads is such that although the threads can exist independently of the cloth, the cloth itself can never exist independently of the threads. Consequently, after the

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14 Bhattacharya, 18
15 Bhattacharya, 19
16 The Navya Nyaya philosopher Raghunatha considered inherence to be many and non-eternal. Prasatapada considers inherence to be inferred rather than perceived. Samkara Misra points out that the canonical treatment of inherence as one, was replaced by the theory that there were as many inferences as there were instances of inherence. Vide. Potter and Bhattacharya (ed.) 46
17 Matialal, 39
destruction of the relata the inherence is also destroyed. Even in the case where a piece of cloth is torn in such a way that only one relatum i.e. individual threads remain, the inherence seems to have been destroyed. Moreover as Prabhakara objects we notice that a pot goes from the color of raw earth to red or to another color when it is baked, is it not the case that the one inherence is destroyed (since each color itself is an unchanging entity), and is replaced by another?18 The eternity of inherence, as well as the claim that there is only one inherence becomes a focal point of Santaraksita’s Buddhist attack on relations. The Buddhist emphasizes that if there is only one inherence would it not be the case that “when we see a pot, we should’nt say there is a cloth.”19 If inherence were single and pervasive, the Buddhist thinks that we would be unable to distinguish between the inherence that is relevant to a pot from the inherence that is relevant to a cloth. The Naiyayika of course believes that inherence obtains only when the items to be related (by inherence) occur as locus and located, a precondition for inherence that prevents the seeing of a cloth in a pot. In conclusion, the Nyaya thinkers seem to have included the inherence relation as a category because it is not a substance since it does not have any qualities and it is not a quality but allows qualities to be in substances.

**The Buddhist Critique**

The Buddhist position has been compared to Kant and Bradley by Stcherbatsky20; the linchpin of this anti-realism being the stock question of anti-realists viz. if relations are “facts” which connect other “facts” or, to use Bradley’s phrase, “facts which exist between facts” what connects them to the “facts” or things they seemingly connect?

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18 Phillips, 234
19 Potter, 124
20 Stcherbatsky, 246
Unable to overcome this difficulty the Buddhists, like Bradley reject the reality of relations. The Buddhist answer is to deny that relations have anything more than a contingent, transactional reality. Dharmakirti's use of the relation regress argument also known as the relation paradox or the Bradley problem although lucid is not the best argument advanced to establish the illusoriness of relations. It is stated as follows:

Since of two relata there is a connection through one, this one is a relation- well then if that is proposed, what is the relation of the two, the relation and the relata? There is an infinite regress and therefore the idea of a relation does not hold. 21

As Phillips points out the regress is based on the treatment of relation as a term 22. Having said this we have no wiggle room to argue for any exemptions for relations, they are processed and packed as terms. Therefore, the relation (qua term) needs something to connect it to the relata, that something will need a further tie and so on ad infinitum. There is something counter-intuitive about an infinite relational series (unlike an infinite causal series), which sends up logical red flags. I contend that the solution to the regress problem lies in either a relational exceptionalism, the introduction of a new kind of entity that brings about a non-relational tie or the Nyaya doctrine of self-linkage that I will discuss in the conclusion of this chapter, as a response to Dharmakirti's critique.

The radical realism of the Nyaya philosophy is clearly expressed by Uddyotkara, who writes, "the perception of the connection of an object with its mark is the first act of

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21 Dharmakirti Sambandha-Pariksa quoted in Phillips, 23
22 Phillips, 23
sense-perception from which inference proceeds." Thus, the Nyaya belief that besides the objects even the relations between them are perceived.

The Buddhist response compares relations when considered as “objective realities” to “unfair dealers” who purchase goods without paying for them, they masquerade as perceptible when they are in fact lacking any form “which they could deliver to consciousness as a price” for the “acquisition” of perceivability. If relations were perceptible i.e. a “separate unity, they would have to possess a form which is represented in consciousness. However, relation lacks a form that can be represented in consciousness and hence cannot be objectively real. The Buddhist logicians by rejecting relations save their view of reality as composed of unrelated point-particulars (svalaksana). The Buddhist logicians are still faced with accounting for inference and inferential knowledge, which is unmistakably based on relations. These relations, in order to generate valid inferential knowledge have to reflect reality.

Inference proceeds from the inferential mark, which discloses a relation on which the inference is built. As the Vaisesika Sutra points out, the inferential mark indicates the presence of relations like “effect of,” “cause of”, “conjoined with”, “opposed to”, “inhering in”. Even the Mimansa philosophers like Sabara consider inference to be of two kinds “that in which the relation is directly experienced (pratyaksatodrstasambandha) and that in which it is experienced from likeness (samanyatodrstasambandha).” Relation is the hinge that holds the inferential process together, because inference cannot proceed without the perception of relations. Furthermore, the

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23 quoted in Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 ayedam karyam karana samyoj virodhi samyoj cet laingikam
26 VS IX, ii, 1
27 Quoted in Randle, 149
structure of reality does not disclose relations as fortuitous co-occurrences but as a necessary component of what there is, just as there is a necessary relation between the premises of an inference and the conclusion which follows from it. As Stcherbatsky interprets the Buddhist logicians, they can be committed to a similar claim without conceding the reality of relations, because the entire relational matrix in which reality unfolds becomes for them a subjective construct. Although relations lack being, they still perform the function of connecting things and make possible rational discourse about this subjectively constructed world of interrelated particulars.

The Nyaya realist, unlike the idealist Advaitin, answers affirmatively to the question whether relations have any ontological status. Basing their conclusion on the role played by relations in the generation of cognition, the Nyaya philosophers argue that relation is the third element present in any cognition that involves a qualifier-qualificand structure. For example, the cognition “The boy with the dog” is composed of the qualifier i.e. the boy, the qualificand i.e. the dog and the preposition “with”, which is the relation that connects the boy and the dog. The Nyaya epistemology also has a ground floor assumption that if we have knowledge of an object it is because this object has the ontological density of an existent entity. It is the real entity, which (under the right circumstances) causes its own cognition. This is why there can be no knowledge of a hare’s horn or sky-flower and we cannot posit such entities. Yet, we do have the cognition of a relation between the boy and the dog, or between a father and son, or between the red color and the cloth in which it inheres. The Naiyayikas take this as evidence for the ontological reality of relations.
For Dharmakirti, relations between things can either be of "dependency" (paratantrya) or of "amalgamation of the forms of things" (rupaslesa). In other words, either all relations function as obtaining between relata, either or both of which depend on the other, or the relation brings about an amalgamation of the forms of the relata. Having set this as a premise for his argument Dharmakirti attempt to show how both these kinds of relation cannot obtain. Dharmakirti argues that if relata are produced independently of each other then they cannot be said to exhibit dependence. Their separate production indicates that there is no dependency between them. If on the other hand we were to say that dependence holds between phenomena, when they are not yet produced, then that would be absurd, because we have established a relation in the absence of the relata. Moreover, a non-existent entity cannot bear properties like apeksadharma (property of expecting or requiring something), a pre-condition for the dependence relation. If an established entity (sat-padartha) is to be a truly existent discrete entity, it cannot be dependent on something else. In the momentarist Buddhist view, having this expectancy means enduring beyond a “moment” and this is not accepted by Dharmakirti.

To reject relation as an amalgamation of form, Dharmakirti introduces his definition of relation that states that a relation always holds between at least two distinct things. If there is an instance of the amalgamation of forms, then we have only one object and there can be no relation since definitionally it can hold only between two distinct relata. Dharmakirti’s position seems to be informed by the intuition that if you have a genuine

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28 Dharmakirti, 3
29 Dharmakirti, 10
instance of the merging of forms then what we are left with is one identity which following Dharmakirti’s definition is not a relation.

As expected, the relation regress argument is also deployed by Dharmakirti, like all anti-realists against relations. Firstly, for Dharmakirti if the relation is identical with the relata, then he has made his case that there is no relation. However, if the opponent insists that relation is distinct and different from the relata then Dharmakirti asks how this distinct item is related to the relata. If another relation is required to connect the relation with the relata and so on, we have an infinite regress. The regress argument is also used by Sriharsa to reject the reality of relations. Sriharsa discusses the regress as an “attribution dilemma.” 30 If the property red is distinct from a pot and if it is connected to the pot by the relation of inherence, there has to be a relation between this inherence and each of the relata. Gangesa and other Navya-Nyaya thinkers reject this regress by arguing that the relation was “self-linking” (svarupa) and does not need something more to connect it to the relata. 31 Yet, Gangesa does not defend the self-linking relation as an “independent real”; thus in the inventory of the world there is no “self-linking’ relation only things that are “self-linked.” 32

Dharmakirti’s theory is that although positive entities are unmixed or unrelated, the imagination (vasana) relates or mixes them. This is why following this act of the imagination, we use relational phrases or causal ascriptions in language. Relational phrases are not derived from the world but from the activity of the imagination. It is only the imagination that establishes a relation between an action and the agent, because on

30 Phillips, 221
31 Dharmakirti, 11.
32 Phillips, 235
the Buddhist view, there is no enduring agent to relate (enduringly) with the action.\textsuperscript{33} Relation for Dharmakirti is ultimately in the mind and hence his inclusion in the conceptualist, nominalist camp.

Having defined the relation as obtaining between two existing things, causality also cannot be a viable relation because cause and effect do not co-exist. Relation as existing in two objects is dependent on the simultaneous existence of the two objects i.e. the relata. If one relatum (i.e. effect) is produced through the action of the other relatum (i.e. cause), we do not have simultaneously existing objects and the relation cannot hold. If two objects exist simultaneously, one of them cannot be caused by the other. Insofar as causality is a form of dependence, which as mentioned earlier is premised on apeksadharma in one entity, and since that does not obtain in the case of a non-existent entity, causality as a relation does not exist.

If two things are truly different, Dharmakirti thinks that they cannot be related and if they are non-different then the question of causal interaction does not arise.\textsuperscript{34} Dharmakirti fails to see that there is no pure non-relational difference. If something is different, it is so, only as differentiated from something else i.e. as related to something else. Difference itself is a relation. In the concluding verse, of the Sambandhapariksa Dharmakirti points out that in the case of contact which is a product of the proximity of two things, the existence of the causal relation is assumed which he has already rejected and since there is no causal interaction, no contact can then be produced.

The Buddhist position on relations has to reconcile nominalising relations with the acceptance of dependent co-origination, which makes everything relational. If relations

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. 12-13
\textsuperscript{34} Dharmakirti, 39
are the work of imagination then even co-origination will have to be a feature of how we see the world rather than a description of the "suchness" of the world.
CHAPTER 6
THE SEMANTIC RELATION

Can we do without the denotation relation?

Language and the world although interwoven are distinct realities. This distinction is hard to keep in focus because we somehow manage to manufacture a linguistic sign for everything that is there in the world and even for things that are not there. Thus, language seems to be more capacious than the real world. Yet, obviously the world includes all languages as its proper part- there being much else besides words and sentences in the world. Such complications notwithstanding, the distinction seems quite unchallengeable because that is why one cannot take “dog” for a walk, nor drink “water.” What is it about these words that connect them to dog and water respectively? Is there a relation that connects a word (sabda) with what it denotes (artha)? Russell suggests that when we say that the name “Napoleon” means a certain individual and in using the name to mean that individual we are asserting a relation between the word “Napoleon” and the person it designates. What exactly is the relation that we are asserting? Following Russell’s realism there is a relation between the word and the meant object which needs to be known and presupposed if we are to denote objects, in other words, if our words are to have meaning.

In this chapter, I have two goals, first to consider whether the concept of a denotative relation is tenable, and secondly to examine the discussion of the denotative i.e. semantic relation in Indian philosophy with an emphasis on the work of the grammarian

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1 Punyaraja points out 18 different kinds of artha but here I am confining myself to the external object (pātimātra) For a detailed discussion of this topic vide. Deshpande (1992)
2 Russell, AM, 189
Bhartrhari. Realists about the denotative relation can argue that it is this relation itself which is the meaning of the word, since meaning cannot be either the word or the object (the terms of this relation). Understanding a word means understanding this relation, similarly knowing the meaning of the word is knowing this relation. A realist argument about the denotative relation is presented by R C Pandeya:

The relation between “cow” and the object is equal to $x$ and that between “gau” and the object is equal to $x$ and the $x$ in the former case is identical to the $x$ in the latter case. This consciousness of identity presupposes something that is common to both.³

This “something” is the relation between these words and the denoted object, which on this reading is distinct from both the relata. Anti-realism about the denotation relation will have to provide a different account of that which is common to both these words.

An anti-realist about relations would deny that there is a relation between word and meant entity that is separable from the relata. The problem of the existence of a denotation relation is not resolved by pointing out that the word “table” may not be related to an individual, but to a class of objects with similar features or to a universal common feature. Even in the case of verbs such as “to eat”, “to walk”, “to sleep”, the words are associated with or are labels for a set of similar occurrences but this does not clarify what is meant by the denotation relation. It is not an issue concerning what is denoted by a word but about how denotation actually happens. Is a relation between the word and the object a pre-requisite for meaning? To reject the denotation relation one line of argument will make “denoting the meant entity” a property of the word; the word will then serve as a pointer that indicates the meant entity. “Gau” in Sanskrit and “cow” in English share the denotative property of denoting cows, this is the common $x$ which Pandeya was referring to in the quote on the preceding page.

³ Pandeya, 39
To phrase it in a Wittgensteinian idiom, there is nothing over and above the *use* of “table” as handed down by convention that is necessary for this word to be meaningful. There is no connection other than this property of indicating table that the word “table” has to actual tables. This anti-realist strategy has denied any separable relation between word and world and has absorbed the relation into one of the relata viz. the word. This notion of a denotative property is especially useful in the case of words that denotes non-existent objects like “unicorn” or “sky-flower.” In order for there to be a relation between the word and the meant entity this meant entity has to exist, whereas this is not a requirement for a denotative property. (However, if we argue that the relation can be preserved even when individual meant entities are destroyed then what is denoted has to be the universal (*jati*) the form (*akriti*) or the class rather than individuals. This implies not only accepting that the word is non-destructible as much as the universal or class is non-destructible but also that the relation between word and meant entity is eternal.) “Golden Mountain” continues in the absence of all golden mountains to serve as a relatum for this putative denotation relation. Similarly, “smallpox” can denote smallpox even when the disease is eradicated. If there were a relation between the word and the now eradicated disease, then it would be a relation between an existent relatum at one pole and a historical relatum at the other. It would be difficult to account for a relation that holds between a word in the present and an object in the past or a historical object like Napoleon. The meaning of “Napoleon” is apparent from the denotative property of picking out the historical individual Napoleon. In this case, a relation between “Napoleon” and the object becomes redundant and is easily shaved off by Ockham’s razor.
The Nyaya Sutras seem to suggest that the denoted object is always an individual (vyakti) which is the locus of qualities. Vatsyayana in the Bhasya, says, “an individual as meant by the term vyakti has a perceptible nature” and as a consequence all substances (dravya) are not individuals. Madhav Deshpande suggests that if substances like akasa, which is non-perceptible, cannot be included in the category individual, then does this imply that they cannot be referred to. If Nyaya wants to preserve a relation between word and meaning (other than convention) then this relation will have to obtain between a word and non-individual substances. Deshpande believes that this is the reason behind Uddyotakara’s reinterpretation of the relevant verse from the Nyaya Sutras. Uddyotkara expands the concept of vyakti to include qualities, differentiating properties (visesa), actions and substance (dravya) which is the substratum for these attributes. Vyakti then includes ontologically diverse items (except for jati and akriti). Deshpande suggests that Uddyotakara interprets vyakti in a purely linguistic context and this is what “allows him to include under vyakti entities that are ontologically diverse.” In order to preserve the denotation relation (which as we shall see is not eternal in Nyaya,) Uddyotakara creates a category of “denotables” by expanding the concept of vyakti, which overcomes some of the obstacles which are imposed by early Nyaya metaphysics.

Russell thinks that the denotation or meaning relation is “of the nature of a causal law, governing our use of the word and our actions when we hear it used.” This causal ability of a word to denote can explain what it means to understand a word, so the causal link is between the word and our understanding of it. The denotation of “table” governs the use of this word. However, this causal link need not obtain between the word and the

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4 Deshpande, 29
5 Deshpande, 30
6 Russell,
object but between awareness of what I call the denotative property or what the Indian grammarians call "signification function" and a verbal cognition. Knowing the signification function (vritti-jnana) or denotative property causes a verbal cognition.

In order to strengthen the skepticism about the denotation relation it needs to be pointed out that the association between a word and meaning i.e. the denotative property of the word is not a relation like "being on top of", "being to the left of" etc. We can argue that the association of "dog" with the animal dog is contingent upon the language we speak and not a fact about the world, whereas if x on top of y it is a fact about the world independently of linguistic use and relational judgments. "Dog" denotes dog only because we are speaking English and because this is the conventional usage or association handed down to us; there is nothing about "table" which links it to actual tables or vice versa other than its property of denoting the object table. (Of course there is the esoteric kabbalistic doctrine that everything has its true name, given to it by Adam in his role as "nomothete" (name-giver or institutor of convention which although concealed is a natural relation between object and name.) There is nothing about the object table, which links it to the word "table" other than the fact of being denoted by it. It is not as if there is a bridge which connects words and the world, other than understanding. The word "ghata" has the property of denoting pots. This is not a type of potency that is natural or innate to the word, but is in fact endowed, molded and changed by use. The Indian grammarians from Kaiyata to Nagesa seem to think that meaning of a word is only a projection of the intellect (buddhi-pratibhasa); the cognition which is produced upon hearing a word is of a certain mental configuration. The object of the verbal cognition is not a physical entity but on the contrary something conceptual. If this

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7 Vide Deshpande (1992) for a discussion of this causal link.
is the case, the argument for a relation between word and world is weakened because the relation which seems relevant is between the word and the mental or notional existence (aupacariki-satta) of the object, bypassing any need for bonds to the worldly objects. The grammarians of course use this concept to account for the meaningfulness of terms with empty reference like “son of a barren woman.” Although there is no son of a barren woman, the fact that this word does not pick out an item in the external world does not deprive it of its meaning.

If there were a relation between word and meant-entity it will then have to be non-paradigmatic, quite simply because “chair” makes no difference in the realm of furniture. Calling a grain of rice “rice grain” or “tandulam” or something else makes no difference to the rice grain. Denotation occurs in language or in thought, which is not in the world in the same sense that “being to the west of California,” or “X being larger than Y” is in the world. Honolulu was to the west of California even prior to the spread of language and linguistic expression of this fact. Can we not argue that this is just an instance of one relation being older and more enduring than others? The point in short is this: the earth’s “being larger than” the moon obtains independently of language whereas the denotation of chair by “chair” is only contingently and conditionally a putative relation obtaining only within language use. This putative relation would then be analogous to the relation between my thinking of Keith Campbell and the person Keith Campbell, where my noetic act brings about no change in the object.
The early grammarians like Vyadi believed that the word-world denotative relation was eternal \( (nitya) \) and was \( siddha \) "given to us not created." Further, if the relation is eternal, then the word cannot denote the particular, which is non-eternal; it must then denote the universal. This generates problems that are outside the scope of this inquiry into relations.

The defense of the permanence of the denotative relation, as offered in Patanjali, is based on the linguistic behavior of people. The use of words to denote objects is regular and it is not the case that we routinely require neologisms. If we need a non-eternal object like a pot, we can have one made but this situation never arises with words; it is very rare for us to approach a grammarian and ask her to create a word for us. Patanjali's point is that word-meaning relations are given, in the sense that they are not produced by grammar and hence have permanence from a human standpoint.

The orthodox Mimansa school of Vedic hermeneutics also considers the relation between the word and the meant entity to be eternal. This position enabled them to defend the view that the Vedas themselves, a linguistic phenomenon, were authorless and eternal. If the meaningfulness of a word had a history then the Vedas could not be eternal, since the words used in composing them only became meaningful at a definite point of time. As Kunjunni Raja writes, "according to the Mimansakas the significative power is inherent in the words themselves." They thought that the origin of the word–meaning relation cannot be traced back historically to a person or persons. This \( pravaha-nityata \) (eternal flow) of the relation denied the possibility of any name giving activity on the part of early humans. In defending this position, the Mimanasaka also has to argue that the

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8 Matilal, 27
9 Raja, 20
meaning of the word is not the individual but the form (*akriti*), that is the meaning of denotative words like “pot” or “table.”

Since pots and tables are destructible, to preserve the notion of an eternal relation the Mimansakas have to make the meaning of the word something that is non-destructible i.e. the form. The Mimansaka by granting permanence to the word, (words have to be permanent to support this eternal relation) has also granted permanence to the phonemes (*varnas*) that make up the word. This theory of the permanence of the word is contradicted by the Vaisesikas who believe that the word is impermanent and who assuming this, deny any relation between word and meant-entity.

The Naiyayikas, on the other hand, believe that the Mimansa view is misguided because “the cognition of the denotation of a word is based upon convention.” This denies any “natural” relation (*svabhavika sambandha*) between the words and the denoted objects other than that which is “conventional.” If there were a natural relation, the Naiyayikas think that on the utterance of the word “agni,” I would feel the sensation of fire on my tongue. (I am equating here natural relation with eternal (*nitya*) because if the natural relation is *svabhavika*, i.e. derived from the *svabhava* of the word then there can be no instance of the word’s occurrence and the non-appearance of the relation.) If the word is eternal, as the Mimansakas suggest, then its *svabhava* is eternal and consequently so is the relation.

Vatsyayana understands “conventional” (*samaya*) as arising from an “ordinance restricting the denotation of words by injunctions.” On the Nyaya view, it is the knowledge of this injunction linking a word and the object it denotes which gives rise to

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10 NS 2.1.55
11 Jha, 843
the cognition. For example, when I hear the word “dog,” it gives rise to the cognition of dog because I know this conventional link between word and denoted object. The dialectical point that the Naiyayika wants to score is that even if you accept an “eternal” relation between word and object like the Mimansakas, you have to concede that the cognition of the denoted object arises only when you know that the word denotes this object. This is a convention and even though (for a Mimansaka) there is an eternal relation between the word and the world, we need to know the conventional association in order to know the word. Nyaya need not be concerned with answering an opponent as to how word meanings are relatively stable in the absence of a “natural” relation because convention allows for this stability while also allowing for the changes which word meanings evidently undergo over a period of time.

This convention is derived from an ordinance from God or God’s desire (iccha) that connects a particular word with a definite object which it denotes and it is for the purpose of “preserving this (God-made) convention that we have grammar”, which explains the correct use of words. The literature suggests a comparison with a newborn infant, who cannot be referred to simply as “baby” and has to acquire a name, which the parents confer on it, similarly God establishes an association between the word and an object, which the word will then conventionally designate. This conventional designation is learnt through “the science of words and through usage.” The science of words preserves the right use of words. Usage is instrumental in understanding this convention; for instance, a child has to learn the correct use of words from his elders.

12 Jha, 843
13 Jha, 844
Yet, Uddyotkara’s *Vartika* argues that even in the case of a non-eternal, conventional establishment of the connection between denoter and denoted, we have to admit a relation, because without this relation there would be no cognition of the denoted object upon utterance of the word.\(^\text{14}\) Therefore, although the Naiyayika wants to be a conventionalist about meaning he has to admit the denotative relation as well. In the case of the Mimansa doctrine of *pratitisakti* (significative power) Nyaya has argued that this power implies that the eternal or natural relation of denotation is otiose, since denotation happens because of the word’s *sakti*. Similarly, if we already have *samaya*, why then do we need an additional relation between word and meant entity? One tentative solution would be to argue that there is no relation other than this convention. It is this relation, which is established through convention or in other words the denotative relation is *nothing but* this convention.

As far as realism about the word-world relation is concerned, the arch realists are the Mimansakas. The Naiyayikas are midway between realism about relations and the Vaisesika denial of this relation (discussed below). The canonical Nyaya texts “do not accept a relation between word and thing meant.”\(^\text{15}\) Houben describes the Nyaya position as a “qualified non-acceptance of a relation between word and meaning.”\(^\text{16}\) As the quote from Uddyotakara used above indicates, Nyaya needs the relation for epistemological reasons. For the Naiyayika on hearing the word, if we are to cognize the object then there has to be a relation between the word and the object. This is perhaps what Houben means by a “qualified non-acceptance.” It is “qualified” because cognition of an object from the word requires a relation and yet this relation is not eternal or natural.

\(^{14}\) Jha, 844  
\(^{15}\) Houben, 151  
\(^{16}\) Ibid.
The Vaisesiska school, begins with the premise that *samyoga* and *samvaya* are the only two relations, neither of which obtains between a word and a meant entity. Then there is no relation between word and meant entity, only convention. In the Vaisesika scheme of categories all linguistic phenomena are classified as *sabda* which is a *guna* (quality) inhering in *akasa* (space). The Vaisesikas can reduce *sabda* to a quality because they do not have any commitments to a *sabda-pramana*, or verbal testimony as a means of knowledge, since it is reducible to perception. Unlike the Mimansakas they do not have to defend authorless and eternal Vedas. The Buddhists with their conceptualist-minimalist metaphysics also join the Vaisesikas in rejecting the word meaning relations. For the Buddhists reality consists of *svalaksanas* (momentary particulars) which can never be captured by language. Concepts and words are mere constructions *vikalpa* lacking any ability to refer to reality. Denotation then is nothing but a *vastusunya vikalpa*, a linguistic construct lacking a worldly object. A similar position is expressed by Bhartrhari who believes that language cannot reflect a thing as it really is, that is to say, verbal representation is only partial.

**Bhartrhari**

Bhartrhari’s *Vakyapadiya* has an entire section dealing with relation, especially the relation between word and meant entity (*vacya-vacaka bhava*). This work to a large extent, is a sustained polemical engagement with the Vaisesika system. Bhartrhari rejects not only the Vaisesika premise that contact and inherence are the only two relations but also denies the status of relation to contact and inherence. If we wonder why contact and inherence are even brought up in the context of discussing the word-world relation,

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17 VS 9.19
18 Vide. Sambandha-Samuddesa, Karikas 54-55
(when no system has claimed that the word-world relation is either that of contact or inherence), the answer will have to be sought first in Bhartrhari’s rejection of the Vaisesika concept of relation. As we will see, Bhartrhari does not accept that contact and inherence are relations in the true sense but something similar to relations. “As regards samyoga and samvaya they are called by that word (relation) because they have that property dependence.”¹⁹ Both contact and inherence have a specific domain of function. It is “relation” which connects them to this domain, that is to say both contact and inherence need relation. Thus, as Helaraja’s commentary points out, inherence and contact can be relations only in a secondary sense and not in the sense of a “pure and simple” relation.²⁰ By pointing out the limiting conditions of these model relations of the Vaisesikas, Bhartrhari is perhaps tapping into the intuition that relations are ens minimum and cannot have limiting conditions nor do they need further relations.

Bhartrhari, at least on Helaraja’s interpretation, followed the traditional grammarians in accepting a “well-established” as opposed to conventional relation between word and meant entity. This relation is “by its own nature generally accepted, it is not introduced by any person.”²¹ Helaraja reads Bhartrhari as advocating that the relation between the speaker’s cognition and the word is causal, whereas the relation between the word and meant-entity is suitability (yogyata). Suitability implies that there is a suitability in the sequence of letters “p” “o” “t” to denote pot, just as for perceiving a color the faculty of vision is suitable and not the faculty of hearing. In the case of the causal connection between the word and the speaker’s or hearer’s cognition, the thing meant is prompted, as it were, by the word. Although Bhartrhari himself does not refer to superimposition

¹⁹ VP Karika 6
²⁰ Haelaraja in Houben, 342
²¹ Houben, 153
Helaraja uses this concept to explain the denotation relation. Superimposition is the fundamental relation underlying both the causal relation and the suitability relation. In order to explain the word-meaning relation as superimposition, we would have to argue that the word is superimposed on the object and the object is identified with the word.

The concept of relation that Bhartrhari wants to defend is stated in Karikas 10 and 11 of the Sambandha-Samuddesa:

That capacity, called samavaya (inherence), rendering service to capacities, beyond difference and identity, being established otherwise, (10) is assisted by sambandha (relation), which is beyond the attribute of all categories or objects and which is characterized by everything. This is the tradition from the ancients (11)\textsuperscript{22}

Here Bhartrhari is demonstrating what is considered a model-relation in Indian philosophy and a category of the Vaisesika system falls short of the status of relation. Sambandha is the property of all padarthas and yet it is itself too abstract to be a category in its own right. Bhartrhari claims that relation is sarvalaksana i.e. it characterizes everything and as Helaraja's commentary points out is "made known by everything"\textsuperscript{23} (as opposed to inherence which has a restricted domain of application). Houben thinks that by "relation" Bhartrhari is trying to indicate something which is much more abstract than inherence.\textsuperscript{24} Relation then is unique in that although it is not reducible to a category, an object, or a property of an object it is still "made known" by everything. Everything testifies, as it were, to the presence of relation. Colors can

\textsuperscript{22} Houben, 180
\textsuperscript{23} Houben, 346
\textsuperscript{24} Houben 185
inhere in an object only because of a relation that enables or aids this inherence thus suggesting that inherence itself is only a secondary form of relation.

Bhartrhari has captured some of the same insights about relation that are central to the Aristotelian and Scholastic discussion of relations. According to Houben “Bhartrhari’s concept of relation “is that it is neither an independent category or categorizable object, nor an entity that can be designated by a word.” Consider Karikas 4 and 5:

There is no word which signifies relation according to its specific property. Because it is extremely dependent, its form cannot be pointed out. (4)
Where this relation is because some service is rendered (from one thing to another, from signifier to signified etc, there one arrives at a property (viz. dependence) but not at the relation itself. It is even a capacity of capacities; it is even a quality of qualities. (5)

The form of relation cannot be pointed out because relation is parasitic upon the relata where the relation “renders aid” (upakara). Bhartrhari seems to be suggesting that although relation can be inferred no properties can be ascribed to it because of its utter dependence on the relata. In instances where we infer relations, (following Helaraja’s commentary this inference proceeds from the effects of the relation) we can attribute the property of dependence to one of the relata, but can make no commitments about relation itself. As Helaraja writes, relation “is always dependent, having a specific character that has to be inferred in all cases.”

The other important lesson for this inquiry into relation as such is that relation is a sakti or a capacity (“a capacity of capacities”) Notice that although parasitic and dependent on the relata, relation is a sakti (that enables other saktis). If relation is a

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25 Houben, 191
26 Houben, 170. Translation slightly modified.
27 Houben, 340
28 Houben, 341
capacity or power, it cannot be anything other than the power to relate. Bhartrhari here has given us more than the Aristotelian *ens minimum* conception of relation. Relation is potency, which aids the functioning of other potencies or capacities. It is not exactly clear whether it is potency or capacity of individuals, like words or it is the capacity of other capacities of the individual.

The relation between word and meant-entity, because of the lack of a specific property cannot be known or expressed except through the sixth nominal (genitive) case ending.\(^{29}\) The genitive case marker "sya" in "ramasya putra" (the son of Rama) discloses that a relation obtains between Rama and his son. Bhartrhari writes, "the connection of word and the thing meant is known through the sixth nominal ending."\(^{30}\) Here Bhartrhari directly challenges the Vaisesika denial of the relation between word and meant entity. The Vaisesikas will have to provide an alternate account for the sixth case ending if they have to maintain their anti-realist thesis. The use of the genitive is an effect, as it were, of this relation. In the case of the word-meaning relation, the relation is evident in the use of the genitive case as in "x is the meaning of y." Bhartrhari reminds us of this effect because if reification of relation is to be avoided, i.e. turning something utterly dependent into something independent, then it is extremely important to allow only the sixth ending as an expression of relation.

Bhartrhari’s position, although creating a sharper concept of relation as compared to the Vaisesika system, is ultimately nominalist. As Aklujkar writes about Bhartrhari’s ontology "one who is out to find out what really exists will realize that ultimately only

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\(^{29}\) Houben, 170

\(^{30}\) Houben, ibid.
the physical things and the language principle exists."\(^{31}\) Other candidates like qualities, universals, potencies, relations, have no existence of their own because of their dependence on physical objects. In a sense, they are nothing but the products of the interaction between objects and the language principle. From the ultimate point of view, even physical things are absorbed into the language principle. Bhartrhari’s position on the word-meaning relation\(^{32}\) is that this is a relation between the linguistic expression and the speaker’s idea or thought. As Matilal writes, “The linguistic expression designates the speaker’s idea having first designated its own form.”\(^{33}\) Matilal seems to think that the interpretation of the meant-entity as an external object is a realist spin on Bhartrhari. As Matilal puts it “he is not a realist in this sense. For him the object meant is what is grasped by the speaker’s awareness.”\(^{34}\)

**Bhartrhari’s Paradox**

The paradox of relation, which Bhartrhari articulates in Karikas 20-21, can be expressed as follows: the claim that relation (or for that matter anything since the karika uses “something”) is unsignifiable entails that we are using “unsignifiable” to signify the relation, thereby contradicting our first claim that it is unsignifiable. If, on the other hand, we take “unsignifiable” to be signifying this relation, then in what sense are we calling it “unsignifiable” or in what sense are we succeeding in calling it unsignifiable. In both cases we are led to a contradiction and we can then agree with Houben that

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31 Aklujkar, 125
32 Here the fact that Bhartrhari considers the sentence to be the primary meaning and not the word is not particularly relevant
33 Matilal 129
34 Ibid.
Bhartrhari has indeed presented us with a "weak paradox." This paradox is not directly a paradox about relation but about the expression of relations.

Bhartrhari resolves this paradox by using another paradox viz. the liar paradox about which he writes "with "everything I am saying is false," that statement itself is not meant or included in the class of false statements made by the speaker. Just as the statement, "this thesis is not probative" does not apply to itself. For if its own expression is false, one does not arrive at the point in question." The analogy Bhartrhari is trying to draw is between the inapplicability of this statement to itself and the statement "something i.e. relation is unsignifiable." Unsignifiable does not refer to itself but expresses "another thing." It is meant to capture something about relation and does not become an instance of the signification of relation (using the word "unsignifiable") It succeeds in conveying something about relation i.e. that cannot be signified and Bhartrhari has thus attempted to redeem the thesis that there is a relation that is unsignifiable. To use a schematic representation, suppose that words signify--- X is unsignifiable. Then: the words signifying that X is unsignifiable do not deny that X is unsignifiable. Bhartrhari is perhaps suggesting that relation (at least the putative denotation relation) can only be shown not said. This relation, then in a sense is ineffable.

Although it is a candidate for ineffability, Bhartrhari does not doubt that there is a relation between word and meant-entity. In karika 29 he writes of an acceptable model for this relation: "Just as the sense faculties have a beginningless suitability to their

35 Houben, 220
36 Houben, 227
37 ibid.
38 Houben, 221
objects like that the *sambandha* of words with their meanings is a beginningless suitability."^39\ The problem with this model is the analogy with the sense faculties, objects of vision cannot be sensed through the auditory faculties but there is nothing about the word "*deva*" which makes it suitable to denote god, because in Avestan the same word denotes demon. Bhartrhari’s option then would be to make the case that the Avestan use is a mistake. This, I think, is the only plausible model that Bhartrhari has to offer for the denotation relation. The view that "the word is the cause of the thing-meant"^40\ does not obtain because the word does not bring into existence the meant-object. In case the thing-meant is mental (in the hearer’s mind) then we have a relation between word and something in the mental domain, not something external.

If indeed the meant-entity is primarily mental, it is unreasonable to translate *upacariki-satta* as "secondary existence", it seems to be the primary existence of the meant entity. Perhaps it is more accurately a metaphorical existence or as Helaraja explicitly calls it "mental existence."^41\ This argument is strengthened by the fact that it is not the existence of an actual pot that makes this mental existence secondary; there is no primary or prior existence in the case of a "sky-flower." Houben uses the Vijananavadin inspired argument that this existence is secondary to consciousness and hence correctly understood and translated as "secondary existence." Bhartrhari has rightly, perhaps because of the Buddhist influence, challenged a strictly referentialist paradigm of language.

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^39\ Houben, 233
^40\ Houben, 246
^41\ Houben, 258
CHAPTER 7

LEVINAS AND THE ETHICAL RELATION: QUASI-REALISM ABOUT RELATIONS?

Metaphysics is enacted in the ethical relation

The philosophy that begins with Unity or the One as a first principle cannot but see the world as a lapse from this primordial unity; this world then is a stage for the unfolding drama of the dialectic of reality and appearance. Philosophy is an attempt to retrieve and return to this Unity, to clearly demarcate what is merely apparent from the real. Reality, as the undifferentiated One, does not admit genuine differences and thus cannot admit any true relations. Relations, insofar as they appear to proliferate in the world are disruptions of this unity, delusions that lead the mind further from the truth. It is such a disruption or interruption of the flow of consciousness that takes center-stage in the writings of Emmanuel Levinas.

The relation to the other disrupts the solitary existence of the self. The Biblical figures associated with the other viz. the orphan, the widow, the stranger provoke more than a sense of charity. These canonical figures of otherness complicate the self, by appearing in a manner that necessitates the disruption of the self in a going toward the other. Metaphysical affirmations take on a “spiritual” meaning proceeding from this disruptive relation, as Levinas writes, “Metaphysics is enacted in ethical relations.”

The aim of the Levinasian project is to demonstrate the primacy of the ethical relation as the “irreducible structure” on which the entire relational fabric of the world rests. According to Levinas, placing an impersonal relation to the sublime or any aesthetic or ontological

\[^1\] Levinas, TI 79
concept at the center of human life is, to see something which is in fact derivative as foundational.

The Levinasian treatment of the ethical relation is relevant in mapping out relations because it advocates the constitution of moral agency by the moral relation; the moral agent as a term is constituted by this relation. Discussion of Levinas’ concept of the ethical relation can take us in many fruitful philosophical directions, but here I restrict myself to those aspects of the moral relation that are relevant to the discussion of relation as such, although the relation with the other seems to absolve itself from the mundane relational tasks of connecting two or more entities. The “with” of the ethical relation is sensitive to the order of the terms and would become oppressive if it were to neglect this order or asymmetry. Yet, in a fundamental sense it is a “with,” although layered with qualifications to produce the desired Levinian meaning.

Levinasian ethics is a rejection of the Kantian model of ethics, which is articulated in terms of the universality of the moral law. Levinas distances himself from the monism of a Plotinus, for whom the unity remains the standard of judgment for all relations. As Levinas writes, “In this whole priority of the relation to the other, there is a break with a great traditional idea of the excellence of unity.”2 For the Plotinian monist, relation is a fall from this unity. Both relation and temporality are nothing but lapses or deviations from unity and eternity, a view that is continuous with those theologies that envisage salvation as not just a return to God but a coincidence, a conflation with or achieving union with God.

Levinas, with the Indian dualist Madhva, the founder of the Dvaita school of Vedanta, would argue for a relation to God that does not overcome or subsume the difference

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2 Levinas, IIRTB, 173
between God and the creature. Much of Indo-European philosophy becomes on the Levinasian view an “egology.” As opposed to the “excellence of unity” the Levinasian approach is that by placing relation at the centre of philosophy we pursue the “excellence of multiplicity.” Levinas invokes the Bible, in which God commands to go forth and multiply, which he thinks is a command to overcome the impulse to exist solely for oneself.³ (Levinas’ philosophy is perhaps aptly labeled allocentric because of the place the other occupies at the epicenter of his thinking.)

This is why Levinas contrasts the journey of Ulysses with the exile of Abraham. The self of Western Philosophy, like the hero Ulysses, ventures beyond itself only in order to return home. The contrast is with a subjectivity which undergoes a radical outward move, which is described by Gary Mole, following Levinas, as “the transcendence of the infinite cracking the imperturbable shell of being and opening it to the human other.”⁴ Ethics for Levinas arises from the relation to the other. Levinas tries to overcome the ethics of rational self-interest, which is inextricably tied to a conatus essendi (effort to exist), an instinct, as it were, for self-preservation and the perpetuation of its own being. Levinasian ethics holds that “starting from the existence of the other that my existence can be posed as human.”⁵ Levinas is thus departing from the assumption that human action occurs only in the context of competing, self-regarding desires and which alleges that every encounter can be explained on the basis of competing individual projects. We can communicate about these projects, but as the Sartrean would put it, the projects themselves remain essentially separate. It is precisely this assumption of separateness that Levinas rejects in his moral metaphysics.

³ Levinas, IIRTB, 174
⁴ Mole, 102
⁵ Levinas, IIRTB, 129
Precisely because the moral relation is unique, it cannot be a template for relations in general, but is to be treated as an exceptional relation. In Locke, we saw how the moral relation was profoundly indifferent to any ethical criteria and was simply a comparison of an action with the rule that guides it. For Levinas the ethical relation is calling into question of the same. This calling into question of the same is apparent since the ethical relation is not experienced per se because, as it will become clear, it is a relation to infinity which cannot "be stated in terms of experience, for infinity overflows the thought that thinks it." The moral relation is the key to overcoming of what Heraclitus thought was the essential connection between being and war. The moral relation is the overcoming of the concept of totality, which reduces individuals to being mere subjects of forces that command them. As I will explain this is not a lament for the individual because in the moral relation the individual is profoundly dependent and heteronomous. The relation between the "I" and the other is not a simple conjunctive presence of two individuals. The self and the other do not constitute "a simple correlation which would be reversible." Levinas writes:

The reversibility of a relation where the terms are indifferently read from right to left and from left to right would couple them the one or the other; they would complete one another in a system visible from the outside.

Levinas believes that the other transcends the one (i.e. the self, the ego) approaching the self from "on high" displaying a remarkable asymmetry to the self. The moral relation i.e. the relation to the other discloses an other who is transcendent to the self, and Levinas believes that we have to guard against seeing this as the "completion" of a totality. Completion will betray the transcendence of the other, destroying the radical alterity of

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6 Levinas, TI, 25
7 Levinas, TI, 35
the other, which is always denied in this kind of completion or inclusion within a conceptual framework.

The relation to the other, who is radically other and whom I cannot enclose or fix in my conceptual framework, is an “irreversible relation”, because the order of the terms is vital to the relation. Without this order, it would not be the same relation; without this order and the asymmetry it implies, it would not be an ethical relation at all.\footnote{Levinas, TI, 36} Anyone who asks “Why should I love my neighbor; does my neighbor love me”- is thereby exiting the moral domain according to Levinas. Ethical theory cannot be subsumed by a game theory, varieties of the social contract or reciprocity; there is no economy of the ethical. As Levinas writes regarding this order of terms, “the same goes unto the other differently than the other unto the same.” The relation of the other to me is not simply a converse to my relation to the other; my relation to the other is unique and it seems, because of this uniqueness it does not have any equivalent converse. Neither are both these relations simply two perspectives on the intersubjective relation. They are two distinct relations that elicit different responses.

The ethical relation in Levinas is the basis of an attempt to present ethics as first philosophy. Levinas invokes the words of Cain when asked by God about Abel, Cain replies “Am I my brother’s keeper?” This is the answer of ontology for which I am I and he is he; ethics is aimed at overcoming this separation. The concept that is central to this reformulation of first philosophy is alterity; the relation to the other which Levinas understands as implying an imperative of infinite obligation. This otherness is not simply the reversal of identity in another location. This is why according to Levinas “you” or “we” is in a philosophical sense not a plural of the “I.”
Alterity implies that the other is not of thought of as someone who is just numerically other but sharing many features with us such as ethnicity, culture, language or skin color. The other implies radical difference and that ethics cannot be approached in terms of commonality. The ethical relation is not negotiated around some common goals or purposes, that for Levinas is commerce not ethics. As Jeffery Bloechl puts it “for Levinas, the relation (with the other) is a relation of kinship outside all biology, against all logic.” As a result, those approaches that seek commonality between the terms of the ethical relation are contaminating the concept of ethical responsibility. Levinas also warns against conceiving of alterity in terms of properties which differentiate the other from me; the other is not other by virtue of his race or her gender. This too would imply on Levinas’ view “that community of genus which already nullifies alterity.” In contrast the social phenomenology of Alfred Schutz speaks of the other person as “within the reach of my direct experience” who “shares with me a community of space and time.” For Levinas the other is not to be thought of as occurring within a shared community of space-time where our experiences of the world are occurring side-by-side; we have no access to the thoughts and experiences of the other besides the moral imperative, which calls us to responsibility. Levinas seems to overstate the distance between me and the other, because we do in fact have a certain access to the minds of others, which makes possible the responses to the other in communication. What Levinas is resisting is the risk of this minimal access or assumption of access being turned against the other in an act of subsumption by the same. An assumption of commonality should not empty the other of his alterity and does not factor into the ethical relation, as it does not proceed on the basis

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9 Bloechl, 131
10 Levinas, 194
11 Schutz, 163
of commonality. The other, as Levinas presents the concept, as a consequence of the asymmetry of this relation is abstract.

I am arguing for a quasi-realism in Levinas’ thinking about the ethical relation, not only because he grants a priority to relation but also because he believes that it cannot be reduced for instance to a “representation” of the other. It is not a process of conceptual apprehension or comprehension of the other; this is not a relation of knowing. Neither is the other simply a self in another location, an “other mind” by analogy or alter ego as suggested by Husserl. Levinas would also reject the Sartrean idea that although the relation to others is constitutive of my own being, I need the other to fully grasp the structures of my being. On Levinas’ view this is merely a detour through the other to return to the same and a repetition of the somewhat trivial claim that the identity of human beings depends on their relations with others. Neither of these ideas jeopardizes the power and centrality of the “I.” As Levinas writes, “the power (pouvoir) of the self will not cross the distance marked by the alterity of the other.”12 The relation to the other is paradoxical because it is a relation that preserves “distance” (perhaps it is an illusion to conflate relation and proximity as Hume rightly suggested).13 This is perhaps why Levinas is reluctant to think of the relation to the other as a “contact.” For him contact implies a “thematization,” enclosing the other in a totality; this is a relation of immediacy, that is to say, a relation that is a face-to-face relation. The ethical relation is above all not a relation between objects.

12 Levinas, TI, 38
13 Hume,
**Relation without Relation**

Levinas calls the asymmetrical ethical relation a "*rapport sans rapport*"\(^{14}\) (a relation without relation) because it does not result in the "community of a concept or totality."\(^{15}\) If we take a relation like "x is larger than y", the relation along with the converse "y is smaller than x" creates a kind of conceptual unity, which we understand as the concept of difference in magnitude. On the contrary, the relation to the other, the ethical relation does not generate a concept because it would seem that one of the terms of the relation is always exceeding and escaping the relation. The other is only present qua other, thus disallowing any conceptual appropriation. This relation or bond between the one and the other that does not constitute a totality Levinas calls "religion."\(^{16}\) Recall that etymologically the word religion is speaking about a relation, a binding (*religare*). The religious or the theological in Levinas is only available through the ethical detour. Levinas writes:

> To posit the transcendent as stranger and the poor one is to prohibit the metaphysical relation with God from being accomplished in the ignorance of men and things. The dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face......It is here that the Transcendent, infinitely other, solicits and appeals to us.\(^{17}\)

Ethics is what makes theological concepts meaningful. Levinas is not saying that the other is an incarnation and that is why I am infinitely responsible to him. This again would be a misplaced emphasis on who the other is rather than the radical alterity that is at issue here. It is in this profoundly human relation that we can have knowledge of God;

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\(^{14}\) Levinas, TI, 80

\(^{15}\) Levinas, TI, ibid.

\(^{16}\) Levinas, TI 40

\(^{17}\) Levinas, TI 78
as Levinas puts it, “ethics is the spiritual optics.”\textsuperscript{18} Without the relation to the other, there can be no relation to God, because it is only in this relation that the dimension or height of God is manifested.

Levinas rejects Buber’s idea that the relation to the other is a reciprocal relation; “Buber says that when I say “thou,” I know that I am saying “thou” to someone who is an I and that he says “thou” to me.”\textsuperscript{19} With regards to considering the ethical relation as a relation of reciprocity, Levinas worries that if this relation is entered to with an expectation of a reciprocal obligation then it would be like being generous only when and where there is an expectation of generosity in return, this has the flavor of a commercial transaction. In the Levinasian version of the ethical relation, the other appears as someone to whom I am already indebted, in the sense that I already owe him responsibility.

The face of the other commands responsibility and it “goes beyond legality and obliges beyond the contract” and is not a responsibility that arises because of biology. Biological responsibility, according to Levinas, is still a kind of indirect \textit{conatus essendi}.

The face of the other is a manifestation unlike any other in that it appears as signaling the destitution and mortality of the other. This “epiphany” of the need and mortality of the other “imposes itself upon my responsibility.”\textsuperscript{20} For Levinas this responsibility is such that it does not allow me to leave the other to his fate. The appearance of the other “paralyzes possession.”\textsuperscript{21} The “I” content in the enjoyment of its possessions cannot remain indifferent to the other. The obligation not to abandon the other in the face of

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Levinas, IIRTB, 213
\textsuperscript{20} Levinas, IIRTB, 115
\textsuperscript{21} Levinas, TI 171
death extends to the point of risking one’s own life or dying in the place of the other. As Levinas puts it in *Entre Nous* “at the last moment, the not-leaving the other alone consists……only in answering, ‘here I am’.” Levinas clarifies, in an interview, that the implications of this founding relation especially the infinite responsibility it entails is not “agreeable or pleasant, but it is the good.”

Levinas seems to equate this relation to the other as that which makes *individuation* possible. Yet, is it not the case that to affirm and accept this responsibility one needs a prior affirmation of one’s status as an individual, as an “I”? As opposed to an “I” who is persevering his being and has no scruples about this persevering, for Levinas the “I” which is affirmed is “straightway for the other, straightaway in obligation and straightway as the only one who is ready to respond and to bear this responsibility.”

This responsiveness is a primary kind of individuation in which is also contained the freedom of the subject. Paradoxically, Levinas locates freedom in this state of being obligated, being indebted to the other. However, the heteronomy that seems to become apparent in the relation of infinite responsibility to the other is neither servitude nor bondage. Levinas claims that although it is the case that A’s commanding B would be a formula for B’s non-freedom yet if A is God then the subordination of B is not a servitude but a “call” to B. The moral imperative of the other is similar to this call from God. The other is not just another freedom comparable to my own, which will allow it some commonality with me. The other, for Levinas is a master who does not conquer, but teaches. This teaching breaks, as it were, the closed circle of totality.

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22 Levinas, EN, 131
23 Levinas, EN 203
24 Levinas, IIR.TB, 117
In the relation to the other self-consciousness loses its first place to what Levinas calls "the awakening to humanity." In other words my consciousness is no longer sovereign in this relation. Levinas thus rejects, through the primacy of the relation to the other, the Kantian notion of putting autonomy at the heart of ethics. The ethical relation can never be subsumed under some form of consciousness, which emanates from the "I," on the contrary it puts the "I" in question. This putting in question emanates from the other

**Some Obvious Objections**

Levinas' discussion leaves somewhat unclear how the other who is radically other can be defined without any reference to the same because the "other" is a relational concept. The concept of an "other" is possible only if one acknowledges, a prior relation to the same i.e. the one with regard to which one is other. Levinas seems to think that the radical alterity that is the other polarity of the "relation without relation" is not defined in this manner. Such a definition would dissolve the radical alterity making it an otherness that is what it is only relative to something; this is what Levinas would criticize as a totalizing move, which would make the other dependent on or a lapse from the original unity. A response to this objection would begin with a rejection of the notion that the other is a simple negation of the I. The "elsewhere" and "otherwise" which characterizes the other does not belong to the here. Levinas writes

Transcendence designates a relation with a reality infinitely distant from my own reality, yet without this distance destroying this relation and without this relation destroying this distance, as would happen with relations within the same,

The other does not belong to the same order as the self and this is the reason for the other's transcendence; the other is not an instance of a not-I. The other cannot be reduced

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25 Levinas, *IIRTB*, 173
26 Levinas, *TI 41*
to the same within a general "comprehension of being" or produced merely through a negation of the self.

A second objection that can be raised against the Levinasian interpretation of the ethical relation and its primacy is that the other is too abstract. There can be no relation between an other that is simply the face of need and mortality and me. The face of the other is bereft of all features; those features that mark it as it as belonging to an age, gender, or race do not figure into the responsibility it imposes on me. The criticism leveled against Levinas is that such a neutral and abstract entity, which is so completely distant and separated from everything else, could not be related to anything else. Radical alterity would imply the impossibility of entering into a relation. The Levinasian response would consist in pointing out the uniqueness of this "relation without relation" from which we cannot have the formal expectations of everyday relations between objects. Levinas is perhaps helped by comparing the ethical relation to the relation with God; a relation that does not absorb God, as a term into the relation; the relation is between me and a God who always transcends the idea of God.

A third possible objection that can be voiced against Levinas involves the concept of heteronomy. Levinas thinks that before the other the self loses its autonomy, how can this loss of autonomy in the interests of infinite responsibility be distinguished from the loss of autonomy before a tyrant. Is not the case that the other deprives me of my freedom, as would a tyrant? As Catharine Chalier explains the loss of freedom before the tyrant is a submission that enslaves me and "it prevents the slave from emerging into life as a subject; it wounds and bruises the subject without awakening it to the good."27

27 Chalier, 78
The heteronomy before the face of the other, by contrast, is like the Israelite coming out of Egypt. Levinas thinks that before the face of the other the subject emerges, "in its irreplaceable uniqueness" as a response to the appeal of the other. The subject is awakened to the arbitrariness of its freedom, as Levinas writes, "Ethics begins when freedom, rather than finding its justification in itself, senses (that) it is arbitrary and violent."\(^{28}\) It is in the "investiture" by the other that the subject comes to this realization; that is to say, it is not an act of self-reflection. It is from this realization that the subject passes to the response "here I am" and it is in this utterance that the subject becomes itself.

The relation with the other is non-paradigmatic, in the sense that it does not necessitate a converse; the other even within the ethical relation is not a site of reciprocity. Husserl's model of consciousness was fundamentally non-relational in that consciousness consisted of the possession of subjectivity\(^{29}\) whereas the Levinasian relational model of consciousness saw it as in a sense already possessed and determined by alterity, by the relation to the other. The model of relations as presented by Levinas' interpretation of the ethical relation rejects the notion of the symmetrical relation being the model of all relations. Levinas is not a full-fledged realist about relations because the relation is not extracted as separable from the relata. The very concept of the ethical relation implies the relata, thus presenting the relation in a quasi rather than a robust sense of realism.

The notion of infinite responsibility can be deepened into a concept of infinite receptivity. An individual is born with an original moral debt, a dent in the sphere of

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28 Levinas, TI, 56
29 Even in the intentional relation, consciousness remains in charge, as it were, possessing the intentional objects.
egoity. This is not an actively incurred debt, just as the responsibility to the other is not something, which obligates us contractually. The notion of a primordial debt does not run contrary to the Levinasian obligation to the other which does not have a ground in commonality. This debt is a consequence of being human, a being capable of addressing and responding to moral claims. This receptivity is an openness to the moral claims of others; claims made by hunger, thirst, the need for protection and shelter, friendship, compassion, and justice. The moral claim which arises as a consequence of this infinite indebtedness is Levinas would agree a claim on my possessions, which is prior to my ownership of them. The infinitely indebted self is not seeking completion or a release from these debts, because one can only approach the discharging of these debts precisely because it is an infinite indebtedness. The notion of infinite indebtedness and the infinite receptivity which it implies seemingly departs from Levinas because it is a “for the sake of” for the ethical obligation. However, it is not for the sake of the indebtedness that we are morally obligated; the debt is the obligation or responsibility. It is not that we have to be responsive to the moral claims of others because of this indebtedness; it is not a burden, a kind of interest as it were, paid on this debt. The “indebtedness before any loan” whether admitted or not, is obligation.

It is perhaps in the space opened by this relationless relation of the unincurred debt that discourse and fraternity become possible.

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30 This idea owes a debt to one of many conversations with Prof Arindam Chakrabarti on Levinas.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I will consider, against the grain of the thinking that has dominated the previous chapters, the possibility of a relation that is logically prior to the relata. This logical priority also suggests the possibility that the terms are constituted by the relation, providing an exception to the rule “no relations without relata, no relata without relations.” The relation in such a situation is not dependent on the terms and is granted a level of autonomy without granting it the status of an entity. This would be a kind of non-reductive realism about relations, however limited or regional its application. By admitting a logical priority or a constitutive role to a relation, we are faced with the difficulty of how a relation, an *ens minimum*, can await relata as it were, or in other words seemingly exist outside of a relational situation. A possible solution to this problem will be suggested that consists in considering certain social relations as “forms of life” a la Wittgenstein.

*Realism and Anti-realism about relations*

About relations, Russell wrote that it is a “difficult” subject, involving questions that are among “the most important that arise in philosophy as most other issues turn on it.” Besides the issues of monism or pluralism, the philosophical problem of relations is also linked to the problems of idealism and realism. One can easily agree with Russell that relations are relevant to “the very existence of philosophy as a subject distinct from
Among the many questions that the concept of a relation generates is whether there are indeed phenomena called relations. To reply in the affirmative is of course realism, the strongest form of which is not only the acceptance of relations but accepting them as a *sui-generis* aspect of the world whether as entities, properties or as abstracta. For the realist the fact that \( x \) has relation \( R \) to \( y \) is not reducible or inferable from \( x \) and \( y \) alone. In other words a relational fact cannot be explained away or reduced to something non-relational.

The degree of one’s realism is tested on the basis of the degree of real separation (from its terms) that one grants to the relation; the strongest form of realism is that where the relation can exist completely separate, (as something *sui generis*) from its relata. For the robust realist, relations are not something derived from the terms or a product of the terms. Reductive realisms, which accept that statements about relational facts are mind-independently true but reduce relations to “nothing but” relational properties or foundations etc are weaker forms of realism. A weaker realism about relations admits a kind of formal distinction between the relation and the relata i.e. a distinction that does not add things to the world. My argument so far has hinted that strong realism is not a plausible position ("no relation without relata"). Below I will discuss some possible exceptions to this claim in the domain of interpersonal and social relations. This does not mean that I concede any entitative status to these relations. Doing away with relations as entities or denying that they are (really as opposed to formally) separable from their terms does not entail that one is denying the pervasive relationality. An admission of relationality without relations (qua something separable from the relata) converges in its philosophical conclusions with the results of an entitative approach to relations that

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1 Russell, AM 333
admits pervasive relationality. It is not the case that if relationality is accepted we have to also accept relations as links between terms which are then as real as the terms. To deny that relations are as real as the terms is a nominalist claim but it does not concede any ground as far as pervasive relationality or the mind independent truth of relational statements is concerned. I share with the realist the intuition that relational facts cannot be explained away and I share with the nominalist the intuition that relations are not a tertium quid. If relations are rejected as entities or as a tertium quid, it does not follow that the universe then becomes a universe of interacting discrete individuals that are not truly interrelated. I reject the nominalism which would place relations in the mind or in language, and I accept the realist intuition of the relations being “out there” only with qualifications as to what this “out thereness” implies. The distinction between “interaction” and “interrelation” is presented by David Bohm as follows:

First of all, we note that the universal interconnection of things has long been so evident from empirical evidence that one can no longer even question it. However, in the mechanistic point of view, it is assumed that this interconnection can ultimately be reduced to nothing more than interaction between the fundamental entities which compose the system. By this we mean that in the mutual action of these entities on each other, there can only be quantitative changes in their properties, while fundamental qualitative changes in their modes of being cannot take place....

Bohm understands the universe as one in which each interconnected entity is maintained by that which is in its background viz. a series of interconnections. Implying that “no given thing can have complete autonomy in its mode of being,” since its basic characteristics depend on its relations with other things. On this view, a thing is an abstraction from its background; this in other words is pervasive relationality. The world is not an aggregation of things; on the contrary, things are a conceptual construct,
abstracted from the relational matrix of the world. Yet, does this acceptance of pervasive relationality commit us to an ontological acceptance of relations? With some reservations, I will argue that it does not. Interrelation in Bohm's sense does not entail the acceptance of relations as a tertium quid that is to say the statement aRb, does not imply that the state of affairs it seeks to represent has three (ontological) components, viz. a, b and the relation that links them. This is a representation of the fact that they are related, or stand to one another in a certain way; this is how the individuals a and b are i.e. this is their mode of being. If two objects a and b are adjacent to each other, it is not the case that this relation can be explained away as simply the spatial location of a and the spatial location of b or even as a predicate possessed in common by both a and b. This is because these are not two isolated facts, presenting them as such by reducing the relation does not perspicuously represent the state of affairs which obtains between a and b. Even if contingently related the two objects are part of a relational situation. Yet to preserve this fact of relatedness, one does not need recourse to a tertium quid to link a and b, that is quite simply how they are. Relationality does not necessitate either a bridge concept as the nominalist suggests or a bridge entity as the realist suggests, over and above the relata. Relational facts can be adequately explained by invoking the respective quiddities of the relata.

**Anti-Realism**

Anti-realism denies relations by claiming that they are nothing but mental projections. Relations for the anti-realist are nothing but relational judgments. The anti-realist will claim that the relation is nothing but a certain perspective on or a way of looking at the
terms of a relation. The relation supervenes on its terms or it is derived from the interaction of its terms, that is to say, it has only a diminished degree of reality as compared with the terms. A stronger form of anti-realism about relations is found in the work of the French philosopher Alain Badiou. For Badiou, whatever is true is essentially unrelated or autonomous, self-constituent and self-regulating “while the idea of the link (lien), or of relation (rapport), is fallacious.”4 Badiou thinks that unlike everyday human subjects whose existence is bound by the relations of hierarchy and order, obligation and deference, a true individual is to be thought of only in terms of its own affirmations. “Pure subjective freedom is founded quite literally on the absence of relation.”5 For Badiou there is nothing in the elements of reality that forms or serves as the basis of relations Badiou’s elements are discrete and dry as opposed to the “sticky individuals” I invoked in Chapter 1.

Badiou’s point seems to be that “elements are indifferent to each other as are different slices of empty space.”6 This makes a good case for the absence of continuity, which it would seem, is a precondition for relations like similarity. Badiou admits nothing but differences, which he thinks are not relations in the strict sense. This anti-relational ontology is at best implausible. Badiou would claim that this windowpane could be truly known for what it is, only if it is extracted from the relational matrix of this window, in this room etc in which it occurs. Within the relational matrix, it loses its individuality and its true form. Relations are accretions on the object, which obscure its true form and hence have to be suspended in order to defend the object “itself.” Yet, difference is a relation, in the deepest sense. The relation of otherness does not obtain in the absence of

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4 Hallward, xxxi
5 Ibid.
6 Hallward, 276
difference; none can be other than me who is not concretely different from me. Otherness is perhaps a concrete and unique form of difference. Even if we were to accept dry and linkless individuals, insofar as they become objects of conscious scrutiny, whether as objects of knowledge or thought, they become terms in a non-paradigmatic, intentional relation.

Even though one may deny a *sui-generis* status to relations or may reduce them to relational judgments or relational properties, it seems self-evident that relations are the true medium of being. Individuals occur only relationally i.e. as related. The view that the true form of things is evident only when they are subtracted from their relational baggage forgets that nothing exists independently of its relations to other things. Autonomy itself is impossible without relations, because if we imagine a world consisting of only one object, then the attribution of autonomy to that object seems misguided. Autonomy presumes others from which something is autonomous or toward which this something can act with autonomy. This object cannot be different either because the attribution of difference assumes a *differentiation from*; hence, there are no ‘pure’ non-relational differences. Further, the very concept of a pure difference is incoherent. Badiou is not saying that the phenomenal world is not relational, but in fact it is so only because being qua being, is a captive of being there i.e. of its localization within a certain region or context. It is the context which brings the relational baggage. Contrarily, as the direction of my argument has gone so far, relation does not preserve the atomic logic of its terms but deeply and creatively disrupts it without reducing them to anonymity.
Realism about relations: Social relations as "Forms of Life"

A robust realism about relations, not only as something sui-generis and separable from the relata but also prior to (and constitutive of) the terms of the relation is to be found in the domain of social relations. I will invoke here the distinction between the form and content of relations to clarify the sense in which I believe that some social relations are "real." The form of a relation is indifferent to the quiddity of the terms; it only assumes terms as placeholders, that is to say, terms that will accomplish the relation. I will argue that it is these forms of social, (especially interpersonal) relations that are sui-generis, separate from and logically prior to the terms. This does not imply that I am committed to the existence of these relations as possessing being. They are comparable to social norms or other social structures like kinship that do not posses being and yet are not reducible and are causally efficacious in an important sense.

Relations are what they are through their forms. The form of the relation "being the father of" is indifferent as to who the individual father is or the child is and what obligations of fatherhood he fulfils. The form is quite indifferent to the content of the relation; it obtains under the right circumstances if the terms do not exclude the relation. The "right circumstances" are the medium for the obtaining of the relation and should not be confused with its terms. The only "features" of terms that will exclude certain relations is the obtaining of prior relations. For example, if there is the relation of siblinghood between two individuals then the marriage relation cannot hold between them; the very form of the siblinghood relation excludes (at least by law and custom) other relations like paternity or marriage from obtaining between these terms.
In the relation of “being married,” the individual participants are contingent, they make no difference to the relation, and that is why the relation is repeatable without being a universal. A particular married couple gives its own content to the relation but cannot modify the form (even in a gay marriage). However, polygamy perhaps implies a change of form of marriage, because the relation is usually between two individuals. The form (of social relations) is simply a kind of social invariant or structure (not a universal or a Platonic Form) that constitutes and organizes terms and is dynamic in the sense that it admits of historical modifications. The status of this form of social relations remains to be examined. The relation however is not the form alone because the form needs the terms for the relation to obtain.

The structure or the form of a non-social or natural relation like “being heavier than” is indifferent to whether one stone is heavier than another or whether it is an aircraft that is heavier than a feather. The form of the relation “heavier than” is indifferent to the magnitude of the difference in weight between the terms. The terms of the relation and the actual magnitude of difference in weight between them are in different degrees relevant as the content of the relation. In the case of natural relations, it is not possible to accept their logical priority to the terms, because unlike those social relations, which are part of the normative fabric of society, a robust realism about natural relations entails ontological commitments. Social relations are “out there” in the sense that they are not merely psychological. In a hierarchic society, the hierarchy that pre-exists and organizes individuals cannot be derived from or reduced to psychological facts about the individual members of that society. Yet, this hierarchy does not possess being quite in the same way as the papaya on my table or the paper on which this is printed. This perhaps recapitulates
the Aristotelian position that relations have only a diminished being. The significant difference is that the relation is not parasitic upon its terms. The effects of social relations like bills of sale or title deeds have a full blooded existence but one hesitates to grant the commercial relation itself as much being as its effects.

In order to say that somehow the form of the relation “being heavier than” is separable from its terms (and instances) and is logically prior to them is to say that it is configured into the metaphysical structure of the world. Since we are not speaking about the concept of a relation, to say that the form of a relation pre-exists its instances (as something separable) would take us squarely into a Platonism or an acceptance of relations as universals. In order to avoid this difficulty, all we can say about the priority of natural relations is that the world is such that in it “being heavier than” necessarily and repeatedly obtain.

Relations (or at least the forms of relations) are real as “forms of life.” Wittgenstein introduces the notion of “forms of life” in the following way “what has to be accepted, the given is-so one could say- forms of life.”7 Social relations as forms of life are logically prior to all terms, to all particular instances of relations. The import of Wittgenstein’s concept in the context of the forms of relations is that they are given; they are part of the social background or context in which we live. They are real in the sense that they are embedded, as it were, in the social fabric indifferent to the particulars they can relate. For example the form of the relation of “being a ruler” or “being a subject” is a form of life, it brings terms together under the right circumstances and constitutes subjects and rulers, masters and slaves. There are neither masters nor slaves outside the relations that constitute and sustain slaves and masters.

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7 Wittgenstein, 226
This treatment of relations as "forms of life" merely reinforces the notion that relations are incomplete simples. Requiring the terms for completion and unanalysable into simpler components. The relation then need not be conceived as a reality emergent from the terms but on the contrary is the reality that constitutes the terms. It is not the interaction of terms that produces relations; the terms emerge in and through the relation that obtains between them. Shifting the status of relations gives them a causal force, which otherwise rests with the terms in all forms of anti-realism or even reductive realisms about relations.

The amorous relation is not something enacted or fabricated by the "I," but on the contrary it is the relation, under the right circumstances, which constitutes the "I" as a term. The "I" becomes a lover not through an act of the will or of the intellect but as being "invested" to use a Levinasian term, by the relation. The term in this case is not passively in a relation but its very being is in a sense a being related to the beloved. Each individual enacts this investment in her own way, adding her own lived content to the relation. Being related means being or acting in a specific medium which set out conditions and constraints and in an important sense determines the actions which occur in it. Relations, let us say with the realist, are not subjective events, although the subject contributes to sustaining and developing certain relations. The human subject cannot be regarded as self-sufficient solitary will enacting relations. In many respects, the "I" itself may be nothing but an enactment of social and interpersonal relations, without exhaustively capturing it and without being reduced to a relational anonymity.
**Sticky Individuals**

The treatment of relations in the history of philosophy can be mapped out between the realist position of the Nyaya and the radical conceptualist anti-realism of Peter Aureolus, and the conceptualist nominalism of Ockham. A stock taking of the treatment of relations with respect to ontological issues will have to take account of the medieval split between the reductive anti-realism of Abelard and the non-reductive realism of Duns Scotus. The conceptual anti-realist reduces the relation to nothing but mental activity. The reductive realist argues that relational statements are not true because of relational judgments but in fact, the phenomena of relations can be reduced to relational properties of the terms. The non-reductive realist also absorbs the relation into the terms, as opposed to leaving the relation as a *tertium quid*, he argues that the relation is absorbed into the terms but as something *sui-generis*. A (non-reductive realist) foundationist like Duns Scotus does not make the reductionist move of saying that the relation is nothing but the foundations.

All these positions share the common characteristic of deriving the relation from certain features of the term, whether it is properties or the treatment of the terms in judgment, that is to say they derive the relations from the terms.

Individuals i.e. countables relate and are connected in diverse ways because of a certain basic receptivity in them to connections or links i.e. a stickiness that is not a property but a power or potency. This is a propensity or proneness of individuals to connect with other individuals without bridge entities or bridge concepts like relations. Just as a magnet sticks to an iron surface without requiring any further connecting mechanism, similarly individuals relate without relations and without an irreducibly separate class of properties like relational properties.
Relations (as opposed to the facts of things being related in a certain way) are simply how sticky individuals are in the world. To say that a is above b is to describe how a and b occur in a slice of space-time, not to give an account of something distinct from the terms called a relation. This occurrence is sui-genris in the sense that it is not reducible to properties of a or b or cognitive acts with regard to a and b, (yet the cognitive element may be more relevant in the case of relations like similarity or resemblance) The statement that “a is above b” is true independently of any linguistic or psychological considerations. Moreover, this approach allows us to put relations (or the facts they describe) “out there” in the sense that relations are thus objective facts about the world. Claiming that relations are descriptions of the way things are does not reduce them to linguistic or psychological phenomenon, neither are they parasitic on properties of the terms.

Even non-reductive realism requires foundations that mediate and as it were, bring about a relation; it is in virtue of this foundation that relational facts occur. The notion of a “sticky individual” does not need a foundation or any relational property in virtue of which it becomes a term. The individual has a certain potency to be in a certain way, under the right circumstances in concert with the potencies of other individuals.

In order to argue that the world is fundamentally a relational matrix, a field of interrelations as opposed to mechanistic interactions, where there is a dynamic flow and exchange of properties from one locus to another, a sticky individual becomes a natural fit. Pervasive relationality would become a metaphysically cumbersome thesis if it accepted relations as something over and above the terms. Yet, relations as modes or ways of being of sticky individuals preserve the density of relations without reducing
them to the mechanistic interaction of terms. This density is non-trivial as it is pertinent to an accurate account of the world and is captured without reifying relations. The illusion of discrete, non-relational particulars entering into relations and the problems (like the Bradley problem) it generates is obviated by the concept of a “sticky individual.” A world of sticky individuals does not depend on anything other than its constituents and their receptivity to others under the right circumstances, to sustain itself as pervasively relational. Although the analogy with a Leggo set is not entirely happy, because it would lead us believe that individuals are discrete, atomic building blocks, the world seems to function in some respects like Leggo pieces; connecting without bridge concepts or entities, precisely because of this stickiness, this suitability for relations.
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