

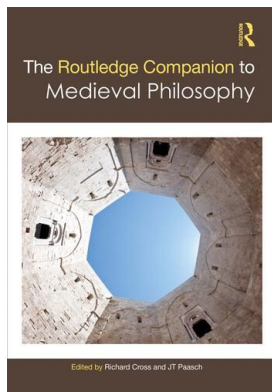
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### Relations

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# 8

## RELATIONS

*Heine Hansen*

Medieval thinking about relations is historically as well as theoretically embedded within the larger context of the Aristotle's theory of categories. This basic fact is important, both because it had a profound impact on the way medieval philosophers thought about relations and because a great many of the questions that come up in medieval debates arise more or less directly out of the basic commitments of that theory. Three commitments are particularly important.

First, relations make up a distinct category, the category of relations. This, at least *prima facie*, suggests two things: one, that relations somehow belong to the furniture of reality; and two, that they are somehow significantly different from items belonging to other categories such as substance, quality, and quantity.

Second, relations are accidents. Accidents are characterized by being in a subject, and it is this feature that distinguishes them from substances (substances are characterized precisely by not being in a subject). Roughly, the exclusive and exhaustive distinction between substance and accident is one between natural kinds and their members on the one hand, and the properties and features of those kinds and their members on the other. Thus, for example, the property paleness is in whatever substance has that property, but not vice versa. One implication of an entity  $x$  being in another entity  $y$  as a subject is that  $x$  is dependent on  $y$  for its existence (Aristotle, *Cat.* 2.1a24–25). In sum, relations require subjects in which to be and depend on those subjects for their existence.

Third, as with all other categories, relations come in two kinds: universals and particulars. This is important to notice because in many contemporary debates, it is simply assumed that relations are universals. The medieval debates, by contrast, are concerned mainly with particular instances of relations, which, it was normally assumed, are what inhere in substances and do the actual relating between them.

### Relatives

The word “relation” is an abstract term that comes from Latin *relatio*. The key texts in which Aristotle discusses this category are *Categories* 7 and *Metaphysics* V.15. However, no corresponding Greek abstract term occurs in these texts. Rather, Aristotle speaks of that which is  $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma\ \tau\iota$ , “towards something.” In the Latin translation of the *Categories* made by Manlius Boethius (c. 475–526 CE), this gets rendered simply as *ad aliquid*, “towards something,” or alternatively as *relativum*, “relative.” This is perhaps innocuous enough—Boethius, at least, insists that the two renditions are equivalent (1860: 217b). In a few places, however, he uses neither but translates, perhaps less innocuously, with *relatio*.

The medievals distinguished sharply between a relation and a relative. As a model for this distinction, they took Aristotle's own distinction in the *Categories* between a quality and a quale (*Cat.* 8.10a27–32). Basically, a quality is an accident of certain kind; a quale is such an accident plus a subject of inherence. Similarly, a relation is an accident of a certain kind; a relative is such an accident plus a subject. Paleness is a quality; a pale is a quale. Similarity is a relation; a similar is a relative. The items that Aristotle discusses in the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics* are relatives.

A main concern in the *Categories* is to define the notion of a relative. Aristotle, in fact, proposes two definitions. His second, improved definition goes as follows: “those things are relatives for which being is the same as standing towards something in some way” (*Cat.* 7.8a31–32, trans. Ackrill, modified). For present purposes, Aristotle's point may perhaps be elucidated as follows. To be a human being, say, is to be a mortal rational animal, and that is something that a thing can be independently of other things. To be double, by contrast, is not something that a thing can be all by its lonesome; to be double is to stand toward something else in a certain way (in the ratio 2:1, say). Of course, a human being can be the double of something, namely by standing toward that something in a certain way, but a human being in and of itself is not a relative. If God made everything else disappear, you could still be a human being, but you could not be double, for there would be nothing else for you to stand toward in that way. Things, such as double, that satisfy Aristotle's second definition of relatives were known in the middle ages as relatives according to being (*relativa secundum esse*).

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle is not concerned to define relatives, but rather to give a general classification of them. There are, he maintains, three general classes:

Things are relative (1) as double to half and treble to a third, and in general that which contains something else many times to that which is contained many times in something else, and that which exceeds to that which is exceeded; (2) as that which can heat to that which can be heated, and that which can cut to that which can be cut, and in general the active to the passive; (3) as the measurable to the measure and the knowable to knowledge and the perceptible to perception.

(*Metaphysics V.15.1020b26–32, trans. Ross*)

The second class is reasonably straightforward, but there are a few things to notice about the first and the third class. In the first class, Aristotle places not only, as his examples suggest, the terms of ratios of various sorts, but also relatives such as equal, similar, and same. The latter are “numerical relatives” in the sense that they “all refer to unity” (1021a10–14). If, for example, Socrates and Plato are similar, this is because there is a qualitative feature—paleness, say—that they both have in common; their quality is in some sense one. In the third class, Aristotle places a sort of relative that is relative “because something else is related to it” (1021a26–29). The class is somewhat curious, but the medievals took him to mean something along the following lines. Suppose Socrates really knows something. His piece of knowledge is then really related—by conformity, say—to the knowable object, but the knowable object's being related to his piece of knowledge about it consists entirely in that piece of knowledge's being related (i.e. conforming) to it. In this sense, a knowable object is a relative solely “because something else is related to it.” This third class of relatives is worth drawing attention to, because it came to play an important role in certain contexts in the middle ages.

## Relations

As Aristotle's definition of relatives suggests, a relation is a certain way of standing toward something else. Medieval philosophers would usually try to capture this by saying that a relation is simply a link (*habitudo*), a directedness (*respectus*), or a being toward (*esse ad*).

To get clearer on what they mean, suppose that the following assertion is true: Socrates is pale. What is it about the world that makes it true? A common answer was that it is made true by a particular instance of the accident paleness (a quality) being in the substance Socrates as its subject. Suppose, then, that this assertion is true: Socrates is similar to Plato. What makes this assertion true? Again, one might say that it is made true by a particular instance of the accident similarity (a relation) being in the substance Socrates as its subject. But that can hardly be the whole story. After all, Socrates is not simply similar; he is similar *to Plato*. The standard medieval way of completing the story therefore is to say that, in contrast to his paleness, Socrates' similarity is not an absolute accident of his but an accident that he has with respect to some other substance, in this case Plato. In medieval parlance, the particular instance of similarity in question has Socrates as its subject (*subiectum*) and Plato as its term (*terminus*). This does not mean that there is a relational property, similarity to Plato, that Socrates has, but that there is relation, similarity, that Socrates has to Plato. Thus, the assertion that Socrates is similar to Plato is made true by a particular instance of the accident similarity (a relation) being in the substance Socrates as its subject with Plato as its term. On the standard medieval analysis, then, a relation is a sort of link or being toward that a single substance has, not all by its lonesome, but with respect to some other substance. Indeed, this is the main difference between relations and other accidents such as quantities and qualities: relations require not only a subject of inherence, but also a term.

This construal of relations led to some puzzles. Medieval philosophers were, as we saw, committed to particular instances of relations and in fact held that it is these that inhere in particular substances. It was furthermore commonly assumed that there cannot be several instances of the same accident inhering in the same subject. There cannot, for example, be several instances of the same height inhering in Socrates, since by being the same kind of height and having the same subject, they would be indiscernible. This is sometimes called the principle of instance uniqueness and may be expressed as follows. If an instance  $i$  of a given specific accident is in subject  $x$  and an instance  $j$  of the same specific accident is in subject  $y$ , and  $x = y$ , then  $i = j$  (cf. Mertz 1996: 10). Since relations are accidents, the principle seemingly implies that two instances of the same relation cannot be in one and the same subject.

This, however, seems problematic. For suppose that I am taller than both Socrates and Plato and that they are exactly the same height. Certainly, the taller than relation that I have to Socrates is then exactly the same kind of relation as the one that I have to Plato. But it cannot be numerically the same relation instance, since I could lose the first relation without losing the second (if, say, Socrates grew an inch). So it seems that there must be two instances in me of the taller than relation. But what is it that distinguishes the two instances? It is not I, the subject, nor is it the kind of relation that they are instances of, so it seems that it must be the terms or something about them. Medieval philosophers would usually use the fatherhood relation to make this point. If a father has ten sons, Abelard (1079–1142) explicitly says, then there are ten fatherhoods inhering in him. See *Dialectica* 1970: 89.20–27. Some thinkers, however, of which Albert the Great (c. 1200–1280) is an example, seem to have found it troubling that one substance or something about it can somehow individuate a property inhering in another, distinct substance, and so they insisted on the somewhat surprising claim that the principle of instance uniqueness holds even for relations and that the father in question is, in fact, not related to his ten sons by ten numerically distinct fatherhoods. See *De Praedicamentis* IV.10 (2013: 101.45–61), but also Penner (2016).

### Relations and Their Subjects

The stipulation that a relation requires both a subject and a term is an attempt to accommodate the essential feature of relations that they serve to connect things, while honoring one of the basic commitments of the ontology, namely the fundamental distinction between substance and accident.

It has been not uncommon since Russell to scoff at this sort of approach. Basically, the claim seems to be, the now standard way of representing relations formally as  $xRy$  is not only a powerful logical device, but in fact mirrors the way things are. Thus, when the notation is usually explained as meaning that  $R$  holds between  $x$  and  $y$ , this gets the ontology exactly right. A relation is not *in* the relata; it holds *between* them. See, e.g., McTaggart (1927: 82).

It is important to notice that medieval philosophers were not oblivious to the intuitive pull of this kind of construal of relations. Again and again, they invoke the analogy of a road between two cities (usually the one between Athens and Thebes) in their discussions of relations. See, e.g., Albert the Great, *De Praedicamentis* IV.10 (2013: 100.47–53); Martin of Dacia, *Quaest. sup. Praed.* q. 45 (1961: 207.7–9). Intuitively, a relation is a bit like such a road: it too serves to connect things. Time after time, however, they deny that the analogy provides an accurate picture of the ontology of relations (Brower 2018). One of the more forceful and famous such denials came from Peter Auriol (c. 1280–1322):

Something single that must be construed as a sort of interval between two things does not seem to exist in extramental reality [. . .] both because nature doesn't produce such intervals and because a medium or interval of this sort doesn't seem to be in any of the things as its subject but rather between them where there is clearly nothing that can serve as a subject.  
(*I Sent.*, d. 30 (*MS 329*: f. 318va))

Placing the relation *between* the relata leaves it without a subject of inherence. In other words, a relation will be something that is not in a subject. Assuming that a relation is something that has extramental existence, this would make a relation a sort of substance. But that can hardly be right, and it is certainly not what Peter wants to argue. Rather, he wants to deny the assumption: a relation construed in this way is not something that exists in extramental reality.

Most medieval philosophers agreed with Peter in rejecting this analysis as an ontologically viable option. Similarly, there seems to have been unanimous agreement among them when it came to rejecting another analysis, namely one that takes a relation to be in both relata as its subjects. See, e.g., Aquinas (1929, *I Sent.* d. 27, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2). If Socrates and Plato are similar, such an analysis would go, there is a single relation of similarity that is both in Socrates and in Plato. Again, the reason why medieval thinkers reject this analysis has to do with their basic commitment to particular instances of accidents. Not only can a particular instance of an accident not be in no subject at all, but it cannot be in more than one subject either. Today, this is sometimes called the principle of subject uniqueness, and it may be expressed as follows: if an instance  $i$  of a given specific accident is in subject  $x$  and an instance  $j$  of the same specific accident is in subject  $y$ , and  $x \neq y$ , then  $i \neq j$  (cf. Mertz 1996: 10). This principle implies that, like any other accident instance, a single relation instance cannot be in both of the relata as its subjects.

Another analysis tries to get around this problem by saying that the subject of a relation is not actually the two relata taken separately, but rather the two taken jointly. In other words, the move is to allow relations to have collective subjects. If Socrates and Plato are similar, the analysis would go, there is a single relation of similarity that is in Socrates and Plato not as its subjects (plural), but as its subject (singular). Proponents of this analysis of relations use numbers to illustrate their point. In the *Categories*, Aristotle places number in the category of quantity. Quantity, however, is an accidental category, and so apparently numbers also need subjects in which to be. Suppose, then, that you have a pair of kittens in front of you. Here you seem to have an instance of the number two, but what is the subject that this instance is in? It cannot be just the one kitten, because that kitten is not two. Nor by parity of reason can it be the other kitten. Nor again can it be each of the kittens taken separately, both because neither of them is two and because this would violate the principle of subject uniqueness. The only viable answer thus appears to be that the subject is

the two kittens collectively. Construed in this manner, the claim is, there are not actually two subjects—it is not true of either of the kittens that it is the subject of the number two—but just one collective subject. Thus, since there is only one subject and only one instance of the number two involved here, subject uniqueness is not actually violated. This kind of analysis of numbers seems to have been not uncommon in the thirteenth century, but as a general analysis of relations, it too appears to have been almost unanimously rejected. The only medieval philosopher known to have fully embraced a collective subject theory of relations is the mid-thirteenth-century arts master Nicholas of Paris (Hansen 2013).

In the end, then, the medieval philosophers standardly opted for the analysis of relations sketched in the previous section. A relation is a sort of link or being toward that a single substance (the subject) has, but only with respect to some other substance (the term). Another way to explain  $xRy$  that is not uncommon in today's literature on relations is to say that  $xRy$  means that  $x$  has relation  $R$  to  $y$ . Basically, the standard medieval approach amounts to the claim that this gets the ontology exactly right.

### Relations and Their Converses

In the *Categories*, Aristotle is concerned not only to define relatives, but also to discuss certain characteristics that they have. Two of these characteristics are especially important: convertibility and simultaneity.

Convertibility is the claim that for every relative there is what we may call a correlative. Aristotle explains the characteristic as follows:

the slave is called slave of a master and the master is called master of a slave; the double double of a half, and the half half of a double; the larger larger than a smaller, and the smaller smaller than a larger; and so for the rest too.

*(Cat. 7.6b28–33, trans. Ackrill)*

In keeping with their analysis of relatives, the medievals took this feature to be indicative of the fact that every relation  $R$  has a co-relation  $R^*$ , what we today would call the converse of  $R$ . (Aristotle focuses almost entirely on dyadic relations; the medievals follow suit.)

Simultaneity, in turn, is the further claim that every relative not only has a correlative, but is simultaneous with that correlative. Aristotle explains this characteristic as follows: “there is at the same time a double and a half, and when there is a half there is a double, and when there is a slave, there is a master; and similarly with the others” (*Cat. 7.7b16–19, trans. Ackrill*). The medievals took this characteristic of relatives to be indicative of the fact that the instantiation of a relation and its converse are strictly simultaneous. If an instance of some relation  $R$  comes to exist at some time  $t$  in some subject  $x$  with respect to some term  $y$ , then an instance of the converse relation  $R^*$  comes to exist at  $t$  in  $y$  with respect to  $x$ ; and if the instance of  $R$  in  $y$  to  $x$  ceases to exist at some time  $t$ , then the instance of  $R^*$  in  $x$  to  $y$  ceases to exist at  $t$ .

Suppose, for example, that the following assertion is true: Sophroniscus is the father of Socrates. According to the standard medieval analysis, this assertion is true because there is an instance of the relation fatherhood inhering in Sophroniscus as its subject with Socrates as its term. By convertibility, every relation has a converse, and in the case of fatherhood, the medievals take it, this converse is sonship. By simultaneity, a relation and its converse are intimately connected, so intimately in fact that when an instance of one comes (or ceases) to exist, so does an instance of the other. So the instant Sophroniscus comes to have the relation fatherhood to Socrates, Socrates comes to have the relation sonship to Sophroniscus; and the instant Sophroniscus ceases to have the relation fatherhood to Socrates, Socrates ceases to have the relation sonship to Sophroniscus.

Simultaneity has some interesting consequences. Basically, it means that only things for which there is some time  $t$  at which they both exist can be related. This is because relations are accidents and the existence of an accident is dependent on the existence of its subject. Thus, the moment Sophroniscus ceases to exist, the relation of fatherhood he has to Socrates ceases to exist. But what is more, by simultaneity the relation of sonship that Socrates has to Sophroniscus also ceases to exist. In other words, when Sophroniscus dies, Socrates, strictly speaking, ceases to be the son of Sophroniscus. A favorite example of medieval philosophers in this context is the relation of priority and its converse posteriority. Strictly speaking, Adam was not prior to Noah, since there was no time  $t$  at which they both existed. See Anonymous D'Orvillensis, *in Cat.*, 340 (Ebbesen 1999). Similarly, I am not really prior to future members of the human race (Aquinas 1929, *I Sent.* d. 26 q. 2, a.1, corp.). In sum, it was common among medieval philosophers to hold that for a relation to really obtain, it requires the actual existence of the relata.

What is it about a relation and its converse that make them have this peculiar intimacy? Most medieval philosophers seem to have taken it as a brute fact about relations, but there were some who appear to have wondered if there was a way to avoid this unexplained connection. One strategy that has received a lot of attention in contemporary discussions of recent years is to say that at the fundamental level, there is actually just one neutral relation, either because a relation is simply identical with its converse (Williamson 1985) or because converse relations are somehow derivative on this more basic neutral relation (Fine 2000). If the cat is on top of the mat, then the mat is under the cat. But, the claim is, although we can represent it in different ways, there is, at the fundamental level, just one relation here.

There were also medieval proponents of this sort of approach, but they certainly do not seem to have been many. Basically, the approach was rejected because of the principle of subject uniqueness. Take the similarity between Socrates and Plato again. Let's assume that there is only one relation here. As the medievals see it, this must be a particular instance of the similarity relation. However, this instance is an accident, so it must somehow be in a subject. But there do not seem to be grounds for saying that its subject is just one of the relata, for by parity of reason, it should be the other. So there appears to be two subjects. By the principle of subject uniqueness, however, if similarity instance  $i$  is in Socrates as its subject and similarity instance  $j$  is in Plato as its subject, then since Socrates and Plato are distinct subjects, similarity instance  $i$  and similarity instance  $j$  are numerically distinct instances. So although these relations are instances of the same kind, namely similarity, they are nonetheless numerically distinct.

Of course, if one held that relations have collective subjects, then there is a way to get around this. For one could simply say that there is only one collective subject here, namely the two men, and then by the principle of instance uniqueness, it seems to follow that there is only one similarity instance. For if similarity instance  $i$  is in the two men as its collective subject and similarity instance  $j$  is in the same two men as its collective subject, then since they are the same kind of relation and have identical subjects, similarity instance  $i$  and similarity instance  $j$  are numerically the same instance. There are, of course, additional problems that such an approach will have to overcome when it comes to non-symmetric relations such as fatherhood and sonship, but they are perhaps not insuperable. Nonetheless, the approach seems to have been almost unanimously rejected (see Hansen 2016).

That said, there were nevertheless cases where many medieval philosophers insisted that there is only one relation instance involved in two things being related, namely when the relation involved Aristotle's third class of relatives. Here, the idea was that the relation is non-mutual; it simply has no real converse. In such cases, therefore, there is only one relation instance involved, but it is a directionally biased, not a neutral one. It does not accrue to the two relata in an equal way, but is fundamentally had by one relatum to the other. What is more, this kind of relation was of prime importance to many medieval philosophers, since they took the relation between

God and his creation to be of precisely this sort. While every creature has a real relation to God, Aquinas (c. 1225–1274), for example, would say, there is no corresponding co-relation inhering in God (Henninger 1989: 31–39). In such cases, therefore, there was additional, strong motivation for keeping a relation and its converse ontologically distinct.

### Relations and Their Foundations

As we have seen, most medieval philosophers seem to have taken the essential connection between a mutual relation and its converse as a brute fact about relations, but one might start worrying that there are some undesirable consequences here. Suppose that Socrates is similar to Plato because both men are pale. There is, in other words, an instance of the quality paleness inhering in Socrates and another instance of the same quality inhering in Plato. In medieval terminology, the instance of paleness in Socrates is the foundation (*fundamentum*) of his relation of similarity to Plato. Similarly, the instance of paleness in Plato is the foundation of his relation of similarity to Socrates.

Now suppose that Socrates walks down to the market place one morning and spends the day pestering people with philosophical questions, while Plato stays at home to work on a dialogue. Being outside all day Socrates gets a tan, whereas Plato remains as pale as ever. Socrates has certainly changed, but what about Plato? For a full-blown realist about relations, a famous example being John Duns Scotus (c. 1266–1308), the answer to this question will be “yes.” According to this sort of view, Plato has really changed because he has lost a relation that he previously possessed, namely the similarity he had to Socrates. That similarity was a real thing (*res relativa*), and so Plato has undergone a real change (see, e.g., Scotus 1982, *Lectura* II, d. 1, q. 5, n. 214; p. 71).

Some might find this puzzling. Can what happens to Socrates really change Plato? How can that be? Indeed, many medieval philosophers rejected this, and they would often refer to the authority of Aristotle to back up their position:

A sign that the relative is least of all a substance and a real thing is the fact that it alone has no proper generation or destruction or movement, as in quantity there is increase and diminution, in quality alteration, in place locomotion, in substance simple generation and destruction. The relative has no proper change; for without changing, a thing will be now greater and now less or equal, if that with which it is compared has changed in quantity.

(Met. XIV.1.1088a29–35, trans. Ross; cf. Phys. V.2.225b1–13)

Applying this to our example, Aristotle clearly denies that Plato has really changed. Sure, there has been real change somewhere, namely in Socrates when he acquired a tan, but Plato has undergone no real change by losing his relation of similarity to Socrates. If you are a realist about relations—and one way or the other most medieval philosophers were—the challenge becomes to find a way to maintain that relations are real without denying Aristotle’s intuitively plausible insistence that it is possible for a substance to come or cease to be related without itself undergoing any proper change.

For many, the starting point for meeting the challenge is the claim that not only some, but all relations are founded on non-relational features of the relata. This was accepted by most, and the point was often expressed by saying that for a relation to really obtain it requires, in addition to the actual existence of the relata, that the relation has a real foundation (*fundamentum in re*). See, e.g., Aquinas (1929, *I Sent.* d. 26 q. 2, a.1, corp). Once this is accepted, the strategy for meeting the challenge is to say that the relation is in some sense the same thing as its foundation.

One proponent of this sort of strategy is Henry of Ghent (c. 1217–1293). According to him, a real relation is not a different thing (*res*) from its foundation. That, however, is not to say that



the relation is simply identical to the foundation (Henninger 1989; Williams 2012). Rather, the relation is a certain way that foundation is. As Henry (1983) puts it:

For this reason I have repeatedly insisted that a relation contracts the reality it has from its foundation, and that in itself it is nothing but a bare link, which is merely a certain mode for a thing of standing towards another, and thus it is not a thing in its own right but only a mode of a thing.

(Quodlibet IX, q. 3; p. 56:85–88)

In Henry's theory of categories, only substance, quantity, and quality count as bona fide things, each of which has its own distinctive way of being (*ratio*). The remaining categories, by contrast, are not in themselves things, but rather additional ways that substances, quantities, and qualities are. So when Socrates loses his tan and becomes his pale old self, Plato will again come to have a relation of similarity to Socrates. This relation is real—it obtains independently of the activity of some human mind—but in acquiring it Plato has not properly speaking changed. Unlike Socrates, he has not obtained some new thing that inheres in him as a subject. Rather, the instance of paleness inhering in him already has come to be in a new way, i.e. toward something else (*ad aliud*). In this sense, relations are real without being things. Compared to someone like Scotus, Henry's approach is modest: relations are things only to the extent that they are ways things are. And yet, even on this more modest approach, a relation would appear to still be a real extramental feature of some entitative standing over and above that of its subject and foundation.

A more radical approach was that of William of Ockham (c. 1287–1347), who forcefully rejected the view that relations are a distinct type of entity over and above substances and their absolute properties. In his ontology, the only category besides substance that has a distinct kind of entity corresponding to it in extramental reality is the category of quality. But again, this does not mean that relations depend on the activity of some human mind:

Socrates is similar to Plato because of absolute things alone, all else excluded be it in extramental reality or in the intellect. And so in extramental reality there is nothing but the absolute things. Since, however, there are several absolute things in extramental reality, the intellect can express them in different ways, in one way by saying precisely that Socrates is pale (and then it has precisely absolute concepts), in another that Plato is pale, and in a third way by saying that Socrates as well as Plato is pale. This it can also do through a concept or intention that is relative by saying "Socrates is similar to Plato according to paleness," for exactly the same is implied by these propositions: "Socrates as well as Plato is pale" and "Socrates is similar to Plato according to paleness."

(Ockham 1979, *Ordinatio I, d. 30, q. 1; p. 316:14–24*)

If you then ask what a real relation such as similarity is, there are, according to Ockham, two ways of replying, both of which are true:

I say that (1) similarity is either a relative concept signifying several things collectively or (2) it is the several absolute things collectively; as a people is several men and no man is a people, so similarity is several pale things and no pale thing is a similarity.

(Ockham 1980, *Quodlibet VI, q. 15; p. 639:70–73*)

What (2) says is that the relation is actually there in extramental reality, but it is nothing over and above the relata with their absolute properties. Once you have them, you have the relation. Nothing more is needed, and yet this does not mean that the relation is not there, that it isn't

real. In the case of similarity, the relation just is the relata with their respective palenesses. But, importantly, that is not to say that one pale thing is a relation. Rather, a relation is a bit like the tango: it takes two.

Another forceful opponent of more robust approaches was Peter Auriol. We have already seen him reject that a relation construed as something existing *between* the relata can be found in extramental reality. This in itself was not uncommon. What was more uncommon was his insistence that replacing the “between” with a “towards” makes no difference. In order to relate, he insists, a relation has to, so to speak, reach beyond the subject to the term, and no matter how you cut the cake, the only way in which it can do so is to be between them or to be in both of them and thus somehow divided between them, neither of which is feasible. And so,

taking a relation for that which it formally and directly means, namely a link which exists in the foundation and mediates between the foundation and the term, and which is nothing but a being towards and directedness, it itself as such does not exist in reality if one excludes all intellectual and sensory apprehension, but it exists in the soul objectively, so that in extramental reality there is nothing but the foundations and the terms, while the link or connection between them comes from the cognitive soul.

(MS 329, I Sent. d. 30; f. 321ra–b)

On Peter’s view, connections between things, that is to say, relations, have actual existence only in the mind. Actual relations are concepts. Peter takes care to stress, however, that this does not mean that relations are mere figments of the imagination. Although relations do not *actually* exist in extramental reality, they do so, he insists, *potentially*. What he means by this is that if Socrates and Plato are both pale, then an intellect considering them as such will immediately apprehend them as indistinct in this regard, and their similarity is just this conceived indistinctness. Another way he puts it is that the relations are in extramental reality foundationally. Like Ockham, Peter is clearly attempting to give our relational talk and thought a solid basis in extramental reality without positing corresponding relational entities “out there” over and above the relata and the foundations in them. And clearly, on such a view, a thing can come to be related without itself undergoing any proper change.

## Conclusion

As should by now be clear, there was no one medieval theory of relations. There were some shared basic commitments springing from Aristotle’s categorial theory and its ontology of substance and accident, and these commitments did motivate a certain construal of relations. Still, there was plenty of room for debate and lots of conceptual space for articulating a plethora of divergent views about the precise nature and ontological status of relations. The medieval literature on relations is vast, rich, and varied, and large parts of it remain more or less unexplored. But from what is known of the story so far, it is to be expected that for pretty much every view that someone held, there was someone else who found a reason to disagree. Medieval philosophers were, after all, philosophers.

## Further Reading

A good study of medieval theories of relation is Henninger (1989) which focuses on the period 1250–1325 and gives a lucid and detailed discussion of the views of Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, Richard of Mediavilla, John Duns Scotus, Henry of Harclay, William of Ockham, and Peter Auriol. In the case of several of these major theological thinkers, there are also detailed

studies in either book or article form. Thus, for example, for Aquinas one might consult Krempel (1952); for Henry of Ghent, Williams (2012); and for Ockham, Adams (1987) and Beretta (1999).

The periods before and after the 75 years Henninger focuses on have received less attention. For the period before Aquinas, one might consult Marenbon (2018) on the period up to c. 1100, Brower (1998) on Abelard, Erismann (2014) and Martin (2016) on the twelfth century, Brower (2001) on Albert the Great, Hansen (2012) on John Pagus, Hansen (2013) on Nicholas of Paris, Thom (2013) and Hansen (2016) on Robert Kilwardby. Marmo (2013a, 2013b) gives an introduction to the views of the late thirteenth-century arts master and theologian Raldulphus Brito. For the period after Ockham, a good place to start is by looking at Conti's article on Walter Burley in Carraud and Porro (2014), and for late Scholasticism, see Penner (2012, 2013) on Francisco Suárez and Rodrigo de Arriaga.

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