Bertrand Russell is often credited with bringing the significance of relations to philosophers’ attention. He not only recognizes relations as interesting in their own right but is convinced that one’s account of relations bears on many other central philosophical issues:

The question of relations is one of the most important that arise in philosophy, as most other issues turn on it: monism and pluralism; the question whether anything is true except the whole of truth, or wholly real except the whole of reality; idealism and realism, in some of their forms; perhaps the whole existence of philosophy as a subject distinct from science and possessing a method of its own.¹

It is certainly the case that much of the attention analytic philosophy has given to relations has been inspired by Russell’s work. But Russell was not the first philosopher to give relations significant philosophical scrutiny. No other tradition has paid relations as much attention as the medieval and early modern scholastic tradition, in which nearly every theologian and philosopher devoted some — and often considerable — discussion to relations.² One does not have to look far to see why. This is a tradition with a healthy respect for its intellectual forebears, and two of the most prominent of those forebears were Aristotle (the Philosopher) and Augustine. Relations form one of the ten basic categories of being for Aristotle.³ A further six categories look suspiciously like they might involve relations. It is hardly surprising, then, that an Aristotelian tradition would take note of relations. If

2. Assertions such as the following by D.M. Armstrong appear rather ill-advised: “Philosophy has been a long time coming to grips with the category of relations…. It is not until the late nineteenth and the twentieth century with C.S. Peirce, William James, and Bertrand Russell that relations begin (no more than begin) to come into focus” (Universals: An Opinionated Introduction [Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989], 29).
that weren’t motivation enough, Augustine made relations central to discussions of the Trinity by suggesting that the divine persons are constituted in some way by relations. This combination of philosophical and theological motivation gave rise to a rich tradition of sophisticated thought about relations.

This tradition remains relatively unexplored. Some valuable work has been done on scholastics from the twelfth century to the early fourteenth century. The next philosopher whose work receives significant attention is Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), heir to the medieval discussions. Both endpoints have further work left to be done, but in between we have several centuries almost entirely unaccounted for. Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), one of the shining philosophical lights of Spain’s Golden Age, falls into that unexplored period. He wrote more about relations than anyone else of whom I know. The centrepiece of his discussion is a book-length treatise entitled On Real Relation, the 47th of his 54 Metaphysical Disputations. He also deals with relations extensively elsewhere — e.g., with divine relations in De Deo Uno et Trino and with relations of reason in the 54th of the Metaphysical Disputations — but On Real Relation will provide ample material for present purposes.

The history of discussion about relations to which Suárez is heir is both a blessing and a curse, especially to someone of his temperament. Suárez is extraordinarily scholarly, painstakingly judicious with his sources, and a harmonist who finds it well-nigh impossible to throw received parts of the tradition overboard. On the one hand, it would be a challenge to find any interesting argument about relations from the previous two millennia of Western philosophical reflection that does not receive at least passing attention from Suárez. On the other hand, as we will see later in the paper, there are various places where one gets the impression that Suárez ties himself into knots in increasingly desperate attempts to preserve parts of the tradition that he might better have jettisoned.

4. De Trinitate V.
6. I will not cite the large literature on the question of whether Leibniz was a reductionist about relations; interested readers can consult Anja Jauernig’s ‘Disentangling Leibniz’s Views on Relations and Extrinsic Denominations’ (Journal of the History of Philosophy 48 [2010]: 171–205) for references to the relevant literature, not to mention reading her paper for its own excellent discussion of the question.
7. For an introduction to Suárez, see Jorge J.E. Gracia’s ‘Francisco Suárez: The Man in History’ (American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly 65 [1991]: 259–66) and the other articles in the same journal issue. Alfred J. Freddoso provides a nice overview of Suárez’s metaphysics, albeit with an eye to efficient causation, in his introduction to On Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence: Metaphysical Disputations 20–22 (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2002).
8. The qualification ‘of whom I know’ is necessary, given the state of our knowledge of the period.
9. About 55,000 words in Latin, to be more precise. While writing my paper I was not aware of any other English-language discussions of Suárez on relations, but another paper has just been published: Jorge Secada, “Suárez on the Ontology of Relations”, in Interpreting Suárez: Critical Essays, ed. Daniel Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 62–88. Secada covers some of the same material that I do, though our emphases differ. On reading his paper, I was gratified to see that our interpretations appear to be broadly in agreement.
10. I will cite Metaphysical Disputations (henceforth: DM) by disputation, section, and paragraph number. Latin quotations are from the 1597 Salamanca edition, which provides the most reliable text. The work is most easily available, however, as volumes 25 and 26 of the Opera omnia published in Paris in 1856–78 and reprinted in Hildesheim in 1965. Quotations from other works are from the Opera omnia and are cited by the relevant division numbers. All translations are mine, with consultation of John P. Doyle’s valuable translation of the 47th disputation (On Real Relation [Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2006]) in relevant cases.
Suárez on the Reduction of Categorical Relations

The paper will proceed as follows: Section 1 presents some of the relevant terminology and taxonomy for talking about Suárez’s account of relations. In section 2, I introduce the motivation for a reductionist account of relations and look at Suárez’s main treatment of that question as well as a related question about whether relations constitute an Aristotelian category. Sections 3 and 4 take a closer look at Suárez’s reductionism, especially some of the reasons why he is reluctant to throw in his lot with other reductionists wholeheartedly. Section 5 sketches some worries concerning reductionism about relations and reveals that Suárez’s reductionism may not be as thoroughgoing as it appears at first glance. I end by addressing a lingering issue concerning relations’ status as a distinct category of real being.

1. Terminological and taxonomic preliminaries

Medieval philosophers quickly developed a professional vocabulary for talking about relations. Suárez shares this standard vocabulary with others in his philosophical tradition, but it may sound unfamiliar to modern ears, so a quick review is in order. I will point out a few of Suárez’s philosophical positions along the way.

First, there are the various terms for relations: ‘relation’ (‘relatio’), ‘comparison’ (‘comparatio’), ‘respect’ or ‘outward-looking-ness’ (‘respectus’), ‘ordering’ (‘ordinatio’), and so on. Some of these terms have connotations that make them more appealing to advocates of certain positions than to others. ‘Comparison’, for example, has psychological connotations that make it a preferred term for conceptualists about relations. Suárez seldom uses ‘comparison’. The terms that he uses repeatedly are ‘relation’, ‘respect’, and ‘habitude’ (‘habitudo’). A challenge with this abundance of terms for relations is determining when a given author uses them as synonymous expressions and when different terms signal different concepts. I see no reason to worry about Suárez’s use of ‘relation’ and ‘respect’. The problematic term is ‘habitude’ (which is why I prefer to use the archaic English cognate rather than a more elegant translation). In some texts it looks like Suárez may be using it as just another term for relations. In other texts, however, one senses that there may be a distinction lurking in the background, a distinction that he, unfortunately, does not spell out. What is clear is that he primarily uses ‘habitude’ when he has transcendental relations in mind (see the taxonomy below). Since the focus in this paper is on categorical relations, just what Suárez means by ‘habitude’ is less of a concern for us.

He also frequently uses the term ‘relative’ (‘relativum’), which in its strict sense he defines as something that consists of a subject together with its relation — so Peter, with his relation of similarity to John, is a relative. Suárez notes that the term is also used more loosely to refer to the subjects of relations.

Second, there are the terms for the different elements needed to construct a theory of relations. Let’s distinguish several terms with reference to the example of Peter’s relation of similarity to John. Let’s say they are similar in both being white.

The subject of the relation is Peter. The view is that relations are accidents and accidents require subjects of which to be accidents. There is a further question in the vicinity: namely, what special claim does Peter have to being the subject of this relation? Why not John? Or, better, both Peter and John?


12. See Brower, “Medieval Theories of Relations”, §2.1.

13. DM XLVII.6.2.
Most philosophers from Avicenna to Leibniz take it as axiomatic that an accident cannot have more than one subject. Given that premise, it follows quickly enough that relations — being accidents — cannot have more than one subject and thus cannot inhere in both relata. The standard medieval view, then, is that, in ordinary cases, one has a pair of converse relations, one of which inhere in \( a \) as its subject and terminates in \( b \) and the other of which inhere in \( b \) and terminates in \( a \). This is true both for asymmetrical relations (e.g., Peter's being taller than John and John's being shorter than Peter) and for symmetrical relations (e.g., Peter's being similar in colour to John and John's being similar in colour to Peter). The claim that an accident can have only one subject strikes me as worth questioning, but doing so now would take us too far afield. For the moment, we should just accept, as a standard part of the medieval picture, the assumption that each relation has a single subject.

The foundation of the relation is Peter's whiteness. This is the feature in John that makes it the case that he is similar to Peter. The thought here is straightforward enough. Whenever we have a subject and its relation, there is something in virtue of which that relation holds of that subject. That something is the foundation for the relation. The foundation of a relation is also that from which the relation derives its reality, but this is to get ahead of the story.

Matters become more complicated when we introduce the term 'reason of founding' ("ratio fundandi"), a term that seems to have become a standard part of the later scholastic discussions. It is not at all clear, however, what the term contributes to the discussion — i.e., what the difference is supposed to be between a reason of founding and a foundation. In fact, one of the views defended by some scholastic philosophers is that there is no difference. Others, however, argue that there is a difference. Suárez himself — in a rather unsatisfactory discussion of the matter — concludes that there is a reason of founding in every foundation but that the reason of founding is not “really or physically distinct” from the foundation. Rather, they are only “distinguished metaphysically or in reason to explain the rationes of things.” One gets the impression that Suárez is not sure of himself in this passage.

He is more sure of himself with respect to the question of whether the subject and foundation of a relation need always be distinct. Aquinas seems to have thought that they must always be distinct. One might think that the foundation for a relation must itself be an accident, since
a relation is an accident and is supposed to derive its reality from its foundation. Suppose we have a relation inhering in a subject that is a substance where we are tempted to say that the subject and foundation are identical in reality. If the subject and foundation are identical, the foundation must also be a substance. Since the being of the relation is derived from that of its foundation, it must also have the being of a substance. But relations have the being of accidents. Therefore, it must not be the case that the subject and foundation are identical. Suárez, however, rejects this argument, noting that there are cases where we have good reason to say that the relation arises from the essence of the subjects and not from some accident that they might have. For example, John and Peter also share the relation of specific identity — i.e., Peter is the same species as John. But it is implausible to say that they are of the same species as a result of some accident — e.g., whiteness. After all, any number of things are similar in that respect without being of the same species as a consequence. Rather, it seems clear that John and Peter are of the same species because they have the same essence. In response to the argument on behalf of Aquinas’s view, Suárez denies the premise that says that if the being of a relation is derived from a substance, it must consequently itself have the being of a substance. He notes that there are other cases as well where accidents — e.g., duration — are distinguished from substances only by reasoned reason (ratione ratiocinata). So Suárez parts company with Aquinas on this question and concludes that subjects and foundations are not always really distinct.

The terminus of the relation in question is John. That termini are needed is obvious, since it is of the essence of a relation to be toward another thing. That other thing is the terminus. Those, then, are the ubiquitous terms in scholastic discussions of relations. An attentive reader, of course, will notice an asymmetry in these terms. We made a distinction on the subject side — i.e., between subject and foundation — but made no parallel distinction on the terminus side. Despite not typically making this distinction in his discussions, Suárez is not opposed to making it. As he himself notes:

For, just as a white thing is apt for founding a relation of similarity because it has whiteness and that whiteness itself is an apt foundation because it has such a formal unity, so also the same white thing is apt for terminating the relation of another [white] thing because it has a whiteness of the same character or unity with another whiteness.

Of course, just as in the case of the foundation, the terminus will not always be distinct in reality from that which provides the aptness for terminating. That is, in some cases the essence of the terminus will itself provide the aptitude for termination.

On to matters taxonomic. Here is a diagram of how Suárez charts the territory:

This diagram is somewhat misleading in that Suárez does not think that ‘relation’ is univocal between real relations and conceptual

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23. Suárez suggests this argument on behalf of his opponents in DM XLVII.7.2.
24. DM XLVII.7.5.
25. DM XLVII.7.8.
26. DM XLVII.6.18: “...nam sicut album aptum est ad fundandam relationem similitudinis, quia habet albedinem, et ipsa albedo est aptum fundamentum, quia habet tale unitatem formalem, ita etiam idem album est aptum ad terminandum relationem alterius, quia habet albedinem ejusdem rationis vel unitatis cum albedo alterius.”
Transcendental relations are somewhat puzzling both in Suárez and in scholastic thought more generally. Scholastic authors not only give very different accounts of transcendental relations, disagreeing about basic points such as whether they are real or not—they disagree about what feature determines the extension of the class. Suárez offers two characterizations. In one place, he says that transcendental relations run through all the categories (that is, they transcend the categories);\(^{28}\) in other places, he says that transcendental relations are those relations that are essential to something—\(i.e.,\) relations that are intrinsically included in the concepts of things.\(^{30}\) It is not clear, however, that these two characterizations capture the same class. His contemporary Antonio Rubio (1548–1615), for example, thinks that not all relations that are essential transcend the categories. Since he gives priority to the feature of transcending the categories, he thinks that only some transcendental relations are essential.\(^ {31}\) Rubio takes a minority view, however. The core notion is usually that of being essential to the subject. A transcendental relation is one without which a thing could not be the thing that it is.\(^ {32}\) Despite his offering of two characterizations, I think it is the one about essentiality that drives Suárez’s discussion.\(^ {33}\)

Regardless the disagreement about how to characterize transcendental relations, there does seem to be some agreement about what some of the paradigmatic examples of transcendental relations are. One is the essential dependence that every created thing has with respect to God. Both of Suárez’s characterizations apply to this example. Beings in all the categories depend on God in this way, and that dependence is taken to be essential to everything in those categories. Another widely used example, and one that Suárez favours, is the relation of inherence that an accident has to its subject. This relation seems to transcend most but not all of the categories; it is, however, plausibly essential to its subjects.

There are further issues that are unclear about Suárez’s account of transcendental relations. To be fair, transcendental relations are not the focus of his discussion; despite the title of the treatise being \textit{On Real Relation}, his focus is on one kind of real relation—namely, the categorical kind. Categorical relations, of course, were the usual focus in medieval discussions of relations and are supposed to encompass the paradigmatic cases of relations. Furthermore, for at least some philosophers, transcendental relations are not real relations and hence are justifiably sidelined in discussions about relations. Suárez, however, does think that transcendental relations are real. Not only that—it quickly becomes clear that they play crucial roles in central parts of his philosophy. Causation, for example, involves transcendental relations.\(^ {34}\) Hence, a clear explication of transcendental relations...

\(^{27}\) \textit{DM XLVII}.3.3.

\(^{28}\) \textit{DM XLVII}.3.

\(^{29}\) \textit{DM XLVII}.3.10.

\(^{30}\) \textit{E.g., DM XLVII}.1.5 and 3.12–13.

\(^{31}\) \textit{Logica mexicana, hoc est commentarii breviores et maxime percipue in universam Aristotelis dialecticam} (Lyons: Antonio Pillehotte, 1620), 358.

\(^{32}\) Transcendental relations thus are akin to one of the key notions of internal relations in discussions of monism and idealism. See, for example, Jonathan

\(^{33}\) I do not know of any fully satisfactory discussion of transcendental relation with respect to Suárez or otherwise, but readers may wish to consult G.M. Manser, “Begriff und Bedeutung der transzendentalen Beziehung”, \textit{Divus Thomas} 4 (1941): 351–60. Although also not proffering a full investigation, Secada says more than I do about Suárez’s account of transcendental relations in “Suárez on the Ontology of Relations”, 77–80.


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\textit{Suárez on the Reduction of Categorical Relations}

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would be desirable. At present, however, we just need to keep in mind that Suárez’s account of categorical relations is not the full story. There are other real relations lurking in the vicinity, a point that becomes especially relevant when we see that it is not obvious that Suárez’s reductionism extends to these other relations.

Conceptual relations constitute one of the three main divisions of conceptual beings or beings of reason (the other two being negations and privations). Conceptual relations are analogous to real relations but fail to be real, because one of the conditions for real relations is not met. For example, Suárez, following the standard medieval view, thinks that self-identity is not a real relation, because there is no real distinction between the relata. Relations between relata that are not real also fail to be real relations and so are conceptual relations.

2. Of minimal entity

Suárez opens On Real Relation by noting that Averroes says that, among all the categories of being, relations have minimal entity. The general sentiment goes back to Aristotle, who says that “the relative is least of all things a real thing or substance”. Now, talk of something that has a little bit of being but not as much being as most other things can quickly become puzzling, given that the claim is not simply that relations have less mass than other things or something like that. But perhaps we can see why one might be tempted to say that relations have minimal entity.

Start with the thought that we often express propositions with relational predicates: ‘Peter is five metres away from John.’ If the proposition is true, there should be some being or beings in the world that make it true. So we might be tempted to think that there really is a relation or relations of distance in the world that makes the proposition ‘Peter is five metres away from John’ true. After all, Peter by himself does not make the proposition true, nor does John. So maybe a relation is called for. On the other hand, if we had a world with nothing but Peter and John in it, five metres apart, it is not too hard to imagine that someone counting the things in the world would say that it had two things in it. In fact, it is not too difficult to find sophisticated philosophers who have forgotten about relations when doing their ontological enumerations. Even after we have granted that there must be a relation around in order to make our aforementioned proposition true, we may still think this relation a rather ghostly being. Just where is it? How can I get my hands on it?

Such thoughts may have led to the slogan that relations have minimal entity. Such thoughts no doubt also motivate reductionist programmes. One of the most heavily debated questions in medieval discussions about relations was whether relations can be reduced to absolute things (absolute accidents such as qualities and quantities, usually). If Peter and John and their absolute accidents are enough to make relational propositions about them true, then it is no wonder that our attempts to find some additional relational thing left us feeling like we were chasing a ghost. Choice of example matters here. It is more difficult to see how this reduction should go in the case just mentioned. But the stock medieval example of a relation — the relation of similarity between two white things — lends itself to such reductionism. It seems plausible that Peter’s whiteness and John’s whiteness are enough to make the proposition ‘Peter is similar in colour to John’ true. Thinking of the latter sort of example, then, might lead us to try formulating a general reductionist programme for relations.

The question of reduction is at the forefront of Suárez’s mind right from the start of the treatise. The questions for the first two sections


36. DM XLVII.proem.


38. We can ignore for the present the possibility that we should also count a good many qualities and the like.
are (1) “whether relation is a true genus of real being distinct from the rest of the categories” and (2) “whether real categorical relations are really or modally — that is, ex natura rei — distinct from substance and all absolute accidents”. The second question is of more obvious interest, since it seems to get to the heart of the reductionist question, while the first one more concerns fitting relations into an Aristotelian categorical scheme. But the two questions intertwine and so need to be examined together. Sections in Suárez’s works are usually more or less stand-alone pieces. It is unusual, then, that the first section ends on a very unsatisfying note, with a number of its opening arguments receiving their replies only in the second section. Let’s look at the two sections in turn.

2.1 A distinct genus of real being?

An affirmative answer requires that two conditions be met: (1) that relations have real being and (2) that relations constitute a distinct category. So three positions present themselves.

The first position denies that the first condition is met. Advocates of this position argue that relations do not form a distinct genus of real being, because relations are not real beings. Only absolute things exist in extramental reality. Suárez attributes this view to Peter Aureoli (ca. 1280–1322). Suárez presents three arguments for doubting that the first condition is met. The first one is rather complex and not especially relevant for our purposes. But the latter two are straightforward, and Suárez’s response to them will be illuminating with respect to his own position. One we might call the *Cambridge Change Argument*. This argument goes back at least to Aristotle and has been popular ever since. It starts from the observation that relational predicates can go from applying to not applying to a subject without any real change in the subject. Suppose a is similar in colour to b (they are both white). If we now paint b red, a will no longer bear the relation of similarity to b. Yet it seems that only b changed, not a. Hence, the thought goes, the relation of similarity added no real being to a, for if it had, then either a would really change merely because something else got painted or a would still bear the relation of similarity even though b is no longer the same colour. Neither option is attractive, so relations must not add any real being to subjects.

The other we might call the *Necessary Consequence Argument*. Here is how Suárez puts it:

\[ \text{For if we posit, for example, two white things in reality, they, by force of the absolute qualities that they have, are similar to each other. Therefore, they have that relative denomination by force of the absolute things existing together or being taken together, without any other real addition. Therefore, a relation adds nothing real to absolute things.} \]

The relation necessarily follows with the positing of the two white things, so why posit some additional entity to explain the relation? Better just to take the relation as an “ontological free lunch”, as D.M. Armstrong puts it. That, of course, is not quite enough to say that relations are not real. Relations might fail to add any real being to absolute things because they are reducible to absolute things rather than

44. See Henninger, *Relations*, 8–9, for some references.
45. *DM* XLVII.1.2.
46. *DM* XLVII.1.3: “…quia si ponamus v. g. duo alba in rerum natura, illa, ex vi qualitatum absolutarum quas habent, sunt inter se similis: ergo habent illam denominationem relavitam ex vi absolutorum similium existentium, seu similium summarum absque aliqua alia additione reali: ergo relatio nihil rei addit rebus absolutis.”
47. Armstrong thinks this is true of only some relations — namely, those he calls internal relations (*Universals*, 100).
than because they do not really exist. That is, the Necessary Consequence Argument could just as well lead to reductionism as to conceptualism. That possibility is not taken into consideration here, but noting it shows us why this first question about whether relations form a distinct category of real being cannot be answered fully before tackling the reducibility issue in the second section of On Real Relation.

So those are two ways of arguing that the first condition — namely, that relations have real being — is not met. Suárez is clearly sympathetic to these arguments, but we will see how he responds to them later.

The second position denies that the second condition is met. Suárez reports that Domingo de Soto attributes this position to Zeno of Elea and other Presocratics. Advocates of this position concede that relations are real but deny that they constitute a distinct category of being. The thought, roughly, is that relations are a transcendental condition of being — just as being in a genus is a condition or property of all beings, so being related is a condition or property of all beings — and so can be found in all beings rather than making up a distinct category. In Suárez’s taxonomy, this amounts to the claim that all real relations are transcendental relations: there are no additional relations to be put in a special category. Obviously, this issue will quickly land us in the tangle about transcendental relations; fortunately, sorting this out is not crucial for present purposes. Suffice it to say that Suárez rejects this position and claims that there are categorical relations and that they are distinct from transcendental relations.

Finally, the third position claims that relations meet both conditions and so relations do form a distinct genus of real being.

This is the traditional view, and Suárez marshals an impressive list of philosophical authorities on its behalf. He also raises several traditional arguments for the view but is unsatisfied with each. One argument comes from theology: the three divine persons are constituted by three relations, and these relations clearly are not just mental entities. But if we admit that the relations in the case of God are real, it seems probable that the relations in the case of the created order are also real. Suárez, however, thinks the disanalogy between the cases renders the argument ineffective. A second argument argues from the linguistic data. Relative predications are common, and we do not merely imagine that things are related. Hence, there must be some extramental foundation for them. But absolute things cannot ground relative predications, so they must be grounded in relative things. But, as Suárez points out, this simple argument does not settle the matter. After all, it begs the question against reductionism about relations, for the idea that absolute things can ground relative predications is just what the reductionist is committed to. Similar concerns weigh against a third argument from the order of the universe. The reductionist agrees that there is mind-independent order in the universe, but she denies that we need relational things for that order in addition to absolute things.

Suárez ends the first section, however, by affirming the third position. But he says that so far he primarily has the weight of authority on his side. He seems to think that the argument from the linguistic data carries some force, but he grants that the reductionism question needs to be tackled first before it can be evaluated properly. That is the question we turn to next.

48. DM XLVII.1.9.
49. For this analogy, see Domingo de Soto, In Porphyrii Isagogen, Aristotelis Categorias, librosque De demonstratione, absolutissima commentaria (Venice: apud Guerraeos fratres et socios, 1573), 195.
50. The arguments against the second condition being met are in DM XLVII.1.5–7; the main part of Suárez’s response comes in 4.17–20.
51. DM XLVII.1.10.
52. DM XLVII.1.11 and 13.
55. DM XLVII.1.13 and 15.
2.2 Distinct from absolute things?

We are used to talking about whether one class of things can be reduced to another class of things — e.g., whether mental phenomena can be reduced to physical phenomena. Medieval philosophers get at the same issue by asking what sort of distinction holds between entities of the two classes. So, in the second question of On Real Relation, Suárez asks whether categorical relations are really or modally distinct from absolute things.

A brief digression into Suárez’s theory of distinctions is in order here. What kinds of distinctions one can have in one’s conceptual toolbox was itself a matter of heated dispute, and Suárez — is it any surprise? — has a treatise on the subject. Suárez recognizes three main kinds of distinction, with two variations of one of them.

- At one end is the real distinction. In line with traditional views, Suárez takes separability to be the sign of a real distinction. In contrast to some — e.g., Scotus — Suárez requires mutual separability for a real distinction. That is, the sign of a real distinction between a and b is that a can exist without b and b can exist without a.56
- One-way separability is the sign for an intermediate kind of distinction, the modal distinction. If either a or b can exist without the other but not the other way around, we can infer a modal distinction between a and b.57
- If a and b are neither mutually nor one-way separable, then all that we can have is a distinction of reason.58 Distinctions of reason, however, come in two flavours, according to Suárez. The distinction of reasoning reason has no foundation in reality, but the distinction of reasoned reason does, even though there is no real or modal distinction in

Suárez does not think that any further kinds of distinction beyond the basic three kinds are possible. The Scotist formal distinction, for example, is acceptable only if it turns out to be the same as the distinction of reasoned reason or the modal distinction.60 These may exhaust the kinds of distinctions that Suárez grants; they do not exhaust the vocabulary he uses. In particular, he sometimes uses the terms ‘actual distinction’ and ‘distinction ex natura rei’. I take both of those terms as covering both real and modal distinctions but excluding merely mental distinctions. It is, however, not always entirely clear which distinction Suárez has in mind, despite admirably spelling out his terminology in a treatise devoted to distinctions.

Given Suárez’s account of distinctions, we can see that a negative answer to the second section’s question amounts to reductionism. That is, if there is no real or modal distinction between relations and absolute things, then all that is left is a distinction of reason. This distinction of reason might have some sort of foundation in reality to provide that foundation.59 The classic example of a distinction of reasoned reason is between the justice and the mercy of God. According to the doctrine of divine simplicity, there are no real or modal distinctions within God; nevertheless, there is supposed to be some extramental foundation for our attributing justice and mercy as separate attributes to God.

56. DM VII.2.9–21.
57. DM VII.2.6–8.
58. DM VII.2.28.
For part of his career, Suárez seems to have been moved by non-reductionist arguments such as this. In a work published seven years before the *Metaphysical Disputations*, he says:

But, indeed, I think there is some distinction *ex natura rei* [between a relation and its foundation]: not, to be sure, as of things that are wholly distinct, but as of different formal rationes or as of a mode and the thing of which it is a mode.  

He does not accept Scotus’s line that relations are things — *res* — really distinct from absolute things, but he does here seem to accept that there is a modal distinction between relations and their foundations. Even in *On Real Relation* it is clear that the modal-distinction view still has some pull on him. He explicates it at greater length than the other views, offers more arguments in its favour, and says that this view is “more probable” than most of the other views.

But, in the end, he rejects the modal-distinction view. As Suárez points out, the Separability Argument can be turned on its head:

We can turn back that argument about separability. For it is impossible even with absolute power to make it so that, for example, the two posited white things are not similar. Therefore, this denomination [of similarity] is not taken.

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61. They are presented in DM XLVII.2.2–21.

62. De Incarnatione Verbi (aka: Commentariorum ac disputationum in tertiam partem Divi Thomae, tomus primus) q. 2, art. 8, n. 16 (= Opera omnia 17:328): “Ego vero sentio esse quidem distinctionem aliquam ex natura rei, non quidem tanguam rerum omnino distinctarum, sed tanquam formalium rationum diversarum, seu tanquam modi, et rei cujus est modus.” Later in the same work (disp. 11, sect. 2, n. 16 [= Opera omnia 17:440]), he says: “I respond that a relation is not in or united to the subject or foundation as a distinct entity but as a mode…” (“Respondetur, ipsam relationem non inesse vel uniti subjecto, seu fundamento, tanquam entitatem distinctam, sed tanquam modum …”).

63. DM XLVII.2.7–11.
from some thing or mode that is distinct ex natura rei from both white things taken at the same time.\textsuperscript{64}

The problem with the Separability Argument is that it only puts the foundation in the subject of the relation in the putative reductive base and then, of course, it turns out that foundations are separable from their relations. But if we also include the termini, separability is no longer so obvious (a point that Ockham emphasizes in his treatment of relations). In fact, the Necessary Consequence Argument that we looked at earlier precisely denies separability once the termini are in the picture.

So Suárez throws in his lot with the reductionists. But here matters become complicated. When Suárez first introduces the reductionist view — as the fifth on his list of six views and before he affirms it — he presents it simply as the view that denies that there is an actual distinction between relations and absolute things; rather, this view holds, there is only a distinction of reason with some foundation in reality —\textit{i.e.}, a distinction of reasoned reason. Furthermore, he immediately notes that this is the view that the nominalist school teaches; he cites Ockham and Gregory of Rimini in particular.\textsuperscript{65} He then goes on to credit Hervaeus Natalis with an especially good presentation of the view. He even cites Aquinas for support, though the passage he quotes is actually from a spurious work that may also be by Hervaeus.\textsuperscript{66} But he clearly recognizes that this is the view associated with the nominalists.

It is not difficult to see why. Consider the classic text for Suárez’s presentation of his own view:

\textit{Possumus retorquere argumentum illud de separabilitate, nam positis, \textit{e.g.} duobus albis, impossibile est etiam de potentia absoluta facere ut non sint similia ergo haec denominatio non sumitur ex aliqua re aut modo reali distincto ex natura rei ab utroque, albo, simul sumpto.}\textsuperscript{67}

\textit{Ita ut similium, verbi gratia, aliqua forma realis sit existens in re quae denominatur similis: illa tamen non sit in re distincta ab albedine, quantum ad quod pontit in re quae dictur similis, sed solum quantum ad terminum quem connotat: et ita similium in re non est alia, quam ipsamet albedo ut respiciens aliam albedinem, tantum eiuisdem seu similis rationis.}\textsuperscript{68}

Anyone familiar with medieval philosophy should hear, in this passage, strains of Ockham’s theory of connotation as a tool for a programme of ontological reduction. Ockham applies his theory of connotation much more broadly than just to relational expressions, but he does apply it to relational terms.\textsuperscript{69} As the story goes, we need to distinguish between

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Possumus retorquere argumentum illud de separabilitate, nam positis, \textit{e.g.} duobus albis, impossibile est etiam de potentia absoluta facere ut non sint similia ergo haec denominatio non sumitur ex aliqua re aut modo reali distincto ex natura rei ab utroque, albo, simul sumpto.}\textsuperscript{67}
\item \textit{Ita ut similium, verbi gratia, aliqua forma realis sit existens in re quae denominatur similis: illa tamen non sit in re distincta ab albedine, quantum ad quod pontit in re quae dictur similis, sed solum quantum ad terminum quem connotat: et ita similium in re non est alia, quam ipsamet albedo ut respiciens aliam albedinem, tantum eiuisdem seu similis rationis.}\textsuperscript{68}
\end{itemize}
primary signification and secondary signification (or connotation). Absolute terms signify only primarily. Connotative terms, on the other hand, have both a primary and a secondary signification. In the case at hand, the point is that we do not need to posit some new entity in our ontology to be the primary significate of ‘similarity’. Instead, we should just see that it is a connotative term that has the same primary significate as ‘whiteness’ but differs from the latter term in also having a secondary significate — namely, the whiteness of the terminus.

If we attend closely to Suárez’s text, however, it becomes clear that he is not comfortable being bedfellows with Ockham and the nominalists. He recognizes that the nominalist position is very close to his own, but he warns readers repeatedly that his own view has to be understood in a certain way in order to ward off unwanted consequences. The unwanted consequences look like nominalist consequences. The first indication of Suárez’s wariness comes after he has presented the six different views and says which view he endorses:

Of these views, therefore, the one that seems most proven to me is the fifth one, which Hervaeus and some other Thomists taught, from the sense of which the nominalists hardly differ at all ...

To say that the nominalists “hardly differ” from the affirmed view may not seem significant, but recall that when the view was first presented, the nominalists were the first exemplars of the view. Now there seems to be something about them that makes Suárez hesitant. We need to figure out what is worrying him.70

70. I should note that I am not offering a proper interpretation of Ockham’s account or that of any other nominalist. Whether any nominalist actually held precisely the view that Suárez is worried about is not part of this paper’s ambit. Much of the nominalist tradition is, of course, severely underexplored, but readers interested in Ockham’s account of relations can consult Henninger, *Relations*, Chapter 7; Marilyn McCord Adams, “Relations, Inherence, and Subsistence: or, Was Ockham a Nestorian in Christology?”, *Noûs* 16 (1982): 62–75; and Beatrice Beretta, *Ad aliquid: la relation chez Guillaume d’Occam* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1999).

3. Two desiderata
Suárez closes the second section of *On Real Relation* with two warnings: (1) foundation and terminus do not contribute equally to a relation and (2) sense must be made of the traditional distinction between mutual relations and non-mutual relations.

3.1 Relations as one-subject accidents
Medieval reductionists commonly use the term ‘coexistence’. The relation of similarity between Peter and John might be said to involve the coexistence of two white things. The thought is a natural one. As Scotus’s Separability Argument shows, the similarity relation is separable from Peter’s whiteness; as his opponents point out, however, it is not separable from two coexisting white things. This might suggest that relations function in a way akin to collections. Just as each of the goldfinches flying past my window contributes in the same way to the flock, so both Peter and John (or their whitenesses) might be thought to contribute in the same way to the relation of similarity. But Suárez thinks this would be to get the analysis of relations wrong:

When it is said that a respective denomination arises from the coexistence of multiple absolutes without any real addition, that denomination should not be understood as being taken equally and simultaneously from multiple absolute forms, one intrinsic and the other extrinsic [to the subject]. Rather, it should be understood that this denomination indeed requires an association or coexistence of such things or forms, but in each extreme it is taken from that extreme’s own form as respecting another form, which as such has the ratio of a relation,
even though in reality it is nothing other than the absolute form itself.\textsuperscript{71}

It is true that Peter’s relation of similarity to John requires the coexistence of two forms—namely, Peter’s whiteness and John’s whiteness. But the two forms do not contribute equally to that relation. In Suárez’s view there are two relations here, each an accident and each with one subject: Peter’s similarity to John and John’s similarity to Peter. In order to get two relations instead of just one in the way we get one flock of goldfinches, we need to identify relations with their foundations in the subjects.

The point is most easily seen in the case of asymmetrical relations. Suppose Peter is 200 centimetres tall and John is 180 centimetres tall. So Peter is taller than John, the converse relation of which is not that John is taller than Peter but that John is shorter than Peter. Suárez does not think that the way to analyze either of these converse relations is as the mere coexistence of Peter’s height and John’s height. That would not capture the difference between the two converse relations. Rather, Peter’s being taller should be identified with his height—not, to be sure, with his height considered in itself, but with his height as respecting John’s height. John’s being shorter, in turn, is to be identified with John’s height as respecting Peter’s height.

The same analysis can, of course, then easily be made in the case of symmetrical relations. Peter’s similarity, for example, is identified with Peter’s whiteness as respecting John’s whiteness and John’s similarity with John’s whiteness as respecting Peter’s whiteness. This way the traditional picture of relations as accidents inhering in single subjects can be preserved even on the reductionist picture.

\textsuperscript{71} DM XLVII.1.25: “...cum dictur denominatio respectiva consurgere ex coexistentia plurium absolutorum absque ulla reali additione, non esse intelligendum illam denominationem aequo ac simul sumi ex pluribus formis absolutis, una intrinseca, et altera extrinseca. Sed intelligendum est, illam denominationem require quidem consortium, seu coexistentiam talium rerum seu formarum: tamen in unoqueque extreneo sumi a propria forma ut respicit aliam, quae ut sic habet rationem relationis, quamvis in re non sit alia ab ipsa forma absoluta.” My thanks to Cecilia Trifogli for drawing my attention to the significance of this passage.

3.2 Non-mutual relations

Even more important for Suárez than the issue of relations as single-subject accidents is the possibility of non-mutual relations. In addition to the warning at the end of section 2, he writes one of the longest sections of On Real Relation in order to defend their possibility.\textsuperscript{72} Non-mutual relations should not be confused with asymmetrical relations, such as Peter’s being taller than John. The converse relation to Peter’s being taller is John’s being shorter, which is a different species of relation but, nevertheless, is an equally real relation. Non-mutual relations are cases where one relation is real and its converse is not real.\textsuperscript{73} The notion may sound strange to modern ears, but the existence of non-mutual relations is widely accepted by medieval philosophers. It is easy to see how one might accommodate non-mutual relations on a non-reductionist picture (though seeing this may not remove all strangeness). The non-reductionist says that in order for a subject to change from not being related to something else to being really related, some new thing or mode must be added to the subject. In the case of mutual relations, both relata receive such a new thing or mode. In the case of non-mutual relations, only one of the relata receives such a new thing or mode. Hence, the relatum that received the new entity will be the subject of a new real relation, while the other relatum will merely be the subject of a relation of reason that our minds imagine as the converse of the real relation.\textsuperscript{74}

This account is not available to the reductionist. Presumably Gregory of Rimini and the other nominalists whom Suárez cites as denying that there are any non-mutual relations recognized that

\textsuperscript{72} DM XLVII.2.25 and XLVII.15.

\textsuperscript{73} DM XLVII.15.1.

\textsuperscript{74} For a few more details on how one non-reductivist handles non-mutual relations, see Giorgio Pini, “Can God Create My Thoughts? Scotus’s Case against the Causal Account of Intentionality”, Journal of the History of Philosophy 49 (2011): 56–58.
reductionism does not lend itself to non-mutual relations and so decided to jettison them. Suárez, however, wants to preserve them.

There are two groups of cases of particular concern to him. The first group comprises relations between created things and God. It was a standard theological teaching that creatures bear real relations to God but that God is not the subject of any real relations to creatures. So, for instance, Peter’s being created is a real relation, but God’s creating him is not.

The second group of concern to Suárez requires some stage-setting. Aristotle divided relations into three classes. Interpretations of just how this division goes vary, but we might say that there are those founded on unity or multitude, those founded on potencies of acting or suffering, and those founded on measure and the measurable. Suárez devotes several sections of On Real Relation to defending Aristotle’s division, even though his defence in the end looks rather deflationary relative to the more wholehearted defences offered by Aquinas and others. Aristotle remarks that a distinctive feature of the third class is that for each relative that is truly said to be towards something, the terminus in turn “is called relative because something else is related to it” rather than because it truly is towards the first relatum. For example, the knowable is called knowable merely because knowledge is related to it. This claim in Aristotle initiated a tradition of seeing non-mutuality as a distinguishing feature of the third class. Suárez, as might be expected, is loath to abandon the tradition.

Perhaps he should not have been so loath. The section in which Suárez defends non-mutual relations is one of the less satisfying of the treatise. The arguments he gives on behalf of his opponents seem more compelling than the ones he endorses, some of his own arguments seem obviously unworkable, and in places he says things that suggest he in fact recognizes that he has little reason to advocate non-mutual relations. The section is long and complex, and I will not analyze all its arguments in detail, but I will present some representative passages to support my judgements.

Recall that non-mutuality is supposed to be distinctive of the third class of relations in Aristotle’s division — e.g., psychological relations such as those between knowledge and the knowable and between sight and the visible. Objections can come from two directions. They can target the claim that relations of the third class are non-mutual, or they can target the claim that relations of the first two classes are always mutual (if some relations in the first two classes are non-mutual, then non-mutuality will not be distinctive of the third class). The second kind of objection is especially pressing for philosophers who wish to maintain the theological doctrine that God is not the subject of any real relations, since many of the relations between God and creatures do not seem to fit into the third class.

Suárez considers several arguments of each sort. The first argument for the mutuality of relations in the third class starts from the premise that the most promising cases of non-mutuality are the relations between knowledge and the knowable and between sensation and the sensible. But these relations are in fact mutual, the argument goes, and so we have no reason to think that there are any non-mutual relations. The argument for the premise that these relations are mutual is that the denomination ‘knowable’, for instance, is relative rather than absolute. That is, the knowable is so in relation to knowledge, just as knowledge is so in relation to the knowable. Furthermore, that something is a knowable is grounded in reality, in things themselves. In other words, knowability is not merely a relation we imagine. So a knowable’s relation to knowledge is real. Everyone grants that knowledge’s relation to the knowable is real. Since both relations are real, we have mutuality.

\[ \text{DM XLVII.15.3.} \]
In response, Suárez makes a distinction:

Therefore, in response to the first argument made at the beginning, it should be said that the knowable can be denominated in two ways: first, merely terminatively and, as it were, passively, and second, correlatively with knowledge. In the first way it is denominated extrinsically from the real knowledge itself and in this way such a denomination can be said to be in things themselves rather than constructed through the intellect.... The second denomination of the knowable is respective and this is only through a relation of reason, since our minds, in order to explain the relation that knowledge has to that knowable, conceive that [knowable] as correlative to the knowledge. The argument, therefore, only goes through concerning the former denomination.81

Making a distinction in the face of a difficulty is, of course, the strategy perfected by scholastic philosophers. And, indeed, in many cases a distinction is just the cure needed. In this case, however, the distinction seems both obscure and ad hoc. It is difficult to shake the impression that it is a distinction made in a desperate attempt to shore up a thesis held primarily out of respect for the authority of philosophical predecessors, or, as Suárez puts it, “a view that is received with so much consensus that philosophers are not permitted to call it into doubt.”82

81. DM XLVII.15.13: “Ad primum ergo argumentum in principio positum dicendum est, scibile dupliciter posse denominari: primo mere terminative et quasi passive: secundo correlative ad scientiam. Primo modo denominatur extrinsece ab ipsamet scientia reali, atque ita talis denominatio dici potest esse in rebus ipsis, et non esse per intellectum conficta.... Secunda denominatio scibilis est respectiva, et haec solum est per relationem rationis, quia mens nostra ad explicandam illam relationen quam scientia habet ad ipsum scibile, concipit illud ut correlativum scientiae. Argumentum ergo solum procedit de priori denominatione.”

82. DM XLVII.15.8: “Estque sententia tanta consensione recepta, ut non liceat philosophis eam in dubium revocare.”

Of course, presumably there is a reason why Aristotle and so many philosophers after him thought that relations of the third class are non-mutual. And in fact there does seem to be something importantly asymmetrical about these psychological relations. We might start with the observation that the real change is always on one side (knowledge, sensation) and the Cambridge change always on the other (the knowable, the sensible). More fundamentally, the psychological states have an aboutness or directedness that their objects do not have, a directedness that might readily be thought of as a relational sort of thing if ever there was one. Hence, it is not surprising that non-reductive realists think there is some real, new relational entity on the one side but not the other. Since — on the non-reductionist view — real relations require such a new entity in a subject for it to be really related to something else, the case as described will be one of a non-mutual relation.

But Suárez is a reductionist. For a reductionist, a mere Cambridge change is sufficient for something to become the subject of a real relation. No additional entity is required in the subject. So the fact that there is no real change on the side of the knowable or the sensible is no reason not to ascribe real relations to them. To put the point in a different way, it may be true that there is something interesting happening on the side of knowledge that is not happening on the side of the knowable. But this interesting thing is also not happening in the case of a white object that becomes subject to a similarity relation because some other object turned white (the whiteness does not have that special aboutness or directedness that intentional states have). So the right conclusion to draw is that there is something extra going on with knowledge and its kin, rather than that the knowable fails to be a real relation. Whatever the similar white object has, the knowable also has.

The main argument of the second sort — i.e., against the claim that only relations of the third class are non-mutual — rests on the premises that many of the relations between creatures and God belong to the first and second classes and that relations between creatures and God...
are non-mutual. From these premises it follows that at least some relations in the first and second classes are also non-mutual. Suárez basically concedes, granting that there are non-mutual relations in the first and second classes. He tries to preserve the force of the Aristotelian claim, however, by arguing that all relations in the third class are non-mutual by virtue of being the sort of relations that belong to that class.

Relations in the first and second class only rarely fail to be mutual, and when they do fail, this is not because of something about the relation itself but rather because of features of the relata.

In particular, Suárez now posits another necessary condition for real relations: the two relata must belong to the same order.

A real relation consists in an order of one thing to another; it is, therefore, rightly required for such a relation that it be between extremes of the same order.

The relevant orders turn out to be created being and uncreated being. Hence, God, the uncreated being, is not the subject of any real relations to creatures. It is difficult to see why an opponent should be moved by Suárez’s claims here. Why not just dismiss Suárez’s claims as ad hoc and otherwise entirely unmotivated? But there is an even more serious problem. Suárez is trying to defend non-mutual relations between creatures and God, but this condition that the relata be of the same order does not achieve that. This condition merely has the consequence that the relations between creatures and God fail to be real in each direction — i.e., the relations are relations of reason in both directions. The obvious solution, of course, is to revise the condition to say that real relations require that the terminus not be of an inferior order. But that only worsens the worry that this is an ad hoc condition.

Part of what makes Suárez’s account look odd is that he appears to recognize that he does not need to make it: that he does not need to defend non-mutual relations. He goes out of his way to argue that while it would indeed be both gravely erroneous and absurd to say that the relations between creatures and God are mutual on the non-reductionist picture, it is of little consequence to say so on the reductionist picture. In fact, he suggests that we might be left with a mere verbal disagreement.

He puts his finger on just the right point. The motivation for the theological doctrine comes from more general doctrines about God’s immutability and simplicity. On a non-reductionist picture, saying that God comes to be the subject of a real relation amounts to saying that some new thing or mode, distinct from his substance, comes to inhere in or modify him. God would then have really changed (as opposed to merely Cambridge-changed) and would be a composite, violating the doctrines of immutability and simplicity. But none of this is a worry on the reductionist account, since, in this account, becoming the subject of a real relation does not require the addition of some new thing or mode in the subject.

Suárez explicitly recognizes all this but then concludes:

But I do not, nevertheless, think that one should depart from the way of speaking of St. Thomas and the more weighty theologians.

83. DM XLVII.15.6.
84. DM XLVII.15.22–29.
86. DM XLVII.15.24: “...relatio realis consistit in ordine unius rei ad aliam: merito ergo ad talen relationem requiritur ut sit inter extrema eiusdem ordinis.”
87. DM XLVII.15.23.
88. Cf. DM XLVII.15.27: “In God, nevertheless, that relation is non-mutual on account of the eminence of his entity” (“...tamen in Deo, proprius eminentium suae entitatis, relatio illa est non mutua ...”).
89. DM XLVII.15.20.
90. DM XLVII.15.17–21. For more on this issue in the context of Aquinas, see Ward, “Relations Without Forms”, 279–301.
91. DM XLVII.15.22: “Nihilominus tamen non censeo esse recendum a modo loquendi D. Thomae, et graviorium Theologorum ...”
But if rejecting non-mutual relations on a reductionist account is of little consequence, why should one not depart? This seems to be a case where his respect for the great philosophers of the past — admirable as such respect may often be — led him astray. Fundamentally, Suárez has accepted a reductionist account; trying to clothe it in non-reductionist “ways of speaking” makes for an ill fit.

4. Different kinds of reductionism

By Suárez’s own telling, his account “hardly differs” from the standard nominalist account. There may be disagreement about just how to analyze relations and about what sorts of relations to posit in particular cases, but both accounts are thoroughly reductionist about categorical relations. At the basic ontological level, we need not posit any new entities to account for categorical relations. Two substances bearing the accident whiteness are ipso facto similar to each other. No further peculiar relational accident or mode is required.

Not only does Suárez identify relations with absolute accidents in the initial presentation of his own view, but he repeatedly emphasizes throughout the remainder of the treatise that, on his view, relations require nothing in addition to the foundation and terminus. Once the foundation and terminus are posited, the relation follows ipso facto. In fact, this claim becomes a premise in other arguments. For example, in response to worries about an infinite number of relations in certain cases (e.g., an infinite number of equality and inequality relations in a continuum), Suárez notes that there really is no problem with an infinity of relations, since they do not add anything real anyway. So, with respect to this core of the reductionist account, Suárez is in perfect agreement with Ockham, Gregory of Rimini, and other nominalists.

92. DM XLVII.2.22.
93. DM XLVII.9.5.
94. Here is a partial list of the places where Suárez says that relations follow once the foundation and terminus are posited and/or that categorical relations add nothing new: DM XLVII.2.24, 4.12, 4.13, 4.20, 5.12, 6.1, 7.1, 7.4, 8.7, 8.8, 8.14, 9.5, 11.12, and 11.19.

Suárez on the Reduction of Categorical Relations

There is, however, a distinctive element to Suárez’s account, because of his commitment to relations as one-subject accidents and to non-mutual relations. We can get a clearer sense of the distinctive element by looking at the criticisms made of Suárez’s account by the Bohemian scholastic Rodrigo de Arriaga (1592–1667). Arriaga does not share Suárez’s commitment to non-mutual relations and to relations as one-subject accidents, so he straightforwardly reduces a relation to its foundation and terminus, both of which he thinks are parts of the relation. His preferred analogy for a relation is being two in number. Just as twoness is not needed as some third thing in addition to the two individual objects in order for it to be true that there are two objects, so similarity is not needed as some third thing in addition to two white objects in order for it to be true that they are similar to each other. As we saw, however, Suárez would object that, on Arriaga’s account, the foundation and terminus contribute in the same way to the relation, a charge that Arriaga would happily grant. Since Suárez wishes to avoid that result, he identifies a relation with its foundation and only its foundation. To be sure, he talks of the foundation as respecting its terminus. But, formally speaking, a relation is identical to its foundation on his view.

Arriaga takes Suárez to task for this identification. It seems as if Suárez has not heeded the force of the Separability Argument, which shows that the foundation of a relation can continue to exist while the relation passes away. Both Arriaga and Suárez reasonably respond that the Separability Argument does not show that a relation is separable from the foundation and terminus taken together, and so the argument does not establish that reductionism cannot work. But surely the argument does successfully show that a relation is separable from the foundation alone. Yet Suárez has to deny that, since he identifies the relation with its foundation and identical things cannot be separated.

So if John, for example, receives a dark tan, on Suárez’s account the relation of similarity in Peter — being formally identical with his whiteness — still exists “fundamentally or in proximate aptitude”.96 Granted, Suárez would deny that it is still appropriate to denominate Peter similar to John, since the denomination also connotes John and his whiteness, which no longer exists. But Arriaga has reason to protest that it is a strange result if Peter’s similarity to John can, in any way whatever, survive John’s becoming dark.

Insofar as Suárez’s motivations for identifying a relation with its foundation alone are underwhelming, one would reasonably avoid this strange result.

5. Does reductionism work?

A key philosophical question is, of course, whether any kind of reductionism about relations works. While I will not attempt a thorough treatment of that question here, some comments are in order.

5.1 Irreducible relational statements

Reductionism might be deemed a nonstarter thanks to twentieth-century logical results that allegedly prove that relational statements cannot be reduced to non-relational statements. And, indeed, putative reductions tend to leave suspiciously relational-looking predicates in their reductive bases. But note that Suárez is interested in an ontological reduction. That is, he claims that we do not need to posit any irreducible items among the world’s furniture to account for categorical relations. He is not claiming that relational statements can likewise be reduced. Some philosophers may be committed to an isomorphism between reality and language such that ontological reductionism requires linguistic reductionism. Perhaps Leibniz is an example.97 But Suárez is not. So the quick answer to objections of this sort is that the objections are irrelevant to Suárez’s project.98

5.2 External Relations

The case of a similarity relation between two white things — a favourite example in medieval philosophy — lends itself to reductionist treatment. Other cases, however, less obviously do. These other cases might give rise to scepticism about a general reductionist programme. The standard division of relations in contemporary discussions will be helpful here. The division is simple. Relations come in two flavours: internal and external. We can characterize them as follows:

- X and Y stand in an internal relation iff the relation necessarily follows from X’s and Y’s intrinsic properties.
- X and Y stand in an external relation iff X and Y stand in a relation that is not an internal relation.99

The idea here is straightforward. An example of an internal relation would be the similarity between Peter and John. The intrinsic monadic properties of whiteness in each of them necessitate the relation of similarity. But take the spatial relation of being five metres apart that I mentioned earlier. Here it does not seem as if the intrinsic properties will suffice for the relation. We could move Peter another five metres from John. Peter and John seem still to have all the absolute properties that they had before Peter was moved, but they no longer have the relation of being five metres apart. Now they have the relation of being ten metres apart. To use Suárez’s terminology, this relation

96. DM XLVII.2.23.
97. See Jauernig, “Disentangling Leibniz’s Views on Relations and Extrinsic Denominations”, 198–204.
98. Jeffrey E. Brower has a sensible, longer discussion of the viability of ontological reductionism about relations in the face of the logical results. See ‘Aebald’s Theory of Relations’, 605–31.
99. Both David Lewis (On the Plurality of Worlds [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1986], 62) and D.M. Armstrong (Universals, 43–44) make this distinction. Lewis goes on to make a further distinction among those that I am calling external relations and retains the term for one of the resulting subcategories. We can ignore that complication.
seems not to follow necessarily once the foundation and terminus have been posited.

Medieval philosophers were aware of the distinction between internal and external relations. Scotus is well known for making the distinction under the terms ‘intrinsically occurring relations’ (‘relationes intrinsecus advenientes’) and ‘extrinsically occurring relations’ (‘relationes extrinsecus advenientes’). Some philosophers made this distinction a prominent part of their theories of relations. Durandus of St. Pourçain, for example, seems to have recognized the apparent ontological implications and given a reductionist account of internal relations, such as similarity, but a non-reductionist account of external relations, such as spatial relations. In general, however, medieval philosophers make less of this distinction than one might expect. It is as if they assume that relations require, or at least can receive, a unified treatment, rather than that this distinction might point to the need for different accounts for each type of relation.

Suárez is aware of the distinction. He only gives a cursory mention to it in On Real Relation, but he discusses it at more length in his treatise on action. Moreover, there are several places where he recognizes cases of putatively external relations as problematic. His responses suggest that he will take different tacks depending on the case but that he will insist that categorical relations can be reduced in all cases.

100. Scotus was well known for making the distinction, but there was significant disagreement about precisely which distinction he meant to capture (Suárez enters the fray in DM XLVIII.1.2–8). The different options correspond to some of the different notions that go by the term ‘internal relation’ in twentieth-century philosophy. I defined the term above according to its most common usage recently, but that is certainly not the only way the term is used. See Schaffer, “The Internal Relatedness of All Things”.


102. DM XLVII.4.12.

103. DM XLVIII.1.2–8.

Suárez considers spatial relations when responding to Durandus’s position. Suárez simply denies that spatial relations are external. Peter’s similarity to John does not necessarily follow if we just posit Peter and John irrespective of colour. Rather, it follows necessarily if we posit Peter and John and their respective whitenesses. Of course, that is perfectly in keeping with our characterization of internal relations. But Suárez thinks that if we are tempted to see spatial relations as external, we are making a mistake akin to forgetting to put Peter’s whiteness and John’s whiteness in the reduction base. Once we posit Peter and John along with their respective places, the relevant spatial relations follow necessarily in just the way that similarity relations follow necessarily.

The obvious point to press here is about the nature of places. What is Peter’s place? Suárez does not address the issue here, but either place is an absolute feature of Peter or it is a relative feature. That Peter’s place is an absolute or intrinsic feature — i.e., a feature that does not depend on any other things in the world — will seem deeply implausible to many. But the second option leaves the reduction looking unsuccessful. What good is it to reduce a relation to another relation?

But here we should remember that Suárez thinks there are both categorical and transcendental relations and that he is only attempting a reduction of categorical relations here. So his reduction can still be successful even though not everything relational has been eliminated from the reduction base, provided that all the relations that remain are transcendental relations.

This assumes, of course, that Suárez is not trying to reduce categorical relations solely to absolute things. One might well think

104. DM XLVII.2.5.

105. Suárez does, of course, have a treatise on the Aristotelian category of where, in which he says that it is an absolute mode distinct ex natura rei from the subject, though, thanks to our cognitive limitations, we can understand it only relationally — i.e., as the foundation of relations of nearness and distance (DM L1.1.13–14.). But where is only a relation according to being said.

that he is trying precisely such a reduction. In most of his discussion, the term ‘absolute form’ is used frequently; one certainly gets the impression that absolute things are what Suárez has in mind when he thinks about what to reduce categorical relations to. Furthermore, he provides no explicit qualification when presenting his reductionist view that would let readers know to expect relations, albeit non-categorical ones, in the reduction base.

In a later section of the treatise, however, Suárez considers the paternity relation and clearly lets transcendental relations in the door, whether consciously or not. Suppose Peter is the father of Paul — i.e., is the subject of a paternity relation to Paul. Suárez considers the scenario in which God creates duplicates of Peter and Paul with all their absolute properties. This is just the right sort of thought experiment to determine whether a relation is internal or external. Suárez recognizes the difficulty and concedes that the duplicate Peter would not be the father of the duplicate Paul. But he thinks he has a solution: posit a third thing in the reduction base. On this account, the paternity relation requires Peter, Paul, and an action of generation. Once the action has been added, then, Suárez says, the paternity relation follows necessarily.107

But actions are certainly not wholly absolute things in Suárez’s view. As he makes clear in the first section of his treatise on action, an action essentially includes transcendental relations.108 So, in the case of paternity, at least, Suárez leaves transcendental relations in the reduction base. It is difficult to tell just what to make of this development. Is Suárez, when confronted with a problematic case, conceding something that undermines his official reductionist position? Or is this continuous with the rest of what Suárez says?

Leaving some relations in the reduction base is certainly less ambitious than reducing relations to only absolute things. Some particular reductions — e.g., in the case of similarity — would be reducible to wholly absolute entities, but others would not be. Leaving irreducible transcendental relations in one’s ontology is a significant concession to the non-reductionists. Of course, insofar as external relations pose a serious challenge to thoroughgoing reductionism about relations, this concession might be a gain in plausibility. But it is not clear, unfortunately, whether Suárez actually intends to make this concession to non-reductionism or whether he conceded something without noting its implications.109

6. Relations as a category

There is a leftover item from earlier in this paper (§2.1) that still needs resolution. We looked at two arguments for the claim that relations are not real beings and that therefore relations also fail to form a distinct genus of real beings: the Cambridge Change Argument and the Necessary Consequence Argument. A reductionist might well be sympathetic to these arguments, but Suárez, recall, concludes that relations do form a distinct category of being. Suárez’s response to the arguments is illuminating. He points out the assumption that relations have real being only if they are really distinct from absolute beings. Suárez denies the assumption. So he agrees that relations add no new being (to this extent he is in sympathy with the arguments), but he does not think that it follows that relations are not real. As he puts it:

Hence, everything brought forward for the proof in that third argument is useful for showing how a real relation does not add any thing or real mode to absolute things that is ex natura rei distinct from the absolute things, but they are not at all valid for concluding that a relation of this sort is wholly nothing.110

107. DM XLVII.7.12.
108. DM XLVIII.1–2.
109. Might Suárez think that he can in turn reduce transcendental relations to absolute things? Perhaps, but I see no evidence for such a programme in the text.
110. DM XLVII.2.24: Unde probationes omnes, quae in illo terto argumento afferuntur, utilis sunt ad declarandum, quomodo relatio realis non addat rebus absolutis
Instead of eliminating relations, we should reduce them, and reduced relations are still real relations.

Not only does Suárez think that categorical relations are real beings, but he argues that they form one of the basic Aristotelian categories of being. This might come as a surprise even to those who are happy to grant that reduced things are real things. We might have expected the categories to be a classification of foundational being. But if, for instance, a relation of similarity is nothing more than the whiteness of its foundation, why should the whiteness go in one category (quality) and the similarity go in another (relation)? But Suárez says that a distinction of reason with some foundation in reality is sufficient for a distinction of categories. This is not unique to the category of relations; he thinks action and passion are also two categories divided by a mere distinction of reason with some foundation in reality.\textsuperscript{111} What is at work here, however, is more a peculiar account of what makes a category than something distinctive about his account of relations;\textsuperscript{112} the former is a topic for another time.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{111} DM XLVII.2.22. Cf. 2.24.


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