

Relations Matter

A relation is what connects two separated beings or what a being joins with itself; what is, in other words, in-between two beings or inside two parts of one being. Relations may be conceived as external or internal to those beings, as an essential part, or as separate beings of another nature. One usually cannot easily perceive or experience relations themselves (although there are exceptions). But the case is that relations must be something rather than nothing. They must be something since we use relations and go around them all the time, in natural, casual, day-to-day life, as well as in philosophical, careful, and reflexive attitude. And, if they are something, one can think them. Some may say, that philosophers should think about what can only be thought. Who else could do this? So, here it is, a new *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* issue devoted to relations.

Since the beginning of philosophy, “relation” has been a philosophical theme. We find explicit analysis of relation in the classic metaphysics of Aristotle, who considered relation as one of nine categories of being; in Greco-Roman ethical concepts, that almost always contain remarks on the subject’s relation to destination in order to define the area of freedom and determinacy; in medieval scholasticism, from which again and again pour out considerations about the relationship occurring between creator and creatures; in the rationalism of Descartes, who breaks off the relationship between thought and body – and in that of Spinoza, who tries to restore it; in British empiricism that posits external relation to ideas of the mind *ipso facto* putting into question any kind of apperception and *a priori* subject identity; in Kant, and philosophers since Plato, who investigate different combinations of cognitive powers and ask for example, what will be the product of the imagination and the intellect cooperating; and in philosophy of culture, which over and over again problematize human relation with its own creations. The list could probably be infinite. Wherever one looks, almost every problem of philosophy includes explicitly or implicitly the problem of relations.

But what is the relation itself? A few interesting thoughts on this kind of strangeness of being were had by the poststructuralist philosopher Gilles Deleuze. What he was looking for in *Difference and Repetition* was

to capture the uniqueness of difference itself; which for him is previous to the terms it differentiates and is the source of all dual divisions and derivative categories. Much of what he wrote on difference could be applied to the analysis of relation. Relations are separating, but also connecting: where there is a relation, there must be at least two beings – or one being that is in some way cracked and therefore has a relation with itself. Relations are positive: they do not negate, but give real intensity to anything they belong to. Relations in themselves are not objects of every-day natural experience, but in some way they are still present. We breathe them all the time and cannot breathe without them, so relations can be conceived of as the ground of a real experience. Relations are unconscious: they work behind the curtain of conscious representation. Relations are differentiating: we can recognize different beings thanks to relations that can be entered into. Relations are productive and generative (this is the main feature of difference according to Deleuze), thanks to portability they can produce new assemblages of beings and therefore, new beings altogether. And, when put in the center of philosophical investigation the concept of relation is the thinking of the relations themselves.

This also opens up some possibilities for the philosophy of culture. What one can point to is an approach to culture as a set of dynamic relations between different constants that include: ethical, aesthetic, and other values; mind-body relation, cognitive relation to the state of affairs, ego-world relation, relations between individuals (intersubjectivity), and one's relation to one's self (intrasubjectivity), and so forth. "To have a culture" would mean here "to have a defined relation to those constants." Therefore, philosophers could focus not on clarifying the definition of one or another (usually basic) concept, and still provoke disputes which do not have conclusions (for example, what is the consciousness? What is good? What is the self?), but on relations that those concepts enter and open. Carefully defined relation could affect those concepts. One can expect that the philosophical problem posed in terms of relations could bring the conclusion that one's relations are an essential part of the constants and have the power to change them because when one changes the nature of a certain relation, the whole assemblage will unexpectedly evolve. And when the assemblage of concepts and relations has changed, one is inside the dynamic dimension of culture or, in extreme cases, jumps into a different culture.

The five articles in the Thematic Section are arranged intentionally and give us a passage from a metaphysical, yet modern, concept of relations (together with the dilemmas or aporias that they include), through the more subject or consciousness-oriented approaches investigating, first, the mind-body problem and then person-world relation – mainly thanks to the application of phenomenological approach. Finally, the reader places him or herself in the middle of the social domain and philosophy of politics. There are also two stops in this passage (for sure you can find many more): one for pathologies in interpersonal relations, and the second for phenomenologically and, to an even greater extent, Eastern philosophy inspired suspension of European traditional dual relations.

In the opening essay, Christian Frigerio starts us off from a metaphysical horizon, providing a detailed and historical view together with demonstrating in action that the discussion on relations is still alive and animates many contemporary philosophers. He places the difference between external and internal nature of relations as the main problem. Leibniz is presented as the one who gets insight into this dilemma with his monadology. Monads, as the basic parts of being, "have no windows" as we know from the popular formula, but at the same time are mirroring (or expressing) the whole world. Therefore, Leibniz needs God as the identity of monads with their expression, so relations are in the same time external and internal. According to Frigerio, this is a starting point to the venture of Whitehead, who in the last two decades deeply inspired philosophers called speculative realists such as Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman, and Levi R. Bryant. What Frigerio finally demonstrates is that the way we conceptualize relations is not indifferent to philosophy of politics.

From modern metaphysics we passed to phenomenology, that Piotr Karpiński takes into consideration to investigate the mind (ego)-body relation. Karpiński widely uses works of Jean-Luc Marion, Maurice

Merleau-Ponty, and other phenomenologists to review the complexity of this relation. He presents an eidetic description that clearly reveals that ego is not symmetrical to the body. Body is an entrance that mind needs to enter the world filled with other beings. Everything here is against classical dualism of two substances. Karpiński also proposes a very interesting approach to the body as the character of mind, which was inspired by Martin Heidegger and Paul Ricœur.

David Jones, next in the tableau, remains in a deep dialogue with the former author especially with rejection of oversimplifications implied by the dualistic accounts of the mind-body problem. Although he is also inspired by phenomenology, he also draws from pragmatism and even more from the Eastern non-dualistic philosophical paradigm. Jones presents a few examples, including Greek Mythology, to argue that dualism (that of mind and body, but also on every other plane of relation) is the most fundamental feature of Western philosophy and culture in general. What he proposes is “aesthetic perception” that can be found in Buddhism, phenomenology, and pragmatism. “Aesthetic perception” is a meditation method alternative to Cartesian doubt that opens an area of pure experience without dualistic relation, where one can find lived phenomena. Jones also finds in Buddhism what he calls the “Aesthetic turn” which, as he suggests, could revitalize Western philosophy and culture.

Next Andrzej Kapusta; who works in the field of philosophy of psychiatry, analyzes relations that the subject has to itself, and to the others, in order to stress the disturbances that mental crisis can cause. To achieve a clear description independent of psychological and medical models, he harnesses phenomenological methods based on a unique mix of Thomas Fuchs, Giovanni Stanghellini, and Matthew Ratcliffe, among others. Kapusta distinguishes and describes three dimensions of relationality: “attitude to the illness” – understood also as a relation to oneself, “dialogical relationship,” and “social consensus.” What we get here is then a phenomenologically oriented, non-biomedical concept of mental health issues. What Kapusta is seeking is a conception of what he called “relational recovery” from mental crisis.

The Thematic Section is closed by remarks on the category of relation within the field of philosophy of politics and social philosophy. Here David Antonini juxtaposes social identity taken as relational and as atomistic. The conception of the former is based on philosophy of Hannah Arendt, and of the latter on John Rawls. The departure point for a relational conception of identity is the social area of dependencies and powers, and for an atomistic one it is the isolated individuality itself. Antonini argues that the relational social identity gives us a more “fruitful” concept of the citizen because it emerges from social relations. What he wants to achieve is an original concept of liberal individuality which would include to some aspects of irreducible relationality of citizenship.

The Forum Section starts with the essay by Zofia Rosińska who marvelously hits the philosophy of culture issues by posing the problem of progress and reversions taken not as a “Great Ideas”, but as “small-scale reversions” and (my term) regional progressions. She suggests that in some way, progress is always a kind of reversion. She also draws some reflections from Leszek Kołakowski, Mircea Eliade, and Carl Gustav Jung to describe how such a phenomenon as a cultural reversion draws from myth. To make her thoughts clear, Rosińska presents four areas of reversions: language, custom, psychiatry, and philosophy. She explicitly refuses to give a short and simple answer to the “one true model of progress.” On the one hand, Rosińska asks for a rest from the covenant of progress, on the other hand, she is looking for the same cultural tools to conduct the progress in some vital way.

In the second text in the Forum, Paul B. Cherlin goes deep in John Dewey’s conception of emergentism defined by the author as “the continuities, developments, and associations that are possible among all natural existences: cultures, ideas, symbols, and the process of inquiry.” Deweyan emergentism calls upon non-natural qualitative relations that are constituted between events or activities, and that group in dynamic fields. Those

fields act as a kind of environment for the consciousness. Therefore, as Cherlin highlights, one deals here with both ontology and methodology that defend against any kind of quantitative reductionism, especially known in scientific naturalism, and that bury the dualism of nature and mind.

Closing words in the Forum belong to Pavel Zahrádka, who investigates judgments of taste of beverages/foods, looking for their objectivity and grounding. He asserts that despite clarification of terms and a logical and epistemic basis, there will be pragmatic and cultural elements that last and, as he suggests, is something specific to aesthetics. This is not against the possibility of harmonizing our judgments, but should be critically taken into account. What is interesting: Zahrádka relies vastly on Kant's *Critic of Judgement*, but also on empirical studies of opinions on beverages/foods in the form of a semi-structured interview study.

We would also like to draw the reader's attention to the essay opening the third section of the issue. In this essay Jon Mills presents reflection on the ultimate end of humans in the context of atomic annihilation, global warfare, climate catastrophes, uncontrollable technological growth, and a pandemic of COVID-19. He meticulously reminds us, that the Doomsday Clock, (started by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* during the Cold War to point in symbolic way to the end of humanity because the nuclear threat), is now as close as ever to the twelve o'clock hour, meaning human extinction. He also analyzes the "Doomsday Argument," a probabilistic argument that claims to predict the total number of people that will ever live. All that Mills presents points to some kind of "call to action," to not be passive in the face of crisis that we as humanity experience now on many levels. In other words, he wants us to change our relation to the world.