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## AQUINAS ON REAL RELATION<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The paper deals with Aquinas's conception of a real relation. It is divided into four main parts. First, I explain some important characteristics of Aquinas's theory of relation, namely the legacy of Aristotle as the main source on which Aquinas draws. Second, I explain the formal cause of relation. Third, I deal with the issue of two metaphysical components of a relation. Finally, I argue that a relation and its foundation are really distinct.

### Key words

Relation and its foundation; Aquinas; order

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**R**elation is a fundamental philosophical concept.<sup>2</sup> We can consider the things around us (as well as ourselves) not only as they are in themselves, but also as they are related to others in some way. Whenever things are ordered in some way, as when one originates from another or is ordered to another, when we add and subtract, when we find a community, language or persons, when we know or love, when we consider how all things are oriented to God and God to the world, we encounter relation. To put it simply, all that exists is always in relation to something else. This quite naturally leads to

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<sup>2</sup> A shortened version of this paper has been published in Czech as David Svoboda. Tomášovo pojetí kategoriálního vztahu a jeho aristotelská východiska. In: Daniel Heider – Jan Samohýl – Lukáš Novák (eds.). *Pluralita tradic od antiky po novověk*. České Budějovice: Jihočeská univerzita 2015, pp. 24–40.

reflection of relation itself. More profound understanding of relation further enables us to understand many other related philosophical problems better, such as e.g. causality (commonly conceived as a kind of relation), the theory of universals (the unity of a universal concept is traditionally considered to be the foundation of its relation to other natures), person (associated with relation not only in personalism), the issue of knowing and desiring (these intentional operations are necessarily related to their object), the logical and semantic analysis of relational propositions, and other logical and metaphysical problems.

Consequently, we ought not to be surprised that philosophers have focused on relation since antiquity. In this paper I want to present Aquinas's theory of real (categorical) relation.<sup>5</sup> This issue is fairly extensive and that is why the exposition will be limited to key selected aspects of it. The problem of so-called transcendental relations, which are traditionally classified among real relations, will be left aside. I hope to treat the topic in another, more extensive paper.

The paper is divided into four main conceptual parts. First, I present the principles of Aquinas's conception, namely his basic ontology, vocabulary and division of relations. Second, I focus on the problem of the formal cause of relation and show that Aquinas admitted at most

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<sup>5</sup> There is fairly extensive secondary literature on Aquinas's conception of relations, of which I have used the following: Mark Henninger. *Relations – Medieval Theories 1250–1325*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989; Anton Krempel. *La doctrine de la relation chez saint Thomas*. Paris: J. Vrin 1952; Fridrich Wilhelmsen. Creation as a relation in Saint Thomas Aquinas. *The Modern Schoolman* 56 (1979), pp. 107–133; Norbert Ginsburg. Metaphysical Relations and St. Thomas Aquinas. *The New Scholasticism* 15 (1941), pp. 238–254; Carl Kossel. Principles of St. Thomas' Distinction between the Esse and Ratio of Relation. *The Modern Schoolman* 24 (1946), pp. 19–36; *ibid.*, 25 (1947), pp. 93–107; Carl Kossel. St. Thomas' Theory of the Causes of Relation. *The Modern Schoolman* 25 (1948), pp. 151–172; Mark Henninger. Aquinas on the Ontological Status of Relations. *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25/4 (1987), pp. 491–515; Anton Krempel. Anerkannte Thomas von Aquin transzendente Beziehungen? *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 67 (1959), pp. 171–178; Edmund Pace. The Concept of Order in the Philosophy of St. Thomas. *The New Scholasticism* 2 (1928), pp. 51–72; Bernard Coffey. The Notion of Order according to St. Thomas Aquinas. *The Modern Schoolman* 27 (1949), pp. 1–18; Alois Maltha. De divisione relationum consideratio in ordine ad questionem de relationibus divinis. *Angelicum* 14 (1937), pp. 61–86; Jeffrey Brower. *Medieval Theories of Relations*. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relations-medieval/>; Constantine Cavarnos. *The Classical Theory of Relations: A Study in the Metaphysics of Plato, Aristotle and Thomism*. Belmont: The Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies 1975; Robert W. Schmidt. *The Domain of Logic according to Saint Thomas Aquinas*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1966; Thomas M. Ward. Relations without Forms: Some Consequences of Aquinas's Metaphysics of Relations. *Vivarium* 48 (2010), pp. 279–301.

two types of relation foundation. Third, I discuss the issue of the two metaphysical constituents of relation, its accidental being and its proper character. Last, I discuss the difference between a relation and its foundation and will argue for the view that there is a real distinction between them.<sup>4</sup>

## § 1. Aristotle and Aquinas

Though Aquinas's conception of relation draws on various sources (the Church Fathers<sup>5</sup>, Boethius, Averroes, and others), it was most inspired by the legacy of Aristotle.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore appropriate to begin the exposition by briefly introducing the Greek philosopher's key texts on the subject. My aim, however, is not to present a detailed interpretation of Aristotle's view, an analysis focusing exclusively on his conception. I will introduce his texts so that they help to illuminate some Aquinas's ideas. I will briefly summarize some important ideas from (1) the 7th chapter of *Categories*; (2) a short passage from the 5th book of the *Physics*;<sup>7</sup> (3) an exposition in the 5th book of the *Metaphysics*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Aquinas's key reflections on relation are mostly found in numerous theological passages dealing with the Trinity and the relations of God and creatures (above all in the *Summa Theologiae*, the *Disputed Questions on the Power of God*, and the *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*), as well as in his commentaries on the works of Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, *Physics*, unfortunately Aquinas did not write a commentary on the *Categories*).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. David Vopřada. *Svatý Ambrož a tajemství Krista*. Prague: Krystal OP 2015, esp. p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> In the following exposition I rely on the works of Mark Henninger. *Relations*, and Lukáš Novák. *Teorie vztahu u Jana Poncia v kontextu scholastické tradice*, advance thesis (ÚFaR FF UK 2001).

<sup>7</sup> There is a very similar text in the *Metaphysics*. Cf. Aristotle. *Metaphysics* 14, 1, 1088a 29–35. See also the instructive commentary on this passage in *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, a revised text with introduction and commentary by D. W. ROSS. *Vol. II*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1924, p. 471.

<sup>8</sup> I used the following critical editions of Aristotle's works: Aristotle. *The Categories, On Interpretation*. London: Harvard University Press 1996; *Aristotelis Metaphysica*. Clarendon: Oxonii e Typographeo Clarendoniano 1960. The secondary literature is not very extensive, cf. Klaus Oehler. *Einleitung und Anmerkungen zu Aristoteles: Kategorien*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1984, pp. 239–256. For a more detailed treatment of the history of the theory of relation see Julius Weinberg. *The Concept of Relation: Some Observations in Its History*, in *Abstraction, Relation and Induction, Three Essays in the History of Thought*. Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin Press 1965; Klaus Oehler. *Logic of Relations and Inference from Signs in Aristotle, Ars semeiotica* 4 (1981), pp. 237–246; Miguella Mignucci. *Aristotle's Definitions of Relatives in Cat. 7*.

(1) Somewhat paradoxically, the crucial influence of the 7th chapter of the *Categories* on Aquinas is not so much due to its content, but first of all to the fact that Aristotle classified relation as one of the categories. Thus the ontological character of relation was fundamentally determined as an accident (*ens in alio*).<sup>9</sup> Aquinas also adopted the definition of relation from the *Categories* and defined it as *that whose proper being consists in being toward another*.<sup>10</sup> Thus he obtained an important distinction between relation and its foundation (*fundamentum*). He conceived foundation as that in virtue of which a relation arises. So e.g. if a man begets a son, the act of begetting is the foundation of the relation of fatherhood which he acquires. So in the case of a categorial relation Aquinas distinguished among three things: the *subject* of the relation (the man who begets a son), further its *terminus* (the begotten son), and finally the *foundation* of the relation (the act of begetting). A necessary condition of the existence of a categorial relation is that the subject, terminus, and foundation are all real beings and that there is a real distinction between the subject and terminus of the relation. If these conditions are satisfied, a categorial relation necessarily exists. The reverse also holds, if a categorial relation exists, its conditions necessarily obtain.<sup>11</sup>

(2) In the first two chapters of the 5th book of the *Physics* Aristotle discusses kinds of movement and distinguishes among three: quantitative, qualitative, and local. At the beginning of the second chapter, where a discussion of relation relevant to our investigation appears, Aristotle discusses movement in respect of the categories and claims that there is no movement in respect of substance and relation. He literally says:

In respect of substance there is no motion, because substance has no contrary among things that are. Nor is there motion in respect of relation: for it may happen that when one correlative changes, the other, although this

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*Phronesis* 51 (1986), pp. 101–127; Guisepppe Sillitti. La concezione del pros ti e il problema degli enti astratti in Aristotele, *Elenchos* 6 (1985), pp. 357–377.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa contra Gentiles* (*ScG*) 4, c. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae* (*STh*) I, q. 28, a. 2: “*ratio propria relationis [...] accipitur [...] secundum comparisonem ad aliquid extra. Si igitur consideremus, etiam in rebus creatis, relationes secundum id quod relationes sunt, sic inveniuntur esse assistentes, non intrinsecus affixae; quasi significantes respectum quodammodo continentem ipsam rem relatam, prout ab ea tendit in alterum.*”

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *STh* I, 13, 7.

does not itself change, is no longer applicable, so that in these cases the motion is accidental.<sup>12</sup>

Aristotle therefore contests the claim that acquiring or losing a relation are movements, or changes of any kind. However, the text presents some obvious difficulties. If a relation is an accidental form acquired by a substance when the conditions described above are satisfied, then the substance should change by acquiring it, since by acquiring an accident a substance obtains a further determination and thereby new accidental being. If a relation is really a categorial being, then it seems that a substance must acquire it by means of movement and acquiring or losing it are therefore certain changes. We will not discuss Aquinas's solution to this difficulty now and return to it later.

(3) Aristotle introduces three basic kinds of relations, which we can label *numeric*, *causal*, and *psychological*. As an example of the first type, Aristotle mentions common mathematical relations, such as 'to be greater than', 'to be equal to something', 'to be a multiple of something', etc. Further (which may be rather surprising) he also includes among them relations such as specific and generic identity, similarity with respect to quality, and quantitative equality.<sup>13</sup>

Aquinas interprets Aristotle's not quite lucid text as follows.<sup>14</sup> When Aristotle has dealt with common numeric relations, constituted by the ratio of a number to unity or of one number to another, he deals with relations which substance, quality, and quantity take with respect to unity as the principle of number. Among these he classifies identity, similarity, and equality. Since specifically or generically identical substances are those sharing one specific or generic nature, the foundation of relations of specific or generic identity is the unity of a specific or generic nature. The same holds for relations of similarity and equality: similar things are those that share a specifically one quality, the foundation of their relation of similarity is therefore unity with respect to quality; things are equal when they have specifically one quantity, the

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle. *Physics* 5, 2, 225b 11–13.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle. *Metaphysics* 5, 15, 1021a 10–15: *All these relations, then, are numerically expressed and are determinations of number, and so in another way are the equal and the like and the same. For all refer to unity. Those things are the same whose substance is one; those are like whose quality is one; those are equal whose quantity is one; and 1 is the beginning and measure of number, so that all these relations imply number, though not in the same way.*

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Aquinas. *In V Metaph. Lect. 17* (1022). See also Henninger. *Relations*, pp. 6–8.

foundation of their relation of equality is therefore unity with respect to quantity. Just as common mathematical relations are based on a certain number, so relations of specific and generic identity, similarity, and equality are based on the principle of number, which is unity. According to Aquinas, this analogy between common numeric relations and relations of identity, similarity and equality is the reason why Aristotle lumps them together.<sup>15</sup> Numeric relations are thus divided into three subordinate types, i.e., identity (non-identity), similarity (dissimilarity), and equality (inequality). The common mathematical relations mentioned above such as ‘to be the double, half, or one third of something’ are classified as relations founded on quantity, i.e., among relations of equality and inequality.

The causal relation is based on the active or passive potency of a subject, or on the action (*actio*) of a subject or on its ‘passivity’ (*passio*). In virtue of its active potency a substance is (as a cause) able to produce an action, which is the foundation of its causal relation to another. Passive potency, on the other hand, enables a subject to be acted on and based on this ‘passivity’ it is related to another as an effect to its cause.<sup>16</sup>

The third kind of relation is that of cognitive powers, habits and cognitive acts to their objects. It has also been frequently labelled as the relation of the measurable to the measure, since the cognized object is the measure which defines and measures the cognitive acts directed to it. This relation to object as to measure can be analogically transposed to habits, cognitive powers, and also to the subject to which this whole hierarchy of acts ultimately belongs.<sup>17</sup> In this context Aquinas often distinguishes between categorial relations and relations of reason, as well as between mutual and non-mutual relations.<sup>18</sup> While

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Aquinas. *In V Metaph. Lect. 17* (1022).

<sup>16</sup> Aquinas. *In V Metaph. Lect. 17* (1002).

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle. *Metaphysics* 5, 15, 1021a 27–30.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Aquinas. *In V Metaph. Lect. 17* (1026–1027). In general the difference between real relations and relations of reason can be explained with respect to their causes. A relation of reason is formed by the activity of the intellect and therefore depends on it. A categorial relation exists independently of the activity of reason and is produced by real causes. There is a non-mutual relation between *a* and *b* when *a* is really related to *b* but not *b* to *a*. There is a mutual relation when there exists a real relation of *a* to *b* and simultaneously there obtains the inverse real relation of *b* to *a*; another necessary condition of a mutual relation is that *a* and *b* are of the same relational character (*eadem ratio ordinis*). Relations are of the same relational character if their foundations are of the same type. That is the case with numerical and causal

a seer relates to the seen by a real relation, the foundation of which is the act of seeing, the inverse relation of the seen to the seer is not real. This relation exists only as thought by the intellect, since there is no really existing foundation in the seen in virtue of which it relates to the one who sees it.<sup>19</sup>

At first sight Aquinas seems to have adopted Aristotle's division of relations and their foundations, since in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* he expresses no explicit doubt concerning it. On the other hand, Aquinas only mentions the psychological relation as a third kind of relation in the commentary on the *Metaphysics*.<sup>20</sup> This ambiguity invites us to return to it in the following paragraph and attempt to explain it.

## § 2. The formal cause of a relation and classification of relations

The formal cause of a relation is its foundation, since it is the form in virtue of which the relation exists and from which its specific determination comes. However, the complete specific determination of a relation is caused by the foundation in respect of the terminus of the relation, since the same foundation can give rise to two specifically distinct relations, in so far as their terms are contrary. So e.g. the redness of an apple is the foundation of its relation of similarity to other

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relations, but not with psychological relations. Cf. *STh* 1, 13, 7; 28, 1; *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia (QDP)* q. 7, a. 11, and others. Ward attempts to defend the thesis that – although Aquinas in fact taught that psychological relations, as well as relations between God and creatures, are non-mutual – he could have held the very opposite. According to Ward, Aquinas rejects the mutuality of these relations primarily because it would lead to the doctrine of idealism. If the cognized were really related to the cognizer, then the cognizer would change and create reality by cognition; Aquinas rejects this altogether. When defending his thesis Ward therefore strives to show that the relations in question can be construed as mutual, without leading Aquinas into the trap of idealism. As I will show later, in Aquinas's conception a relation as such adds no new being or new nature to its subject, i.e., the conception implies no ontological commitments. According to Ward the relation 'to be cognized' can therefore be construed as real without a commitment to idealistic doctrine. Below I will show that Aquinas's conception of relation *qua* relation has ontological commitments and based on this I will evaluate Ward's otherwise greatly inspiring contribution as doubtful. Cf. Ward. *Relations without Forms*, pp. 289–291.

<sup>19</sup> Seeing, as well as all other cognitive acts, are so called immanent operations, which do not pass over to the external object but remain in the cognizing subject as its perfection; thus cognition changes only the cognizer, not the cognized object. The relation of the cognizer to the cognized exists really, while the inverse relation is only of reason. Cf. *QDP* q. 7, a. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Schmid. *The Domain of Logic*, p. 145.

red apples and at the same time the foundation of the opposite relation of dissimilarity to yellow apples. The relation's foundation thus has a double formal effect. It determines its subject absolutely, and it also determines it relatively, i.e., it directs it toward the relation's term. Redness therefore primarily makes an apple red and secondarily similar or dissimilar to other coloured things.<sup>21</sup>

When reflecting on Aristotle's texts, Aquinas reaches an important conclusion, namely that a real relation can have no more than two kinds of foundation.<sup>22</sup> Probably the most extensive discussion of the topic is found in the *Disputed Questions on the Power of God* (7, 9), where Aquinas asks whether and how a creature is related to God. In several steps he defends the thesis that every creature has a real relation to God. First he argues against the view of some thinkers (he does not mention any names, but probably means the Stoics, some orthodox Moslem theologians, and Gilbert of Poitiers),<sup>23</sup> who dispute the real being of relations altogether. Aquinas introduces two arguments against them.<sup>24</sup> The first of these more or less relies on the authority of Aristotle, who classified relation among the categories and thereby among real beings. The ground of the other argument is that the goodness and perfection of real things does not consist merely in their absolute properties, but also in their mutual ordering. Just as the goodness and perfection of an army require that its parts be properly ordered, so the goodness and perfection of the whole world requires that the real things of which it consists be really ordered; and this ordering consists in certain relations. From this follows that there are real relations among the things surrounding us, in virtue of which one can be ordered to another.

In the next step of his reasoning Aquinas focuses on the foundations of relations. There are *at most* two foundations of relations, viz. quantity and active (or passive) potency. Quantity is in itself the foundation of relations of equality and inequality, active or passive potency is in itself the foundation of causal relations. Other categories cannot

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. *In III Phys.*, lect. 1; *In V Metaph.*, lect. 17 (n. 1001–5); *QDP* 7, 9 and others.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *In III Phys.*, lect. 1; *In V Metaph.*, lect. 17 (1004–5); *QDP* 7, 9, and others.

<sup>23</sup> Aquinas's source is Averroes. *In XII Metaph.* 19, vol. VIII, F 306B. In: *Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois commentariis*, X vol. Venedig 1562–1574, repr. Frankfurt 1962. Cf. also Weinberg. *The Concept of Relation*, pp. 89–91.

<sup>24</sup> As far as I know, these are the only two arguments for the real being of relations Aquinas introduces in his work.

in themselves direct one thing toward another. In virtue of substance and quality each thing relates only to itself, to other things merely ‘accidentally’, in so far as quality has something of the nature of active or passive potency, or in so far as substances and quality have something of the nature of quantity. So relations of identity and non-identity are founded not on the substances themselves, but on their unity and multitude. The numeric unity of a substance is the foundation of its (rational) relation to itself, i.e., numeric identity, the specific and generic unity of substances is the foundation of their mutual relations of specific and generic identity. Similarly, quality relates things to one another only with respect to unity and multitude, or in virtue of the degree of its intensity, or in so far as it is an active or passive potency. Unity and multitude with respect to quality is the foundation of a relation of similarity or dissimilarity, different intensity of a quality, e.g. whiteness, is the foundation of the fact that one thing is whiter than another, and as active or passive potency some qualities are the foundations of relations of activity and passivity.<sup>25</sup> The remaining four categories (‘where’, ‘when’, position, and habit) rather presuppose and follow a relation, they cannot constitute its foundation.<sup>26</sup>

With this established Aquinas leads the argument to conclusion. If created things are really directed to one another, then each of them must also be really directed to God as the origin and end of its existence. Then just as the order of parts of an army comes from the relation of the whole army to its leader, so the mutual ordering of created things derives from the whole creation’s relation to God.<sup>27</sup>

Aquinas’s reasoning is fairly clear, though one should not miss the fact that it throws new light on the issue of classification of real

<sup>25</sup> A categorial relation never is or can be the foundation of another real relation, otherwise an infinite regress would arise, e.g. one relation of sonhood would be the foundation of another relation of similarity to another sonhood and the foundation of a relation of dissimilarity to fatherhood and other different relations. This dissimilarity would be the foundation of a relation of similarity to another dissimilarity and this similarity would be the foundation of a relation of dissimilarity to other different relations etc. This clearly shows that a relation requires nothing further to direct toward another. Two distinct sonhoods are therefore similar in virtue of themselves, not in virtue of another relation.

<sup>26</sup> *In V Metaph.*, lect. 17 (1005): *Alia vero genera magis consequuntur relationem, quam possint relationem causare. Nam quando consistit in aliquali relatione ad tempus. Ubi vero, ad locum. Positio autem ordinem partium importat. Habitus autem relationem habentis ad habitum?*

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *QDP* 7, 9.

relations. If the specific determination of relations comes from their foundations, then the number of kinds of relation must be the same as the number of its foundations. Just as Aquinas affirms both by elimination and by direct statement that there are at most two foundations of relation, he should correspondingly also admit no more than two kinds of relations, namely causal and numeric ones.<sup>28</sup> Aquinas could classify the third type of real relation introduced by Aristotle (i.e., psychological relation) among causal relations (which, as I will show below, he *de facto* does in QDP 7, 10).<sup>29</sup>

However, when we examine other relevant texts, it is not very clear how many kinds of relation and their foundations Aquinas in fact admits. In the already discussed commentary on the 5th book of the *Metaphysics* (which, however, is the only exception in this respect) Aquinas following Aristotle probably admits the three kinds of relation mentioned above, as well as three types of foundation.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, there are many, mostly theological texts, in which Aquinas is speaking *ex professo* and which provide evidence that he in fact admits only two kinds of foundations. In some of them, as we have seen above, he expressly claims that there are at most two of them, in others he names two foundations of relation without claiming that there are two at most.<sup>31</sup> However, it is due to add that these texts have a catch, which makes the proper interpretation of Aquinas's position rather more complicated. Even there he engages Aristotle's classification of relations from the 5th book of the *Metaphysics*, including the psychological relation, without expressly rejecting or in any way correcting the classification of this kind of relation. But there is no doubt that Aquinas was fully aware of what Aristotle in fact says and that they probably contradict each other.

I believe that Aquinas mostly mentions the psychological relation in order to distinguish between mutual and non-mutual relations, as

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<sup>28</sup> Aquinas conceives quantity so broadly in a number of passages, cf. e.g. *In III Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 1; *In V Metaph.*, lect. 17 (1005), and others.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. QDP 7, 10. Many later Thomists (e.g. Thomas Cajetan, John of St. Thomas) find this kind of relation problematic, since it allegedly requires a different kind of foundation than active or passive potency. Cf. Thomas Cajetan. In *Summa Theol.* I, 28, 4 ad 2. In: *Commentaria in Summam theologiae I, S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia IV*, ed. Leon. Romae: Ex Typographia Polyglota 1886–1906; Johannes A Sancto Thomae. *Cursus philosophicus thomisticus, Logica*. Marietti: Taurini 1948, p. 584.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Kossel. *St. Thomas's Theory of Causes of Relation*, p. 155.

<sup>31</sup> Among the former there are e.g. *In III Sent.*, 5, 1, 1, sol. 1; *STh* 1, 28; QDP 7, 9, 4; the latter e.g. *ScG* 4, 24; *De ente et essentia*, cap. 6; *In III Sent.* 8, 1, 5; QDP 8, 1, and others.

well as between real relation and relation of reason, and not in order to confirm it as a third kind of relation.<sup>52</sup> Of course, in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* accepts Aristotle's approach and view, which, however, need not be (and in fact is not) fully identical with his own conception. This is plain especially in texts where he returns to Aristotle's classification of relations and – speaking for himself – explains its meaning.

I will now present one key passage representing many to support this interpretation. In the *Disputed Questions on the Power of God* (7, 10), where he reflects on relations between God and creatures, Aquinas defends the thesis that relations between God and creatures are not mutual. Even though in the body of this article Aquinas does not explicitly cite the passage from *Metaphysics* V, he evidently has it in mind, since he expressly mentions it in *Sed contra*. The key part in his reasoning is played by the distinction between mutual and non-mutual relations and the associated distinction between real relations and relations of reason.

In the opening to his reasoning Aquinas introduces the necessary condition of mutual relation, which requires that the *relata* must share the same *ratio* of relation (*eadem ratio ordinis*).<sup>53</sup> Aquinas further divides relations *only* into two kinds and shows which of them satisfy this condition and which do not. Relations based on quantity are always mutual. In the case of relations whose foundation is activity or passivity a distinction must be drawn. Some of them are mutual, namely those whose foundation is a transitive operation which passes from the subject of the activity to its object, which is thereby really changed. Others are not mutual, namely relations based on immanent operations, viz. knowing and willing, which do not pass from the subject of

<sup>52</sup> Robert W. Schmidt pays detailed attention to this interpretative difficulty and I find his reasoning convincing. Of course it cannot and need not be reproduced it here in its entirety. Cf. Schmidt. *The Domain of Logic*, pp. 145–156.

<sup>53</sup> Relations are of the same relational character if their foundations are of the same type. Foundations are of the same type if they have the same (categorical) manner of existence or belong in the same category. So the relation of similarity of two red apples is mutual, since the foundation of the relation is in both cases a certain quality (redness). Similarly, relationships of equality and inequality based on a certain quantity are also mutual. Psychological relationships, on the other hand, are not mutual since the *relata* do not share the same type of foundation. The foundation of the real relation of cognizer to object of cognition is his immanent cognitive activity, to which no passivity corresponds on the part of the cognized object.

the activity to its object and therefore do not really change the object in question.

On this basis, whose ground-plan is evidently taken over from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* V, Aquinas leads the argument to the conclusion. The foundation of the real relation of a creature to God is its created being (*esse creatum*). The created being is received in the creature's essence and is therefore finite; it is limited or determined by the participating essence to a certain kind of being. But God is absolutely beyond the order of created being, divine being is absolutely unlimited, unreceived, it belongs in none of the categories. As a result, God and creature do not share the same *ratio* of relation and their relations are therefore not mutual. The creature relates to God really, while the inverse relation is merely of reason.<sup>54</sup>

Of the above reasoning, two related conclusions are of importance in this context. First, Aquinas uses Aristotle's division of relations from *Metaphysics* V, but only admits two types foundations and consequently according to us at most two kinds of relations, subsuming psychological relations under causal relations. Second, the foundation of psychological relations is activity or passivity construed more broadly than in the case of common causal relations. A psychological relation is a non-mutual relation, since one member of it is really directed to the other, while the other is related merely rationally.

I believe that these texts and their interpretation have sufficiently shown that Aquinas admitted no more than two kinds of foundations and accordingly that it is highly likely he acknowledged at most two kinds of relations. I understand this conclusion as a certain clarification

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<sup>54</sup> *QDP* q. 7, a. 10. This claim does not affect another plane of propositions concerning God, viz. the one on which we claim that God really loves creature etc. When we say that God does not have a real relation to creatures, we merely state God's absolute perfection and independence of created reality. However, this does not prevent us from saying that God really loves creatures. According to Aquinas, our statements concerning God are of analogical nature, since all names we predicate of God are in one way or another obtained from sensory experience. That is why predicating them of God requires a certain clarification or specification. This is usually captured by a three-step sequence referred to as 'affirmation-negation-eminence'. With a statement we affirm something of God, with a negation we reject an incorrect understanding of what we have said, in the last step we state that this purified meaning of the statement pertains to God eminently, in the highest degree. We can therefore say that there is a relationship of love to creation in God. Then we must deny that this relation makes God dependent on creatures, i.e., that it is a categorial relation. In the last step we specify that this properly understood relation of love is in God in the highest degree, that it is in fact God himself, and therefore that God is love.

and supplementation of what Aquinas wrote in his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, not as an absolute negation of what he says there.

### § 3. Two metaphysical components of a real relation

In Aquinas's conception of relation a key part is played by the distinction between the accidental being (*inesse*) and the proper character (*ratio*) of each of the accidental categories.

In each of the nine categories of accidents two things must be considered. One is the being that pertains to each of them in so far as it is an accident. And this is generally in all <cases> to be in a subject, since the being of an accident is to be in <something>. Another [...] is the proper character of each category.<sup>35</sup>

Aquinas adopted Aristotle's ontological scheme, according to which real individuals or natures are divided into two basic classes, i.e., substances and accidents. Substances exist in themselves, accidents exist in substances. This doctrine is Aquinas's point of reference when he describes the being of an accident as being in a subject. Of course, as compared to substance the accidental mode of being is less perfect, since an accident depends on a subject and together with it constitutes a 'composite'. This characteristic is common to all accidents. How do the accidental categories differ from one another, then? The differences are caused by the 'ratio' of each category: one differs from the other in virtue of its own proper character. Both components of a categorial accident, being in a subject and its proper character, are its necessary metaphysical constituents. To summarize it is possible to say that in virtue of the former each accident is simply an accident, while in virtue of the latter it belongs in a certain category and differs from all other accidents.

I believe that the distinction between the two metaphysical components of an accident is drawn at the level of its entitative principles, which are accidental essence and accidental existence, i.e., not at the level of essence. In view of the following exposition the question what

<sup>35</sup> *STh I, 28, 2: '[...] in quolibet novem generum accidentis est duo considerare. Quorum unum est esse quod competit unicuique ipsorum secundum quod est accidens. Et hoc communiter in omnibus est inesse subiecto, accidentis enim esse est inesse. Aliud [...] est propria ratio uniuscuiusque illorum generum.'*

difference there is between the two components is important. I cannot provide a properly justified answer here, which would require a detailed and extensive analysis and mutual comparison of many Aquinas's texts. But the diligent reader will find edification elsewhere.<sup>56</sup> Here I will limit myself to stating that in my view Aquinas regarded that distinction as merely of reason, not real. The proper character of a relation and its accidental existence are therefore really identical, they are distinct only in our cognition.

### § 3.1 *The proper character of relation*

I will first introduce Aquinas's understanding of the proper character as such; then I will explain what he means by the proper character of relation.<sup>57</sup> The proper character of a thing is *what the intellect understands to be the meaning of a name*.<sup>58</sup> It is frequently determined by a definition consisting of the proximate higher genus and the specific difference. Such a definition expresses the proper character of the defined thing. However, this does not mean that natures which cannot be defined in the proper sense of the word do not have a proper character. The highest genera (as well as transcendental concepts and divine attributes) also have it, and we comprehend it when we understand the meaning of the names of these natures properly. Aquinas further asks how the proper character is present in a real thing. In his answer I will only take note of what concerns the categorial 'sphere'. His point of departure is the conception of so-called 'moderate realism', according to which essential concepts, which he understands to be the meanings of the corresponding universal names, have immediate foundation in real things and are a certain similitude of them.<sup>59</sup> The

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. David Svoboda. *Metafyzické myšlení Tomáše Akvinského*. Prague: Krystal 2012, pp. 150–158.

<sup>57</sup> Our point of departure will be the early *Commentary on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard, where the *Angelic Doctor* extensively discusses the topic in the context of reflecting on divine names. In our opinion Aquinas's conception of relation did not change in basic respects in the course of his academic activity. Already in the *Commentary on the Sentences*, the *Angelic Doctor's* early work, fundamentally the same conception as in his mature works is found, e.g. the *Disputed Questions on the Power of God* or the *Summa Theologiae*. The same view is held by Krempel. (*La Doctrine*, p. 11) and Henninger (*Relations*, p. 15).

<sup>58</sup> Aquinas. *In I Sent.* d. 2, q. 1, a. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. J. J. E. Gracia. Cutting the Gordian Knot of Ontology: Thomas's Solution to the Problem of Universals. In: D. M. Gallagher (ed.). *Thomas Aquinas and His Legacy; Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy* 28. Washington, D.C. 1994, pp. 16–36.

proper character of a thing as the meaning of the universal name of a categorial nature is a similitude of the real thing, in so far as it materially corresponds to it, as a sign corresponds to the signified object. Thus the proper character of a categorial nature is in the real thing, since it has immediate foundation in it and is its similitude.<sup>40</sup>

Let us now proceed to the proper character of relation. Aquinas mostly defines it in contrast to the proper character of so-called absolute accidents, viz. quantity and quality. They are called ‘absolute’ because they belong to a substance without reference to something else. It is characteristic of these accidents that we conceive their proper character with respect to their subject. We say that quantity is the measure of a substance, quality is its disposition. So the proper character of absolute accidents signifies ‘something’, i.e., a certain nature or form inhering in a subject (*aliquid alicui inherens*), and the dependence and imperfection associated with it.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, the proper character of relation consists only in being toward another (*respectus ad aliud*)<sup>42</sup> and we do not conceive it with respect to the subject but with respect to something external to the subject. Aquinas often repeats that the proper character of relation is not ‘something but towards something’ (*non aliquid, sed ad aliquid*); so the *ratio* of relation does

<sup>40</sup> This doctrine is further elaborated in connection with the theory of nature considered absolutely. We conceive a nature or an essence absolutely when we consider it only with respect to its proper character. In this way we can truthfully predicate of it only those predicates that pertain to it as such. So e.g. the predicates pertaining to a human being in so far as she is human are ‘rational’ and ‘animal’ and other determinations that are part of the definition of ‘human’. On the other hand, that which does not pertain to the proper character of humanity, e.g. white or black, does not belong to human as such. When we consider a nature with respect to its proper character – and this is important – we abstract from all being without excluding any. The proper character of things does not include being, and therefore by conceptual analysis of the proper character itself we can find out neither if a given thing exists at all, nor whether it has real or intentional being. The proper character of a thing is further what we predicate of individuals. Cf. *De ente et essentia*, cap. 2; *QDV* 3, 8 ad 2; *QDP* 9, 2 ad 1; *In VII Metaph.* 5 (1378–80), and others. See also Joseph Owens. Common Nature: A Point of Comparison Between Thomistic and Scotistic Metaphysics. *Mediaeval Studies* 19 (1959), pp. 1–14; cf. also Joseph Owens. Thomistic Common Nature and Platonic Idea. *Mediaeval Studies* 21 (1959), pp. 211–223; L. Honnefelder. Natura communis. In: J. Ritter – K. Gruender (eds.). *Historisches Woerterbuch der Philosophie*, Band 6. Basel/Stuttgart: Schwabe und Co. AG 1976, col. 493–504.

<sup>41</sup> *STh* I, 28, 1: ‘[...] *quantitas et qualitas, secundum propriam rationem significant aliquid alicui inhaerens.*’

<sup>42</sup> *STh* I, 28, 1: ‘*Ea vero quae dicuntur ad aliquid, significant secundum propriam rationem solum respectum ad aliud.*’; *ScG* 4, 14: ‘[...] *propria relationis ratio consistit in eo quod est ad alterum [...]*’; and others.

not signify a nature or a (relational) form having being in the subject, but only a respect or reference to something that is beyond the subject.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, unlike absolute accidents, the proper character of relation is not associated with dependence on the subject and the accompanying imperfection.<sup>44</sup> When one recalls that every accident has two metaphysical components, being and proper character, we understand that a relation is ‘something’ only with respect to its being, not in its proper character. On the other hand, an absolute accident, e.g. wisdom, is ‘something’ not only with respect to its being, but also in its proper character.<sup>45</sup>

Aquinas summarizes the basic ideas of our exposition of the proper character of relation so far as follows:

However, one needs to note that a relation is something in a different way than other beings, since all other beings are in a dual manner: with respect to their being and with respect to the proper character of their essence. E.g., according to its being wisdom is something in the subject and according to its proper character it is a certain nature in the category of quality. A relation is something with respect to its being, which it has in the subject; but with respect to its proper character it does not pertain to it to be something, merely to relate to something; therefore according to its proper character it is not something in a subject. That is why Boethius says that relatives say nothing at all of what they are predicated of. That is also why there are some *relata* such that the relation in them is merely one of reason, and not something in reality, as when the knowable relates to knowledge. [...] That is why a relation <is> something <only> with respect

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<sup>43</sup> *Quodl.* IX, q. 2, a. 5.

<sup>44</sup> What I have said so far concerning the proper character of relation holds if one conceives it as the highest genus. A lower species of relation can according to its proper character signify ‘something’, a certain nature inhering in a subject, and thereby also that it is an accident.

<sup>45</sup> According to Aquinas this manifests itself in our statements. When we predicate an absolute predicate of a subject (i.e., a predicate that signifies an absolute accident together with its subject), e.g. we predicate of Socrates that he is wise, we in fact say that there is wisdom in him or that he has wisdom. On the other hand, when we predicate a relational predicate, e.g. that Socrates likes Alkibiades, we do not say that there is a relation or a relational nature in him, we merely state that Socrates relates to his beloved pupil in some way. According to Aquinas, who in this respect closely follows Boethius and Augustine, relational predicates in fact say nothing at all about what they are predicated of. Cf. *In I Sent.*, d. 20, q. 1, a. 1. Aristotle. *Physics* 5.

to its being [...] But with respect to its proper character [...] it is not to be called something, but rather toward something.<sup>46</sup>

### § 3.2 *The accidental being of a relation*

Now we can consider the other metaphysical component of relation, its being (*esse*). Regrettably, the statements concerning the issue found in Aquinas's work are brief and not altogether clear. Compared to his fairly extensive and clear doctrine of the proper character of relation he neither paid as much attention to the issue of the accidental being of relations, nor did he succeed in bringing it to desirable clarity. As a result, Aquinas's doctrine has been variously interpreted and many (even non-Thomist) authors of the second and third scholastics endorsing mutually quite incongruous conceptions of relation have invoked it. Contemporary scholars mostly agree that Aquinas identified the being of a categorial relation with the accidental being of its foundation. I share the view and will substantiate it below. If there are no more than two kinds of relation foundation, then accordingly categorial relation can have at most two kinds of accidental being. Aquinas's statements on the subject are scattered in various parts of his work, but he probably pays most attention to it in the context of the Aristotle-inspired discussion of whether the generation and corruption of a relation is or is not a change.

In my exposition I will rely on Aquinas's commentary on the relevant passage of the *Physics*. However, first recall what Aristotle himself says: *Nor is there motion in respect of relation: for it may happen that when one correlative changes, the other, although this does not itself change, is no longer applicable, so that in these cases the motion is accidental.*<sup>47</sup> Aquinas raises no objections as far as intentional and non-mutual relations are concerned, since in both cases one member of the relation may change, while the other begins or ceases to relate to it without undergoing change itself. E.g. when I no longer cognize an object, it does not change, yet ceases to intentionally relate as cognized object to me as a result. A difficulty arises in the case of mutual relation, such as equality or similarity. If *a* is similar to *b*, then it seems problematic to predicate a relational predicate of *a* in virtue

<sup>46</sup> *In I Sent.*, d. 20, q. 1, a. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Aristotle. *Physics* 5, 2, 225b 11–13.

of a change in *b*, without *a* having changed at all. If e.g. my son Prokop grows and becomes equal to me in height, I will acquire a new categorial relation to him without having changed myself. However, I should as a consequence acquire new accidental being and change as a result. And that is precisely the conclusion Aristotle rejects. Aquinas agrees and argues as follows:

When someone becomes as tall as I am as a result of a change that only he has undergone and I have not, then this equality was already found in me in a certain way, as in its root, and in this way real being pertains to it: in virtue of the fact that I am of such and such height, it pertains to me that I am equal [in height] to all who are of the same height as I am. Thus when someone newly attains this height, that common root of equality becomes directed to it [of itself]; consequently, I acquire nothing new by becoming equal to another [in height] in virtue of a change he has undergone.<sup>48</sup>

As we can see, Aquinas claims that the generation of equality, which is a mutual relation, does not require an accidental change to occur in both members of the relation. When someone grows and becomes equal to me in height, then I really relate to him without changing in any way myself. I do not change since that equality was already present in me before *as in its root*. How are we to understand this metaphor? A root is what something grows out of or originates from, it is in fact a certain type of principle. When we identify it with the formal cause of a relation, i.e., with its foundation, which is truly the principle of the real being of a relation, the meaning of Aquinas's metaphor becomes clear. The real accidental being of a relation of equality is therefore identical with the accidental being of quantity, which is the foundation of this relation; and, if only the other member of the relation changes, this really does not change at all. If I become equal in height to you, I thus acquire the other necessary condition of a categorial relation, i.e., being toward another, which as such adds no new nature or (relational) form, no new being to me. Thus equality as being toward another 'gushes' or 'grows' out of its foundation, in which it is (as in a root) 'virtually' or 'potentially' present already before it is realised, as soon

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<sup>48</sup> *In V Physic.*, l. 5, n. 8.

as an adequate terminus of the relation obtains, without the need for further causal efficiency.<sup>49</sup>

However, Aquinas's conception of the being of a relation raises questions and justified doubts. If the being of a relation is identical with the being of its foundation, can relation be a category *sui generis*, irreducible to others? If a relation and its foundation share the same being, are they not in fact materially the same? How do these entities really relate to each other? Note that these questions in fact point to the same ambiguity, though each in a different respect. This can simply be asked about as follows: What is the difference between a relation and its foundation? This question became crucial in later scholastic debates on the character of relation, for good reason. That is why we have to turn to this problem now.

#### § 4. Distinction between a relation and its foundation

As far as I know, Aquinas nowhere asks whether and how a relation differs from its foundation; he therefore does not explicitly answer the question.<sup>50</sup> The exposition so far has shown that Aquinas's view of

<sup>49</sup> How is one, in accordance with this exposition, to account for Aquinas's conception according to which a relation exists in a subject and together with it constitutes a certain 'accidental composite'? If one identifies the being of a relation with the being of its foundation, the answer should be obvious. A relation exists in a subject and constitutes an 'accidental composite' with it in so far as its being is identical with the being of an absolute accident; but this being only becomes the real being of a relation, if it is accompanied by the proper character of relation which directs the subject to another, i.e., to the relation's terminus. As long as no corresponding terminus exists, there really or actually exists no relation, even though it already exists in its foundation as in potency. This potency of a relation to actual being is actualized when its terminus starts to exist; then the relation 'gushes' out of the foundation as from its root. If this necessary condition of a relation's existence is not satisfied, the relation has no actual being and as a consequence does not constitute an accidental composite with its subject. That is why we tend to conclude that a relation constitutes an accidental composite with its subject only when all the conditions of its existence are satisfied, including direction to another (*respectus ad alterum*), which formally consists in the proper character of relation. So even though the proper character of relation is in itself no nature or (relational) form and as such adds no new being to its subject, it is nonetheless an indispensable metaphysical component of the relation, which in its own way participates in constituting its real being and without which a categorial relation has no actual entity at all. In this point our interpretation of Aquinas agrees with M. Henninger and diverges from T. M. Ward. Cf. Henninger. *Relations*, p. 14; Ward. *Relations without Forms*, p. 286.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Henninger. *Relations*, p. 15; see also Krempel. *La Doctrine*, pp. 255–271; Cf. Schmidt. *The Domain of Logic*, pp. 138–140.

the issue is not quite clear. However, this problem is without doubt an absolutely crucial one, since its solution shows the true strength of Aquinas's conception. If there is not a real distinction between a categorical relation and its foundation, then it seems that a relation cannot be a true accident. In such case only the respective relation foundation, i.e., quantity or activity or passivity, could be a categorical accident. That, however, leads to the absurd conclusion that among created things there is no real order. Creation would thus consist only of absolute, mutually independent and unordered beings. That, however, is a thesis Aquinas many times rightfully explicitly denies.<sup>51</sup> I therefore believe that a real distinction between a relation and its foundation is one of the key conditions on which Aquinas's conception of categorical relation is acceptable and valid. In the following I will therefore attempt to provide a detailed historico-exegetical exposition of Aquinas's conception of the problem.

It is my preliminary estimate that the distinction between a relation and its foundation should not be merely that of reason, but rather real (i.e., not depending on the activity of our reason), since if a relation was not really distinct from its foundation, which is always an absolute accident, Aquinas would not have classified it among the categories, which comprise only real natures, irreducible to others.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, I realize that a relation qua relation is in fact no nature or thing, by gaining or losing it a substance does not change at all, and it is therefore hardly possible to distinguish it from its foundation in the way we commonly distinguish 'one thing from another'. Further, if the being of a relation is identical with the being of its foundation, it seems that these two entities should also be really identical. In what follows I will attempt to show in several steps that Aquinas most probably believed that there is a real distinction between a relation and its foundation.

I will begin by formulating the fundamental objection against the thesis which I believe Aquinas in fact endorsed. The main argument for the identity of a relation and its foundation derives from the identity of their being and is supported by the principle of transitivity. This principle can be expressed as follows: if *a* and *b* are identical with *c*, then

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. QDP 7, 9 aj.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. In I Sent. 26, 2, 1: 'Nihil quod est ens tantum in anima in genere determinato collocatur'; QDP 7, 9: 'Si autem relatio non esset in rebus extra animam non poneretur ad aliquid unum genus praedicamenti.'

*a* is identical with *b*. By applying it to our case we obtain the simple judgment that if the proper character of relation is identical with the accidental existence of its foundation and if the proper character of the foundation is identical with its accidental existence, then the proper characters of the two entities are identical. So it holds that a relation is the same as its foundation. Consequently, Aquinas could not have (consistently) defended a thesis according to which these two entities are really distinct.

Next, I try to contradict the argument. According to its proper character a relation differs from any absolute accident that can be its foundation, since the proper character of an absolute accident comprises being in a subject, while the *ratio* of relation does not, it comprises only respect to another. The proper character of relation and that of an absolute accident therefore exclude each other, one does not comprise the other, cannot be deduced from the other. Of course, the proper character of a relation must in this context be conceived as having a foundation in the thing, therefore its distinction from its foundation is not merely in our thought, it has a foundation in reality and some distinction *a parte rei* corresponds to it.

Is a distinction according to proper character sufficient to really distinguish two entities sharing the same being? In the *Summa Theologiae*, in the context of speculating on the distinction among the divine persons, Aquinas defends the thesis that the divine persons conceived as subsisting relations are really distinct, even though they share the numerically one and the same essence (and also being, since divine being and essence are identical).<sup>53</sup> He bases the first objection to that on the principle of transitivity we are already familiar with.<sup>54</sup> By applying this principle to the Trinity we obtain the following judgment.

<sup>53</sup> Here a short theological clarification is due. According to Aquinas, following an ancient tradition of Christian orthodoxy, the first Divine person relates to the second as Father to Son. The proper character the Father, who from the ontological point of view is conceived as a subsisting relation, thus consists in being the ‘one who generates’ (*generans*); on the other hand, the proper character of the Son is the ‘one who is generated’ (*genitum*). The proper characters of these persons therefore exclude each other, there is relational opposition between them, and therefore, even though they share the same essence or being, these persons are really distinct. Cf. *STh* I, 28, 3.

<sup>54</sup> The issue of the Trinity is very complicated and one could easily object that if Aquinas’s Trinitarian reasoning is used in order to elucidate the tangled issue of relation and its foundation it is a case of ‘*obscurum per obscuriora*’. I would respond that the Trinitarian mystery is not important for my argument. Aquinas’s reasoning has philosophical content which can be used to support my objective.

Every relation in God is identical with the divine essence or existence (*esse*), and therefore relations in God cannot be really distinct.<sup>55</sup> Aquinas responds by distinguishing as follows: If two entities are identical with a third one, they are the same only if they are identical both in reality (*secundum rem*) and in their proper character. If their proper characters are distinct, the argument does not hold. Therefore the divine persons, who are identical with respect to essence or existence (*esse*) but distinct with respect to their proper character, are mutually distinct.<sup>56</sup>

So Aquinas explains the real distinction among the divine persons who share the same being by the difference in their proper characters. Crucial to the argument is that the proper characters of the Divine persons express mutually opposite relations, due to which they are absolutely disparate. The proper character of one Divine person is in relational opposition to the ratio of the other Divine persons, which is why they are mutually really distinct. In order to understand that relational opposition plays a truly key part in this argument let us take a look at the second objection of the same article, which Aquinas formulates as follows. Just as the Father and the Son are really distinct in virtue of their distinct proper characters, so divine goodness and power ought to be really distinct since their proper characters are distinct as well. However, divine power and goodness are not really distinct, so the Father and the Son ought not to be really distinct either. In his short answer to the objection Aquinas states that there is no opposition between divine goodness and power, therefore the objection does not hold. So it is clear that even if the proper characters of divine goodness and power are distinct, the two are nonetheless identical with the divine essence. There is no real distinction between them, and as real divine perfections they differ only by a distinction of reason.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *STh* 1, 28, 3, obic. 1: ‘*Videtur quod relationes quae sunt in Deo, realiter ab invicem non distinguantur. Quaecumque enim uni et eidem sunt eadem, sibi invicem sunt eadem. Sed omnis relatio in Deo existens est idem secundum rem cum divina essentia. Ergo relationes secundum rem ab invicem non distinguuntur.*’

<sup>56</sup> *STh* 1, 28, 3 ad 1um: ‘[...] *quaecumque uni et eidem sunt eadem, sibi invicem sunt eadem, in his quae sunt idem re et ratione, sicut tunica et indumentum, non autem in his quae differunt ratione [...]* Et similiter, licet paternitas sit idem secundum rem cum essentia divina, et similiter filiatio, tamen haec duo in suis propriis rationibus important oppositos respectus. Unde distinguuntur ab invicem.’

<sup>57</sup> *STh* 1, 28, 3 ad 2um.

What have we learnt from this reasoning? First, it is obvious that Aquinas could reject the objection introduced above, according to which there can be no distinction between a relation and its foundation. As the Father and the Son who share one being are distinct, so are a relation and its foundation whose being is also the same. Second, since there is not a relational opposition between the *ratio* of relation and the *ratio* of every possible foundation of a categorial relation, it is not clear on the base of this argument how they in fact differ. The distinction can be real, as in the case of the divine persons, but it need not be, as divine goodness and power are not really distinct. In order to support my interpretation of Aquinas I will search his work for further arguments.

We know that a foundation relates to a relation as a cause to its effect. But a cause, which Aquinas construes as the principle of the being of an effect, is really distinct from what it causes. If a cause is to bring something to being, it must not exist before it produces effect, and once the effect starts to exist, it must be distinct from its cause. Therefore a relation is really distinct from its foundation.<sup>58</sup>

The conclusion is confirmed by the doctrine of the ten categories as highest genera of real being which Aquinas endorses. Dividing real being into ten genera would be meaningless if the individual categories were not really distinct. Since Aquinas classifies relations and their foundations, i.e., the appropriate absolute accidents, in different categories, they cannot be identical.<sup>59</sup>

This is further confirmed by the fact that Aquinas classifies relations as such as real beings. If relations were really identical with their foundations, i.e., if Aquinas believed that relations are materially the same as their foundations, then it would suffice to show that quantity and quality, or activity and passivity, are real beings. However, as we have seen above, Aquinas explicitly argues for the view that relations are real beings. That is best explained by accepting the view that Aquinas construed relations not merely as real, but as really distinct from their foundations.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Cf. *STh* I, 33, 1 ad 1um; *In Phys.*, II, 10, n. 15, and others.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *In V Metaph.*, lect. 17 (1005).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *QDP* 7, 9.

One can also argue that the foundation of a relation is an absolute accident, which as such does not cause anything to be related. If the relation and its foundation were identical, nothing would really relate to another, therefore only absolute, mutually unordered and independent beings would really exist. That is an absurd consequence which Aquinas explicitly rejects.<sup>61</sup>

The real distinction between a relation and its foundation further manifests itself in their divisibility. When the terminus of a relation ceases to exist, so does the relation. But the foundation does not cease to exist, therefore it is really distinct from the relation. For example, if my son, who for some time was the same height as I am, grows, the relation of mutual equality ceases to exist while my height stays the same.<sup>62</sup>

Further, though Aquinas himself rarely speaks of the distinction between a relation and its foundation, he nonetheless says, as R. Schmidt notes: *'Actions and passions, in so far as they imply movement, differ from the relations which result from action and passion.'*<sup>63</sup> That further confirms the claim that Aquinas held relations and their foundations to be really distinct.

Aquinas also distinguishes the type of existence that a relation has from that of other beings, not only substance but other absolute accidents, saying that the existence of relation is the most unsubstantial and weakest of all.<sup>64</sup> How is one to understand this claim? All categorial accidents depend on a substance as on the ultimate subject. Every accident therefore inheres in a substance, some immediately, some by means of other accidents. In this sense accidents are ordered in a certain way, based on their perfection. The more 'proximate' an accident is to substance and the less it depends on other accidents, the more perfect it is; on the contrary, the more 'remote' it is and the more accidents it requires to exist, the less perfect it is. So quantity is the first accident of a material substance, it inheres in it immediately and there-

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. *QDP* 7, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *In I Sent.*, 31, 1, 1.

<sup>63</sup> *STh* I, 41, 1 ad 2um. Cf. Schmidt. *The Domain of Logic*, p. 139.

<sup>64</sup> *QDP* 8, 1 ad 4: '[...] *relatio est debilioris esse inter omnia praedimenta* [...]'; *QDV* 4: '[...] *relativum habet esse debilissimum* [...]'; In XII *Metaph.*, lect. 4 (2457): '[...] *ea quae sunt ad aliquid, remotiora videntur esse a substantia quam alia genera, ex eo quod sunt debilioris esse. Unde et substantiae inhaerent mediantibus aliis generibus* [...]' and others.

fore does not depend on any other accidental form. Other accidents inhere in a material substance by means of quantity and in this sense depend on it and are therefore less perfect. In this sense quantity is the most ‘proximate’ and most perfect accident of a material substance. Relation is in a sense the opposite of quantity, since it is the last accident of a substance and depends on many other things. It depends not only on the substance, but also on other accidents, by means of which it inheres in the substance and which also cause it. Further, unlike quantity and quality, the existence of a relation requires the existence of something external, since it cannot exist without a terminus.<sup>65</sup> For these reasons a relation is the most ‘remote’ from a substance, the least perfect, and consequently is the least substance and something existent. Now if a relation has this kind of existence, then it must be distinct from the beings of other categories, even when one of these is its foundation.

Moreover, recall that a relation and its foundation have different conditions of existence. A necessary condition of the existence of a categorial relation, unlike an absolute accident, is that its terminus obtains. Although a relation depends on its foundation for its being in so far as its being is the being of the foundation, its being nonetheless also depends on the term, since it cannot exist without it. That is why an absolute accident does not become the foundation of a relation ‘of itself’ (without reference to another), but only in synergy with the relation’s term. This makes manifest the difference between substance and quantity or quality on the one hand and relation *qua* relation on the other. While the former differ *intrinsically* and as ‘one thing from another’, a relation differs from its foundation *extrinsically* as ‘a real mode from a thing’. It is similar as when we say that a whole differs from its part, not as a thing from another thing, but as that which comprises more than the part. Similarly a relation differs from its foundation, since a relation requires not only a foundation but also a term, which the foundation does not. If the necessary condition of the existence of a relation is the existence of other (absolute) categories, on which it depends for its being, we cannot simply identify it with them.

All these arguments lead me to conclude that it is highly probable that Aquinas construed relation and its foundation as really distinct.

<sup>65</sup> *ScG* IV, 14.

For reasons stated above I view the truthfulness of this conclusion as one of the key criteria for judging to what extent Aquinas's conception is a well-grounded and acceptable conception of categorial relation. It is therefore not surprising that the later (not only) Thomistic tradition paid key attention to the distinction between a relation and its foundation.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> A different view is endorsed by Ward, namely that a relation differs from its foundation only rationally *ex parte rei*. Cf. Ward. Relations without Forms, p. 290.