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METAPHYSICAL ORDER.
SUÁREZ'S THEORY OF REAL RELATION

*ORDINE METAFISICO.
SUÁREZ SULLA NOZIONE DI RELAZIONE REALE*

Abstract

È cosa nota che la nozione di relazione sia uno dei pilastri teorici della dottrina metafisica e della teologia di molti autori Scolastici medievali e moderni e sia alla base della loro visione cosmologica del mondo. Questo saggio intende ricostruire la nozione di relazione reale nel pensiero di Francisco Suárez, esplorando la sua articolazione interna in concetti inferiori e affrontando alcuni nuclei problematici tipici del dibattito scolastico. La prima sezione dell'articolo prende in considerazione il concetto estensivo di relazione reale, tracciando la distinzione fondamentale tra relazioni categoriali e relazioni trascendentali: mentre le prime sono degli accidenti che devono soddisfare tre condizioni per esistere (l'esistenza di un soggetto, di un fondamento e di un termine), le seconde non sono accidenti e fanno direttamente parte dell'essenza della cosa a cui si riferiscono. La seconda parte si concentra invece sull'analisi del concetto intensivo di relazione, giungendo alla definizione di relazione reale come una referenza reale fondata sul primo elemento della relazione (il fondamento) e diretta verso il secondo (il termine) come qualcosa di diverso da sé. Infine, l'ultima sezione del saggio si sofferma sul problema della natura della distinzione tra la relazione e il suo fondamento. Dopo aver esaminato l'opinione di eminenti autori, ossia Tommaso d'Aquino, Duns Scoto, Durando da San Porciano e Pedro da Fonseca, Suárez assume la posizione nominalistica che riduce lo statuto ontologico della relazione a quello del suo fondamento. Su questo punto la dottrina di Suárez si discosta da quella di Ockham solo per l'aggiunta della tesi della distinzione di ragione tra la relazione e il suo fondamento, una posizione inammissibile per i nominalisti.



It is commonly known that the notion of relation is one of the theoretical pillars of the metaphysical and theological doctrine of many medieval and modern scholastic authors, determining their cosmological world view. This essay aims to reconstruct the notion of real relation in Francisco Suárez's thought, exploring its internal articulation in lower concepts and addressing some problematic cores peculiar to the scholastic debate. The first section of the paper considers the extension of the concept of real relations, drawing the fundamental distinction between categorical and transcendental relations: while the former are accidents that must fulfil three conditions in order to exist (the existence of a subject, a foundation and a term), the latter are not accidents and are thus part of the essence of the thing they refer to. The second part focuses on the intension of the concept of real relation, concluding by defining it as a real reference based on the first element of the relation (the foundation) and directed towards the second (the term) as something else. Finally, the last section of the essay addresses the problem of the nature of the distinction between the relation and its foundation. After examining some eminent authors' position, namely Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Durandus of Saint-Pourçain and Pedro da Fonseca, Suárez assumes the Nominalist position which reduces the ontological status of the relation to that of its foundation. In this regard, Suárez's doctrine differs from Ockham's only by adding the thesis of the distinction of reason between the relation and its foundation, a position unacceptable for Nominalists.

Keywords:

Francisco Suárez; relazione reale; fondamento; termine; riduzione nominalista

Francisco Suárez; Real Relation; Foundation; Term; Nominalist Reduction.

A 16th-century theologian like Francisco Suárez, who saw himself as an heir to the long Scholastic tradition, undoubtedly recognized in the underlying order of the universe the reflection of God's creative intelligence. In Book I of his treatise on creation, *De opere sex dierum*¹, he offers a comprehensive commentary of the Genesis account. Here, he traces God's creative and ordering action across the six biblical days, delving into the complexities of the theological themes involved. Although his conviction that the world is governed by an ordering intelligence has clearly a theological basis, his Scholastic approach brings him to prove the existence of God through a logical regress from finite beings to the source and efficient cause of all creatures, the uncreated Being². The dependence of creatures on God becomes evident through a system of relations and hierarchy of causes, each of which directly depending on the First Cause³. Hence, besides the arrangement of creatures toward God as their ultimate end, the world is structured according to an order immanent to a plurality of individual beings, connected by relations that determine their interactions. Yet, how could an heir to the medieval

¹ Cf. F. Suárez, *De opere sex dierum*, l. 1, c. 1-12, in *Opera omnia*, apud Ludovicum Vivès, Parisiis 1856, vol. 3, pp. 1-89.

² *Dicendum ergo est demonstrari evidenter posse illud ens quod est per se necessarium esse fontem seu causam efficientem rerum caeterarum ac proinde esse tantum unum* [Suárez, *Disputationes Metafisicas*, Disp. XXIX, sec. 2, par. 4, S.R. Romeo, S.C. Sanchez, A.P. Zanon (eds.), Editorial Gredos, Madrid 1962, vol. IV, p. 277]. From now on, I will quote the Latin text of the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* (henceforth DM) from the Gredos edition mentioning the Disputation, section, and paragraph in Arabic numerals. Although this is not the most widely edition used by scholars, it is certainly the most accurate and reliable one, sometimes correcting the older Vivès edition.

³ Cf. DM 21-22. For a critical introduction cf. Freddoso's essays: A.J. Freddoso, *Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature*, in T.V. Morris (ed.) *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1988, pp. 74-118; A.J. Freddoso, *God's General Concurrence With Secondary Causes: Why Conservation Is Not Enough*, in "Philosophical Perspectives" 5 (1991), pp. 553-585; A.J. Freddoso, *God's General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Pitfalls and Prospects*, in "American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly" 68/2 (1994), pp. 131-56.

tradition, such as Suarez, conceive of this ontological order? What internal and defining elements characterize it? Moreover, regardless of the transcendent First Cause, what immanent principle underlies the ordered structured of the universe? Obviously, the very notion of order involves a plurality of individual objects, but even more so, it is relations that serve as constitutive elements of order, arranging objects and shaping their connections. It could be argued that relations constitute the very nature of order, functioning as the *connective tissue* that bonds together the fundamental elements of reality, i.e. individuals. In this perspective, to explore the concept of order is tantamount to inquiring the fundamental nature of relation. Suárez represents a perfect example of this conception: the geometric precision through which he establishes the conceptual boundaries of the different types of relations reveals a world firmly grounded in a metaphysical order.

In this essay, aiming to provide an answer to these questions, I will discuss Suárez's theory of real relation (RR) as presented in *Metaphysical Disputation XLVII (De relationi reali in communi)*. While Suárez did not explicitly provide a definition of RR, it will be necessary to focus on the different types of existing relation and, from these, to establish a definition that encompasses all their common properties. I will firstly examine the extension of the RR concept by expounding the distinction between categorial and transcendental relations; subsequently, I will delve into its intention, arguing that a RR is a relation including a term and a foundation, whose essence consists in being referred to something else. Finally, in the last section, I will address the critical problem of the distinction between the relation and its foundation, showing that Suarez's solution is intrinsically connected to the nominalist position and is influenced by the discussion of the theses put forth by his predecessors.

1. The Extension of Real Relations

Before delving into the specifics of RRs, Suárez posits the existence of Conceptual Relations (CoRs), that connect entities that are not related in reality. This type of reference is merely intellectual, linking one concept to another, whereas RR constitutes an actual reference between two objects. Nevertheless, the concept of RR is not univocal and presents remarkable variations depending on the different instances of relation to which it applies. The first division of RRs is into Categorical Relation (CaR) and Transcendental Relation (TR). In reconstructing Suárez's view, it is more convenient to begin with the exposition of CaR, as it offers a more extensive and detailed discussion compared to that of TR, which sometimes appears to be a borderline case of CaR.

1.1 Categorical Relations

Suárez holds that a CaR is an accident whose being consists entirely in being towards, being ordered to, or in being referred to something else: *Dicendum ergo est relationem (de sola praedicationali) esse accidens cuius totum esse est ad aliud esse, seu ad aliud se habere, seu aliud respicere*⁴. This definition is explicitly shaped on that of *Categories*⁵, where Aristotle claims that relative notions, precisely in what they are in themselves, are something else or are referred to something else. This kind of relations involves all the Aristotelian categories, such as quantity, quality, somewhere, sometime, etc. Two aspects of CaRs can be readily drawn from Suárez's definition. Firstly, as accidents, they must *inhere* in something real, upon which their being depends. In this sense, they constitute

⁴ DM 47.5.2.

⁵ Aristotle, *Categories*, 6 a 36, in J.L. Ackrill (ed.), *Categories and De interpretatione*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1990, p. 17: *We call relatives all such things as are said to be just what they are, of or than other things, or in other way in relation to something.*

real properties of a subject, even if they are not essential parts of it and do not fall under its concept. Secondly, the essence of CaR consists in a certain *reference* or *directedness* to something else, distinguishing them from any other non-relational properties. Suárez attempts to keep together the two property of inherence and reference – which might seem contradictory – by arguing that an accident cannot produce in a subject the formal effect of reference without inhering in it, that is, a relation cannot fulfill its formal function of connecting one thing to another unless it inheres in a subject. Endorsing a passage from Aquinas's Commentary on the *Sentences*⁶, where he asserts that relation doesn't posit something absolute in God but the reality of relation itself, Suárez contends that CaR's being referred to something is not opposed to being inherent in something, but rather to being an absolute entity. Relation stands in opposition only to absoluteness and not to inherence. A CaR is therefore a relation that really affects (*afficit*) the subject in which it inheres by referring it to a really distinct thing. Obviously, the essence of a CaR does not refer attitudinally or potentially to something else because, otherwise, it would not be a real and actual relation⁷. On the contrary, the formal effect resulting from the relation inhering in a subject is the reference to an existing term, as this is what the CaR confers on the subject that it affects:

*Unde etiam dici potest quod, licet de ratione albedinis, simpliciter loquendo, non sit constituere actu album, tamen de ratione albedinis ut efficientis et informantis subiectum est constituere actu album. Sic igitur in praesenti in hoc posteriori sensu dicimus formalem effectum relationis esse actu referre, quia hoc est quod ipsa per se primo confert formaliter subiecto quod suo modo afficit.*⁸

⁶ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In Sent.* I, d. 25, q. 1, a. 4, ad. 3: *Ad tertium dicendum, quod relatio quamvis non ponat ex illo respectu aliquid absolutum, tamen ponit relationis rationem realiter in Deo existentem: et ideo ex hoc potest dici res, et ex pluribus relationibus oppositis plures res.*

⁷ Cf. DM 47.5.12-13.

⁸ DM 47.5.11.

Undoubtedly, as a Catholic theologian, Suárez had to acknowledge Trinitarian relations as the inevitable exception to relations as accidents of substance. Relations among three divine Persons are not accidents inhering in a substance ontologically prior and independent, as there can be no accidents in God. Like Aquinas, he holds that Trinitarian relations are subsistent relations (*relationes subsistentes*) whose being depends on nothing but themselves⁹.

The analysis of CaRs becomes more specific and complete when Suarez recognizes the three conditions they require to exist: a real subject, a non-relational foundation, and a real term. Consider the example of RR most frequently used by Suárez in DM 47, that is, the similarity¹⁰ between the whiteness of two objects, A and B. Taking only one verse of this relation (the similarity of A's whiteness to B's whiteness), A represents the real subject of the relation, A's whiteness the non-relational foundation of the relation, and B's whiteness the term of the relation.

⁹ F. Suárez, *Tractatus de Sanctissimo Trinitatis Mystério*, l. 5, c. 8, n. 8, in *Opera omnia*, apud Ludovicum Vivès, Parisiis 1856, vol. 1, pp. 667: *Quia relationes personales non habent proprium fundamentum, in quo quasi nitantur; quia per se et intrinsece subsistens sunt*. For a general introduction to Suárez's Trinitarian ontology see Elorduy, *Las perfecciones relativas de la Trinidad en la doctrina suareciana*, in "Archivo teológico Granadino" 7 (1944), pp. 187-219; C. Esposito, *Existence, relation, effieience. Le næud suarézien entre métaphysique et théologie*, in "Quaestio" 3 (2003), pp. 139-162; Marschler, *Die spekulative Trinitätslehre des Francisco Suárez S. J. in ihrem philosophisch-theologischen Kontext*, Aschendorff, Münster 2007; G. Colacicco, *Hacia una ontología trinitaria: notas sobre el De Deo de Francisco Suárez*, in M.S. de Carvalho, M.L. Pulido, S. Guidi (eds.) *Francisco Suárez: Metaphysics, Politics and Ethics*, University of Coimbra Press, Coimbra 2020, pp. 91-112. In general, Suárez's argument is that Trinitarian relations are the only relations without a foundation because they subsist in themselves.

¹⁰ Some Scholastic authors have questioned the actual existence of relation as similarity. Peter Auriol, for instance, conceiving the relation as an entity that exists between two things rather than as an accident inhering in a substance, argues that relations of this kind are conceptual. Only the intellect can connect two things that are really different, while it is clear that nature cannot bring one thing to another. Instead, Suárez, embracing a nominalist position, claims that similarity is a RR because two things are similar even if they are not thought as such.

I. *Subject*. Sharing ontological conditions with any other categorial accident, a CaR must be grounded in a concrete and real *subject*, informed by the CaR as by its accidental form. Indeed, a CaR is somehow a form, and, like every form, it must inform something. This means that the similarity between A and B's whiteness must be grounded in a real subject, i.e. A, without which the relation itself couldn't exist. Nevertheless, Suárez specifies that the subject needed by the CaR exists only in an abstract sense; from a concrete point of view, the CaR's *relatum* has no subject in the strict sense but consists of the union of subject and relation, if we formally regard *relatum* as the compound of subject and relation:

*Cum ergo dicimus relationem requirere subiectum, de relatione in abstracto id intelligere oportet, nam relativum in concreto non habet proprie subiectum, sed potius ipsum est quid constans ex subiecto et relatione, si formaliter sumatur ut relativum est seu ut compositum quoddam ex relatione et subiecto eius. Nam interdum ipsum subiectum relationis dici solet relativum, denominative potius quam formaliter, id est, tamquam affectum, non tamquam constitutum relatione, et ideo proprius ac formalis dicitur de ipso constituto.*¹¹

Although CaR is a RR really added to its subject, the distinction between the subject and its relation can be made only in abstract, because only the *relatum* really exists.

In opposition to Henry of Ghent, who believed that the relation, according to its being-toward, is present in both relata it refers to¹²,

¹¹ DM 47.6.2.

¹² In DM 47.6.1 Suárez ascribes to Henry of Ghent the thesis that relation, being a medium between two extremes, is the same in the two different relata, whatever the nature of the relation is. Hence, the relation of similarity is the same in the similar objects, just as the relation of the father to the son is the same as the relation of the son to the father. However, Henry's position is much more complicated and does not attribute relation to both relata. According to him, relation is really identical to the absolute property of the thing, but it is distinguished from it by virtue of its *ratio*. A's whiteness represents always the same real entity that possesses two different rationes or modes of existence, the inference to A as an absolute accident

Suárez denies that a CaR can exist simultaneously in more than one subject at the same time. This is because an accident derives its concrete reality from the inherence in its subject, to the extent that if it were to inhere in two different subjects, then there would be two really different accidents. Conceiving of a numerically identical accident being simultaneously in more subjects is contradictory because the accidents of a certain subject are really distinct from those of another, from which they are equally really distinct. Contrary to one might think, the similarity between A and B's whiteness does not constitute a single relation inhering to both relata, but signifies two distinct relations, each with a distinct subject: the similarity of A's whiteness to B's whiteness and the similarity of B's whiteness to A's whiteness. According to Suárez, unity stands out as the sole exception to this condition. Indeed, it is the only relation in which inhering in both relata is an essential function, as they could not be considered united if it did not belong to both as a relational accident¹³.

While a CaR has a single and real subject, this does not preclude it from having multiple subjects subordinated each other and logically distinguished according to their notion (*ratio*)¹⁴. In this regard, Suárez distinguishes between proximal and remote subject. For instance, the relation of equality is in quantity in a proximal

and the reference to B's whiteness as a relation, see Henrici de Gandavo, *Questiones Ordinarie (Summa)*. a. LV, q. 6, in G.A. Wilson, G.J. Etzkorn, *Opera Omnia* 31, l. 374-382, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2014, pp. 412-413: *Hoc nomen 'relatio' uno modo significat respectum ut est intentio pura et ratio praedicamenti, et sic relatio non est res neque substantia neque accidens nec est realis, sed modus ad aliud se habendi purus; nisi secundum modum praetactum appellando rem modum rei, vel appellando modum realem quia sequitur rem. Alio modo significat respectum ut est res praedicamenti absoluti super quam fundatur, sicut et significant omnia nomina specierum relationis, ut paternitas, filiatio et huiusmodi. Et sic in divinis significat rem quae est substantia, et est substantia sed sub ratione respectus significata..*

¹³ *Vel relatio haec dicitur una, vera et propria unitate, tamquam simplex forma, et in hoc sensu procedit ratio facta, quae convincit non posse unam et eandem relationem simul esse in utroque extremo (DM 47.6.4).*

¹⁴ DM 47.6.5.

way (*proxime*) and in substance in a remote way (*remote*), just as the relation of similarity is in quality in a proximal way in substance in a remote way¹⁵. Thus, CaRs belong ontologically only to their proximal subject, as the connection to the remote subject is always mediated by the proximal one.

II. *Foundation*. Secondly, a CaR requires a *non-relational foundation* from which it acquires its reality. Every CaR needs a real foundation to exist, since every accident acquires its being from something other than itself¹⁶. Something is required within the subject to serve as the immediate basis for the relation to be directed toward something else:

*In omni ergo relatione reali requiritur ex parte subiecti res aliqua, natura sua apta et accommodata ut fundare possit respectum ad aliud, ut ab illa proxime habeat relatio realitatem suam.*¹⁷

In other words, whenever a subject and a relation exist simultaneously, there must be a non-relational foundation that allows the

¹⁵ *Priori autem modo distingui possunt plura subiecta unius relationis, unum proximum et aliud remotum; ut relatio aequalitatis proxime est in quantitate, remote vero in substantia, et relatio similitudinis proxime est in qualitate, et remote in quantitate, et adhuc remotius in substantia* (DM 47.6.5).

¹⁶ Cf. DM 47.7.1.

¹⁷ DM 47.7.12. Shortly thereafter Suárez adds that in CaRs such as paternity or sonship, a middle condition between the foundation and the term is required for the relation to be really established. Connecting two men in the form of paternity demands an act of generation: even if God had directly created them with the same absolute properties, yet without one being generated by the other, there would be no father-son relation, but only two separate men. In general, Suárez seems to admit that in relations involving a process of causation or generation, the causal action is somehow distinct from the agent performing it. The nature of causality, as an action distinct from the acting cause, is an issue upon which Suárez dwelt at length in DM 12.1.3 and DM 18. For a more detailed discussion of the topic cf. S. Schmid, *Efficient Causality: The Metaphysics of Production*, in J.B. Fink (ed.), *Suárez on Aristotelian Causality*, Brill, Leiden 2015, pp. 84-121.

relation to subsist in the subject¹⁸.

The concept of non-relational foundation raises two crucial issues: the distinction between the foundation and the subject of the relation, and the distinction between the foundation and the relation itself. Due to its significance to the whole theory of RR, the latter distinction will be addressed separately in the third section of this essay. Regarding the first problem, Suárez maintains that the foundation of the relation coincides with the proximal subject. Therefore, according to the example of similarity, A's whiteness represents the foundation of the relation and the proximal subject. In this case, there can be no distinction between foundation and subject since they have the same function of immediately grounding similarity to B's whiteness. However, things become more complicated with the remote subject. The distinction between the subject and the foundation arises from the fact that the foundation is often simply an accident of the subject, from which it is really distinct. A's whiteness is really distinct from A itself, which is the remote subject of the relation. This does not mean that there can be no instances where CaRs inhere in a substance in which the foundation and the remote subject are the same. When we say that A is identical to B in terms of their nature and not in terms of one of their properties, it is evident that the foundation of the relation is identical with the remote subject. In these specific circumstances, the distinction between subject and foundation is only conceptual and not real. In any case, the fact that the foundation of the relation can be the same with substance does not imply that the relation is a substance as well.

III. *Term*. Finally, since the essence of CaR consists in being referred to something else, the *term* must be included in its notion as the object of its reference¹⁹. Suárez particularly focuses on two

¹⁸ Cf. DM 47.7.1.

¹⁹ DM 47.8.1: *Cum enim essentia eius sit ad aliud se habere secundum suum esse essentiale, in hoc ipso includitur terminus; cumque relatio haec praedicamentalis et realis sit, terminum eius realem esse necesse est.*

aspects of the term. Firstly, the term is real²⁰, as real is the CaR; if the term were not real, the relation could not be real either. Secondly, since what the relation is directed to is something other than the relation itself, the term must really be distinct²¹ from the CaR. As Jorge Secada has already noticed²², if the term did not actually exist, our mind would be forced to conceive of a CaR by shaping a CoR, rather than recognizing it as a RR. In addition to that, the term and the foundation are simultaneous and coexisting elements in constituting a CaR²³. This is because if both are present it is impossible for the relation not to exist, and if one of them were missing the relation itself ceased to exist. Intuitively, if A's whiteness and B's whiteness exist simultaneously, then their similarity must also exist. Conversely, if one of the two whiteness didn't exist, it would be impossible for the other to be similar to it.

Drawing upon Aristotle's tripartite classification outlined in *Metaphysics* V, 15, Suárez enumerates the three types of CaR. According to him, this classification is not deduced from the application of a general principle, but rather emerges from a comprehensive inductive process that successfully encompasses the entire spectrum of relations²⁴. The first kind of CaRs includes relations which are said to be grounded in unity or multiplicity. They involve all Aristotelian categories except for action and passion: quantity is connected to equality and inequality, quality to similarity and dissimilarity, sub-

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ Cf. DM 47.8.1.

²² J. Secada, *Suárez on the Ontology of Relations*, in D. Schwartz (ed.), *Interpreting Suárez: Critical Essays*, Cambridge University Press, published online 2012, pp. 64: *If the term does not exist, then a mind is needed to conceive it and establish a relation between it and the subject; so in reality and independently of any mind there would not be a relational accident... Similarly, if subject and term are not really distinct, they are distinct conceptually and require a mind in order to be posited as two things.*

²³ DM 47.8.7: *Omnia vero illa (relatio) supponunt realem existentiam termini, nam includunt coexistentiam extremorum, quae supponit utriusque existentiam.*

²⁴ Cf. DM 47.10.16.

stance to specific or generic identity and distinction etc.

Action and passion constitute the second kind of CaRs. Their relata do not possess the same nature, because their *ratio fundandi* is different in the active power and the passive power. The foundation of the action of heating does not share the same nature with the object that is being heated. Suárez calls this type of CaRs non-reciprocal relations (*relationes disquiparantiae*), in opposition to reciprocal relations (*relationes equiparantiae*) whose elements share the same *ratio fundandi*²⁵. While relations based on action and passion are always non-reciprocal relations, the other two kinds of CaRs can include both reciprocal and non-reciprocal relations. Similarity is clearly a reciprocal relation in which relata are connected precisely because they have the same nature. Nevertheless, relations based on number or specific diversity are non-reciprocal relations, as is evident from the case of duplicity, which in one relatum is said according to excess and in the other according to defect.

The third type of CaR encompasses relations between the measure and the measurable. These relations are to be understood as the connection between a faculty (the measure), such as appetite or cognition, and its corresponding object (the measurable). Their peculiarity lies in their object not serving as the foundational element for the converse relation going from the object to the subject of the operation. In a seen-object, for instance, there is no foundation for the relation that has the seeing-subject as its term. Consequently, the being-seen relation, lacking a real foundation, is a mere construct of the intellect. As a result, the converse side of a CaR of the third kind is always a CoR. Being a mental construct, a CoR does not constitute a real accident and lacks a subject of inherence. Suárez

²⁵ Cf. DM 47.15.2: *Nam relationes omnes secundi generis disquiparantiae sunt, quia ratio fundandi est aliquo modo diversa in extremis, nam in altero est potentia activa, in alio vero potentia passiva seu dependentia a sua causa, ex quo etiam fit ut termini talium relationum sint diversarum rationum, nam illi proportionate respondent fundamentis, ut superius tactum est et infra latius dicitur.*

calls these relations non-mutual relations²⁶, as opposed to mutual relations, in which the corresponding direction arises on account of the first direction. In non-mutual relations, instead, only one direction is real, and the other is not. Similarity, for example, is a mutual relation, since it is impossible for A's whiteness being similar to B's whiteness without B's whiteness being similar to A's whiteness, so that the two directions of the relation arise on account of each other.

1.2 Transcendental Relations

However, there are some relations that exceed the limits of the ten categories and appear to be real²⁷, though they do not belong to any accidental category. Suárez calls this extra-categorical relations *transcendental*:

*... vero esse alias habitudines veras etiam et reales, essentialiter pertinentes ad varia et fere ad omnia genera entium, quae propterea transcendentales dicuntur et a praedicamentalibus distinguuntur, quia ad certum aliquod praedicamentum non pertinent, sed per omnia vagantur.*²⁸

In addition to being present in all categories, he attributes to TRs the property of being part of the essence or concept of the absolute thing they refer to:

Nam imprimis omne ens creatum, quatenus tale est, etiam ipsa substantia, dicit habitudinem essentialis dependentiae ad ens increatum, et ideo est analogice ens vel substantia comparatione illius. Omne item accidens dicit essentialem habitudinem ad subiectum, ob quam dicitur esse entis ens potius quam ens Ergo haec ratio

²⁶ Cf. DM 47.15.1: *Dicetur (relatio) non mutua quae in uno extremo est vera et realis relatio, non vero in alio.*

²⁷ Cf. DM 47.3.9: *Opinor enim relationes transcendentales includere in re ipsa et in suo esse veras et reales habitudines.*

²⁸ DM 47.3.10.

*ad aliquid transcendens est et inclusa in omni entitate, praesertim creata; non ergo constituit peculiare genus.*²⁹

This twofold characterization excludes that a TR can be an accident of a substance, as its function is that of grounding and constituting its relata by positing them in reality. This is why a TR cannot inhere in something by supervening externally, as an accident is added to its substance.

The creation of finite beings stands as the most paradigmatic example of TR in Suárez's exposition, clearly illustrating the two defining elements of this type of relation. For God's creative action is both an essential part of finite being, which could not exist without being caused by God, and a relation that extends to all categorical entities. If the relation between God and creatures were to cease to exist, the existence of creatures themselves would come to an end, whereas if the relation of similarity between A's whiteness and B's whiteness were to terminate due to a change in one of two relata, neither A nor B would cease to exist for this reason. In addition to the dependence on God, Suárez mentions other TRs that exclusively concern created beings. These are relations between the metaphysical principles of real entities, such as the relation between potency and act, substance and accident, matter and form, and an object and its faculty. In each of these instances, at least one of the relata depends ontologically on being related to the other element of the relation: there could be no accident except insofar as related to a substance, there could be no potency except insofar as related to something that is in act, etc.

Yet, Suárez's elucidation of TR does not entail an exhaustive and thorough examination of its concept. Instead, it relies on an accurate comparison with the features of CaR, which are more readily understood. Suárez outlines the transcendental nature of relations by employing a sort of *negative ontology* that identifies four distinct

²⁹ DM 47.1.5. Cf. also DM 47.3.12-13.

attributes of TRs, allowing their positive nature to be deduced from the examination of what they are not.

A. The first difference is more complex than the others and refers to the three fundamental conditions of existence of CaRs, to which TRs are not bounded. (i) Firstly, TRs do not need their foundation to be absolute and real before their relation is established³⁰, as is the case with CaRs. In the relation of matter to form – just as in the converse relation of form to matter – matter does not play the role of the *absolute* and *non-relational* foundation of form, because its existence depends on the relation to form. Indeed, there is no matter except as a reality structured by a formal principle³¹. Accordingly, this relation has no real foundation and is not added externally to matter, but rather is included as the specific difference constituting the essence of that thing to which the relation is referred³². (ii) The second condition Suárez denies to TRs is the existence of a real term to which the TR must be referred. Unlike CaRs, TRs is not necessarily directed towards a real term, as exemplified by the ability to conceive of privations, negations, or extrinsic denominations, which are all beings of reason³³. For the relation of the intellect to a being

³⁰ This specification is crucial. Suárez does not intend to argue that the foundation of TRs must not real but insists that its actual existence depends on the relation to something else. At the same time, however, it is not possible to isolate the TR from its foundation and term, otherwise one would be compelled to argue that the TR that unites matter and form could exist independently of their actual existence, which is clearly absurd. Thus, each TR is characterized by mutual dependence of relation and relata.

³¹ This point is highly controversial, because Suárez endorses Scotus' view of matter, which attributes to it a sort of ontological independence from form. On the other hand, he emphasizes in many passages of DM that matter is not complete without form and that a substance cannot exist except insofar as it is complete. For an in-depth analysis of the subject cf. D. Perler, *Suárez on the Unity of Material Substances*, in "Vivarium" 58 (2020), pp. 143-67.

³² Cf. DM 47.4.2.

³³ Cf. DM 47.4.5: *Ergo ex illo discrimine solum habetur inter transcendentales respectus quosdam esse qui terminum realem vel actu existentem non requirunt*,

of reason is a TR, since a this does not exist except as object of an intellectual act resulting in the constitution of a concept. (iii) Finally, it is not even necessary to admit a real or modal distinction between the term and the foundation, both because the term may also not be real and because there are some relations in which the term is not distinct from its foundation at all. Divine intelligence has its essence as proper object, from which it is only conceptually distinct. In CaRs, instead, the foundation is always really or modally distinct from the term to which the relation refers³⁴.

B. The second difference, assumed from Scotus, delineates the distinction between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* relations³⁵. CaRs are not directed by their very nature towards their term and are not essentially generated by the action of an agent. Once the foundation and the term are established, CaR necessarily exists. This type of relation does not stem from an action that inherently fulfills its function but arises from the concurrence of its relata, which is why they are called intrinsic relation. The similarity between A and B's whiteness originates not from the nature of whiteness itself but arises from the simultaneous existence of the two instances of whiteness. Conversely, TRs are relations directed to the term by their nature, and their form results from the action of an agent, not by the simple position of the two relata. This is why TRs are extrinsic relations³⁶. The pro-

etiam si sint alii qui huiusmodi terminum habeant et postulent, in quibus non habet locum illa secunda differentia.

³⁴ Cf. DM 47.4.2.

³⁵ Suárez seems to be referring to Scotus' distinction between relations *intrinsic* and *extrinsic*. Intrinsic relation always follows from the position of its extremes, while extrinsic relation is that relation that exists through a cause that operates on the extremes already posited, see Duns Scotus, *Ord.* IV, d. 14, q. 1: *Relatio realis intrinsicus adveniēns necessario sequitur positionem extremorum. Quod si sit relatio extrinsecus adveniēns, necesse est sibi dare causam per quam adveniat extremis iam posititis.*

³⁶ Yet, this does not preclude TRs from being intrinsic relations to some extent, see DM 47.4.15: *Et iuxta hanc rationem explicandi hos respectus, potest ad eundem sensum reduci differentia superius tacta, quod respectus transcendentalis*

cess of heating generates heat, to which is intimately connected in the form of a TR, just as sight is an act entailing a transcendental reference to its object. From these considerations, Suárez concludes that TRs are relations belonging to a form, an entity, or a mode of being, insofar as they are essentially ordered to some specific function that can be understood through the nature of the action itself. This means that TRs are produced through an action, as they are included in the form expressing that relation:

*Respectus autem transcendentalis convenit alicui formae vel entitati aut modo entis, quatenus a natura per se est institutus et ordinatus ad aliquod peculiare munus quod potest per se intendi per aliquam actionem; et ideo ille etiam respectus potest per se fieri per actionem, ut inclusus in forma dicente talem respectum.*³⁷

C. The third difference is closely related to the previous one and concerns relation's *mode of referring* to its term, which in CaRs is a pure (*pure*), while in TRs has a constitutive function. TRs always perform a real function upon its term, such as causation, union, or representation, while a CaR consists only in referring (*respicere*) to something else without adding any real operation:

*Sic igitur universaliter convenit formae vel modo absoluto includenti respectum transcendentalem aliquod reale munus exercere circa illum ad quem dicit respectum, vel causando, vel uniendo, vel repraesentando illum, vel aliquid aliud simile efficiendo, et hac ratione dicitur non respicere illum ut pure terminum. At vero relatio praedicamentalis ita respicit terminum ut circa illum nullum aliud munus exercent nisi pure respicere, ut patet in similitudine unius albi ad aliud; et hoc modo dicitur esse proprium talis relationis respicere aliud ut pure terminum.*³⁸

semper est intrinsecus et essentialis alicui entitati, sub entitate modos etiam reales comprehendendo. God's creative action is evidently a TR intrinsic to every creature, without which they could not exist.

³⁷ DM 47.5.13.

³⁸ DM 47.4.10.

As a result, while the function of a CaR is purely defined by formally referring the foundation to the term, a TR is the form that causes or operates upon what the relation refers to³⁹. Similarity consists only in referring A's whiteness to B's whiteness, while God's creative act, for example, adds causal action to the mere reference to creatures. From this, Suárez concludes that the form including a TR is a *principium agendi*, whereas CaR does not act on something ontologically constituted but results directly from the position of the foundation and term⁴⁰.

D. The fourth difference concerns the exclusion of TRs as accidents. As we mentioned above, a TR cannot be conceived as an accidental form, for it is an *essential mode* or *difference* that stands to its relata as the specific difference stands to its genus. In this sense, TR is both instituted to cause or operate on something else and depends essentially on its relata⁴¹. This means for Suárez that a TR does not inhere in a certain being in the manner of a physical form as CaRs but constitutes a form or entity by intrinsically referring in the manner of a metaphysical difference⁴².

³⁹ Cf. DM 47, 4,11: *Sic ergo explicata illa differentia, vera et universalis esse videtur recteque explicare proprium munus relationis praedicamentalis, quod est referre formaliter seu respicere, aliud a munere et officio respectus transcendentalis, quod est constituere formam vel naturam aliquid causantem vel operantem aliquo modo circa rem ad quam dicit habitudinem, vel e converso.*

⁴⁰ Cf. DM 47.4.14.

⁴¹ Cf. DM 47.4.15: *Respectus autem transcendentalis non est concipiendus tamquam integra forma, cuius munus sit tantum referre, sed est essentialis modus seu differentia alicuius formae seu entitatis, quatenus ad causandum aliquo modo vel operandum circa alia per se primo instituta est, vel e converso, quatenus ab alia essentialiter pendet.*

⁴² By *physical form* Suárez means any real form inhering in a complete substance, such as whiteness for the category of quality or similarity for CaRs. Unlike physical forms, TRs do not inhere in an existing thing but instead intrinsically constitute its essence, similar to how a metaphysical difference constitutes a species from a genus. This is why Suárez concludes that TR as metaphysical difference constitutes the physical form of CaR, see DM 47.4.9: *Unde, licet ille respectus (tra-*

In conclusion, for Suárez, a TR is a RR that differs from a CaR in being an extrinsic (B) and not accidental (D) relation that adds a real operation (C) (causation, representation, or union) to its term, without thereby presupposing the actual existence of the term or foundation, nor their actual distinction (A). A CaR necessarily results from the concurrence of the term and foundation, while a TR grounds the reality of its relata.

2. *The Intension of Real Relation*

Having reconstructed taxonomy of RRs and elucidated the nature of both CaR and TR, we can now delve into Suárez's concept of RR. However, this task is complicated by both the complexity of the extension of RR concept and, from a semantic point of view, Suárez's unclear use of terms denoting relation. In DM 47, these terms mostly include *relatio*, *relativum*, *comparatio*, *ordo*, *ordinatio*, *habitus*, and *respectus*. As Penner has already noticed⁴³, they lack a consistent explanation and frequently are employed interchangeably. Only *habitus* and *respectus* seems to have a precise meaning and application. In some passages of the Disputation, *habitus* indicates an actual state or arrangement of tendency toward something, that is more appropriately expressed by the word *disposition* rather than *relation*. Instead, Suárez uses *respectus* more frequently when discussing the difference between CaRs and TRs. In this specific context, *respectus* seems to denote relation as reference, regard, or direction, likely to avoid suggesting that TRs refer to their term as

scedentales), *metaphysice consideratus, non sit forma physica referens subiectum ad aliud, sed differentia constituens aliquam formam, tamen illa forma constituta per talem respectum est forma physica respectiva, referens subiectum ad suum terminum. Neque enim potest forma respectiva informare aliquod subiectum secundum ultimam rationem suam, quin illud referat ad terminum quem ipsa suo modo respicit.*

⁴³ Cf. S. Penner, *Suárez on the Reduction of Categorical Relations*, in "Philosophers' Imprint" 13/2 (2013), p.3.

something ontological prior and independent.

The complete absence of an explicit definition for RR compels us to infer its concept from the comparison between TR and CaR, as well as from the brief passages in which Suárez dwell on CoRs. What is relevant here is to build a minimal concept of RR that includes only properties shared by both TRs and CaRs, because otherwise it wouldn't apply to all RR instances. We will argue that RR is a relation composed solely of a foundation and a term, whose essence consists in being directed or referred to something else.

To begin with the comparison with CoRs, no one could doubt that for Suárez the essence of RR is to be directed toward something else:

*Dicendum ergo est solam relationem realem esse vere et proprie ad aliquid; relationem autem rationis non esse, sed concipi ac si esset ad aliquid, ideoque solas relationes reales ad proprium praedicationem ad aliquid pertinere. Et inde etiam fit ut facilius possint entia rationis secundum illum modum habitudinis concipi, non quod in tali relatione sit vera habitudo seu verum esse ad, tale quale est in relatione reali, sed quia ad instar seu proportionem eius concipitur.*⁴⁴

By establishing the difference with CoRs, Suárez claims that the predicate *ad aliquid* uniquely belongs to RRs. This thesis draws parallels with a passage from *Summa Theologiae*, where Aquinas introduces the distinction between relations whose reference to something else is real – such as the case of heavy bodies that are naturally inclined towards the bottom – and those whose reference is only in our mind – such as when we compare the genus and species in animals⁴⁵. Following Aquinas, Suárez argues that the nature of a RR

⁴⁴ DM 47.3.5. Cf. also DM 47.3.3,4 and DM 47.17.2,3,6.

⁴⁵ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, q. 28, a. 1, co.: *Qui quidem respectus aliquando est in ipsa natura rerum; utpote quando aliquae res secundum suam naturam ad invicem ordinatae sunt, et invicem inclinationem habent. Et huiusmodi relationes oportet esse reales. Sicut in corpore gravi est inclinatio et ordo ad locum medium,*

consists in referring to something else (*essentia relationis est ut eius esse sit ad aliud*⁴⁶) and that a CoR is called relation only by analogy with RR. The formal effect of a RR is the act of referring, since this is the property conferred upon the thing that relation immediately affects⁴⁷.

In addition, while a RR is essentially independent of being thought or perceived, a CoR exists only in our mind as the effect of an intellectual act that relates things not connected in reality. As noticed by Noreña in his essay on Suárez's theory of relation, the difference between CoRs and RRs can be attributed to the fact that *relations are real because the subject and the term, in virtue of the foundation in the subject, stand to each other in such a way that our minds are compelled to make a distinction between them and their being related to each other*⁴⁸. This is why Suárez mentions CoR among beings of reason, together with negation and privation⁴⁹. As objects of thought, they are not relations in the strict sense but only by analogy with RRs. They encompass logical relations (relations between premises and the conclusion, between subject and predicate, between *definiens* and *definiendum*), relations of self-identity, relations between actually existing things and possible things, and finally relations between the term of a non-mutual real relation and its subject (extrinsic denomination). To justify his thesis, he reduces

unde respectus quidam est in ipso gravi respectu loci medii. Et similiter est de aliis huiusmodi. Aliquando vero respectus significatus per ea quae dicuntur ad aliquid, est tantum in ipsa apprehensione rationis conferentis unum alteri, et tunc est ratio rationis tantum; sicut cum comparat ratio hominem animali, ut speciem ad genus.

⁴⁶ DM 47.17.2.

⁴⁷ Cf. DM 47.5.11: *Dicimus formalem effectum relationis esse actu referre, quia hoc est quod ipsa per se primo confert formaliter subiecto quod suo modo afficit.*

⁴⁸ C. Noreña, *Suarez on the Externality and Internality of Relations*, in "Cuadernos Salmantinos de Filosofía" 10 (1983), p. 190.

⁴⁹ For a detailed discussion of this issue Cf. S. Duarte, *Introduction*, in S. Duarte (ed.), *Metaphysical Disputations III-IV: On Being's Passions in General and Its Principle and On Transcendental Unity in General*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C 2023, pp. xxiv-xxvi.

the analogy between CoRs and RRs to that between being of reason and real beings. Just as beings of reason are not real beings, but rather mental constructs that are considered beings only by analogy with real beings, so CoRs are not RRs but only conceptual objects called relations by analogy with RRs. Thus, the concept of relation is not predicated univocally of CoR and RR, as well as, in a broader sense, the concept of being has no univocal convenience with real being and being of reason⁵⁰.

One might object that if the predicate *ad aliquid* is the exclusive feature of RRs, then TR is not real, given that Suárez explicitly maintains that TRs are not directed toward something. He repeatedly affirms throughout the Disputation that only CaRs have the property of “being toward something else”⁵¹. Despite that, he openly claims that TRs are *ad aliquid*⁵² and subsumes TRs under the broader scope of RRs⁵³. This manifest contradiction can be resolved if one observes that the exclusion of the predicate *ad aliquid* from the transcendental field is closely related to condition C of TRs. In that context, Suárez maintained that a TR is not a pure reference but constitutes its term by adding a real operation (causation, representation, or union), which, as such, always contains a certain direction. So, being RRs, TRs possess a real reference toward something else, but, unlike CaRs, their whole being does not consist in such a reference⁵⁴. Accordingly, the predicate *ad aliquid* belongs properly only

⁵⁰ Cf. DM 47.3.3.

⁵¹ Cf. DM 47.4.16.

⁵² DM 47.5.5.

⁵³ Cf. DM 47.3.9.

⁵⁴ Cf. DM 47.5.5: *Existimo ergo huiusmodi transcendentales respectus excludendos esse per illam particulam cuius totum esse est esse ad aliud, si in ea proprietate intelligatur quam in fine praecedentis sectionis declaravimus. Nam illa entia quae transcendentalem respectum includunt non sunt ita ad aliud, ut totum suum esse positum habeant in puro respectu ad aliud, et ideo non respiciunt aliud sub pura ratione termini, sed sub aliqua alia ratione et exercendo circa illud aliquod munus ad quod huiusmodi res sunt per se institutae. At vero relatio quae hic definitur habet totam suam essentiam in puro respectu ad aliud, et ideo illi specialiter convenit ut totum illius esse ad aliud sit, tamquam ad purum terminum talis*

to CaRs, while TRs are *ad aliquid* only in a *derivative* sense.

Secondly, as anticipated, to elucidate the nature of RR and identify its common elements, we must compare the properties of TRs and CaRs. Based on our earlier discussion, it is evident that RRs cannot be considered accidental properties or essential parts of the absolute thing, nor intrinsic or extrinsic relations, nor pure references or relations adding real operations to its term. Even the subject must be excluded from the constitutive elements of RRs, since is not a part of the notion of TRs. Consequently, the definition of RR may include only those two fundamental elements – the foundation and the term – common to every RR and enabling the actual reference of one thing to another possible. Suárez argues that *relata* are logically included in the definition of RR, and while this position might seem trivial and obvious, it effectively avoids the problems associated with the separation of RR from its *relata* and the reification of the relation itself. As we shall see in more detail in the next section, he criticizes Scotus for separating the relation from the elements it connects. This is precisely why the error of hypostatizing relation, which has been committed by authors like Richard of Mediavilla⁵⁵, can be avoided. Indeed, if RR is logically connected to its *relata*, it cannot be something added externally that produces a change in its foundation. In contrast, separating the RR from its *relata* leads to conception of relation as a *res* bringing about modifications in the foundation in which inheres.

Thus, the only properties that TRs and CaRs have in common are being constituted by a foundation and being directed toward a term; any further specification would bring RRs under the more specific domain of TRs or CaRs. It is worth noting Suárez does not deny that even TRs have a term or foundation; instead, he contends that the term can be a being of reason and that the foundation is not real before a TR is established. This explains why the reality of the term

respectus seu habitudinis.

⁵⁵ Cf. M.G. Henninger, *Medieval Theories 1250-1325*, Oxford University Press, New York 1989, pp. 59-67.

and foundation cannot be encompassed in the definition of RR. The fact that both CaRs and TRs cannot be formally defined without including the terms they refer to and the foundation on which they somehow depend is textually confirmed by two passages:

*Nam etiam illi, et formae vel entitates de quarum essentia sunt, non possunt adaequate et essentialiter definiri absque additione illius rei quam respiciunt, quae sub ea ratione terminus dici potest.*⁵⁶

*Circa fundamentum autem relationis principio statuendum in communi est omnem relationem indigere aliquo reali fundamento.*⁵⁷

In light of these considerations, it becomes apparent why Suárez asserts that the term and the foundation are like to two transcendental notions (*rationes*) that go through (*vagantur*) all categories:

*Ratio termini ... est ipsamet entitas uniuscuiusque rei, quatenus apta est ad terminandam relationem alterius. Quae ratio est quasi transcendentalis, et forte non est univoca, praesertim cum in Deum et creaturam conveniat.*⁵⁸

*Non est autem necesse ut haec communis ratio fundamenti sit aliquod genus, sed est ratio quasi transcendentalis, quae vagatur per omnia praedicamenta.*⁵⁹

Both the term and the foundation are part of the definition. Therefore, it can be concluded that for Suárez RR is a real reference founded on the first relatum (the foundation) and directed to the other (the term) as something else (*ad aliud*).

While this definition could be enriched by a list of properties shared by all RRs that Suárez outlines in the concluding section of

⁵⁶ DM 47.8.12.

⁵⁷ DM 47.7.1.

⁵⁸ DM 47.17.10.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

the Disputation, this list is not particularly illuminating and sometimes even appear to contradict some theses already established. It involves five properties: firstly, all relations do not have a logical opposite⁶⁰; secondly, relations are said according to the more and less⁶¹; all relations are convertible, because even if they are non-mutual, it is always possible to think of an inverse relation to the real one⁶²; according to the fourth property, relata must share the same nature⁶³; finally, relata are known at the same time and through the same definition⁶⁴. These properties do not shed more light on the nature of RR and appear to offer just some epistemological insights, such as that relata must be known simultaneously and through the same definition. Regardless, it is noteworthy that the second and the fourth property do not align with the rest of Suárez's discussion. The second one is not universally true, because not all relations are defined by degrees of comparison, as evident in the case of the identity relation. Two objects are either perfectly identical or not at all; there is no such thing as a degree of identity. The fourth property appears to directly contradict the existence of non-reciprocal relations, which Suárez specifically introduced to demonstrate the existence of relations in which relata have different natures.

3. *The Nominalist Reduction*

Having thoroughly described the various types of existing relations and having defined RRs, it is now appropriate to examine the crucial issue of the distinction between foundation and relation in CaRs. This problem is essential for understanding how a created relation can be something real, what its nature is, and what kind of

⁶⁰ Cf. DM 47.18.2.

⁶¹ Cf. DM 47.18.3.

⁶² Cf. DM 47.18.5.

⁶³ Cf. DM 47.18.6.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

entity it possesses⁶⁵. Its relevance is further underscored by an objection might be raised against Suárez's conception of relation among created beings. If relations like similarity, dissimilarity, equality etc., are RRs, then it follows that an object possesses an infinite number of RRs connecting it to others, since one thing is always at least similar or dissimilar to another. CaRs being real accidents, this would further entail multiplying to infinity the number of accidents that modify and inhere in a substance just because it is equal to, different from, or similar to another substance. However, Suárez can neither renounce the thesis that this kind of relations are real, nor can deny that CaRs are real accidents. Similarity is a RR because two things are similar even though no one thinks of them as such. His solution involves adopting Ockham's position to argue that a relation is nothing beyond its non-relational foundation, from which it is only conceptually distinct, thereby avoiding an unnecessary proliferation of real beings⁶⁶. Before embracing Ockham's position, Suárez criticizes four positions from the most authoritative Scholastic tradition, which it is useful to analyze to avoid misunderstand his argumentation.

The first opinion is ascribed to some eminent Thomists, such

⁶⁵ Cf. DM 47.2.1: *Haec quaestio maxime necessaria est ad explicandum quo sensu relationes creatae sint aliquid reale et quid etiam sint quamve entitatem habeant*. Due to its importance for the ontological status of CaRs, distinguished interpreters of Suárez, such as John Doyle, have recognized this section as the key to reading DM 47: Cf. J.P. Doyle, *Introduction*, in F. Suárez, *On real relation. Disputatio Metaphysica XLVII*, ed. by J.P. Doyle, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee 2006, p. 29.

⁶⁶ In Suárez's solution, Penner views a form of ontological reductionism that does not require other entities besides absolute things to justify the existence of CaRs, see S. Penner, *Suárez on the Reduction of Categorical Relations ... cit.*, p. 19: *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.*

as Capreolus⁶⁷, Cajetan⁶⁸ and Ferrara⁶⁹, who taught that a RR is always really (*realiter*) distinct from its foundation. Their perspective is grounded on a passage from Aquinas' *De potentia*⁷⁰, where he expounds the difference between uncreated and created relations, arguing that these latter are not identical with their substances and therefore add to and compound with them. Nevertheless, according to Suárez's reconstruction, this opinion does not imply a real distinction between relation and its substance; at most, it proves a distinction *ex natura rei*⁷¹. Besides that, if the relation were really distinct from its substance, it would be a separate and absolute being⁷², which sharply contrasts with its accidental nature.

More complex than the others, Scotus' opinion⁷³ differs in introducing the modal distinction. According to Suárez, this type of distinction is a consequence of the separability of relation from foundation, a thesis which Scotus infers from the fact that foundation subsists even when relation ceases to exist, although relation cannot exist apart from its foundation⁷⁴. In other terms, A remains

⁶⁷ Ioannis Capreoli, *In libros Sententiarum amplissimae questiones, pro tutela doctrinae S. Thomae* I, d. 30, q. 1, Apud Haeredem Hieronymi Scoti, Venetiis 1589, pp. 413-434.

⁶⁸ Cf. Thomas de Vio Caietani, *Commentaria in Summa theologicam* I, q. 28, a. 2, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita, Ex Typographia Polyglotta, Romae 1856, vol.4, pp. 322-324.

⁶⁹ Cf. Franciscus de Sylvestris Ferrariensis, *Commentaria in Summam contra gentiles* IV, c. 14, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita, Ex Typographia Polyglotta, Romae 1930, vol. 15, pp. 58-66.

⁷⁰ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De pot.*, q. 8, a. 1, ad. 5: *Ad quantum dicendum, quod ratio illa procedit de relatione reali, quae habet aliud esse ab esse substantiae cui inest.*

⁷¹ Unlike other Scholastic authors, for Suárez there is no difference between the modal and *ex natura rei* distinction, since there is no other middle distinction between the real distinction and the conceptual distinction aside from this (Cf. DM 7.1.16).

⁷² DM 47.2.2: *Relationem non esse rem in se habentem propriam entitatem realiter distinctam ab omnibus entitatibus absolutis.*

⁷³ Cf. Duns Scotus, *Ord.* II, d. 1, q. 3; *Ord.*, III, dist. 8, q. 1.

⁷⁴ Cf. Duns Scotus, *Ord.* II, d. 1, q. 5: *Nihil est idem realiter alicui, sine quo*

white even when the similarity with B's whiteness ceases to exist, while the relation of similarity cannot exist without the A's whiteness. Yet, this separability is not a sign (*signum*) of a real distinction as Thomists believe, but rather of a modal one. Indeed, the mode has its own entity that actually modifies the thing in which it inheres, even though it doesn't have an absolute existence⁷⁵; it cannot exist without modifying the thing in which it inheres. Similarly, a relation exists only insofar as it modifies its foundation. Suárez's confutation is grounded on the idea that a CaR depends on its term and not only on its foundation. While it is undeniable that the foundation persists even after the relation ceases to exist, it is also true that if the term and the foundation coexist simultaneously, then the relation inevitably exists. As a result, if certain relations appear to be inseparable from their foundation, it is only because even their term necessarily exists; conversely, if some relations seem to be separable from their foundation, it is because their term does not exist necessarily. Scotus overlooked the fact that the relation relies on both relata and so committed the error of separating the relation from the foundation. But once Suárez's premise is accepted, it is evident that the relation is inseparable from its foundation, as well as from its term⁷⁶.

potest esse realiter absque contradictione; sed multae sunt relationes sine quibus fundamenta possunt esse absque contradictione; ergo multae sunt relationes quae non sunt realiter idem cum fundamento.

⁷⁵ Cf. DM 47.2.8: *Primo, quia in distinctione modali, sicut modus in re ipsa distinguitur ab ipsa re cuius est modus, ita habet aliquod esse proprium, aequae et proportionaliter distinctum ab esse ipsius rei, ut tractando de existentia declaratum est. Rursus, sicut modus est aliquid in rebus existens, ita dici potest habere entitatem aliquam, prout hac voce significatur quidquid non est nihil; quia vero talis entitas eius est naturae et conditionis ut per se non valeat ens reale primo ac per se constituere, sed necessario debet esse coniuncta et identificata alicui enti quod afficiat et modifiet, ideo non res, sed modus rei appellatur.*

⁷⁶ Cf. DM 47.2.3: *Addo praeterea hoc signum in praesenti non esse sufficiens ad indicandam distinctionem modalem quae sit actualis et ex natura rei, quia, licet denominatio relativa tollatur manente fundamento et ablato termino, tamen utroque manente auferri non potest, et ideo ex illo signo non concluditur efficaciter relationem esse aliquid distinctum a fundamento.*

After that, Suárez considers Durandus' opinion⁷⁷, who adopted the distinction between true dispositions (*habitus*) or real respects (*respectus*) and relative denominations. True dispositions or real respects, which are essentially RRs, are divided into relations that essentially follow from their foundations – such as inherence essentially follows from the nature of the accident – and those that follow accidentally – such as touching or being touched accidentally follow from the nature of bodies. Along with Scotus, Durandus maintained that these relations are modally distinguished from their foundations. Relative designations, instead, are relations not distinguishable *in re* from their foundations and consist in the concomitance of two or more elements. Instances of relative denomination are similarity and equality, where the relation adds only the coexistence of its relata. Suárez rejects Durandus' position by arguing that there is no difference between relative designations and accidental relations. Just as two things are said to be similar upon positing the foundation and the term of the relation, similarly, if two bodies coexist in the same place, the relation of tangency necessarily follows without requiring the introduction of a modal distinction:

*... nam qua ratione ait res dici similes vel aequales, non per additionem alicuius respectus ex natura rei distincti, sed per solam coexistentiam utriusque extremi et denominationem inde ortam, consequenter dicere deberet duo corpora sese tangere per denominationem ortam ex coexistentia utriusque extremi in tali loco, absque aliquo alio respectu ex natura rei distincto.*⁷⁸

Finally, Suárez excludes relations that essentially follow from their foundation from the scope of relations relevant to the discussion. These relations, in fact, are transcendental, not arising from the

⁷⁷ Durandi à Sancto Portiani, *In Sententias Theologicas Petri Lombardi Commentarium libri quatuor* I, dist. 30, q. 2, Inhaedibus Viduae & Haeredum Ioannis Stelfji, Antuerpiae 1617, pp. 83-85.

⁷⁸ DM 47.3.5.

simple position of term and foundation because they are an absolute mode from which relata themselves result⁷⁹.

Suárez ascribes the fourth opinion to Pedro da Fonseca⁸⁰ and Chrysostomus Javellus⁸¹, who advocated for the formal distinction. They conceived it as an middle distinction between Thomists' real distinction and Scotus' modal distinction, involving a difference between the existential (*esse existentiae*) and essential being (*esse essentiae*) of relation and those of foundation. While a mode does not exist independently from the entity in which it inheres and is distinguished from it only by virtue of its nature, a formal distinction entails two separate beings, each with its own existential and essential being. Suárez claims not to understand any middle distinction between the real distinction and the modal one, which is much more than a rational distinction. It is somewhat challenging to discern the distinction between the formal and real distinction, as both involve a separation between two real beings. In his view, introducing a distinction between the being of a relation and the being of its foundation is equivalent to endorsing either a real or a modal distinction. For the formal distinction either amounts to the distinction of two substances existing independently (real distinction) or to the distinction in which one of the two entities can exist without the other, while the opposite is not possible⁸² (modal distinction). These two alternatives, along with the distinction of reason, exhaust all possibilities of distinction. Consequently, either a relation has its own distinct existence separate from its foundation, implying that it

⁷⁹ Cf. DM 47.2.6.

⁸⁰ Petrus Fonseca, *Commentarium in Libros Metaphysicarum Aristotelis Stagiritae*, lib. V, c. 15, q. 2, sect. 5, Tomus Secundus, Ex Officina Iacobi Tornerij, Romae 1589, pp. 701-703.

⁸¹ Chrysostomus Javellus, *Questiones in Metaphysicam Aristotelis*, Ex Officina Martini Henckely, Vuitebergae 1609, pp. 242-249.

⁸² Cf. DM 47.2.9: *Aut enim extrema distinctionis possunt in re mutuo separari et unum sine alio vicissim conservari, et sic est distinctio realis omnino propria et rigorosa; aut unum tantum extremum potest separari et manere sine alio, non vero e converso, et hanc distinctionem nos vocamus modalem.*

is really distinct, or it exists as a mode depending on the existence of another being, which is the case of the modal distinction. In this way, Suárez refutes Javellus and Fonseca's position by reducing the formal distinction to either the real or modal distinction, both of which he has previously rejected.

Finally, Suárez presents Nominalists and Ockham's position⁸³, which he supports with the inclusion of some integrations. He generally credits to nominalists the thesis that relation has no being other than that of its foundation and does not add any compositional element to its foundation⁸⁴. More specifically, Ockham explains the notion of relation by resorting to his semantic theory of absolute and connotative terms. Relations do not signify any real object beyond their relata, and relational terms are connotative terms that signify relata, or, more accurately, terms that directly signify the foundation and connotatively the term:

*Similitudo unius albedinis ad aliam significat primam albedinem et connotat aliam, et quamdiu simul existunt, dicuntur et denominantur similia sine aliqua relatione. Et hoc quia hoc nomen vel conceptus 'similitudo' significat ista duo alba quo ad totale significatum coexistentia, et non significat unam nisi coexistat alteri. Et ideo destructa una albedine non dicitur prima albedo similis, sed hoc propter solam destructionem secundae albedinis connotatae.*⁸⁵

In this sense, the similarity between A and B's whiteness is nothing other than the whiteness of A and B, i.e. a term that directly signifies A's whiteness and connotatively B's whiteness.

This view is clearly realist anti-conceptualist⁸⁶, as the existence of a group of individuals or relation doesn't depend on a mental act.

⁸³ Suárez refers particularly to Ockham, *Ord.* I, d. 30, q.1; *Ord.* I, d. 31, q. 1.

⁸⁴ Cf. DM 47.2.12: *Dum ait relationem nullum esse proprium habere ultra esse fundamenti, neque aliquam compositionem ei adiunctam, quod non potest esse verum nisi ratione omnimoda identitatis in re ipsa.*

⁸⁵ Ockham, *Reportatio* II, q. 2.

⁸⁶ Henninger, though, believes that in Ockham there are two ways of conceiv-

Two similar things are similar regardless of any individual intellect actually thinking them. The concept of coexistence plays a key role in Ockham's argumentation. He held that a relation coincides with the extension it connotes, i.e. a pair or a group of individuals; consequently, a relation is only the coexistence of two absolute things, beyond which nothing else exists in reality. While admitting that the human intellect can conceive and express relation between two absolute forms in different ways, their coexistence is the only requirement for relations to exist. But if CaRs exist independently of any reference to mind and are not real beings or modes of separated from their substance, it becomes evident that they are really identical to their foundation.

Suárez accepts this conclusion, yet, unlike Ockham, he adds that a relation is conceptually distinct from its foundation. This distinction is indeed conceptual, but with a ground in the thing (*cum fundamento in re*), since it does not arise from two concepts purely constructed by the intellect without the contribution of real things; rather, it is a distinction in which a single thing offers to the intellect the ground for formulating two concepts (relation and foundation) that are not mutually inclusive. Suárez draws it by arguing that one thing is said to be similar or equal to another without a change being introduced into it; if the relation were really or modally distinct from the foundation, then it would introduce a real change or modification, which is clearly not the case with similarity. Moreover,

ing a relation, namely as a relational concept or as an absolute thing (Cf. M.G. Henninger, *Relations. Medieval Theories 1250-1325* ... cit., p. 133). His thesis seems to be confirmed by a passage of *Quodlibetales* where Ockham states that similarity can be regarded as a relational concept or as the similar things themselves, see Ockham, *Quodl.* VI, q. 15: *dico quod albedo non continet similitudinem nec dissimilitudinem secundum perfectam identitatem, quia albedo nec est similitudo nec dissimilitudo. Sed dico quod vel similitudo est conceptus relativus significans plura coniunctim, vel est plura absoluta coniunctim. Sicut populus est plures homines et nullus homo est populus, ita similitudo est plura alba et nullum album est similitudo.* This might suggest a logical and conceptualist interpretation of both Ockham's and Suárez's relation theory, in addition to the realist one.

real change needs the intervention of an efficient cause to bring it about. But even if relations like similarity had an efficient cause, this couldn't be intrinsic, to be found in the foundation or term of the relation, nor extrinsic, as relation follows directly from the position of its relata⁸⁷. Not even the absolute power of God can prevent two things from being similar once they exist with similar properties⁸⁸. Thus, relation, just as in Ockham, is the coexistence of two absolute terms, or, rather, it is the form of the foundation as it refers to something else (*ut respicientem aliam*).

It might be objected that a CaR, being real accident, must introduce something real to the substance in which it inheres, thereby modifying its essence. Suárez explains that in a relation, the properties of *being-in something* (*esse in*) and *being-towards something* (*esse ad*) are not really distinct⁸⁹. Though a Car is a real and inhering accident by virtue of its being-in something, it does not introduce any real addition to its subject but merely connects it to something external. What inheres in the subject, therefore, is just the reference to an external being, which, as such, does not produce any real modification.

The nominalist account endorsed by Suárez should not induce one to believe that the concept of CaR is empty, extrinsic, and inferred from an absolute form. Conversely, relation is identical to the real and absolute form and possesses the essential content of intrinsically denominating its term. The relative form is ontologically the same as the absolute form, even though it is not assumed absolutely but relatively to something else, which relation indicates or connotes. But if the relation adds nothing real to the absolute thing, it is the non-relational foundation that, insofar as it is only conceptually distinct from the relation, possesses a real reference to its term:

⁸⁷ Cf. DM 47.2.17.

⁸⁸ Cf. DM.47.2.15.

⁸⁹ Cf. DM 47.2.18-21.

*Sed intelligendum est relationem quidem dicere formam aliquam realem et intrinsece dominantem proprium relativum quod constituit; illam vero non esse rem aliquam aut modum ex natura rei distinctum ab omni forma absoluta, sed esse in re formam aliquam absolutam, non tamen absolute sumptam, sed ut respicientem aliam, quam denominatio relativa includit seu connotat.*⁹⁰

Going back to the example we introduced at the beginning of this essay, the relative form of similarity is only conceptually distinct from the absolute form of A's whiteness, which connotes or refers to B's whiteness, from which it is instead really distinct.

4. Conclusion

The meticulous description and classification of every kind of RR unveil a metaphysical order governing interactions and connections among individuals. The distinction between CaR and TR has brought attention to the existence of relations that play a constitutive role in real entities by determining their internal structure – such as the relation between matter and form, power and act, or the causal dependence of creatures on God – in contrast with those that merely structure the interactions between entities – such as the relations of similarity, proximity, and tangency. In particular, the concept of CaR seems to be shaped on the paradigmatic example of similarity. Suárez derives the three conditions of CaRs (subject, foundation, and term) by drawing a parallel with the similarity between two white objects, which Durandus would have considered a relative designation and Peter Auriol a CoR, but certainly not a RR. In the third section, we observed that the realist perspective on relations as similarity brings about a counterintuitive implication in Suárez's theory, namely, the unnecessary multiplication of relative accidents in a substance, which is always at least similar or dissimilar to other

⁹⁰ DM 47.2.22.

existing substances. His resolving strategy entails the ontological reduction of CaRs to their foundation; like Ockham, he believes that relation is identical to the extension it connotes, so that similarity coincides with similar objects themselves. However, the complexity of the issues involved did not prevent us from reconstructing a comprehensive definition of RR. Having examined the extension of RR and elucidated the classification of TRs and CaRs, along with their conditions, we provided a minimal concept of RR that includes only the properties common to all relations. In this way, we concluded that for Suárez an RR is a relation consisting only of a foundation and a term, whose essence is to refer to something else.