John Poinsot on Categorial Relations[1]

Selected Aspects of His Conception

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Relations are a fundamental philosophical concept. 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 other entities. 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 relations. To put it simply, all that exists is always in relation to something else.

Consequently, we ought not to be surprised that philosophers have focused on relations since antiquity. Over the past century analytic philosophy has sustained great advancement in the logic of relations, which among other things has helped to clearly define the logical form of relational propositions, develop more precise logical notation for them, and thereby to better grasp the relations of logical consequence in arguments containing such propositions. The undeniable progress in the logic of relations certainly raised hopes that it will eventually be possible to contrive equally convincing solutions in the sphere of ontology of relations. However, it seems to me that these hopes have remained unfulfilled. Simply said, achievements in the logic of relations were not accompanied by a corresponding development in the ontology of relations. I believe that contemporary as well as future solutions to it may be inspired by the scholastic tradition, which devoted incomparable attention to the ontology of relations. That is why I choose the Alcalá based Dominican and Thomist John Poinsot (1589–1644), whose theory of categorial relations I want to present in this paper.

Though Poinsot draws on various sources, he mostly follows and develops the legacy of Thomas Aquinas. I therefore begin the exposition by summarising the Angelic Doctor's key ideas on the subject. My aim, however, is not

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to present a detailed interpretation of Aquinas's view. I will only briefly sum up his crucial thoughts in order to facilitate an understanding of Poinsot's conception.[2]

§ 1. Aquinas[3]

Aquinas divides relations into two basic types. There are real relations and relations of reason (*relatio rationis*). Real relations are those whose existence does not depend on the activity of the human intellect, while relations of reason are produced by it. Real relations comprise categorial relations and subsisting relations conceived as divine persons in the Trinity (I leave those aside).[4]

Aquinas defines categorial relations as accidents *whose proper being consists in being toward another*.[5] Just like any categorial accident, a relation changes the substance it adheres in in some respect. As a substance becomes wise by receiving the accident of wisdom, so it becomes oriented towards another thing through a relation. What are the conditions of existence of categorial relations? The *subject* of the relation must exist (e.g. the man who begets a son), further its *terminus* (the begotten son), and finally the *foundation* of the relation (the act of begetting). All three entities must be real beings, i.e., exist independently of the human intellect, and the subject and terminus of the relation must be really distinct from each other. If these (necessary and sufficient) conditions are satisfied, a categorial relation

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2   In my opinion Aquinas's conception of relations 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, there is fundamentally the same conception as in his mature works, e.g. *Disputed Questions on the Power of God* or *Summa Theologiae*.

3   The following makes use of adapted parts of the text published in Svoboda, D., Tomášovo pojetí kategoriálního vztahu a jeho aristotelská východiska. In: Heider, D. – Samohýl, J. – Novák, L. (eds.), *Pluralita tradic od antiky po novověk.* Studia neoaristotelica Supplementum II. České Budějovice 2015, p. 24–40. There is fairly extensive secondary literature on Aquinas's conception of relations; two works that can be regarded as standard are: Henninger, M., *Relations – Medieval Theories 1250–1325.* Oxford, Clarendon Press 1989; Krempel, A., *La doctrine de la relation chez saint Thomas.* Paris, J. Vrin 1952.

4   A disputed question is whether Aquinas admitted the so-called transcendental relations, traditionally classified among real relations. Most scholars incline to the view that Aquinas did admit what the later tradition named transcendental relations.

5   Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* (*ScG*) IV, c. 14: "… propria relationis ratio consistit in eo quod est ad alterum…"; *Summa Theologiae* (*STh*) I, q. 28, a. 2: "ratio propria relationis … accipitur … secundum comparationem 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 contingentem ipsam rem relatam, prout ab ea tendit in alterum."

exists.[6] If one of the three entities does not exist really or if the subject and terminus are the same (as in the case of numerical identity), then the relation is merely one of reason.

It is disputed how many kinds of categorial relations Aquinas admitted. Some scholars hold that, following Aristotle, Aquinas distinguished three basic kinds of categorial relations, on the view of others he distinguished two.[7] I leave detailed discussion of this problem aside; it is sufficient to state that in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Aquinas speaks of three kinds of relations, which can be labelled *numeric*, *causal*, and *psychological*.[8] Numeric relations are divided into three subordinate species, i.e., identity (and non-identity), similarity (dissimilarity), and equality (inequality), where common mathematical relations such as "to be the double, half, or third of something" are classified among relations of equality and inequality. Causal relations are divided into many subordinated kinds according to different types of movement, activity, passivity, or causality (formal, material, efficient, or final).[9] Psychological relations are relations of cognitive powers, habits, and cognitive acts to their objects. They have also frequently been called relations of the *measurable to the measure*, since the cognized object is the measure defining and measuring 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. The examples Aquinas mentions are relation of knowledge to the knowable and of sensation to the sensible.

In Aquinas's conception the key part is played by the distinction between the proper character (*ratio*) of relations and their accidental existence (*in-esse*).[10] In virtue of the former relations belong in a certain category and differ from all other accidents, thanks to the latter they are simply accidents. Aquinas mostly defines the proper character of relations in contrast to the proper character of so-called absolute accidents, viz. quantity and quality.

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6   There is another necessary condition of real relations which says that the subject and terminus of the relation are of the same relational character (*eadem ratio ordinis*). Relations are of the same character if their foundations are of the same type. For example, there is a real relation of similarity between two red apples since they share the same type of foundation, i.e., redness.

7   E.g. R. Schmidt advocates the view that Aquinas acknowledged only two kinds of relations, three according to M. Henninger. Cf. Schmidt, R. W., *The Domain of Logic according to Saint Thomas Aquinas*. Hague, Martinus Nijhoff 1966; M. Henninger, *Relations – Medieval Theories 1250–1325*, op. cit., p. 29–31.

8   Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In V Metaph.* lect. 17, n. 1022.

9   Ibid., lect. 17, n. 1022.

10 Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, I, q. 28, a. 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."

They are called "absolute" because they belong to a substance without reference to something else. It is characteristic of these accidents that their proper character is conceived with respect to their subject. Quantity is said to be the measure of a substance, quality its disposition. So the proper character of absolute accidents signifies "something", i.e., a certain nature or form inhering in a subject (*aliquid alicui inhaerens*), and the dependence and imperfection associated with it.[11] On the other hand, the proper character of relations consists only in being toward another (*respectus ad aliud*)[12] and it is not conceived with respect to the subject but with respect to something external to the subject. Aquinas often repeats that the proper character of relations is not "something but towards something" (*non aliquid, sed ad aliquid*); so the *ratio* of relations does 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.[13]

Regrettably, the statements concerning the existence (*in-esse*) of relations found in Aquinas's work are brief and not altogether clear. Contemporary scholars mostly agree that Aquinas identified the existence of a categorial relation with the accidental existence of its foundation. 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. Aquinas explains the problem 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.[14]

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11 Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, I, q. 28, a. 1: "… quantitas et qualitas, secundum propriam rationem significant aliquid alicui inhaerens."

12 Ibid*.*: "Ea vero quae dicuntur ad aliquid, significant secundum propriam rationem solum respectum ad aliud."; *ScG* IV, 14: "… propria relationis ratio consistit in eo quod est ad alterum…"; and others.

13 *Quodl*. IX, q. 2, a. 3.

14 Thomas Aquinas, *In V Physic.*, lect. 3, n. 8.

So Aquinas argues that when someone grows and becomes equal to him in height, then he really relates to him without changing in any way himself. He does not change since that equality was already present in him before *as in its root*. How are we to understand this metaphor? When we identify the root with the foundation of a relation, the meaning of Aquinas's metaphor becomes clear. The accidental existence of a relation of equality is identical with the accidental existence of quantity, which is its foundation. If only the other member of the relation changes, the subject of the relation 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 accidental existence to me.[15]

The distinction between the proper character and the accidental existence of a relation is far from clear and I will return to it later.

§ 2. John Poinsot

Poinsot's longest, systematically laid out treatise on relations is found in the first part of his *Philosophical Course* devoted to logic.[16] Its structure is based on the division of Aristotle's *Organon* and the text takes the form of an extensive commentary on the individual books. As a result of the fact that Poinsot discusses relations as part of a treatise on the categories his exposition is somewhat limited. He focuses on relations primarily from the logical point of view and often intentionally postpones solving certain subtle ontological problems for the planned metaphysical treatise, which he however failed to write. In sum it is possible to say that the exposition of the *Philosophical Course* provides basic and fairly extensive information on the subject (in the modern edition it takes up over 35 text pages). However, it probably does not exhaust all that the author intended to say on the topic. Poinsot further mentions relations in the fourth volume of his *Theological Course*, which is in fact an (unfinished) commentary on Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*.[17] But in that work he speaks very little and unsystematically on the present issue, as his attention is mainly focused on the issue of the Trinity, in which the ontology of relations finds an important application, but is regarded as

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15 Aquinas following Aristotle distinguishes in this context between accidental change in itself (*per se*) and in a certain respect (*per accidens*). By the former the subject loses and gains some accidental existence, by the latter it loses or gains merely a respect or reference to something else. Cf. Tomas Aquinas, *In V Physic.*, lect. 3, n. 7.

16 Poinsot, J., *Cursus philosophicus Thomisticus* [hereinafter *CP* followed by a volume-number]. 3 vols. Turin 1948–1950 (reprint: Hildesheim–Zürich–New York 2008).

17 Poinsot, J., *Cursus theologicus in Summam theologicam d. Thomae.* 10 vols. Paris 1883–1886.

a more or less clarified issue. The following exposition draws on Poinsot's *Philosophical Course,* supplemented when necessary with reference to the *Theological Course.*[18] I will only focus on the aspects of Poinsot's conception I view as crucial.

§ 2.1. Division of relations

Let us begin with how Poinsot divides relations. He distinguishes between relations according to existence (*relationes secundum esse*) and relations according to name (*r. secundum dici*).[19] Relations according to existence are relational entities whose proper character (*ratio*) consists in being oriented to another (*ad aliud*). They are forms added to a subject bringing it into relationship to another. The proper character of relations according to name consists in an absolute (i.e., not relational) entity, from which a certain relationship arises or can arise; they are also called transcendental relations.[20] An example of a relation according to existence is the accidental form of similarity due to which one red apple is similar to another. A transcendental relation is e.g. the substance itself conceived as passive potency. A substance is an absolute entity and by itself (i.e., not due to some accidental form) tran-

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18 The exposition is divided into seven articles, which I present here for a general overview. 1. Whether relations which are intrinsic forms really exist. 2. What the conditions of existence of categorial relations are. 3. Division of categorial relations and their kinds. 4. Whether a relation is materially distinct from its foundation. 5. Whether from the formal point of view the terminus of a relation is something absolute or relational. 6. Where the specific and numeric difference of a relation comes from. 7. How the proprium properties of relations are to be explained, i.e., that their elements exist both according to nature and according to cognition.

19 There is fairly extensive secondary literature on the subject, in which the central position is occupied by N. Deely, author of many books and papers on Poinsot's conception of signs, relations and philosophy. Deely is engaged especially with Poinsot's theory of signs, which he evaluates as absolutely crucial in the history of semiotics. But Deely's interpretation has given rise to opposing reactions, some scholars share his views, others reject them quite sharply. Cf. Deely, J. N., *Four Ages of Understanding, the first postmodern survey of philosophy from ancient times to the turn of the twenty-first century.* Toronto, UTP 2001. Deely's views are advocated and elaborated on e.g. by Furton, E. J., *A Medieval Semiotic, Reference and Representation in Poinsot of St. Thomas Theory of Signs.* New York, Peter Lang Publishing 1995. One of the opponents of Deely's interpretation is e.g. Ashworth, J. E., The Historical Origins of Poinsot Poinsot's Treatise on Signs. *Semiotica* 69, 1988, No. 1/2, p. 129–147.

20 The term "transcendent relation" (*relatio transcendens*) seems to have first been used by Poinsot Duns Scotus to signify a relation obtaining in all the categories and thus transcending their borders (*transcendere* means "to step beyond" in Latin). For factual reasons as well as due to the influence of Aquinas's non-authentic works and Albertism this terminology and doctrine were adopted already by the early Thomistic school by the end of the 15th century at the latest (Dominic of Flanders, Cardinal Cajetan and others). Later (approximately since the 16th century) a certain terminological change took place and the expression "transcendental relation" (*relatio transcendentalis*) came to be commonly used rather than the original term to signify the same. Cf. Krempel, A., *La doctrine de la relation chez saint Thomas*, op. cit., p. 645–668.

scendentally relates to its accident.[21] The orientation of some absolute entity to another, which is not distinct from its essence, is traditionally conceived as a transcendental relation.

Poinsot further divides relations according to existence into real relations and relations of reason.[22] He identifies real relations with categorial ones and states the necessary conditions of their existence mentioned above.[23] If a relation does not satisfy one of these conditions, then it is not a categorial relation but a relation of reason. The main difference between real relations and relations of reason he identifies is that real relations have a real foundation and at the same time a really existing terminus, while relations of reason lack (real) foundations.[24] In the following he focuses almost exclusively on categorial relations.

The essential division of categorial relations is grounded in Poinsot's conception of the formal cause 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 relation's terminus, since the same foundation can give rise to two specifically

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21 *CP* I, p. 578–579: "…in relativis secundum esse tota ratio … est respicere. …ratio relationis secundum dici non est pure respicere terminum, sed aliquid aliud exercere, unde sequatur relatio. … relatio transcendentalis, quae non est alia a relatione secundum dici, non importat ex principali significato relationem, sed aliquid absolutum, ad quod sequitur vel sequi potest aliqua relatio."

22 According to this division, can transcendental relations be conceived as real, or are they beyond it? Although Poinsot does not explicitly ask this question, and does not answer it, he appears to regard them as real. To that someone might object that according to Poinsot the division of relations into real relations and relations of reason concerns only relations according to existence. Cf. Ibid., p. 579: "Relationes autem reales et rationis, quae divisio solum in relatione secundum esse invenitur…" But this does not exclude consistently conceiving transcendental relations as real. If transcendental relations cannot be divided into real and of reason, it does not follow that they are not real, as their manner of existence corresponds to the manner of existence of the absolute thing from which the transcendental relation derives. E.g. if a really existing substance relates to its accident of itself, then its transcendental orientation certainly shares its manner of existence and is therefore a real relation. Another question is what prevents dividing transcendental relations into real ones and those of reason. Poinsot gives no reason for that, he merely states that this division concerns only relations according to existence. However, modern authors of Thomistic orientation do distinguish between real transcendental relations and transcendental relations of reason and support the distinction with fairly convincing arguments. Cf. e.g. Sousedík, S., *Identitní teorie predikace*. Praha, Oikúmené 2006, p. 84.

23 Poinsot, in my view rather surprisingly, does not mention subsisting relations at all. Subsisting relations differ from categorial relations in that they do not inhere in some subject, but have the same manner of existence as substances, i.e., they exist in themselves. Subsisting relations are (exclusively) the divine persons in the Trinity.

24 Cf. *CP* I, p. 579: "…principaliter reducitur tota differentia inter relationem realem et rationis, quod relatio realis habet fundamentum reale cum coexistentia termini, relatio rationis caret fundamento…"

distinct relations, insofar as their termini are contrary. So e.g. the redness of an apple is the foundation of its relation of similarity to other red apples and at the same time the foundation of the opposite relation of dissimilarity to yellow apples.[25] Thus the relation's foundation has a double formal effect. It determines its subject absolutely, and it also determines it relatively, i.e., it orients it toward the relation's terminus. So redness primarily makes an apple red and secondarily similar or dissimilar to other coloured things.

Since the specific determination of relations comes from their foundations, the number of kinds of relations is the same as the number of kinds of relation foundations. With reference to Aristotle Poinsot mentions three kinds of foundations and three kinds of categorial relations caused by them.[26] One is quantity or proportion, giving rise to relations of sameness and difference (*r. convenientiae et disconvenientiae*), similarity and dissimilarity, equality and inequality. Another is action and passion, giving rise to causal relations. The third one is measure, which is the basis of psychological relations.[27]

§ 2.2. Categorial relations: Whether they really exist and what they are

In the introduction to his treatise Poinsot presents several arguments for the claim that categorial relations really exist,[28] as this had been contested by many thinkers since antiquity and up to his time. Poinsot's first argument relies on the authority of Aristotle and Aquinas, who mention relations as one of the categories, thereby classifying them as real beings. The second argument derives from the real ordering of things around us, e.g. among the individual parts of an army there really exists a certain order, which is a necessary condition of its proper operation. The same can be observed in nature or the whole universe. But these facts cannot be satisfactorily explained, unless the existence of real relations is admitted. So if someone denies the real existence of relations, he is denying something that is known and acknowledged by even the simplest people. So to admit the existence of real relations is as necessary as to admit real quality and quantity.[29]

Then Poinsot focuses more closely on the essence of categorial relations and defines them as real forms whose entire existence consists in

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25 Cf. Ibid., p. 600–606.

26 I pass over Poinsot's accidental division of relations e.g. into mutual and non-mutual.

27 Cf. Ibid., p. 608.

28 According to Poinsot none of his predecessors denied that some type of relations exists. Even those philosophers who did not acknowledge the existence of categorial relations nonetheless endorsed at least relations according to name. Cf. Ibid., p. 573.

29 Cf. Ibid., p. 574–577.

being oriented to another.[30] How categorial relations differ from relations of reason and transcendental relations is obvious from the definition. Relations of reason are not real forms, while transcendental relations differ in that their entire existence does not consist in orientation to another, they are certain absolute entities.

Poinsot further discusses the proper character (*ratio propria*) of relations. It is stimulated by Aquinas's not quite clear statement: "… *we must consider closely that only in relations there are some things that are only of reason and not in reality.*"[31] How is this statement to be interpreted? Aquinas seems to be speaking either of categorial relations, or of relations insofar as they abstract from real existence and existence of reason. But both alternatives are problematic; if the former holds, then categorial relations are not real. If the latter holds, then beings in other categories could not be conceived as something that is both real and of reason. Both conclusions, however, are problematic. That has led many interpreters to the following three errors. Some believe that Aquinas distinguishes between two components of a categorial relation: "to be in the subject" (*in* for short) and "orientation to another" (*ad* for short). The former is allegedly real, while the latter is of reason or abstracting from real existence and existence of reason. According to others, Aquinas wanted to say that beings of reason can be conceived only in the manner of categorial relations. Still others interpret Aquinas as speaking of relations insofar as they are abstracted from real existence and existence of reason.[32]

Poinsot rejects all these interpretations as inadequate. The first view ultimately leads to the incorrect conclusion that categorial relations are not real. For if the proper character of relations is not real, then relations also do not have real existence. The second view errs in that beings of reason could be formed only in the manner of a relation. According to Poinsot beings of reason can be conceived also in the manner of other categories, e.g. a being of reason can be formed according to the model of substance or quantity. The third view is partially true. According to Poinsot Aquinas is really speaking of relations in all their breadth, of relations as such insofar as they abstract from real existence and existence of reason. In relations thus conceived he notes their proper character consisting in orientation to another (*ad*) and says that it is not a real form by definition, but admits of becoming real or of reason. That does not imply, however, that the proper character of categorial relations is not a real entity. As categorial relations are real, so is their

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30 Ibid., p. 578: "… definitur relatio praedicamentalis, quod sit forma realis, cuius totum esse est ad aliud."

31 Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, I, q. 28, a. 1: "… considerandum est quod solum in his quae dicuntur ad aliquid, inveniuntur aliqua secundum rationem tantum, et non secundum rem."

32 Cf. *CP* I, p. 580.

proper character; the entity of the proper character of a relation corresponds to the relation's manner of existence. In this respect the third group of thinkers mentioned err, as they believe that the proper character of relations abstracts from existence of any kind.

Poinsot further compares relations and the other categories with respect to their proper character. What is proper to relations and is found in no other category is due to the fact that in the other categories their proper character cannot be consistently thought without considering them also "entitatively".[33] What does it mean to consider proper character entitatively? For all the categories with the exception of relations it is characteristic that their proper character is absolute and "oriented only to itself" (*ad se*), i.e., oriented either to existence in itself (substance), or to existence in another (accident). That makes two things evident: first, that orientation to itself (*ad se*) is to be conceived as the opposite of orientation to another (*ad aliud*), and further, that it is orientation to a certain kind of existence. We consider the proper character of a categorial being entitatively when we understand that it comprises orientation to the accidental or substantial manner of existence, not orientation to another thing.

Only for the category of relations it holds that its proper character consists in orientation to another (*ad aliud*).[34] However, it is not the mere negation or privation of some being, but something positive, something is really "posited" (*positum*) thereby. So the proper character of relations is the only one that can be thought consistently and positively without at the same time considering it entitatively, i.e., without that orientation to accidental or substantial manner of existence.[35] Therefore the proper character of relations as it is in itself can be a mere object of reason. This is how Aquinas's statement mentioned above is to be understood on Poinsot's view.

These considerations lead Poinsot to construe relations together with negations (or privations) as the two highest genera of beings of reason without real foundation, since the proper character of beings of reason consists in that they are the opposite of real beings, i.e., that it is repugnant to them to really exist as such. The proper characters of the other categories

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33 Ibid.: "Quomodo autem hoc sit peculiare in relatione et in aliis generibus non inveniatur, dicimus ex eo esse, quia in aliis generibus ratio propria et formalissima eorum non potest positive intelligi, nisi entitative etiam intelligatur, quia positiva eorum ratio est ad se tantum et absoluta, et ideo on intelligitu positive nisi etiam entitative, quo denim est ad se, entitas est."

34 Ibid.: "Sola relatio habet esse ens et ad ens, et pro ea parte, qua se habet ad ens, positive se habet, nec tamen inde habet entitatem realem. Sed aliunde relationi provenit realitas, scilicet a fundamento, aliunde positiva ratio ad, scilicet ex termino, ex quo non habet esse ens, sed ad ens, licet illud ad vere reale sit, quando fundatum est."

35 Ibid.: "…proprium relationis est, …quod possit considerari positive, etiamsi non entitative realiter…"

with the exception of relations, as already mentioned above, include orientation to a certain manner of existence and cannot be consistently and positively thought without it. That is why they are not and as such cannot be only in the intellect, they are not beings of reason. On the other hand, the proper character of relations does not include this orientation to a certain manner of existence, which is why some of them are beings of reason.

To this interpretation someone might object that beings of reason can be formed according to the model of other categories, e.g. a chimera is a substance of reason, imaginary space is quantity of reason, etc. So apparently it is also possible to consistently consider something positive that cannot really exist in the other categories. Poinsot answers the objection by saying that "being of reason" is the name given to such unreal being that we conceive in the manner of a real being. So a being of reason is not a substance or a quantity, according to whose form we conceive something, but quite the contrary, a being of reason is what is formed in the manner of a real being. So when some non-being is conceived in the manner of a substance or a quantity, it is not the substance or the quantity itself what is brought to existence of reason by the intellect, but rather some negation which is thought as if it were a real being. But the case is different with relations, for we do not conceive some non-being as a relation. When we consider relations according to their proper character in the manner of real relations, we bring something positive (not a mere negation) into existence of reason. That is why relation is classified among beings of reason and substance or quantity is not.[36]

At the end of the paragraph devoted to the issue of the proper character of relations the reader is probably expecting that I will now return to the issue of distinguishing between the two metaphysical components of relations raised above. Before I do, it will be appropriate to explain how Poinsot solves the distinction between a relation and its foundation. In light of this exposition the problem will be somewhat clearer.

§ 2. 3. Is a relation really (a parte rei) distinct from its foundation?

Aquinas's somewhat unclear conception of the accidental existence of relations naturally led many Thomistic thinkers to ask whether a relation is materially distinct from its foundation at all. For if the existence of a relation is identical with the conception of its foundation, can these entities be distinct at all? The difficulty of this question is evident from the variety of answers given not only by adherents of other philosophical schools (Scotists, Jesuits, nominalists, and others), but even by Thomists. According to the

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36 Cf. Ibid., p. 581–582.

nominalists the distinction is merely of reason, some Jesuits, such as e.g. F. Suárez, teach the same. Real distinction, on the other hand, is advocated by Thomists (though there are exceptions, e.g. D. de Soto): some of them conceive it as a distinction of two things, others as a distinction between a thing and a mode. Scotists teach that some relations are really distinct from their foundations, others are not. There are relations whose foundations exist while the relations do not, e.g. similarity or fatherhood, and in such cases the distinction between the relation and its foundation is real. But there are also other types of relations, whose foundations cannot exist without these relations, and such relations are not distinct from their foundations, e.g. a creature cannot exist without a relation to God.[37]

In the introduction Poinsot specifies that the debate concerns only categorial relations, transcendental relations are not materially distinct from their foundations. In categorial relations he distinguishes between the *remote* foundation (the substance itself) and the *proximate* foundation (a certain accident as the relation's formal cause). In light of this distinction he poses two main questions. Whether and how a relation is distinct from its remote foundation; whether a relation is distinct from its proximate foundation as really as one thing from another thing (*res a re*), or as a thing from its mode.[38] Let us now examine his answers in turn.

Poinsot thinks that there is a real distinction between a relation and its remote foundation. An exception in this respect are relations of specific or generic identity based on the specific or generic essence, which is really identical with the relation's subject, or more precisely, there is merely a virtual (potential) distinction between the essence and the subject (individual). He supports the claim by quotations from Thomas Aquinas and by his own arguments.[39] His basic stated reason for the distinction is their mutual separability. If a certain relation, due to which a substance is oriented to another, starts or ceases to exist, the substance itself does not cease to exist, which is why these two entities are not identical. That is evident from many examples: a red apple, similar in colour to another apple, does not cease to exist when it stops being similar to its counterpart; similarly a man is not a father before he begets an offspring, when he does beget one he becomes a father but his substantial existence does not change thereby. So these relations sometimes obtain on a substance, at other times they do not, while the substance does not cease to exist. That is why there is a real distinction between a relation

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37 Cf. *CP* I, p. 590–591.
38 Cf. Ibid.
39 Cf. *ScG* IV, c. 14: "… in nobis relationes habent esse dependens, quia earum esse est aliud ab esse substantiae, unde habent proprium modum essendi secundum propriam rationem, sicut in aliis accidentibus contingit…"

and the substance it inheres in. Another argument derives from the assumption that relations are one of the categories. But only real and as a consequence mutually really distinct natures belong to the categories. Therefore substances and relations are really distinct.

As far as the second question is concerned, Poinsot deems it more probable that a relation is not distinct from its proximate foundation as one thing is distinct from another thing, but as a mode.[40] I find Poinsot's exposition of this thesis unclear and not properly structured. In what follows I will therefore not be guided by Poinsot's exposition, but identify three problems in his thesis and see how he deals with them. (i) First it is necessary to know what Poinsot means by mode, or how modes differ from "things"; (ii) further it is necessary to explain what a modal distinction is and how it differs from a real distinction; (iii) finally we must ask what reasons motivate Poinsot to posit a modal distinction between a relation and its proximate foundation.

(i) Poinsot pays but little attention to the issue of modes, for he regards it as a metaphysical topic (*hoc enim metaphysici negotii est*) and intends to treat it more extensively later. His curt statements show that he divides modes into two groups.[41] The first contains entities incomplete in themselves, which constitute or supplement some real nature. Examples of these modes are subsistence, which co-constitutes a supposit and is the cause of its absolute indivisibility, speed of movement, and intensity of colour. In the second group Poinsot classifies (with the exception of quality and quantity) all categorial accidents, which are real and complete natures, i.e., not parts or principles of complete natures. It is characteristic of these entities that

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40 *CP* I, p. 593: "Dico secundo: respectu fundamenti proximi probabilius videtur in sententia S. Thomae, quod relatio non distinguitur ab illo tamquam res a re, sed ut modus…" The doctrine of modes entered second scholastic discussion through F. Suárez (Cf. *Disputationes Metaphysicae* 7, 1, 17), who in this respect follows Durandus a S. Porciano and the Scotistic tradition of so-called internal modes. The distinction *realitas-modus* was introduced as a certain supplementation of and elaboration on the original Aristotelian distinction *substance-accident*. Cf. Schlueter, D., Modus, In: *Historiches Wörterbuch der Philosophie.* Bd. 6. Basel–Stuttgart 1984, col. 66–68; Leinsle, U., Rodrigo de Arriga im Streit um modale Entitäten. In: *Bene scripsisti … Filosofie od středověku k novověku, Sborník k sedmdesátinám Stanislava Sousedíka*. Praha, Filosofia 2002.

41 *CP* I, p. 502–503: "…quidam modi sunt, qui solum reductive ponuntur in praedicamento, ut modi substantiales subsistentiae, unionis et similes. Alii per se habent sua praedicamenta, ut ubi, situs, et similes. Sed breviter dico (hoc enim metaphysici negotii est), quod modi sunt in duplici differentia. Quidam, qui pertinent ad ipsam compositionem vel complementum alicuius rei vel naturae, sicut constitutio substantiae fit per unionem et completur per subsistentiam, accidens per inhaerentiam, qualitas per gradus intensionis et remissionis, sive illi sint diversae uniones sive diversae terminationes eiusdem qualitatis. Et isti modi reducuntur ad praedicamentum rei, quam componunt aut terminant modificando sicut partes componendo. Alii modi sunt neque ad constitutionem neque ad complementum rei pertinentes, sed tantum ex aliqua extrinseca ratione seu principio convenientes, et tales non repugnat praedicamenta per se seorsum constituere, ut ibi et situs et secundum aliquos relatio…"

compared to the categories of substance, quality and quantity they have "weaker" ontological status. Poinsot's most frequent terminological distinction is that he labels the categories of substance, quality and quantity "*realitates*", while the other categories are "mere modes".[42] The modes belonging to the other group, among which Poinsot also classifies relations, are therefore real beings having a "weaker" ontological status as compared to the first three categories.

Poinsot advocates the view that relations are modes and are modally distinct from their proximate foundations with an argument deriving from Aquinas's doctrine that relations are the "remotest" accidents of substances and have the "weakest" existence of all the categories.[43] If all the categories except substance, quantity and quality are mere modes, then relations, whose existence is "weakest" of all the categories, must have "weaker" existence than they do and cannot be "things" (*realitas*).[44]

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42 Cf. *CP* I, p. 593: "… constat aliqua genera esse modos tantum et non realitates."

43 Ibid.: "… si inter omnia genera relatio est debilissimi esse, utique minus erit quam lila, quae sunt modi; ergo ipsa relatio non erit realitas, sic enim perfectior esset illis generibus." 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 "closer" an accident is to the 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. The first accident of a material substance is quantity, which inheres in it immediately and therefore does not depend on any other accidental form. Other accidents inhere in material substances 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 material substances. Relations are in a sense the opposite of quantity, since they are the last accidents of a substance and depend on many other things. They depend not only on the substance, but also on the other accidents, by means of which they inhere in the substance and which are also their formal causes (foundations). Further, unlike quantity and quality, the existence of a relation requires the existence of something external, since it cannot exist without a terminus. For these reasons relations are the most "remote" from substance, the least perfect, and consequently are the least substance and something existent. So if relations have the "weakest existence" of all the categories and if many categories are mere modes, relations must be construed as modes and not as things.

44 Poinsot admits that even among Thomists different views exist as to whether relations are or are not modes. The source of these views are texts by Aquinas himself, which sometimes speak of relations as of "things", at other times they speak as if relations were in fact no natures at all. To reconcile Aquinas's statements Poinsot employs the distinction between the two types of foundations (remote and proximate) introduced above. When a relation is considered with respect to its foundation, it is merely modally distinct; when it is conceived with respect to its subject, it is really distinct from it, i.e., precisely as the foundation itself is distinct from the subject. The places where Aquinas speaks of a real distinction between a relation and its foundation, in the manner in which two "things" differ, are therefore (in light of the introduced distinction) to be interpreted as concerning the difference between the relation and its subject. Aquinas either explicitly speaks of a subject, as when he says that a relation has an existence which is distinct from the existence of its subject, or he speaks of that which is predicated relatively, by which he again means some subject.

(ii) The difference between a relation and its proximate foundation is modal, whereby he regards this type of difference as an instance of real distinction.[45] Again, Poinsot's characterization of the modal distinction is unfortunately very brief. From the little he says it is evident that a thing can be modally distinct from its mode, as e.g. a man from his position or place, or a mode from a mode (Poinsot does not give an example of such distinction). If I were to attempt to compare the modal distinction with the real distinction, they appear to agree in that they mean factual non-identity. They differ in that really distinct entities are mostly (at least by absolute Divine power) mutually separable. But that does not hold generally. Some really distinct things are not separable even by absolute Divine power, such as e.g. a relation from its terminus, etc. Modally distinct entities are not mutually separable at all, they can (mostly) be separated only one-sidedly, i.e., a thing can exist without the mode, but not vice versa. Sometimes it is not even possible to separate a thing from its mode, if there is a necessary bond between them, as e.g. a substance cannot be separated from its subsistence.[46]

(iii) Poinsot does not explicitly say what reasons bring him to the conviction that there is a modal distinction between a relation and its proximate foundation. Almost his entire exposition is aimed at defending the view that relations are modes. And that is apparently the main reason why he posits a modal distinction between a relation and its proximate foundation. If relations are modes and not "things", then of course they differ from their foundations as modes differ from things or modes, i.e., modally.[47]

Glancing over Poinsot's entire discussion, it is impossible to miss its basic defect. It is implicitly concealed in Poinsot's thesis of the modal distinction

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45 *CP* I, p. 294: "Distinctio realis dividitur in realem simpliciter, ut inter duas res, et in realem modalem, ut inter rem et modum…"

46 *CP* II, p. 139: "…separatio mutua unius ab alio saltem non requiritur ad distinctionem modalem. Modus enim non separatur a re; res autem, licet separetur a modo, tamen aliqui modi sunt, a quibus res non potest omnino separari, quia necessariam connexionem habent cum aliquo, licet non cum isto vel illo determinate, sicut non potest aliqua substantia stare sine omni subsistentia propria vel alinea, nec quantitas in suo statu naturali sine omni figura, nec qualitas intensibilis sine omni modo intensionis vel remissionis, et similiter nec essentia aliqua sine existentia propria vel alinea, si est modus. Deinde negatur absolute, quod omnis realitas possit separari ab omni eo, a quo realiter distinguitur, nisi quando non intercedit mutua dependentia. Et instatur tum in relativis, quia relatio non potest existere sine termino, a quo realiter distinquitur…; *CP* I, p. 594–595: „…obicies, si relatio distinguitur a parte rei a fundamento, posset impediri a Deo, ne resultaret posito fundamento et termino, quia quae distinguuntur a parte rei, possunt separari vel impediri…respondetur, … non omne, quod realiter distinguitur ab alio, est semper separabile ab lilo, si sit res, vel impedibile, ne resultet, si sit modus…"

47 *CP* I, p. 594: "Ex hoc autem explicatur, quomodo relation possit fundari etiam in quibuscumque modis, quod non esset, si secundum se esset realitas distincta a fundamento. Sequitur etiam, quomodo relatio sine mutatione physica dicatur resultare ad positionem termini…" I admit that I am not convinced by the second consequence, or I don't understand it.

between a relation and its foundation. The modal distinction is a type of real distinction. How is the claim that a relation and its proximate foundation are really distinct to be defended? Furthermore, Poinsot repeatedly states that the two entities are (numerically) identical.[48] How can he identify relations with their proximate foundations and at the same time advocate a real distinction between them? I would much like to see Poinsot answer these questions, much more so than the question whether relations are (or are not) modes or whether they are modally distinct from their proximate foundations.[49]

This problem is closely associated with the not quite clearly defined ontological status of the two metaphysical components of relations (*ad–in* for short). Apparently, the *prima facie* contradictory claim – relations and their proximate foundations are identical and at the same time really distinct – can be meaningfully defended only by distinguishing between the two metaphysical components of relations. The following paragraph is devoted to this issue.

§ 2. 4. Two metaphysical components of relations "ad" and "in"
In the light of the exposition of the real distinction between a relation and its foundation let us now take a look at the issue of the two metaphysical components of relations! Like Aquinas, Poinsot explicitly distinguishes between these two components of relations.[50] The question now is how he conceives this distinction. Answering the question is not simple since neither Poinsot nor any Thomistic author I am aware of asks this question. Nor do they explicitly answer it. I must therefore try to attempt to infer what Poinsot would reply to a question thus raised by his statements.

Let me first summarize the relevant facts. Poinsot advocates a real distinction between a relation and its foundation. In order to simplify the exposi-

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48 *CP* I, p. 593–594: "Relatio ... comparata ... ad subiectum distinguitur ab illo eo modo, quo fundamentum, cum quo identificatur, sicut gradus intensionis ... non nisi modaliter a qualitate distinguitur, a substantia autem ... sicut ipsa qualitas, cum qua identificatur."

49 This difficulty is succinctly pointed out by the Carmelite authors of a Thomistic course called Complutenses. Collegii Complutensis Sancti Cyrilli Discalceatorum FF., *Disputationes in Aristotelis dialecticam et Phylosophiam Naturalem*, Lugduni 1668. Reprint (mit einem Vorwort von W. Risse) Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag 1977 (I quote this edition): "... semel enim concesso quod relatio est speciale praedicamentum accidentis, habens propriam existentiam, ... contendere, an sit dicenda res aut modus, est pura quaestio de nomine..."

50 *Cursus theologicus*, IV, ad q. 28, a. 2, p. 142: "In relatione reali duo includuntur, seu duplici formalitate aut consideratione explicantur: et per ordinem ad subjectum, quod dicitur in relationis, eo quod relationes, quae sunt accidentia, inhaerent subiecto illudque afficiunt: unde omne quod relationi convenit ex parte subiecti, sive cui inhaeret, sive in quo subsistit, vocatur in relationis; et secundo consideratur relatio realis per ordinem ad terminum, et sub hac consideratione appellatur ad."

tion I will omit the case of specific and generic identity discussed above and focus on relations whose foundation is some accidental form. Poinsot thinks that a relation is (numerically) identical with its proximate foundation. So e.g. there are relations of similarity between two apples of the same colour, for which it holds that they are simultaneously identical and really distinct from the colour which is their proximate foundation. In order to avoid the patent contradiction contained in the preceding sentence it is necessary to distinguish between the two metaphysical components of relation *ad* and *in*. The "in" of the cited relation of similarity is identical with the "in" component of the colour which is the proximate foundation, while the "ad" component of the relation is really distinct from the "in" of the proximate foundation. Evidently, if the "in" component of the relation is (numerically) identical with the "in" component of its foundation and at the same time the other component of the relation "ad" really differs from the "in" component of the foundation, then there also must be a real distinction between the two components of the relation itself.

On what level are we to understand those two really distinct components of relations? I believe that there are two options. Either the difference is situated in the relation's accidental essence itself, or it can be conceived at the level of the entitative principles of relations as categorial accidents. In the former case two really distinct parts or components would have to be distinguished in the relation's essence itself, in the latter case the distinction would coincide with the distinction between an accidental essence and its act of existence. It seems to me that the distinction very probably cannot be drawn at the level of accidental essence. Aquinas and the Thomistic authors I am familiar with mention no really distinct parts of an accidental essence. An accidental essence (leaving aside quantity, which is characterized by having a plurality of quantitative parts) has only so-called metaphysical parts, which according to the Thomistic tradition are only virtually or potentially, i.e., not really, distinct. The Thomistic tradition speaks of no other really distinct components or parts of an accidental essence at all. But even if this distinction were drawn at the level of the essence itself, it would imply that two really distinct beings (a relation and its foundation) share parts of their really distinct essences. That is a striking consequence, to say the least.

If the difference between the two components is situated at the level of a relation's entitative principles, "*ad*" is identical with the relation's essence, "*in*" is an act of existence really distinct from the essence, then evidently relations are not categorial accidents, since those are defined as beings characterized by existing in another (as in a subject). But Aquinas and the entire Thomistic tradition including Poinsot unambiguously classify relations among categorial accidents. If my reasoning is correct, then it turns out that

there is an as yet unclarified problem in the heart of the Thomistic conception of relation. As yet I do not clearly see the path that is to be taken in solving it and understand it as an urgent task for further research.

Conclusion

Poinsot's Thomistic theory of relations, which belongs to early modern university philosophy, is (together with the Scotistic one) a realist conception. It is characteristic of realist conceptions that they view relations as real entities existing independently of our thought, which cannot be reduced to mere extrinsic denominations, to the comparing acts of our thinking, or identified fully with their foundations. As compared to Scotus's (or some of his followers') theory, Poinsot's theory has lesser ontological commitment, since it does not construe relations as "full-blooded" realities, but as modes. Modes have "lesser" ontological status than the accidental categories of quality and quantity, but are regarded as real entities. In Poinsot's (and generally Thomistic) conception of relations there is an as yet unclarified problem concerning the two metaphysical components (*ad* and *in* for short) and how they relate to the relation's foundation.

SUMMARY

The paper expounds the conception of categorial relations in the work of the Thomist J. Poinsot (1589–1644) and is divided into two main parts. In the first part the reader is introduced to the assumptions of Poinsot's theory, which stems from and elaborates on the work of Thomas Aquinas. The second part focuses on selected aspects of Poinsot's conception of categorial relations (type of existence, proper character and type of distinction from foundation).

Keywords: Poinsot, categorial relations, being of reason