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12-28-1997

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Recommended Citation

Baltzly, Dirk, "Porphyry and Plotinus on the Reality of Relations" (1997). *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*. 310.
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EDPH1997
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For presentation at the SAGP meeting 12/28/97 Philadelphia

Porphyry and Plotinus on the Reality of Relations

Both Plotinus and Porphyry contribute in their own ways to the tradition of neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*. In 6.1–2, Plotinus argues that Aristotle's ten categories are not adequate as an account of the genera of Being and that for this purpose they ought to be supplanted by the five greatest kinds from Plato's *Sophist*.¹ In 6.3, he acknowledges that it would be desirable to have a system of categories, not genera, for the sensible realm. He proposes several reductions of Aristotle's ten categories to more compact schemes and finally seems to settle on the number five: composite, relative, quantity, quality and motion. The extent to which Porphyry was at odds with Plotinus over the value of Aristotle's *Categories* is the subject of debate.² Porphyry is certainly keen to claim that the work is about 'simple significant words insofar as they signify things' (*in Cat.* 58,5) and defends it against critics who claim that Aristotle has got the number of divisions wrong (*in Cat.* 59,10–34).³ In what follows I argue that Porphyry has managed to get clear about relations and relational properties in a way that Plotinus has not. As a result, the latter is not well placed to meet potential objections to the autonomy of Aristotle's category of relatives. Since this is a category that Plotinus seems to retain in his own five-fold system, this is a problem for him.

I. Aristotle's category of relatives

Chapter 7 of Aristotle's *Categories* is rather like the tar baby: commenting on τὰ πρὸς τι gets you stuck to an intractable vocabulary for discussing relations. This is because relatives, or τὰ πρὸς τι, are not conceived by Aristotle as relations, though the extension of relatives includes some terms we can clearly see are relations. The difference between relatives and relations can best be illustrated by focusing on the problem of the ontological category of τὰ πρὸς τι: are they the subjects between which a relation obtains, the relation, or the relational property? The fact that there is no clear answer to this question suggests that whatever *Categories* 7 is a theory of, it is probably not of relations as we understand them.

Can relatives be relations? It seems not, since there are things which count as relatives but which are not plausibly thought of as relations. Perception, perhaps,

¹ The *Enneads* will be cited by chapter and line numbers in the edition of P. Henry and H. Schwyzler (Oxford, 1964–82).

² Strange discusses the extent to which earlier commentators may have over emphasized the differences between Porphyry and Plotinus in the introduction to his translation, *Porphyry: On Aristotle Categories* (London, 1992), 1–12.

³ A. Busse (ed.) *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* IV.1 (Berlin, 1887).

is a relation between an object or a sense datum and a percipient. Though Aristotle lists perception ($\alpha\lambda\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$) among the relatives (6b3), he also lists the *object* of perception ($\alpha\lambda\sigma\theta\eta\tau\omicron\nu$) among the relatives. One might think, then, that Aristotle has lumped together in a single category both relations and relata. Were this so, we might say that at least some of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ $\tau\iota$ are relations. However, it is also claimed that the $\alpha\lambda\sigma\theta\eta\tau\omicron\nu$ is prior to $\alpha\lambda\sigma\theta\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ (7b35). One might have the view that the things which stand in relations must have other non-relational properties. This question must be distinguished from the question of whether relata, *qua* relata, are prior to the relations which relate them. It seems clear that they are not. Thus, Aristotle's category of $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ $\tau\iota$ cannot be thought of as one which includes both relations and relata *per se*. If he meant to discuss relata *per se*, then he has surely said the wrong thing about them.

Another intially promising suggestion is that $\tau\acute{\alpha}$ $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ $\tau\iota$ are the relational properties which qualify the relata between which a relation obtains.⁴ By a relational property, I mean a one place property which has a relation and an object as constituents.⁵ Thus, if aRb , then a , in addition to being a subject of the relation R , is also the subject for the relational property standing-in- R -to-something or perhaps standing-in- R -to- b . That relatives might be relational properties of this sort is suggested by the stripping argument (7a26-b10). You can test whether you have identified the proper correlative, i.e. what the relative is *of* or *in relation to*, by stripping the relative of everything except the purported correlative. So, suppose that we say that the correlative of wing is bird. If you strip away everything except being a bird, then the reciprocation does not remain. A wing is a wing *of a bird*, but a bird is not a bird *by or of a wing*. Rather, a winged thing is a winged thing by or on account of a wing. (Cf. knowledge is knowledge *of a knowable* and a knowable is known *by knowledge*.) The things which are being stripped away in this thought experiment seem to be properties. However, properties do not come into existence or

⁴ This interpretation is defended at length by Mario Mignucci in 'Aristotle's Definition of Relatives in *Categories* 7', *Phronesis* 31 (1986), 101-27.

⁵ Khamara ('Indiscernibles and the Absolute Theory of Space and Time', *Studia Leibnitiana*, Band XX/2 (1988), 140-59) attempts to tidy up the notion of a relational property in this way: 'P is a positive relational property if and only if, for any individual, x , x 's having P consists in x 's having a certain relation to at least one individual' (p. 144). (In his analysis, positive relational properties are distinguished from negative ones. The former consist in a thing's *having* a relation to something else while the latter consist in its *lacking* a relation to something else.) There is room to draw a further distinction between those positive relational properties which consist in x 's standing in a relation to something and those which consist in x 's standing in a relation to some particular thing. The latter Khamara calls 'impure relational properties'.

Porphry and Plotinus on the Reality of Relations

get destroyed, but this is exactly what is claimed for relatives at 7b15.⁶ Relatives and their correlatives, with some exceptions, come into being and are destroyed together.

Might τὰ πρὸς τι then be *instances* of relational properties? Aristotle is very concerned to avoid the conclusion that no relative is a substance (8a14-36) and apparently modifies his criterion for inclusion among the relatives just to avoid such a conclusion. But no *property instance* is itself a substance and surely the author of *Categories* chapters 2-5 is in as good a position to know this as anyone.⁷ Thus, if relatives are instances of relational properties, Aristotle's worry is utterly mysterious.

It remains that relatives might be the *things* which are the subjects of relations or relational properties. That is, they might be the *relata* between which a relation obtains, considered not merely insofar as they are *relata*. In this sense, it is very easy to see why Aristotle might be concerned about the question of whether relatives are substances. If a hand is a relative thing and also a substance by virtue of being a part of a substance, then one might be very concerned that the hand *qua* hand is a substance. But even this will not do in the final analysis. At the end of Chapter 8 Aristotle is concerned that many of the things which are counted under quality will be relatives. It turns out that it is the *genus* knowledge which is a relative. The particular kinds of knowledge, like grammar, are not relatives and it is these particular kinds which are possessed and by virtue of which a person is said to be *knowing*.⁸ Thus, when Aristotle says in *Categories* 7 that knowledge is among the relatives, he cannot mean by that the person who has the knowledge.⁹

⁶I take it that in the *Categories* accidental properties are among those things which are both present in and said of a subject. Thus, knowledge is present in the soul and said of the science of the grammatical man. Even if these secondary non-substances are dependent upon substances, perhaps even more strongly than secondary substances are, the eternity of the world precludes the possibility that the *properties*, as opposed to the *property instances*, should come into existence or be destroyed.

⁷*Cat.* 2a34-b7 makes it clear that what is present in a subject (i.e. property instances) depends entirely upon what is neither said of nor present in a subject (i.e. primary substances). If we add the plausible premise that where x depends on y, x is non-identical with y, we have a good argument that no property instance is a substance.

⁸*Cat.* 11a25, τῶν δὲ καθ' ἕκαστα οὐδὲν αὐτὸ ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἑτέρου λέγεται. I take the καθ' ἕκαστα to be the species of knowledge, not the instances of those species. If the thing whose presence makes people ἐπιστήμονες (11a34) is not itself a relative, I presume that there is no reason to think that the subject in which this is present is a relative.

⁹Mignucci provides some additional arguments against the identification of relatives with things; e.g. 'the larger' with Jones who is larger than Smith. First, everything will be a

This is a very cursory examination of the reference of *πρός τι* in *Categories*. It might emerge that there is a *best* candidate for what τὰ *πρός τι* are. That is, there might be one interpretation which seems to cover more of the cases than any competitor and has the fewest passages which tell against it.¹⁰ Alternatively, we may find that it is best not to try to map Aristotle's distinctions onto our own conceptual framework of relations, *relata* and relational properties and try to work with them on their own.¹¹ Be that as it may, what I want to suggest now is that to adopt Aristotle's terminology is to invite confusion, for it is surely not clear on the face of it just what Aristotle is talking about. In what follows, I shall argue that Plotinus falls victim to the tar baby of *πρός τι*, though, by virtue of having the term *σχέσις* available to him, he does make some progress in untangling matters. It falls to Porphyry, I think, to see clearly the difference between relations, *relata* and relational properties. I must, however, acknowledge the possibility that this impression may be created by the fact that we have fewer texts from Porphyry which are relevant to the issue. Perhaps in the lost *To Geladius*, he too got stuck by the tar baby, but the surviving shorter commentary on the *Categories* seems to be free from this confusion.

II. Worries about the reality of relations

In *Ennead* 6.1.6-7 Plotinus presents and attempts to answer some worries about the ontological status of relations. Particularly worrisome are what later came to be called 'internal relations'. I shall say that two terms, *a* and *b* are internally related by relation R just in case *a* and *b* have properties which logically necessitate

relative since everything is self-identical. Second, this would obviously contravene Aristotle's rule that no relative is a substance.

¹⁰ If we must choose between the plausible modern candidates, Mignucci's identification of τὰ *πρός τι* with relational properties has the fewest problems. It is not unreasonable for Aristotle to slide back and forth between describing relational properties and instances of those properties.

¹¹ I prefer to regard Aristotle's relatives as what I call 'accidental beings'. Thus, the relative 'the larger' is a being which bears the relation of accidental identity to Jones. Accidental beings are nearly the same thing as what Frank Lewis calls 'accidental compounds' (*Substance and Predication in Aristotle* (Oxford, 1992)). Unlike Lewis, however, I prefer to withhold judgement about whether all accidental beings must be compounds of some *particular* substance and *its* accidents. It strikes me that the *κυρίως πῶσα* of *Cat.* 6 may be accidental beings which depend upon the existence of primary substances in general, but not any particular primary substance.

Porphyry and Plotinus on the Reality of Relations

that the relation between them obtain.¹² Some relations are such that pairs (or n-tuples) which instantiate them are always internally related by R. Thus, similarity-in-respect-of-being-F is an internal relation since any two things, *a* and *b*, are similar-in-respect-of-being-F only if both are F. This fact about internal relations makes it very tempting to be reductionist about the facts regarding whether they obtain: that is, the fact that $aR_F b$ (where R_F is the internal relation necessitated by its relata being F) is nothing over and above the fact that Fa and Fb. Whether this reduction succeeds depends in large measure on how we count facts. If we individuate facts or events by their causes and effects, then it appears the reduction might be successful. The similarity, for instance, of *a* and *b* has no causal consequences over and above the event of *a*'s being and *b*'s being F.¹³ If, however, one accepts an epistemic criterion, then these appear to be distinct. One can certainly know that Fa and Fb but still fail to know that $aR_F b$. If we accept the causal criterion (and for the sake of argument in what follows I will), then we may well be suspicious that there is some fact that consists in $aR_F b$ over and above the facts Fa and Fb. This thought leads to

¹² See Armstrong (*A Theory of Universals: Universals and Scientific Realism* vol 2 (Cambridge, 1978), p. 85) for this formulation of the internal/external distinction. It seems to run counter to the idealists' use of 'internal relations'. When they said that all relations are internal, one thing they seem to have meant was that the relations that a thing stands in are all essential to it. Had it failed to stand in those relations, it wouldn't have been the very same thing that it presently is. Armstrong's notion of internality is such that a thing might have an internal relation which was necessitated by monadic properties of the relata which were purely accidental.

¹³ One's intuitions about the causal criterion depend on what we allow to count as a property. To take Aristotle's example from *Metaph.* 6.3, both the robbers and the man may have the property of being at the well at 2 o'clock. This necessitates a certain internal relation: resembling each other in respect of being at the well at 2 o'clock, or perhaps the relation of being in the same place at the same time. But there seem to be causal consequences of their both being at the well at 2 which are not consequences of each party being at the well individually at 2 — to wit, the man dies by violence and the robbers have more money. I think that it is important to the case that these are impure relations which involve essential reference to particulars. It is hard to see how the possession of a pure properties and the pure internal relation which they entail could fail to be causally indiscernable from one another. To take an example from David Armstrong, if a machine sorts things by colour and both *a* and *b* are red, their resemblance makes no difference to what will happen to them in the sorting, only their individual colour.

suspicious about the ontological credentials of the relation R_F .¹⁴ The facts about what terms stand in R_F supervenes on the distribution of F-ness in much the same way that, say, the average height of a group of people supervenes on facts about how tall the members of the group are. One might rather incautiously put this point by saying, 'There isn't really the property of having an average height of 200cm possessed by groups; rather there are really just properties like having a height of 195cm and so on had by individuals who are members of a group.' We might say this to someone who mistakenly thought that the average height of the people in the seminar might vary independently of the heights of individuals. Similarly, an incautious way of asking whether there are relations at all is to ask, 'Are all relations internal?'

There is a cheap and easy way to get an affirmative answer to this question. One can use impure relational properties to show that all relations are internal. A impure relational property is easily constructed by putting the second subject of the relation from which it derives into the predicate place.¹⁵ Thus, if a bears R to b , then a has the property bearing- R -to- b . But such properties seem to be somehow gratuitous. Relational properties, unlike relations, seem to be further analysable into parts. What are those parts? They include a relation and another particular. Moreover, one can object to impure properties and relations generally. Regarding them as genuine properties which must be reckoned with by the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles makes that principle trivially true. We ought to think that impure properties and relations are metaphysically insubstantial to the extent that we thought that arguing about the identity of indiscernibles was a substantive metaphysical issue.

There is much that could be said about the reality of internal relations and I am not entirely comfortable with dismissing them as Armstrong does. Be that as it may, we are now in a position to see how the dialectic between the friends of relations and reductionists can unfold. One can try to use impure relational properties to argue that all relations are internal and thus, on one criterion at least, reducible to monadic properties. The alleged reduction might well be a cheat since the relational properties which are used to reduce the relation themselves presuppose relations. But, depending on how the issue is formulated, it is not an easy cheat to

¹⁴ Armstrong's sparse ontology of properties and relations has no room for such slackers as R_F . He endorses what he calls *The Reductive Principle for internal relations*: 'If two or more particulars are internally related, then the relation is nothing more than the possession by the particulars of the properties which necessitate them.' (p. 86)

¹⁵ Lloyd Humberstone ('Intrinsic/Extrinsic', forthcoming in *Synthese*, July 1996) considers a number of ways in which one can generate relational properties from relations. This tactic, which he calls 'place fixing' produces Khamara's category of impure relational properties.

Porphory and Plotinus on the Reality of Relations

detect. For this reason a grasp of the distinction between relational properties (particularly impure ones) and relations is essential if one is adequately to address the question of whether there are relations or not. In *Ennead* 6, Plotinus is grappling with this very issue, but seems to lack the distinction between relational properties and relations.

III. Plotinus and the reality of relations

In 6.1.6 Plotinus acknowledges that only some relations pose questions about whether they exist or not. Some of the relatives have an *ἔργον* or a single activity which leaves us in no doubt about their existence.¹⁶ Thus, knowledge is active in relation to its object and brings about an activity — knowing. Similarly, the measure does a single work in relation to the measured thing: it measures it. ‘But what product (*ἀπογεννώμενον*) would the like have in relation to the like?’ asks Plotinus. He worries that in such cases there is nothing over and above the qualification of each thing by the quality. This, then, is just the point about the reality of internal relations. However, it is immediately turned into an issue about the mind-dependence of relations.

But what is the relation (*σχέσις*) other than our judgement when we compare (*παραβαλλόντων*) things which are what they are by themselves (*τὰ ἐφ’ ἑαυτῶν ὄντα ἃ ἐστι*) and say ‘this thing and this thing have the same size and the same quality’, and ‘this man has produced this man, and this man controls this man’? (6.1.6, 21-5)

¹⁶ Another interesting question is whether Plotinus has any specific philosophical school in mind in this passage. It seems pretty clear that some philosophers argued against the reality of relatives. The Epicurean Polystratus insists, presumably against some unnamed opponents, on the reality of τὰ πρὸς τι (*On Irrational Contempt* xxv–xxvii). Sextus claims that the outline account of some of the dogmatists commit them to the unreality of relatives because they say that πρὸς τι σέτι τὸ πρὸς ἑτέρῳ νοούμενον rather than ὑπάρχον *M.* viii, 453–4. He then rehearses a series of skeptical arguments for the unreality of relatives from 455–62. Von Arnim included both *M.* viii, 453 (= II.404) and *M.* ix, 352 (= II.80) in *SVF*. Jonathon Barnes has recently argued that the position on the mind-dependence of relatives articulated here is not, in fact, Stoic (‘Bits and Pieces’ in Mario Mignucci and Jonathon Barnes (eds), *Matter and Metaphysics: Fourth Symposium Hellenisticum* (Naples, 1988), 251–9). I think that Barnes may be a bit hasty. Elsewhere I argue that the Stoics have a motive for saying that things do not have parts καθ’ αὐτό and that a plausible case can be made that they regard parts in the same way in which they regard limits: somethings which are neither corporeal nor incorporeal (cf. *SVF* II.487 and 488; Diogenes Laertius viii. 135). Both parts and limits are, of course, relatives.

Similarly,

What then would there be over and above these things which are related to each other except our thinking their juxtaposition? Exceeding is a matter of one thing of one definite size and another of another definite size; and this one and that one are two different things; the comparison (*παροβολλή*) comes from us and is not in them. (6.1.6, 29-33)

We can isolate two sorts of confusion in these passages. One concerns mind-dependence and the other concerns relational properties. I will discuss them in turn.

If it were possible to show that all relations are internal, there would be at least two ways of describing this outcome. One could be an eliminativist about them and say that, because 'relation' implies the existence of something over and above the having of monadic properties, the fact that all relations are internal shows that *there are no relations*. Alternatively, one might say that, if all relations are internal, then every relation *just is* the pair of monadic predicates which necessitates it. This, I take it, is one kind of reduction. In neither case is there any issue about mind-dependence. The only way in which our cognitive attitudes toward relations are involved is that, in the first case, we might say that we thought that there were relations (but we were wrong) and in the second that by thinking of the relation we really think of the relevant pair of monadic properties.

It sounds as if in 6.1.6 Plotinus is considering the reductionist view. What would be the case if the relation were nothing but our judgement?

What would sitting and standing be besides the thing which is sitting or standing? And state, when it is said of the thing which has it, would rather signify having [the last Aristotelian category?], and when it is said of the thing had, it would signify quality. (25-9)

The thought here seems to be that *πρός τι* would be reduced to different categories. Contrary to what we initially thought, relatives are qualities, etc. But, when Plotinus is reflecting on the contents of 6.1.6 at the end of 6.1.7 it sounds as if he is considering the eliminativist interpretation.¹⁷ He notes that some relations can cease to obtain simply if the relata change their position.

¹⁷ That Plotinus moves back and forth between the eliminativist and reductionist interpretations would not be surprising if he was reacting to something like the position

Porphry and Plotinus on the Reality of Relations

From such cases in particular came our suspicion that in things of this kind the relation is nothing. (21-2)

To say that the relation is nothing is not to say that it is something *different* from what we first thought that it was. It is rather to say that there is no such thing as the relation.

Plotinus formulates an explicitly eliminativist view about relations in the context of a discussion of the Stoic conception of soul. According to Plotinus, the Stoics think that life and soul are nothing but the material breath, but they also grant that there are some portions of the breath which are lifeless. To explain this, they say that life and soul are the breath so disposed (*πὼς ἔχον*). He then asks:

But what is this so disposed which they are always talking about, and in which they are forced to take refuge when they are made to admit another working principle besides body? . . . either they will say that this 'so disposed' and relation (*σχέσις*) is one of the beings or it is not. If not, then soul is only breath and 'so disposed' just a word. And thus it will happen for them that they will not be saying that soul and God are anything but matter, and all these will be names, and there will only be matter. But if the relation is among the things that are and¹⁸ it is something else besides the substrate and the matter, in matter but immaterial itself—because it is not again composed of matter and form—then it would be a *λόγος* and not a body and so of a different nature. 4.7.4, 9-21

On Plotinus' view, eliminativism is the only option open to the Stoics and if they take it, their defence of soul collapses (in addition to the unintuitive result that *σχέσις* is just a word). They cannot reduce it to one of their material principles because a *σχέσις* is not simply the substrate and matter but must be *λόγος* and immaterial.

This passage sheds light on the discussion in 6.1.6 in two ways. First, it confirms what 6.1.7, 21-2 suggested: Plotinus is able to formulate an eliminativist

advanced by Sextus in *M.* 453–61. It is not clear whether Sextus takes the arguments that he gives here to support that thesis that *τὰ πρὸς τι ἀνόηκτὰ ἔστι* (462) or that they *ἐν ἐπινοίᾳ μόνον ἔστι* (453). Perhaps Sextus assumes that if relatives are *merely* in the mind, then they do not exist in the sense in which everyone thinks that they exist.

¹⁸We must, I think, take this *καί* as epexegetical. If the meaning of the first conjunct leaves room for the denial of the second conjunct, then Plotinus' argument has no force against the Stoics.

view. For the relation to be 'not among the things that are' is for it to be a word which does not latch onto anything. People who use the word do not manage to say either anything true or, alternatively, what they want to say. In either case, here at least, he is able to distinguish issues about elimination from mind-dependence. Further, we can now see at least one reason why he would want to defend the reality of relations. The Stoics might respond to Plotinus' argument by saying that $\pi\omega\varsigma$ $\xi\chi\omicron\nu$ is real but still material by claiming that the disposition is nothing over and above the qualities which necessitate it. These, of course, are material according to them.

It is also important to note that in 6.1.6, 24-5 Plotinus puts expresses position of his hypothetical objector by helping himself to impure relational properties to turn seemingly external relations into internal ones. The relation between size and equality is very different from that between mastership and control over a man. From the fact that a has length ℓ and b has $\ell-n$, it follows that a exceeds b in length and this is true for *any other* c which has length $\ell-n$. The size itself is not object directed. However, from the fact that a has control over a man and b is controlled by a man, it does not follow that a is the master of b . Control over a man is not control over b . Plotinus bridges the gap by using the demonstrative pronouns 'this' and 'that', but what is at issue in this purported reduction are really the possession of the impure relational properties having-control-over- b and being-controlled-by- a . A sharp distinction between relations and relational properties, especially impure ones, would help him see the difficulty here.

What of Plotinus' defence against the reductionist/eliminativist? The first part of 6.1.7 consists in a long and convoluted conditional, the consequent of which is that we ought not to be worried about arguments for the claim that relations do not exist. Each part of the conditional, however, is best interpreted as yet another reason for thinking that relations are real. If it were the case that there was nothing to a relation except our judgement, then it would be the case that our judgements were false and $\sigma\chi\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ would be an empty term. But the reductionist need not claim that the reducibility of relations to monadic properties implies that the judgement ' a is similar to b ' is false. It is rather the case that it simply means ' a is F and b is F '. Nor would 'relation' be a meaningless term. It simply indicates that properly co-ordinated monadic predicates hold for each of the relata.

Plotinus' remaining arguments are not much better. If it is true that a is before b and that 'before' is something other than the relata, then relations are real. The reductionist can grant that 'before' signifies something other than the relata: it signifies that the relata are such that appropriately co-ordinated monadic predicates obtain in each case. This he can do if we allow him relational predicates such as 'being-prior-in-time-to- b ' or 'happening at noon on Friday'. Plotinus also claims that relations are real if aRb is true even when we don't say or think it. The critic can allow this too: $aR_{\text{F}}b$ is true even when we don't judge this simply because $aR_{\text{F}}b$

Porphry and Plotinus on the Reality of Relations

is nothing more than Fa and Fb. The same can be said for Plotinus' claim that relations are real if our knowledge of them is directed upon a knowable.

Having given what he regards as good arguments against the reductionist, Plotinus asks what is common to all relations. It is not enough, he says, for something to be *πρός τι* if it is simply 'of another' as a soul is a soul of a body. We have a genuine case of *πρός τι* only when

the existence derives from nowhere other than from the relation (*ἐκ τῆς σχέσεως*) and the existence is not that of the subjects, but of what is said *πρός τι*. For instance, the double *πρός* the half gives existence to neither the two-cubit long nor in general to two, nor to the one-cubit long, nor generally to one, but when these are in a relation (*κατὰ τὴν σχέσις*), besides being two and one respectively, the one is called and is double and the other will be half in the same way. Both of them generate together out of themselves something else, the double and the half, which came into being in relation to one another, and the being is not something other than the reciprocity; it belongs to the double from exceeding the half and to the half from being exceeded. (6.1.7, 26-35).

The double and the half are clearly the things said *πρός τι* here, but what are these? It can't be the relational properties 'being half of the length of *a*' and 'being double the length of *b*' because these are not generated. It might be the *instances* of the relational properties or it might be the *relata*, not *qua* one-cubit and so on, but *qua* double and half. The fact that he distinguishes the existence of the *πρός τι* from that of the *ὑποκειμένον* does not mean that he is removing from consideration the *ὑποκειμένον* *qualified in a certain way*, though perhaps it makes it more likely that he has in mind the property instance. Worse, it seems that the distinction between the relation and the monadic predicates which necessitate the relation is in danger. On the one hand, we are told that the existence of the *πρός τι λέγεται* derives from the *σχέσις*, but he also says that the being of double and half belongs to the double from exceeding the half and the half by being exceeded. But the exceeding is simply a matter of the possession of the monadic properties 'having length *ℓ*' and 'having length *ℓ-n*' respectively. *But it is just this determination of the relation by the monadic properties of the relata which is the issue with the reductionist.* Plotinus is hampered in his response here because the example that he has chosen as his illustration is already an internal relation—the kind that is most susceptible to reduction.

Unfortunately, Plotinus' example of double and half is common to his other attempts to explicate relatives. In summing up at the end of 6.3.28 he writes:

And about the relative (πρός τι), that it is the relation (σχέσις) of one thing in relation to (πρός) another, and that there is a relative whenever the relation of a substance makes it; the substance is not a relative *qua* substance, but either insofar as (καθό) it is part—for example hand or head—or cause or principle or element.

This passage makes the identification of relatives with the subject *qua* double tempting. If καθό μέρος is doing the same sort of classificatory work here as ἡ οὐσία, then Plotinus' point is that the relative is not the thing considered as a substance, but rather the thing considered as a double.

This is not to say that Plotinus makes no progress at all in the matter of relatives. There is the threat that the criterion of simply being 'of another' will allow the relatives to engulf all the other categories except substance since each accident is an accident *of* a substance.¹⁹ Plotinus provides an interesting response to this threat. In 6.3.21 he argues that movement ought not be referred to πρός τι simply because it is of something, since by the same token quantity and quality will be under relation.

But if it is because these are something, even if they are of something insofar as they are, that the one is called quality and the other quantity, and in the same way, since motion is motion of something, it *is* something before it is *of* something, and this we should grasp on its own (ἐφ' αὐτοῦ). On the whole, one should set down as πρός τι not what first is, and *then* is of something else, but what the relation (σχέσις) generates without anything other thing besides the relation by which it is called. For example, the double, insofar as it is called double, takes its generation and existence in the comparison with the one-cubit and, without anything before this coming to mind, it is called and is double in being compared to something else.

It is a promising beginning. Neither motion nor quantity or quality in general is a relative because each has a nature of its own prior to being an accident of a thing. Again we are told that the πρός τι is generated from the σχέσις. But we have no

¹⁹Cf. Simplicius *in Cat.* 63,23-8 for a report of "some" who did this. It would be nice to know if this was also the ground for Xenocrates' insistence on the adequacy of Plato's categories of καθ' αὐτό and πρός τι (Simplic. *in Cat.* 63,21-3 = Xenocrates fr. 12) in contrast with Aristotle's categories.

Porphyry and Plotinus on the Reality of Relations

clue here whether the $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \tau\iota$ is the property instance or the thing so qualified. Moreover, $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\beta\epsilon\lambda\eta\theta\eta\sigma\alpha\iota$ is somewhat worrying, especially in such close proximity to $\nu\omicron\omicron\upsilon\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\nu$. While 'comparison' and 'in being compared' can be used in an impersonal sense, they can also carry the connotation of an act of comparing. Presumably what Plotinus does *not* want to say is that the $\sigma\chi\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ which generates the double and the half is our act of comparing the size of the two things. This, I take it, would make the relation mind-dependent. This seems to be confirmed by what he says in 6.1.7:

... one must respond that the relation itself produces the relatives, and they are not produced merely by being said to be in relation to another. When there is some existence, whether it is of a different or in relation to a different, it possesses a nature prior to being a relative. Actuality and movement and state, though being of another, do not lose priority to being relative and being thought in themselves; otherwise in this way everything will be a relative, for all things have some relation to something, as in the case of soul.

His point must surely be that we can be aware of the comparison (in the impersonal sense) which generated the relatives prior to awareness of it, without being aware of any $\kappa\alpha\theta' \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}$ φύσις before the comparison. But it is notable, I think, that the same vocabulary shows up in the passages from 6.1.6-7 quoted above. Perhaps it is for this reason that Plotinus equates the *reduction* of relations to the properties which necessitate them with the *mind-dependence* of relations.

To sum up, Plotinus is not able adequately to address the question of the existence of relations because he confuses the reduction of all relations to internal relations with the issue of the mind-dependence of relations. Further, he confuses reduction with elimination. Finally, he is not able to assess the prospects for such a reduction because he does not distinguish between pure and impure relational properties. Indeed, at times it is not even clear that he adequately distinguishes between relations and relational properties—pure or impure. Many of these difficulties are not of Plotinus' own making. He has handled the ambiguous vocabulary of $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \tau\iota$ from *Categories* 7 and become stuck to it.

IV. Porphyry the hero

Porphyry never addresses the reductionist gambit on its own. He does, however, come close to this line of argument in the course of clarifying Aristotle's second

account of relatives in chapter 7 of *Categories*.²⁰ There he encounters the objection that this account is circular. He gives the following defence: We say sometimes that white qua white is the colour that pierces the eyes, so that no one will think that the *body* which also happens to be called white pierces the eyes. We have not thereby included the term 'white' in the definition of white in any harmful way. Aristotle did *not* say that relatives are the same as being related to something, rather they are the things for which their being [qua relatives] is the same as their being somehow related to something.

So relatives consist in the relation (σχέσις) of subjects to one another, and do not exist in virtue of the subjects of this relation, the being of which is not the same as their being related to one another. But the relation that obtains between relatives is just their standing in some way in relation to one another, so that relatives are indeed those things for which their being is the same as their being in some way related to one another. (124,21-25, tr. Strange)

In this passage Porphyry not only clarifies Aristotle's claim, but he also defends a realist view of relations. They are emphatically not the same as the being of the subjects. Nor are they reducible to the properties of the relata:

For 'double'—let us suppose it is the ratio of four to two—does not belong to the relatives in virtue of the four or in virtue of the two, but insofar as the four stands to the two in the ratio (ἐν λόγῳ) double and the two to the four in the ratio (ἐν λόγῳ) of half. (124,19-21, tr. Strange)

The being of the relation is not reducible to the fact that one relata is four [measures] and the other two. The relation obtains in virtue of *the ratio* between them. In what follows he articulates the distinction between relations and relational properties which is crucial to the defence of such a realist approach.

The relation is like an intermediate term (μέσον) between the subjects of the relation, in virtue of which the relative terms come

²⁰At 8a31 Aristotle faces the problem that if the criterion for being a relative is simply to be of another, then parts of both primary and secondary substances will be relatives. He considers the, apparently narrower, criterion τὰ πρὸς τι οἷς τὸ εἶναι ταύτων ἐστὶ τῷ πρὸς πως ἔχειν.

Porphyry and Plotinus on the Reality of Relations

to exist: they acquire a property²¹ over and above those of their subjects precisely in that consideration of them reveals a certain connection between them, in virtue of which they are called by the names of the relative terms. (125,17-19)

Porphyry here makes it clear that he takes Aristotle's τὰ πρὸς τι to be *relational properties*. Moreover, he explicitly acknowledges the dependence of such properties upon their constituent relation. It is this, and not the properties, which is like a middle term.

The differences here between Porphyry and Plotinus are subtle. It is, of course, possible that what we have left of Porphyry's writing simply does not allow him the opportunity to put his foot in his mouth. But, allowing for this, we may say that:

1. Porphyry does not use the language of comparison (παραβολή) in the statement of his examples, preferring the decidedly impersonal ratio (λόγος). Perhaps for this reason he in no way suggests that relations are mind-dependent.
2. Porphyry, but not Plotinus, consistently maintains that relations are independent of the monadic properties of the relata. This is so even with a relation like double which seems to be internal. Thus, he is strongly realist about relations.
3. Porphyry, but not Plotinus, consistently uses Aristotle's misleading vocabulary of πρὸς τι to refer to the relational properties which the subjects of a relation acquire by virtue of standing in the relation.

V. And what difference it makes

Let us suppose that Porphyry is careful to distinguish relations from relational properties. He will then be well equipped to defend the reality of relations from arguments which seek to reduce relations to monadic properties had by the relata. What difference does the reality of relations make to Porphyry's own philosophical views?

²¹Strange, I think, understands πλεονάζουσα παρὰ τὰ ὑποκείμενα to imply that they appear to acquire a further property. He translates τὰ ὑποκείμενα κατὰ σχέσιν τὴν πρὸς ἄλληλα πλεονεκτοῦντα φαίνεται at 124,29-30 in the same way. In 125,17-19 the word ποιάν actually appears, but he takes it with τινὰ συνάφειαν. Its position in the sentence certainly suggests this.

It has been alleged that Porphyry “telescopes” the three distinct hypostases of Plotinus’ metaphysics, producing a more “monistic” system.²² The idea is that the tension in Plotinus between *nous* and soul as independent hypostases and as things which have their being in relation to the One is resolved in favor of dependence: because *nous* and soul exist in relation to the One, they are mere appearances and thus, in some sense, illusory. In particular, it has been claimed that the embodiment of the soul is an illusion of thought. One reason for this concerns Porphyry’s claim that the soul is not *in* the body but is rather related to it. In *Sententia* 28 he claims that soul is not present in a body like a beast in a cage or water in a skin. It could not be, for soul, like all incorporeals, is both everywhere and nowhere (*Sent.* 1, 2, 27, 31, 35). Instead, soul’s powers are made manifest in a certain place through a certain διαθέσις of the soul.²³ This is true of all incorporeals. When they “act” upon bodies, it is not they who actually do the acting. Porphyry adapts Plotinus’ notion of an inner and outer activity to explain how incorporeals act on corporeals. In V.4.2, Plotinus distinguished between the inner ἐνέργεια of fire — the essential heat that it has that makes it what it is — and the heat that it gives off. In this context, Plotinus is discussing how Νοῦς results from the One without the One undergoing any kind of change. Just as with fire, there is an inner activity of the One which is its substance and something different which is generated from it — a συνούσης ἐνεργείας. Similarly, Porphyry identifies a δύναμις that is proximate to bodies when an incorporeal like soul inclines toward them. This δύναμις is not itself a second soul: Porphyry wants no part of this idea which may be found in Numenius.²⁴ Nonetheless, Porphyry uses language which suggests that it is in some sense substantial (δύναμιν ὑπέστησε *Sent.* 4). Smith has argued that this δύναμις is to be equated with the Plotinian lower soul and is regarded by Porphyry as like immanent form.²⁵ This is tempting and would perhaps explain Porphyry’s apparent inconsistency on the question of whether embodiment detracts from the soul’s unity. In *Sententia* 37 he claims that it does not, while in 28 he says that it does. Perhaps the “unparticipated soul” is not diminished but the soul which is like immanent form is. However, this account of the ontological status of the δύναμις doesn’t quite do justice to some of the details of Porphyry’s account. He insists that a soul’s activity is

²² A.C. Lloyd in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, chapter 18, ed A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge, 1967).

²³ *Sent* 27,12–14, διαθέσει τοίνυν ποιᾶ ἐκεῖ εὑρίσκεται, ὅπου καὶ διάκειται, τόπω ὄν πανταχοῦ καὶ οὐδαμοῦ. διὸ ποιᾶ διαθέσει ἢ ὑπὲρ οὐρανὸν ἢ ἐν μέρει που τοῦ κόσμου κεκράτηται.

²⁴ Stobaeus I, 350, 25.

²⁵ Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition* (The Hague, 1974), 12.

Porphyry and Plotinus on the Reality of Relations

localised because of a kind of inclination and disposition toward a certain body. This is not so in the relation between Forms and immanent forms in other cases. The presence of whiteness in the paper on my desk is a result of the contemplation of World Soul or Nature on passive matter for Plotinus (and presumably also for Porphyry); cf. Plot. III.8.2. It is not the case that White Itself is localised here because the very Form inclines or has a disposition toward it. Thus, though the δόναμις which the body receives when the soul inclines toward it may be *ontologically* on a par with immanent form — that is, it may be every bit as real as immanent form, *pace* Lloyd — it is not *simply* immanent form. I shall argue that the δόναμις discussed in *Sententia* 4 and 28 is in fact best thought of as a relational property which a body acquires when it stands in a certain relation to incorporeal soul.

The *Sententia* contain hints of the relational doctrine of embodiment, but the fragments of Σύμμικτα ζητήματα are a bit more explicit.

When it is said that soul is in a body this does not mean that it is in the place where the body is. Rather, the soul is in a relation or present to the body, as we say God is in us. For we say that the soul is attached to the body by a relation or relational inclination and disposition, as we say that the lover is attached to the beloved, not physically or spatially, but by a relation. ... If then an intelligible can stand in a relation to a place or a thing which has a place, then we may by a misuse of language say that it is here on account of the fact that its activity (ἐνέργειαν) is here and we take the activity or relation for the place. But we ought to say 'it acts here' when we say 'it is here'. (261F, 42–63, Smith)

I take it that the ἐνέργεια which is in a place is the actuality of the δόναμις that is discussed in *Sententia* 4 and 28. It is something that a location or thing acquires when it stands in a relation to an intelligible like soul. It will be a relational property which a body acquires not because of what it is in itself, but because it stands in a certain relation to something else. This is just the distinction that Porphyry draws at in *Cat* 124,26–30 and 125,16–19.

What is this relation? It may well be that there are a variety of relations. Porphyry is not clear about whether the inclination which a soul has toward a particular body is a matter of that soul's own volition. Note that in *Sententia* 7–9 we seem to have two deaths or separations of soul and body: one which nature secures and one which philosophy aims at. These are independent of one another. Perhaps one relation of inclination is a matter of the soul deciding whether to live for what is

above or what is below, while the other is necessitated by the falling away from perfection exhibited in all emanation from the One. The former is certainly suggested by the analogy of lover and beloved in this passage.

In Porphyry's examples from *in Cat.*, both the things that stand in a relation acquire a relational property over and above the properties they have considered only in themselves. This presents a complication, for Porphyry seems to want to deny that the soul undergoes any kind of affection when it inclines toward a body.²⁶ But if inclination is a relation which obtains between the soul and a body in virtue of which the body acquires the relational property I have identified with the *δύναμις* Porphyry describes in *Sent.* 4 and 28, how is it that the soul acquires no relational property? Will it not be changed by inclining toward a body? One way that Porphyry could address this problem is to appeal to the idea that gaining and losing properties in the category of *πρός τι* is not a change in a thing's substance or its accidents. They are, as he says, external to their subjects.²⁷ But this does not make relatives unreal. Aristotle's view is that *τὰ πρός τι* are the least of all things substance (*Metaph.* 1088a24–b1), but being the least of all things is not yet to be nothing at all and there is no reason to think that Porphyry would find anything in this with which to disagree. In fact, because Porphyry is careful to distinguish between relational properties and relations it is even less likely that he thinks of the soul's embodiment as in some way illusory or unreal. For, even if the relational property that the soul acquires is 'least of all things a substance', Porphyry is capable of distinguishing this relational property from the relation which endows the soul with it. This relation or relations — perhaps a kind of concern together with a natural inclination — are quite real.

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15 July, 1997

²⁶ *Sent.* 21,18–21, ὡς οὖν τὸ τρέπεσθαι καὶ πάσχειν ἐν τῷ συνθέτῳ τῷ ἐξ ὕλης τε καὶ εἶδους, ὅπερ ἦν τὸ σῶμα-οὐ μὴν τῇ ὕλῃ τοῦτο προσήν-, οὕτω καὶ τὸ ζῆν καὶ ἀποθνήσκειν καὶ πάσχειν κατὰ τοῦτο ἐν τῷ συνθέτῳ ἐκ ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος θεωρεῖται. But see *Sent.* 18,6–8, τὰ μὲν γὰρ ὕλης κεχωρισμένα καὶ σωμάτων ἐνεργείαις ἦν τὰ αὐτά, τὰ δὲ ὕλη πλησιάζοντα καὶ σώμασιν αὐτὰ μὲν ἀπαθῆ, τὰ δὲ ἐφ' ὧν θεωρεῖται πάσχει. The things that incline to matter and body may be the *ἐνέργεια* or *δύναμις* which the soul's relation to body engenders in the body.

²⁷ *in Cat.* 125,25–28, Ὅτι ἐν τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις ἐστὶν οὐτε ὡς οὐσίας συμπληρωτικὸν οὐτε ὡς ἄλλο τι τῶν συμβεβηκότων, ἀ ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις γίνεται, οἷον πάθος ἢ ἐνέργεια, ἀλλὰ τι ἕξωθεν. διὸ καὶ μὴ πασχόντων τῶν ὑποκειμένων γίνεται καὶ ἀπογίνεται.