

Book Reviews

DOI: 10.2478/disp-2017-0030

BIBLID [0873-626X (2017) 44; pp. 123–130]

The Metaphysics of Relations, by Anna Marmodoro and David Yates. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 304 pages, ISBN: 9780198735878

The Metaphysics of Relations is an anthology of thirteen original papers plus an introduction, addressing the philosophical issue of relations from a contemporary and historical perspective. The result is a remarkably coherent whole, where the different papers shed light on each other even though very few of them explicitly address interconnections. As a consequence, the book works really well as an introduction to the philosophical issue on relations, while the individual papers represent cutting edge research on the particular issues that they focus on. The mix of contemporary and historical perspectives means you get a snapshot view of the contemporary issues, as well as insights into their historical development.

Scaltsas (ch. 2), Brower (ch. 3), and Penner (ch. 4), offer a more nuanced understanding of the views on relations in Plato, Aristotle, and the Medieval Philosophers. They refute the popular view that philosophers before the 20th Century “did not—perhaps even could not—properly appreciate the reality of irreducibility of relations” (Brower, p. 36). Partly by showing that those who denied that there were mind-independent relations didn’t do so because they didn’t have a grasp of the notion, and partly by showing that some early philosophers did admit the reality of irreducible relations. Plato allowed that there could be two individuals that together partook in Forms that neither of them did individually. Simmias and Hippias, although not courageous individually, can be so when acting together. Scaltsas, Brower, and Penner demonstrate that there is a greater continuity in the philosophical discussion about relations from ancient times until today, than is popularly appreciated.

Donnelly (ch. 5) takes us through the details of *Positionalism*. In order to answer some worries about how positionalism copes with symmetric relations, Donnelly proposes a revised version, which she

calls *Relative Positionalism*. The solution involves an appeal to a primitive notion of relative property instantiation. The editors Marmodoro and Yates think that this primitive notion is roughly Aristotelian, which again indicates the historical continuity of the debate.

Lowe (ch. 6) and Simons (ch. 7) both arrive at the conclusion that there are no irreducible relations. They agree that, predication of internal relations is a case of formal predication, where no genuine property is attributed in addition to the intrinsic properties the objects already possess. Real relations, if any there be, must therefore be external relations. However, the prime candidates for being external relations, i.e. causal and spatiotemporal relations, turn out to be internal relations on closer inspection. The difference between Lowe and Simons is in what they take to be the fundamental constituents of reality, and hence the proper subjects of predication. Lowe thinks substances are basic, while Simons thinks processes are basic. On their view, since there are no plausible candidates of external relations, we should suspect that the very notion of irreducible relational properties is incoherent.

Heil (ch. 8), and Yates (ch. 9) continue the discussion of whether causal relations are internal or external, but now from the perspective of powers-based accounts. Heil concludes that they are internal relations, so ends up with a position very close to that of Lowe and Simons. Yates, on the other hand argues that there is a tension in the way powers are characterised as intrinsic to their bearers and yet essentially related to other powers, which in the end does not allow of reduction of causal relations to a form of internal relation.

Berenstein (ch. 10), Ladyman (ch. 11), and Briceño and Mumford (ch. 12) discuss structuralism, i.e. in what sense we could think of the nature of properties as grounded in network of relations to other properties and not as intrinsic to the individual. Berenstein and Ladyman attempt to develop structuralism. Berenstein suggests that a structuralist account of properties cannot rely only on causal relations, but must also consider a property's mathematical and nomological higher-order features. Ladyman attempts to provide a naturalist basis for structuralism by illustrating how physics makes use of irreducible relational features to explain various natural phenomena. Briceño and Mumford are critical of the project. They accuse *ontic structural realism* for requiring the reality of relations without rela-

and therefore ends up describing reality as an abstract Platonic entity.

Finally we have Esfeld (ch. 13) and Dorato (ch. 14) discussing which lessons to draw from Quantum Physics. I won't venture to say too much about what those lessons are, because I really struggle with Quantum Physics. It is worth mentioning though that Esfeld is one of the few to explicitly relate to other chapters of the book—well, to those who address the contemporary issues anyway—and attempts to sketch a middle way between the position that there are no fundamental relations (Lowe, Simons, and Heil), and the view that relations are fundamental to everything else (Berenstein and Ladyman).

This is an excellent book, which has greatly enriched my understanding of the metaphysics of relations. Alas, my role as reviewer is not just to praise but also to be critical. My main complaint is that the book provides a background against which Ingvar Johansson's neo-Aristotelian 'hypo-realism' about relations is absent (cf. 'Hypo-realism with respect to relations', in *The Metaphysics of Relations*, ed. by F. Clementz and J-M. Monnoyer, Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2011; and 'Scattered exemplification and many-place copulas', *Axiomathes* 23: 235–46, 2013). For my own part, hypo-realism—like Sartre's 'absent Pierre'—appears absent because I was looking for it. But, I suspect that for readers who aren't familiar with Johansson's work, then reading *The Metaphysics of Relations* will still leave them with one question (or, it *should*); why would relations not be mind-independently real if all there is are the relata and their intrinsic properties? The editors formulate this core theme in the following way in the Preface:

It is uncontroversial that there are true relational predications—'Abelard loves Eloise' [...] 'Derby is between Sheffield and Coventry' [...] 'smoking causes cancer', and so forth. More controversial is whether any true relational predications have irreducibly relational truthmakers. Do any of the statements above involve their subjects jointly instantiating polyadic properties, or can we explain their truths solely in terms of monadic, non-relational properties of the relata? (Marmodoro and Yates, vii)

The assumption running through most of the volume is that *if* the expression 'Simmias is larger than Socrates' is true simply in virtue of the existence of Simmias and Socrates respectively, each having a certain size, then we don't have two subjects jointly instantiating

a polyadic property ‘larger than’; we only have Simmias having one size, and Socrates having another. I struggle to see why this should be the conclusion. I am tempted to think that the criteria for something to count as real and irreducible are set too high, so that in effect the only way for there to be real polyadic properties is if they can obtain in two or more relata independently of any intrinsic properties the objects may have.

The fact that relations depend for their existence and reality upon non-relational entities and their monadic properties—which is what Briceño and Mumford call the standard view of relations (p. 198)—doesn’t automatically make them non-existent, reducible, or merely subjective, does it? Surely, if there is only Simmias and his size, he is not larger than anything. For Simmias to be larger than something, something else has to be instantiated, and that something else has to have a size. Hence ‘larger than’ only exists in so far as there exist two things with each a different size, and yet we need nothing more than the things and their sizes.

I take Johansson to argue that with the existence of two things and their sizes, we get the relation “for free” and yet we have something more than two *unrelated* things and their sizes. Johansson takes himself to be doing little more than pointing out that even though relatives “belong to the least substantial of all the categories and are posterior to quality and quantity” (Aristotle, *Metaphysica* book 14: 1088a) then they are still substantial. They exist in the very same way everything else does, but they are not as fundamental as everything else.

Now, I suspect that something like the concern I gave voice to is what Briceño and Mumford have in mind when they complain of Ontic Structural Realism that it requires the possibility of relations without relata (p. 198), but as far as I can see they do not tie this concern to the general idea of what it would take for an irreducibly real relation to obtain.

It is also possible that I have misunderstood the ultimate concern here. Maybe the question is whether there are irreducible *fundamental* relations, while I have been thinking of whether relations are mind-independently real. If that is the case, then I can only complain that this isn’t stressed consistently throughout the book. Whatever is the case, I wholeheartedly recommend this volume as essential reading for anyone who wants to feel on top of the metaphysics of relations.

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Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital, by William Clare Roberts.
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017, 304 pages, ISBN: 978-0691172903.

William Clare Roberts' recent book, *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital*, provides a novel and interesting interpretation of the first volume of Marx's masterpiece. Roberts argues, controversially, that Volume 1 of *Capital* presents a stand-alone piece of political theory. His two over-arching theses are that (1) *Capital* Volume 1 aspired to provide "the definitive analysis of what's wrong with capitalism" and (2) that this is based "on rewriting Dante's *Inferno* as a descent into the modern 'social Hell' of the capitalist mode of production" (p. 1). He does this in part by emphasising the many different strands of socialist theory that Marx was responding to, which include an important and oft-overlooked strain of radical republican thought. It is clear, well-researched, original, and well worth reading for anyone with an interest not only in Marx and Marxist political theory, but in freedom, domination, republicanism, and critiques of capitalist economic institutions as well.

Roberts begins by arguing that Volume 1 of Marx's *Capital* be read and understood as essentially a work of political theory on its own, independently of the other two volumes and Marx's work thereon, and thereafter arguing that Marx modelled the structure of *Capital* Volume 1 on that of Dante's *Inferno*. Roberts' thesis has elicited a well-known debate with David Harvey, who argues that the three volumes of Marx's *Capital* can only be understood as a whole, partly because Marx's full political economy of capitalism only comes to fruition with Volumes 2 and 3. However, I think it's worth making the point that even if, like Harvey, we want to argue *contra* Roberts that Marx is developing a theory of political economy in *Capital*, and that that theory can only properly be understood by reading all three