

RELATIONS

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Many kinds of relations exist. If the nature of a relation depends in any way upon what it relates, then there are as many kinds of relations as there are kinds of things which are related. But, since they are all alike in being relations, do they not all have something in common? Our first question about relations is, then, what is a relation, or what is it that all relations have in common?

Minimally, a relation involves two things (traditionally called "terms") which are related. The two must be different at least in whatever sense they are two. Thus, minimally, relation involves difference. But also the two must be alike in some sense, for, in being related, they at least have their relation in common. Even the relation of negation, wherein each of two or more things is not the other, involves the two negatively related things in sharing it in common. "As a relation, negation both unites and separates its terms."¹ Hence, minimally, relation involves the things related in both some sameness and some difference. The amount and kinds of sameness and difference may vary from relation to relation; but if either all sameness or all difference ceases, relation ceases. "A 'relation' in which the terms are either totally different or totally similar is no relation at all."²

These two essential characteristics of all relations impress thinkers differently. Some regard the ways in which the things related are different from, or other than, each other as more important, and some regard the ways in which they are alike, similar, the same, or identical as more important. These differing emphasis tend to beget opposing views about the nature of relation. The first view, holding that relations separate or divide things from each other in such a way that they exclude each other, has come to be called the "theory of external relations." The second view, holding that relations unite things in such a way that their likeness is somehow a part of each thing, is called the "theory of internal relations." Now holders of these two views may differ with respect to how much difference or how much sameness is involved; but awareness of the oppositeness of the two views tends to lead their holders to make extreme statements. Externalists often insist that things are completely unlike things is also external to the things. Internalists, seeking to eliminate all externality, sometimes claim that all is one, and that all relations are illusory appearances. But, let us hope that "The present drift is decidedly toward the admission of both internal and external relations."³

The problem of "relations" is actually a problem of "things and

relations," and of the relation between things and relations, since no existing relations exist apart from things. We find at least four distinguishable kinds of problems relative to relations, namely, *A*) the problem of the nature of things, *B*) the problem of the nature of the relation between things and relations, *C*) the problem of the nature of relations themselves, and *D*) the problem of the nature of existence. Uncertain as to whether comprehension and clarity are served better by treating each of these four problems separately or together while reviewing theories, we arbitrarily adopt the latter method. The reader may prefer to follow only one of these treatments (i.e., either *A*, or *B*, or *C*, or *D*) throughout the following series. Thirteen different kinds of theories are presented.

I. Extreme externalism. A. Things which are related are completely external to each other, or are completely different from each other. Therefore, things which are related are not in any way internally related to each other, or have nothing in common. "The claim is sometimes made that terms are independent of relations, and not only of specific relations but, it seems, or any at all."⁴

For example, a person and a table are completely external to each other. A person is not a table, and a table is not a person. They have nothing in common.

B. A thing and its relations are completely external to each other. Things and relations are completely different kinds of things; things are not relations and relations are not things; they are entirely unlike; they have nothing in common. No relation between things is a part of either of the things which it relates. To be a relation between things is to be completely external to the things related. Hence, it is false that a thing and its relations are completely alike, or completely internal to, each other.

For example, when a table is next to a person, the relation between the table and the person is not a part of the table and is not a part of the person. The table and the person are what they are regardless of the relations they happen to be in. Being next to a person does not change the nature of the table in any way. Hence, such relation of next-to-ness is completely external to the table.

C. Every relation is a completely external relation. Relations occur only between things which are not each other. In order to be related, things must be different from each other. If they were merely identical, they would not be different, and so could not be related. Therefore, no relation has any element of internality about it.

For example, a person and a table are different from each other, and the relation between them consists in such difference. The difference of the person from the table is not a part of the person and is not a part of the table; it is external to both; and the relation between them, consisting

in this difference, is external to both. It consists entirely in what, or how, such differences are external to them.

D. Existence is such that all things are externally related only. Each thing is different from every other thing, and thus is external to every other thing. Hence, no internally related things exist.

Or example, this table is different not only from all other tables but also from all other things. The same may be said of every thing considered.

II. Extreme internalism. A. Things which are related are completely internal to each other, or are identical with each other. All are parts of the universe, which is a single whole, and are inseparable from it. Relations unite things; things which are divided are unrelated. When two things are related, they share the same relation; and, being the same, they are identical and not different. Since each thing is related to everything else in the universe, it is likewise united to all of them or shares sameness with all of them. And since the universe unites them all, they all share in this unity, which is one, and hence completely internal. Therefore, it is false that things which are related are completely different from each other.

For example, a person and a table, although seemingly different, are both integral parts of the universe which is manifesting itself through them. It is only because they appear to manifest the universe in different ways that they appear different; but the underlying basic unity of the universe consists entirely in internality.

B. A thing and its relations are completely internal to each other. Relations between things are parts of the things related, and nothing more. To be a relation is to be completely internal to what it relates. Therefore, it is false that a thing and its relations are completely external to each other.

For example, a person who is next to a table *is* a person who is next to a table. Being next to a table is a part of what he is at that time. To say that a person *is* next to a table and to say that being next to a table *is not* true of that person is to speak self-contradictorily.

C. Every relation is a completely internal relation. Two or more things are related when they are the same in some respect; and such sameness is internality, and is internal to both of them. Things may be different from each other, but the relations between things unite them. What does not unite is not a relation. Therefore, it is false that every relation is completely external relation.

For example, a person and a table may be different as things, but they are the same to the extent that they share common relations. If a person and a table are next to each other, they share a common relation; next-to-ness is a part of the actual description (and existing condition) of each,

so each is what it is in this respect because of the relation it shares in common with the other. They are internally related by this relation, and this relation is a completely internal relation both in the sense that it is self-contained and in the sense that it is internal to both of the things which it relates.⁵

D. Existence is such that all things are internally related only. A completely external relation to what exists would have to be a relation to non-existence, which is impossible. All existing relations are internal to existence, internal to the universe, and internal to relatedness. Therefore, no externally related things exist.

For example, existence includes both persons and tables, which cannot get outside existence without ceasing to be. Even every sense in which each thing is not other things is a sense about it; for the complete description of the full (inner) nature of a thing consists both in saying what it is and saying what it is not. That a person is not a table is as true about the nature of a person as that he has two arms.

III. *Modified externalism.* A. Things which are related are more external to each other than internal to each other. Although things which are related are both external to each other and internal to each other, they are more external than internal to each other. Therefore, they are not more internal than external to each other.

B. A thing and its relations are more external than internal to each other. Therefore, a thing and its relations are not more internal than external to each other.

C. Every relation is more an external than an internal relation. That is, relations between things separate them more than they unite them, or keep them apart more than bring them together. Therefore, no relation is more internal than external.

D. Existence is such that more external relations exist than internal relations (or more external relatedness than internal relatedness). Hence, it is false that existence is such that more internal relations exist than external relations (or more internal relatedness than external relatedness).⁶

IV. *Modified internalism.* A. Things which are related are more internal than external to each other. That is, although things which are related are both internally and externally related, they are more internal than external to each other. Therefore, they are not more external than internal to each other.

B. A thing and its relations are more internal to than external to each other. Therefore, a thing and its relations are not more external than internal to each other.

C. Every relation is more an internal relation than an external relation. That is, relations between things unite them more than separate

them, or bring them together more than keep them apart. Therefore, no relation is more external than internal.

D. Existence is such that more internal relations exist than external relations (or more internal relatedness exists than external relatedness). Hence, it is false that existence is such that more external relations exist than internal relations (or more external relatedness exists than internal relatedness).

V. *Extreme middlism.* A. Things which are related are exactly as much internal to each other as external to each other. Therefore, they are not inexactly internal to and external to each other; that is, it is false that things which are related are either more internal to than external to each other or more external to than internal to each other.

B. A thing and its relations are exactly as much internal to each other as external to each other. Therefore, it is false that they are either more internal to than external to each other or more external to than internal to each other.

C. Every relation is exactly as much an internal as an external relation. Therefore, no relation is more internal than external or more external than internal.

D. Existence is such that there is exactly as much internal relatedness as external relatedness (or there are exactly as many internal relations as external relations). Hence, it is false that there is more internal relatedness than external relatedness or more external relatedness than internal relatedness.

IV. *Modified middlism.* A. Things which are related always are either more external to than internal to each other or more internal to than external to each other. Hence, it is false that they are ever exactly equally internal to or external to each other.

B. A thing and its relations always are either more external to than internal to each other or more internal to than external to each other. Hence, it is false that they are ever exactly equally internal to and external to each other.

C. Every relation is either a more internal than external relation or a more external than internal relation. Hence, it is false that any relation is ever exactly equally an internal and an external relation.

D. Existence is such that either more internal relatedness exists or more external relatedness exists, or that either more internal relations exist than external relations or more external relations exist than internal relations. Hence, it is false that existence is such that there exists exactly as much internal relatedness as external relatedness.

VII. *Extreme dualism.* A. Things which are related are of two completely different kinds, namely, those which are externally related to each

other (or which are related by external relations) and those which are internally related to each other (or are related by internal relations). Therefore, it is false that all things are alike in their relations to each other because all relations are exactly alike.

B. A thing and its relations are related in either of two kinds of ways, which are completely unlike each other, namely, those in which they are related by external relations and those in which they are related by internal relations, or those in which a thing and its relations are completely external to each other and those in which a thing and its relations are completely internal to each other. Hence, it is false that a thing and its relations are related by relations which are all exactly alike.

VIII. *Extreme aspectism*. A. Things which are related are all alike in being related because all relations are exactly alike in being relations. Hence, it is false that things are of two completely different kinds, namely, those which are externally related and those which are internally related.

B. A thing and its relations are related by relations which are all alike, because every relation is a relation regardless of whether it appears as if external or internal. Hence, it is false that a thing and its relations are related by two completely different kinds of relations, external and internal.

C. Every relation is a relation regardless of whether it appears as if external or as if internal. Relations are actually neither external nor internal, but only seemingly so. Hence, it is false that relations are of two completely different kinds, external and internal.

D. Existence is such that all relations are exactly alike in being relations. Hence, it is false that existence is such that two completely different kinds of relations, external and internal, exist.

IX. *Modified dualism*. A. Things which are related are of two different kinds, namely, those which are externally related to each other and those which are internally related to each other, which relations, and consequently also kinds of things, are more different than alike. Hence, it is false that things which are related are of two different kinds, namely, those which are externally related and those which are internally related, which are more alike than different.

B. A thing and its relations are related in either of two ways, by external relations or by internal relations, which ways are more different than alike. Hence, it is false that a thing and its relations are related in either of two ways, i.e., by external relations or by internal relations, which are more alike than different.

C. Every relation is one of either of two kinds, namely, external relations and internal relations, which kinds of relations are more different

than alike. Hence, it is false that every relation is one of either of two kinds, external and internal, which are more alike than different.

D. Existence is such that all existing relations are of either of two kinds, namely, external relations and internal relations, which are more different than alike. Therefore, it is false that existence is such that all existing relations are of either of two kinds, external and internal, which are more alike than different.

X. *Modified aspectism*. A. Things which are related are related by relations having two aspects, an external aspect and an internal aspect, which are more alike in being aspects of the relation(s) than different in being different aspects. Hence, it is false that things which are related are of two different kinds, namely, those which are externally related and those which are internally related, which relations, and consequently also things, are more different than alike.

B. A thing and its relations are related by relations which have two aspects, external and internal, which are more alike in being relations than different in being different aspects of relations. Hence, it is false that a thing and its relations are related in two different ways, externally and internally, which are more different than alike.

C. Every relation has two aspects, an external aspect (whereby the things related are different) and an internal aspect (whereby the things related are the same), which are more alike in being aspects of the same relation than different in being different aspects of that relation. Hence, it is false that every relation is one of either of two kinds, internal and external, which kinds are more different than alike.

D. Existence is such that all existing relations have two aspects, an external aspect and an internal aspect, which are more alike in being aspects of the same relation than different in being different aspects of that relation. Hence, it is false that existence is such that all existing relations are of two kinds, external and internal, which are more different than alike.

XI. *Extreme equalism*. A. Things which are related are related by relations which function exactly equally as being kinds of relations (i.e., the external kind and the internal kind, as described under *dualism*, *extreme* and *modified*) and as being aspects of relations (i.e., the external aspect and the internal aspect, as described under *aspectism*, *extreme* and *modified*). Hence, it is false that things which are related are related by relations which do not function exactly equally as being kinds . . . and aspects. . . .

B. A thing and its relations are related by relations which function exactly equally as being kinds of relations (i.e., the external kind and the internal kind, as described under *dualism*, *extreme* and *modified*) and as

being aspects of relations (i.e., the external aspect and the internal aspect, as described under *aspectism, extreme* and *modified*). Hence it is false that a thing and its relations are related by relations which function always unequally in being kinds . . . and aspects. . . .

C. Every relation functions exactly equally as being a kind of relation (i.e., the external kind and the internal kind, as described under *dualism, extreme* and *modified*) and as having aspects (i.e., the external aspect and the internal aspect, as described under *aspectism, extreme* and *modified*). Hence, it is false that every relation functions always unequally as being a kind of relation . . . and as having aspects. . . .

D. Existence is such that all existing relations function exactly equally as being kinds of relations (i.e., the external kind and the internal kind, as described under *dualism, extreme* and *modified*) and as having, or being, aspects of relations (i.e., the external aspect and the internal aspect, as described under *aspectism, extreme* and *modified*). Hence, it is false that existence is such that all existing relations function always unequally as being a kind of relation . . . and as having aspects. . . .

XI. Modified equalism. A. Things which are related are related by relations which always function unequally as kinds of relations (i.e., the external kind and the internal kind, as described under *dualism, extreme* and *modified*) and as relations having aspects (i.e., the external aspects and internal aspects, as described under *aspectism, extreme* and *modified*). Hence, it is false that things which are related are related by relations which function exactly equally. . . .

B. A thing and its relations are related by relations which always function unequally as kinds of relations (i.e., the external kind and the internal kind, as described under *dualism, extreme* and *modified*) and as relations having aspects (i.e., the external aspects and the internal aspects, as described under *aspectism, extreme* and *modified*). Hence, it is false that a thing and its relations are related by relations which function exactly equally. . . .

C. Every relation functions unequally as being a kind of relation (i.e., the external kind and the internal kind, as described under *dualism, extreme* and *modified*) and as having aspects (i.e., the external aspect and the internal aspect, as described under *aspectism, extreme* and *modified*). Hence. . . .

D. Existence is such that all existing relations function unequally as being kinds of relations (i.e., the external kind and the internal kind, as described under *dualism, extreme* and *modified*) and as having aspects (i.e., external aspects and internal aspects, as described under *aspectism, extreme* and *modified*). Hence. . . .

XIII. Organicism. A. Things which are related in such a way that 1)

there is a sense in which they are completely external to each other, 2) there is a sense in which they are completely internal to each other, 3) there is a sense in which they are more external to than internal to each other, 4) there is a sense in which they are more internal to than external to each other, 5) there is a sense in which their being externally related to each other and their being internally related to each other are exactly equal, 6) there is a sense in which their being externally related to each other and internally related to each other are unequal, 7) there is a sense in which their external and internal relations are completely different in kind, 8) there is a sense in which their external and internal relatedness are completely alike in being aspects, 9) there is a sense in which their external and internal relatedness are more different in being kinds than alike in being aspects, 10) there is a sense in which their external and internal relatedness are more alike in being aspects than different in being kinds, 11) there is a sense in which their external and internal relations functioning as kinds and their external and internal relatedness functioning as aspects are exactly equal, and 12) there is a sense in which their external and internal relations functioning as kinds and their external and internal relatedness functioning as aspects are unequal.

And it is false that. . . .

B. . . .

C. . . .

D. . . .

NOTES

¹Otis Lee, *Existence and Inquiry* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 119.

²Hubert G. Alexander, "Concerning a Postulate of Fitness," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, XIV, No. 3 (March 1954), 309.

³Roy Wood Sellars, *Evolutionary Naturalism* (Chicago: Open Court, 1922), p. 198.

⁴Lee, *Existence and Inquiry*

⁵"Relations are modes of unification of elements, not further elements requiring unification." DeWitt H. Parker, *Experience and Substance*, p. 215. "A relation is not a thing stretching between two other things. . . . A relation is not between its terms but in its terms. Or, better, its terms are in it." D. W. Gotshalk, *Structure and Reality*, p. 77.

⁶"There are degrees of interality, and complete externality is of the nature of a limit." Sellars, *op. cit.*, p. 215.