

Pierre Gassendi

EXERCITATIONES PARADOXICÆ ADVERSUS ARISTOTELEOS

Liber II, exercitatio 3, art. 12¹

Relations are like extrinsic denominations.

Concerning relations this one thing is permitted to be observed and marveled at, by which reason real entities are enumerated. And lest anyone at the beginning immediately bring up divine relations,¹ I confess not to speak of these; for they² both generally refuse that these are categorical and they are most certainly of another character than the rest,³ supposing it is true that the divine persons are constituted through these. Indeed, as when in created things, paternity, for example, follows already on the production of the son in the father before [the son] has been constituted, divine paternity, nevertheless, is understood to constitute the first person [of the Trinity] before the Son is understood even to be able to be brought forth. Therefore, I speak of the other kind [of relation], which to me truly seems nothing more than that which is commonly called extrinsic denomination. We stick to one [example], since the account is the same for the rest. Similitude is a relation, which is said to come to a white wall as often as another white wall is constructed anywhere in the world. Truly they want a relation of this sort to be a real being, because although earlier it was not present, it is present as a result of the new wall, and because it would pass away whenever another wall will be blackened or destroyed. Nevertheless, I ask, in good faith look at a certain white wall when you understand another white [wall] is being raised or

Relationem esse tantum Denominationem extrinsecam.

Circa relationem hoc unum observare et mirari licet, qua ratione entibus realibus adnumeretur. Ac ne quis statim initio Relationes divinas objiciat, fateor me de illis non loqui; nam et nolunt communiter illas esse prædicamentales, et revera alterius longe rationis sunt, quam cætera, siquidem est verum per illas constitui personas divinas, adeo, ut cum in rebus creatis, paternitas v.c. ad productionem filii in patre jam ante constituto consequatur, paternitas tamen divina intelligatur primam personam constituere antequam et ut filius produci posse intelligatur. Loquor igitur de quacumque alia, quæ mihi sane nihil amplius videtur, quam id quod vulgo denominationem extrinsecam nominant. Hæremus in unica, cum par sit de cæteris ratio. Similitudo est Relatio, quæ parieti albo advenire dicitur quoties alicubi gentium constructur alius paries albus. Ejusmodi vero relationem volunt esse reale ens, quod cum antea non adesset, parieti de novo adsit, et quod ubi alius paries denigrabitur, aut dissolvetur, pereat. Attamen, quæso, bona fide intuere quendam parietem album, cum alibi alios albos extrui, diruive intelligis; ac tum si ejusmodi Relationis entitatem accedere videas, aut abscedere,

¹Latin text is from Bernard Rochot's edition, *Dissertationes en forme de paradoxes contre les Aristotéliens* (Paris: Vrin, 1959).

destroyed; and then if you see the entity of this sort of relation approaching or departing, Phyllis shall certainly desire it alone. Immortal God! Is this not like a portent? There is a white wall in France, another is whitewashed in India, who on earth at the same moment reports here what was done over there, so that this wall may immediately dress itself in a new entity as a garment of joy? What if ten thousand white walls were constructed at the same time in diverse parts of the world, as could happen—might not this poor wall, as that Vestal virgin, be crushed under so many towering heaps thrown on top? What but that it must perpetually be buried, because the innumerable storerooms in the temple of Vesta are white walls according to each one of which it has relations one by one dressing it. What do I say? Does it not even have relations of dissimilitude to every black wall, red wall, and wall of the rest of the colours? I add more: nothing is in the world, whether substance or accident, spiritual or corporeal, living or inanimate, etc., to which this same wall does not have some relation of similitude, diversity, and others. Can it be that you think therefore to support this Herculean labour which so many beings support? Except perhaps you conceive of relations as feeble shadows, of which none is really a burden, or, rather, this wall likewise has itself and that ‘elm shaded, enormous, which is the resting place, so they say, // of vain dreams, and they cling underneath every leaf’.⁴ Cast off, therefore, both dream and sleep, in order that you both see and understand nothing other in the wall than one whiteness. Of course, there certainly are many, and rightly, who, when they want the whiteness to be the foundation of similitude, hold that the relation does not have real entity distinct from the whiteness, but is that whiteness, not however taken absolutely but just as whiteness respecting another [whiteness]. Nevertheless, I would inquire of them whether whiteness is a divided entity or one? Or when a single absolute entity is present, what is more meagre and weakened, than when a relative is present? Do they want there

Phyllida sane solus habeto. Deum immortalē! nonne hoc est simile portento! est paries albus in Gallia, dealbatur alius apud Indos, ecquis hūc eodem momento renunciat quid illūc agatur, ut hūc paries statim novam entitatem, ut lætitiæ indumentum induat? Quid si in variis Mundi partibus dena millia parietum alborum, ut fieri potest, simul construantur, an non miser hic paries, ut Vestalis illa, obruetur tot superjectis montibus? Quid quod debet perpetuo esse obrutus, cum innumeri pene sint parietes albi, ad quos singulos singulares relationes convestitas habeat. Quid dico? nonne et relationes habet dissimilitudinis ad omnes parietes nigros, rubeos, cæterorumque colorum? Amplius addo, nihil est in Mundo, seu substantia, seu accidens, seu spirituale, seu corporeum, seu vivens, seu inanime, etc., ad quod idem hic paries relationem aliquam similitudinis, diversitatis, aliasque non habeat. Annon putas igitur Herculeum laborem illum sustinere, qui tot entia sustineat? nisi forte ut tenues umbras relationes concipis, quarum nullum penitus sit pondus, aut potius hic paries perinde se habeat, ac illa ‘*Ulmas opaca, ingens, quam sedem somnia vulgo // Vana tenere ferunt, follisque sub omnibus hærent*’. Excute ergo et somnium et somnum, ut nihil aliud in pariete et videas, et intelligas, quam unam albedinem. Sane vero sunt et bene multi, qui cum velint albedinem esse similitudinis fundamentum, tuentur relationem non habere entitatem realem distinctam ab albedine, sed esse ipsammet albedinem, non absolute tamen sumptam, sed prout albedinem aliam respiciat. Quaesierim tamen ex ipsis an albedo sit duplex entitas, an una? aut cum adest sola absoluta entitas, qui pauperior et minutior sit, quam cum adest relativa? Volunt esse in pariete novum quid reale, cum pari-

to be in the wall a new thing that is real, when it looks toward (*respicit*) the new wall, connotes it as a *terminus*? I pass over [the question of] by what eyes it looks toward (*respiciat*) the wall, or with which chalk it connotes. I ask only by what new entity of yours these are fastened. For the workman who whitewashes the wall in India cannot at the same time produce it [the relation] in the wall already existing in France. And this wall thus can be solitary as another agent receives something, does not have beyond the spider: the relation again is infinitely more subtle than the web of the spider. They answer that they are indeed not produced through real change, which is extrinsic to the agent, but they sprout, as they say, through a natural result, an intrinsic origin. And, strange to say, how something so disdainful is defended! For examine what here they call ‘sprouting’, how the relation having been pressed down keeps leaping up, which is this internal bubbling spring from which it voluntarily flows forth? How does the hidden relation hear from under the wall and understand the wall being whitewashed in India, in order to at once and speedily emerge, jump up, and other similar things, like a mushroom erupting from the earth? How austere will you be, if you withhold laughter? What do you make when you have heard some throwing out that a relation is a minimal entity, so that the image of the remaining beings need not produce it in the same manner, when it is not something but to something; and those having been asked whether this ‘to something’ is really something, pressing forward in the same, so that with the most secure ramparts you will see that it is not something but to something: is it appropriate for laughter or do you rather think for pity? I said again that all relations of this kind that I call real, seem nothing more than extrinsic denomination, which itself is only a conceptual relation, as when a wall is denominated to the right of an animal because it was turned to the right. For certainly the wall is not changed more on account of the rotation of the right-hand parts of an animal than on account of the erection of another wall, and to

eternum novum respicit, quem ut terminum connotet? Praetereo quibus oculis parietem respiciat, aut qua cretâ connotet; quaero solum quomodo nova ista entitas ipsi appingatur? neque enim faber, qui parietem dealbat in India, producere simul illam potest in pariete in Gallia jam existente. Et paries hic ita potest esse solitarius ut aliud agens aliquid accipiat, praeter araneam non habet: Relatio porro telis aranearum est infinite subtilior. Respondent non produci quidem per realem mutationem, quae ab agente extrinseco sit, sed pullulare, ut loquuntur, per naturalem resultantiam, intrinsecam-ve dimanationem. Et mirum dictu quomodo tam superciliose istud defendatur! Quaere enim quid hic vocent istud pullulare, quomodo pressa relatio subsultet, quae sit interna illa scaturigo ex qua sponte fluat? quis sit modus dimanationis? quomodo latens relatio sub pariete audiat et intelligat dealbari parietem in India, ut proinde statim, ac citius, quam e terra fungus erumpat, emergat, prosiliat, aliaque similia, quam eris austerus, si risum contineas? Quid facias vero cum aliquos jactantes audieris Relationem esse minimae entitatis, ut entium caeterorum instar produci proinde non debeat, cum esset non aliquid, sed ad aliquid; et rogatos num istud ad aliquid sit revera aliquid, insistentes in eo, ut vallo tutissimo videris quod non sit aliquid, sed ad aliquid: an risu dignum, an potius commiseratione putabis? Dixi porro ejusmodi omnem relationem, quam vocam realem, vihil nideri amplius, quam extrinsecam denominationem, quae ipsis est solum relatio rationis, ut cum paries denominatur dexter ab animali, quod ipsi dexteram obverterit. Sane enim non amplius commutatur paries ob conversionem dextrae partis animalis, quam ob extrusionem alterius parietis, ipsique prorsus

it it is exactly the same whether an animal turns left or some wall is blackened. In truth, what does not remain in the thing, which requires a little attention? perinde est, seu animal convertat laevam, seu alius paries denigretur. Verum quid in re immorer, quae tantillula eget attentione?

- 1 Divine relations were a key part of scholastic discussions about relations, thanks to Augustine's explication of the doctrine of the Trinity by identifying the three persons with three relations. Naturally, this doctrine put some pressure on medieval philosophers to allow that at least some relations are real.
- 2 Presumably referring here to the Aristotelians.
- 3 Pointing out that the divine relations are a special case was a standard move among scholastics with reductionist sympathies.
- 4 Virgil, *Aeneid* book 6, ll. 283–84.