



Tomasz Duma

## The Specificity of *Secundum Dici* Relations in St. Thomas Aquinas’ Metaphysics\*

### Introduction

One of the contemporary authors dealing with the relations problem, Peter Simons, notes that, in spite of widely conducted logical research on relations, we know about them much less than it seems to us, and that metaphysical understanding of relations does not have much in common with what has been said on this topic on the ground of logic.<sup>1</sup> From logic’s perspective, not only can one not point out what is essential and

---

Tomasz Duma, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland  
tomasz.duma@kul.pl • ORCID: 0000-0002-6313-0588

\* The article was written on the basis of my book about the relations of being, which was published in Polish: see T. Duma, *Metafizyka relacji. U podstaw rozumienia relacji bytowych* [The metaphysics of relations. At the basis of understanding the relations of being] (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2017). Since the *secundum dici* relations are extremely important for the interpretation of the whole of St. Thomas’ metaphysics and there are some difficulties with understanding those relations, as one can see in the literature on the subject, I decided that it might be useful to share my interpretation with English-speaking readers.

<sup>1</sup> P. Simons, “Relations and Truthmaking,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary* vol. 84, (2010), 212.



irreducible in the structure of things, but also it is not possible to decide whether, for example, action is a relation, whether veridical intentional relations are reducible to other relations, whether and how semantic, mathematical or other relations exist, etc. Usually, how we conceive of relations, what they are, what their mode of existence is, what their structures are, and what forms they take is conditioned by the ontological and epistemological assumptions made by researchers. At the time of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the field of philosophical analysis of this topic was mainly demarcated by Simplicius' *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories*. This was the ground on which philosophers formulated the basic understanding of relation as a being category that stood furthest from substance and that was differentiated according to its subjection as *relatio realis* and *relatio rationis*. Such a conception generated a number of difficulties with the explanation of the "over-categorical" realm of being concerning its fundamental structure, its qualities, its causes, its multiplicity as well as its unity, etc. For this reason, St. Thomas Aquinas reinterpreted the problem of relations by making, among other things, the basic distinction between *relationes secundum esse* and *relationes secundum dici*; he connected the former ones with the traditional Aristotelian theory of categorial relations while with the latter ones he associated a completely new approach, in which relations were perceived as causes (as well as reasons) founding the being on various levels of its ontic structures—both categorial and transcendental. However, although such an interpretation, especially introducing *relationes secundum dici*, was strictly connected with the conception of being, St. Thomas did not develop it precisely enough, because his considerations were basically oriented towards theological questions. This is why at present there is no agreement among commentators regarding how Saint Thomas conceived of relations transcending the accidental plane.<sup>2</sup> In my article, I

---

<sup>2</sup> See B. A. Kemple, *Ens Primum Cognitum in Thomas Aquinas and the Tradition: The Philosophy of Being as First Known* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2017), 306–320; R. Kalka,

will try to show that the key to understanding Thomas' conception was his notion of *secundum dici* relations. I will begin with recalling of some of St. Thomas' statements concerning those relations, next I will present some important interpretations of this kind of relations by some of the main commentators and continuators of Aquinas' philosophy, and finally I will try to characterize the specificity of the relations under discussion.

### **St. Thomas Aquinas' Statements**

St. Thomas made many statements about the necessity of distinguishing between the two kinds of relations or "relative things" and he points to, more or less, the same reasons, for which the distinction is indispensable. His texts on this topic are so concurrent that there would be no need to recall a number of them if it were not for the context in which Aquinas considers the problem. The context shows, among other things, both the way those relations should be explained and the very "scope" of the issue.

In *Summa Theologica* (I, q. 13, a. 7, ad 1), Thomas means the names which are vested to God because of the relationship to creatures. Some of them do not directly refer to the Divine Being, but they only mean the relationship: for example, the name "Master." Others, in turn, directly express the essence of God, for example the name "Savior" or "Creator," because, first of all, they mean God's action, which belongs to His essence. Thomas presents it in the following statement:

Some relative names are imposed to signify the relative habitudes themselves, as *master* and *servant*, *father*, and *son*, and the like, and these rel-

---

"Structure métaphysique de la relation chez Thomas d'Aquin," *Rocznik Tomistyczny* [Thomistic Annals] 6, (2017), 26–46.

atives are called predicamental. But others are imposed to signify the things from which ensue certain habitudes, as the mover and the thing moved, the head and the thing that has a head, and the like: and these relatives are called transcendental.<sup>3</sup>

In his commentary on the first Book of *Peter Lombard's Sentences* (d. 30, q. 2, a. 1, c., ad. 4), Thomas also touches upon the problem of predicates about God and, specifically, he ponders if the terms predicated about God refer to His essence. And the conclusion is that we cannot directly predicate anything about God, but only in the case when we refer to His essential relationship to creation. This relationship may be considered both from the side of the cause and from the side of the effect, which demands the appropriate grasp of the connection constituting this relationship, both from the side of God and from the side of the creatures. In this context Thomas speaks about the basic types of relations as follows:

[S]ometimes names are given to designate the relation itself; such as the name 'master' and this kind of relatives *secundum esse*, and other words predicated about God, are relatives indeed, because they primarily sig-

---

<sup>3</sup> S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa theologiae*, in *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, vol. 4 (Rome: S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888); English edition: St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (<https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST.I.Q13.A7.C.4>), p. I, q. 13, a. 7, ad 1: "[...] quod relativa quaedam sunt imposita ad significandum ipsas habitudines relativas, ut dominus, servus, pater et filius, et huiusmodi, et haec dicuntur relativa secundum esse. Quaedam vero sunt imposita ad significandas res quas consequuntur quaedam habitudines, sicut movens et motum, caput et capitatum, et alia huiusmodi, quae dicuntur relativa secundum dici." I quote the statements of Saint Thomas in English after published translations. I do not modify these translations to show the tendencies prevailing among Thomists in understanding relations. If no translator is indicated, I use my own translation.

nify conceptually the relation which is logically in God (*secundum rationem*), but as a result they create the understanding of the essence according to the fact that such a relation is founded in something essentially. Sometimes, however, a name is imposed to signify something that is founded in a relation, as the name 'knowledge,' the quality which results from a certain relation to what is known. That is why those things are not *secundum esse* relatives, but only *secundum dici*.<sup>4</sup>

In *Disputed Questions on the Power of God*, it is the description of the relationship of God towards creation that makes the context of Thomas' statements about relations. The main question is: what is characteristic about this relationship on the side of God and on the side of creation? Is this relationship real on both sides and what would be the consequences of that? In this analysis there is a very important statement by Thomas that the distinction between the relations "according to speech" (*secundum dici*) and the relations "according to existence" (*secundum esse*) does not attest to the real existence of a relation, but only to its specificity, as there are relations "according to existence," which do not signify real relations (e.g. right-hand side, left-hand side) and there are relations "according to speech," which assume real relations (e.g. "knowledge," "a sense"). Here is Aquinas' pronouncement on that:

---

<sup>4</sup>S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Scriptum super I Sententiarum*, ed. by P. Mandonnet & M. F. Moos (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929), d. 30, q. 2, a. 1, c.: "[...] aliquando enim nomen imponitur ad significandum ipsam habitudinem; sicut hoc nomen dominus, et hujusmodi, quae sunt relativa secundum esse, et alia dicta de deo, sunt quidem relativa, quia etiam significant ex primo suo intellectu habitudinem quae secundum rationem est in deo; sed ex consequenti faciunt intellectum essentiae, secundum quod talis habitudo fundatur in aliquo essentiali. Aliquando autem nomen imponitur ad significandum illud supra quod fundatur habitudo, sicut hoc nomen scientia, qualitatem, quam consequitur respectus quidam ad scibile. Unde ista talia non sunt relativa secundum esse; sed solum secundum dici."

This distinction between relatives according to existence and according to speech does not make a relation real. For there are some relatives according to existence that are not real, like the right and the left of a pillar, and some relatives according to speech that bring in real relations, like those concerning knowledge and sensation. For because relatives are said to be ‘according to existence’ when the terms are employed to signify the relations themselves, whereas relatives are said to be ‘according to speech’ when the terms are employed to signify principally qualities or something of the sort from which relations follow. Nor as regards the question at issue does it matter whether they be real relations or relations of reason alone.<sup>5</sup>

In another section of the above-mentioned first book of *Commentary to Sentences* (d. 26, q. 2, a. 1, c., ad. 4), Thomas considers a theological problem connected with the possibility of a real distinction among the Divine Persons in the Trinity. The basic question concerns the relation of the origin which will turn out to be the only “tool” to carry out the differentiation among Divine Hypostases (persons). Here Thomas uses Aristotle’s statements about the difference,

---

<sup>5</sup> “Distinctio ista relativorum secundum esse et secundum dici, nihil facit ad hoc quod sit relatio realis. Quaedam enim sunt relativa secundum esse quae non sunt realia, sicut dextrum et sinistrum in columna; et quaedam sunt relativa secundum dici, quae tamen important relationes reales, sicut patet de scientia et sensu. Dicuntur enim relativa secundum esse, quando nomina sunt imposita ad significandas ipsas relationes; relativa vero secundum dici, quando nomina sunt imposita ad significandas qualitates vel aliquid huiusmodi principaliter, ad quae tamen consequuntur relationes. Nec quantum ad hoc differt, utrum sint relationes reales vel rationis tantum” [S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae De potentia*, in *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Quaestiones disputatae*, vol. 2, cura et studio P. Bazzi [et al.], 10. ed. (Taurini: Marietti, 1965); English edition: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Power of God*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (<https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~QDePot.Q7.A10.Rep8>): q. VII, a. 10, ad. 11].

which is essentially based either on quantity or on form. Having excluded any quantity in God, since He is immaterial, Thomas was left with only the possibility of accepting the form as the basis of the distinction. However, formal difference usually entails shortages or defects which cannot characterize the Divine Persons. The only case when a formal difference can be free from shortages or defects is the relation, because the differences within its form are not based on the essence of what there is in the relation, but only on the essence of the relationship itself. Thomas formulates it in the following way:

Whence, one should distinguish among relations. For there are some that have something in the reality on which their existence is founded, such as equality is founded on quantity; and relations of this sort are something really in a real thing. But there are some that have no foundation in the reality of which they are said, like right and left in things wherein such positions are not determinate according to nature, the way they are in the parts of an animal. For there, in the animal, such relations really exist, since they are founded in the diverse powers of diverse parts, whereas in other things they are there only according to the account of the orientation of one to another; this is why they are called relations of account (or of reason).<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>“Unde distinguendum est inter relationes. Quaedam enim sunt quae habent aliquid in re, supra quod esse eorum fundatur, sicut aequalitas fundatur supra quantitatem; et hujusmodi relationes aliquid realiter in re sunt. Quaedam vero sunt quae non habent fundamentum in re de qua dicuntur, sicut dextrum et sinistrum in illis in quibus non sunt determinatae istae positiones secundum naturam, sicut in partibus animalis. Ibi enim, scilicet in animali, istae relationes realiter sunt, quia fundantur in diversis virtutibus determinatarum partium; sed in aliis non sunt nisi secundum rationem habitudinis unius ad alterum; et ideo dicuntur relationes rationis” [In I Sent., d. 26, q. 2, a. 1, resp.; English edition: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Sentences I*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (<https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Sent.I.D26.Q2.A1.C.2>)].

In *De veritate*, in Question 21 *On Good* (q. 21, 6, c.), Thomas considers the problem of defining good, which he perceives as a “relative.” He obviously means a type of relation, which would allow to express what good as such is. The relation which is expressed by the name “good” means the reference to the cause of perfection, thanks to which something can achieve perfection. Therefore, good is both the consequence of a relation and the relation itself. Let Thomas speak on that:

It must be said that the notion of goodness consists in the three mentioned above according to what Augustine says. In evidence of this it must be known that any name can imply a relation in two ways. In one way such that the name is imposed to signify the relation itself, such as the name ‘father,’ or ‘son,’ or fatherhood itself. But some names are said to imply a relation since they signify a thing belong to some genus, which the relation accompanies, even though the name is not imposed to signify the relation itself; as for example, the name ‘knowledge’ is imposed to signify some quality upon which a certain relation follows, but not to signify the relation itself.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>“Dicendum, quod ratio boni in tribus praedictis consistit, secundum quod Augustinus dicit. Ad huius autem evidentiam sciendum est, quod aliquod nomen potest respectum importare dupliciter. Uno modo sic quod nomen imponatur ad significandum ipsum respectum, sicut hoc nomen pater, vel filius, aut paternitas ipsa. Quaedam vero nomina dicuntur importare respectum, quia significant rem alicuius generis, quam comitatur respectus, quamvis nomen non sit impositum ad ipsum respectum significandum; sicut hoc nomen scientia est impositum ad significandum qualitatem quamdam, quam sequitur quidam respectus, non autem ad significandum respectum ipsum” [S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate*, in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, vol. 22/3 (Roma: Editori di San Tommaso, 1976); English edition: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions On Truth*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (<https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~QDeVer.Q21.A6.C.2>), q. 21, a. 6, resp.].



The pronouncements quoted above show that it will not be easy to extract Thomas' understanding of *secundum dici* relations if we want to grasp this problem in a broader context and not only in some general scheme of particular types of names. The matter is certainly not simple, as Thomas connects his reflections on those relations with the explanation of such questions as: the properties of God, the relationship between God and creation, the distinction among the Divine Persons, or defining the good itself. Taking into account a certain schematism of his considerations, seen even in the quoted pronouncements, one should not be surprised that, until now, there has not been a unanimous interpretation of Thomas' conception of relations. The more so that he was not a theoretician in this very field, but he just undertook the problem for the sake of solving other matters, especially theological and the anthropological ones. That is why his approach and the broad context of his considerations still causes considerable difficulties to many commentators. Let us have a look at the most important elements of some better-known interpretations.

### **Some Interpretations of Thomas' Conception of *Secundum Dici* Relations**

At the close of the Medieval Ages, W. Ockham questioned the merit of distinguishing *secundum dici* relations which, in his opinion, do not in any way differ from mental relations *cum fundamentum in re*. However, later investigations on that issue referred to scholastics and came back to Thomas' conception, though here also we can notice some influence of nominalism.<sup>8</sup> The existence of relations other than

---

<sup>8</sup> See J. Deely, *Purely Objective Reality* (Berlin-New York: Mouton Gruyter, 2009), 54 ff.

categorial relations was acknowledged by Thomas de Vio (Cajetanus) who regarded *secundum dici* relations as identical with the transcendental relations. While in the categorial relations the terminus of a relation is a constitutive element of its being, in the transcendental relations the terminus is only a part of the definition of them, since it does not stand in any distinction from what makes the absolute subject of the relation.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the majority of later Thomists conceived of the *secundum dici* relations as the mental ones. The main purpose of identifying this type of relations was seen in the difficulties with defining the subject conceived as the absolute, since all the content of the subject appears as something absolute.<sup>10</sup> That is why, while not having the appropriate cognitive tools, researchers conceived of the elements constitutive of the being in the same way as predicamental relations and expressed the outcome of their analysis in due concepts, not taking into account the fact that there might be any real relation.

Another well-known commentator of Aquinas, John of St. Thomas, thought that it is not a formal structure that decides about the reality of a relation and it is not due to the structure that we distinguish the relation from other categories of being; the decisive factor here is the mode of being of the subject of the relation, or the elements of the subject, on which the relation is founded.<sup>11</sup> So the ontic status of a relation

---

<sup>9</sup> “Respectus aliorum generum (scilicet generum, quae non sunt relationes praedicamentales), qui propter vocabulorum penuriam respectus dicitur, respicit essentialiter aliud, sed ut subiectum, vel materiam, vel formam et huiusmodi; sic enim materia essentialiter respicit formam et contra” [Thomas de Vio Cajetanus, *In De ente et essentia d. Thomae Aquinatis commentaria* (Taurini: Marietti, 1934), c. VII, q. XV].

<sup>10</sup> A. Horváth, *Metaphysik der Relationen* (Graz: Moser, 1914), 101.

<sup>11</sup> “Unde prout explicat ‘ad’ formaliter erga terminum, non explicat realitatem, quam habet, sed istius realitatis oppositionem. Illa tamen oppositio per realem et veram formam exercetur, quae est relatio, etiam ut ad terminum, quia per hoc quod sit ad terminum, non amittit, nec exiit realitatem, nec exercet aliquid, quod realitate exerceri non

depends entirely on the foundation, and this is why a relation as such does not signify any perfection which would be added to the subject, but in its being the relation is just some relative perfection which owes all its important qualities to its foundation. The form of reality of a relation depends on how much and if the relation differs from its foundation—so this is either (1) the reality identical with the foundation or (2) different from it.<sup>12</sup> In the first case, we have to do with the *secundum dici* relations (John of St. Thomas often calls them “transcendental,” though he does not reduce the *secundum dici* ones to the “transcendental” ones).<sup>13</sup> In the second case, *secundum esse* relations are at stake—they are categorial relations founded in a different kind of being; they include mental relations. The basic difference consists in the fact that *secundum dici* relations do not have an “in” aspect, but just an “ad” aspect, since they do not actually exist in the subject, but they in fact constitute the subject.<sup>14</sup> So from the ontic side, those relations do not have much in common with the categorial relations. For John of St. Thomas, *secundum dici* relations are conceptual expressions of the absolute form of the compound being, which does not mean that they have an exclusively logical character, since purely logical relations belong to the categorial order, while *secundum dici* relations transcend that order. In this way, John of St. Thomas reduced all

---

possit” [Joannes a Santo Thoma, *Cursus theologicus*, vol. 4 (Paris: Desclée et Socci, 1946), I, q. 28, disp. 13, a. 2, n. 1].

<sup>12</sup> Joannes a Santo Thoma, *Cursus theologicus*, I, q. 28, disp. 13, a. 3, n. 8–9.

<sup>13</sup> M. Głowala, “Co wyrażają predykaty relacyjne? Jan od św. Tomasza oraz Bartłomiej Mastri i Bonawentura Belluto o czterech typach realności relacji,” [What do relational predicates indicate? John of St. Thomas, Bartholomew Mastri and Bonaventure Belluto on the four types of reality of relations] *Studia Philosophica Wratislaviensa* 7, (2012), 57–70.

<sup>14</sup> See S. Breton, *L'«esse in» et l'«esse ad» dans la métaphysique de la relation* (Rome: Scuola Tipografia Missionaria Domenicana, 1951).

reality to two directly perceived categories: the *secundum dici* relations and the *secundum esse* relations.

Caietanus' and John of St. Thomas's writings have become the main source of the subsequent interpretations of the question of relations in St. Thomas Aquinas' system. Those authors would also be referred to by the representatives of 20th century Thomism. Most often those representatives treated *secundum esse* relations just as normal categorial relations, whose beingness is characterized by pure mutual subordination, which constitutes a kind of "to be between."<sup>15</sup> The case of *secundum dici* relations looks totally different: their interpretations are no longer so unanimous. According to C. Cavarnos, they are just "so called relations," because in the strict meaning of the word they are not real, but they are called "relations" by some analogy to real relations (i.e., to *secundum esse* relations). Here there is a kind of being at stake which includes a relation within itself. The example of that is "substance" which includes form and matter subordinated to each other, or the category of "acting" embracing, among other things, the "act and potency" relation. When a *secundum dici* relation is not limited to some definite categories, it is called "transcendental."<sup>16</sup> The *secundum dici* relations may be viewed independently of the subject only in one way: each terminus of such a relation is exclusively defined by the necessary subordination to the other correlated terminus—just as it is in the relation between act and potency: potency is always in the relation to some definite act, remaining at the same time the potency. What is more, Cavarnos claims that such relations may

---

<sup>15</sup> M. A. Krapiec, *Metaphysics. An Outline of the History of Being*, trans. by Th. Sandok (New York etc.: Peter Lang, 1991), 308.

<sup>16</sup> C. Cavarnos, *The Classical Theory of Relations. A Study in the Metaphysics of Plato, Aristotle and Thomism* (Belmont: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1975), 85.

exist even without actual termini, which takes place when termini are only potential.<sup>17</sup>

A similar interpretation of *secundum dici* relations can be found in the writings of one of the 20th century relation theoreticians, A. Horváth, who strongly emphasizes that what is relative cannot be in any way reduced to just one definition, because not in all cases relativity realizes itself in the same manner. He claims that the *secundum dici* relations do not have the form proper to the relation—that is, the relation which would not be reducible to the being as such; there is only some similarity, a common name, a way of marking them. They do not have their own *ratio*, because they are constituted by the elements vested to the being in the absolute way; as a result they are not real relations, but just apparent ones, and it is only the reality of the being they co-constitute that can allow us to consider them real.<sup>18</sup> That is why those relations do not make a separate ontic category, but they just signify the way of predicating of and conceiving of the beingness of the absolute character, which in spite of having within some subordination of something to something preserves its absolute content and the absolute manner of existence.

The *secundum dici* relations are perceived somewhat differently by A. Krempel, for whom they have an exclusively logical status, although indirectly they have a basis in reality. This indirectness results from the fact that no relative beings are counterparts to this type of relations, because if they were, they would have to be simultaneously both absolute and relative, which is an impossible contradiction.<sup>19</sup> So if in our cognition we use relative names expressing *secun-*

---

<sup>17</sup> C. Cavarnos, *The Classical Theory of Relations*, 86–87.

<sup>18</sup> Horváth, *Metaphysik der Relationen*, 45–46. Cf. G. Martin, *Wilhelm von Ockham: Untersuchungen zur Ontologie der Ordnungen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1949), 119.

<sup>19</sup> G. Rosińska, “Spór o relację transcendentálną (Próba oceny stanowiska A. Krempela),” [The dispute over the transcendental relation (An attempt to assess

*dum dici* relations, then the basis of such formulations are not real beings, but the act of the intellect determining the content of those concepts, which are next referred to reality. “The human nature,” “substance,” or “genre”<sup>20</sup> are some of the examples of such concepts. This means that the content of the *secundum dici* relation is set by the intellect, so consequently this is not a real relation. That applies even to such relations which take place between act and potency, matter and form, or the essence and the existence; to be sure, Krempel admits that they are transcendental but merely of logical status.<sup>21</sup>

Georg W. Volke, in turn, while analyzing the specificity of *secundum dici* relatives, draws our attention to the fact that no real difference can take place within their structure—that is within the subject, the foundation, the terminus and within the relation itself. Citing the examples of these kind of relations such as the subordination of accidents to substance, potency to act, or matter to form, he notes that those components are not in any way different from the relation of subordination, as one cannot conceive of accidents without their relation to substance, as well as potency without act, or matter without form. Whether we notice the inner quality of one co-principle depends on how we conceive of the other respective co-principle. And there is no “in-between” in such co-principles. That is why the *secundum dici* relation signifies the relation itself as well as what is related by this relation, so it is impossible to make a distinction, either in speaking or in thinking, between the relation itself and what it subordinates. The confirmation of this fact is that St. Thomas does not generally speak about the *secundum dici* relation, but merely about the *secundum dici* relatives.

---

A. Krempel’s position)] *Roczniki Filozoficzne* [Philosophical Annals] 9, no. 1 (1961), 121–123.

<sup>20</sup> A. Krempel, *La Doctrine de la relation chez Saint Thomas* (Paris: Vrin, 1952), 312–313.

<sup>21</sup> Krempel, *La Doctrine de la relation chez Saint Thomas*, 631.

Because the terminus is not something that is really different from—i.e., “external” to the relation itself—then, ultimately, for the existence of a real *secundum dici* relation, the existence of terminus is not even necessary. According to Volke, it is a mistake to identify those relations with the transcendental ones, because that would be connected with an unjustified reduction of real *secundum esse* relations to the categorial plane. This, however, does not alter the fact that a *secundum dici* relation, taking place in each being of a given ontic category, does not transcend the categorial order, even if it occurs simultaneously with categorial references.<sup>22</sup>

Another interpretation of the distinction between the *secundum dici* and the *secundum esse* relations is proposed by M. A. Krapiec—he not so much connects them with the problem of realness, since they both can be real, but rather with their different ontic status. The *secundum esse* relation is a categorial relation, which is characterized by the fact that it does not possess so called *ratio in*, but only the *ratio ad*, which means that it signifies such an ontic category whose whole beingness is expressed by subordination “to.” Therefore this is an unnecessary relation, whose whole beingness is located “between” termini.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, the *secundum dici* relation is a necessary relation which enters “the inner structure of being or the elements it is composed of, independently of what ontic category a given element is included in.”<sup>24</sup> Such a relation “realizes itself both in the substantial order and in the accidental order, as there are real subordinations of both substance and accidents [...]. So it is not some special category of real beingness, as it is not a “pure” (i.e. only a) relationship, meaning a new type of being, but it is a relation ingrown into various beings and the elements

---

<sup>22</sup> G. W. Volke, *Sein als Beziehung zum Absoluten* (Würzburg: Tritsch 1964), 8–14.

<sup>23</sup> Krapiec, *Metaphysics. An Outline of the History of Being*, 308.

<sup>24</sup> M. A. Krapiec, *Teoria analogii bytu* [The theory of analogy of being] (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 1993), 203.

of beings, which create through their complexity a whole of being. Therefore any separation of this type of relations from being annihilates simultaneously both the beingness of things and the beingness of relationships.”<sup>25</sup> It clearly follows from the above statement that, according to Krapiec, St. Thomas distinguished among real relations both the relation as such—that is the relation which is one of the ontic categories-accidents—and the relation, which constitutes being or its particular components, which is in reality identical with the internal structure of being, making it a relative being. If we have to do with a situation in which such a relation is characteristic of every being, it should be named “transcendental.”<sup>26</sup> Although this interpretation seems to follow the lines of Thomas Aquinas, it generates some problems, among which we can count the lack of explanation of: (1) how “the subordination of the one to something else enters into the internal structure of the subordinated being,” (2) the so-called “relativity” of being, which seems to be some kind of returning to the traditional dualism between the absolute and the relative, (3) conceiving the origin of the created being from the Creator as *secundum dici* relation, so, as a result, the bases of particular forms of causality in the framework of the theory of participation become unclear (e.g., final, formal, or exemplary causality).

To sum up all of those interpretations of St. Thomas’ conceptions, we must emphasize that they contain many important elements, whose highlighting and setting in order may be of considerable help in the understanding of the relations crucial from the perspective of metaphysics—namely, *secundum dici* relations—especially their basic

---

<sup>25</sup> Krapiec, *Teoria analogii bytu* [The theory of analogy of being], 204.

<sup>26</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, p. I, q. 28, a. 2 ad 2. Actually, Thomas does not use the term “transcendental relation,” but except for categorial relations, he also distinguishes the relations of the universal character.



qualities and general structure. Not without significance for achieving this purpose will also be an attempt to solve the problems generated by these interpretations, which were probably not foreseen by St. Thomas, because he generally treated the issue of relations purely instrumentally.

### **How the *Secundum Dici* Relations Shall Be Understood**

To put the above interpretations in some order, let us try to extract the most important elements which seem to be the essential contribution to stating precisely what Thomas' conception of the *secundum dici* relations is, especially in the aspect of being, which has always been the source of most controversies connected with the issue. It also must be added that in case of the *secundum dici* relation, discovering its qualities, structure, and its basic types as well as functions in the metaphysical cognition is usually carried out simultaneously, so it is not easy to present the issues in a strictly set order.

Certainly, John of St. Thomas's contribution must be appreciated, especially his separating the question of a relation's formal structure from its realness, as the latter one is decided exclusively by the ontic status of the subject. In case of the *secundum dici* relations, besides strictly connecting their realness with the realness of the subject, it was his important achievement to assign to this kind of relations the constitutive function for the subject. Certainly, in considerable measure, it was thanks to John of St. Thomas that in the 20th century Horváth would clearly note that what is relative cannot be grasped in just one definition, since the relationality in beings realizes itself in various manners. Among the most important statements of Horváth, as far as the *secundum dici* relations are concerned, is his refusal to ascribe to them the form proper to the relation, and through that, denying to treat

them as a separate category of being, as in those relations there is nothing except for the elements vested to beings in the absolute manner.<sup>27</sup> In that way these relations connect the beingness in itself with the pure subordination to the other something, not violating in any way the absoluteness of thus constituted being, both in the aspect of content and in the aspect of existence. Also, we must acknowledge the formal determinants of *secundum dici* relations distinguished by Horváth—that is, 1) well-defined direction (*tendentio*), and 2) a factor that gives the direction or determines the point of destination.

Cavarnos' input, in turn, is the emphasis on the fact that in case of the *secundum dici* relation, each of its termini is determined by the necessary subordination to the other correlated terminus. The power of this correlation is stressed by Volke; he not only points out that the components of the relation are in no way different from their mutual subordination, so that they cannot be separated, but he also notes that there is no “in-between” moment in such a relation. Besides, he rightly opposed the identification of the *secundum dici* relations with the transcendental relations. Krapiec also goes in the same direction—he identifies the *secundum dici* relations as the necessary ones, which constitute the internal structure of being, causing its own kind of “relationality” on different levels of beingness. So those relations appear to be something inseparable from the real being, something that is permanently fused with the being, uniting various complementary elements into one compound whole. If such a relation is characteristic of every being, we can talk about its transcendentality.

The above-cited observations concerning the *secundum dici* relations require some supplementary comments, because—as we can

---

<sup>27</sup> Only the categorial relation has its own form of a separate, independent category, so only in the case of this kind of relation can we talk about the relation as such or about the “pure” relation. See Horváth, *Metaphysik der Relationen*, 79–80.

notice—they sometimes lead to various aporias. And thus it is impossible to maintain their identification with the transcendental relations, which was postulated by Caietanus, because—as Volke rightly observed—that would consequently entail the identification of the real *secundum esse* relations with the categorial relations, which cannot be accepted, since the *secundum dici* relations realize themselves also on the categorial plane. But, on the other hand, it is clear that the *secundum dici* relations can transcend the categorial order, being in that case transcendental relations, although it is hard to agree with Volke's thesis that it is enough for a relation to take place in each being of a given ontic category to be conceived of as transcendental. As it seems, one can speak about the transcendental only when a relation takes place in every case of being, without taking into account categorial aspects. But Volke's remark about the simultaneous occurrence of transcendental and categorial connections in one being is correct, though there should be some indication of the problem of conditioning of the ones by the others.<sup>28</sup>

The next problem is about the connections between the elements constituting the “absoluteness” of being in the way analogical to the categorial connections, which was in considerable measure brought up by Caietanus. Certainly not without the influence of Aristotle, he eventually reduced the structure of the *secundum dici* relation to the conceptual plane, which followed, among other things, from questioning a real difference between its termini, because he ultimately claimed that one terminus' exclusive function is to define the other and he denied treating them as something really separate.<sup>29</sup> To some extent John of St. Thomas's interpretation was similar, since he considered

---

<sup>28</sup> Volke, *Sein als Beziehung zum Absoluten*, 8–14.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas de Vio Cajetanus, *In De ente et essentia d. Thomae Aquinatis commentaria*, c. VII, q. XV.

the *secundum dici* relations as the conceptual expression of the absolute form of the “compound” being, and therefore he refused to ascribe to this kind of relations the so-called “ratio in”—that is a real subjecting them in the being. So no wonder that, when considering the influence of the above-mentioned authors on the interpretation of St. Thomas’ metaphysics, we fairly often come across the treatment of the *secundum dici* relations as just mental relations, seeing in them only a certain similarity or convergence in naming to the real relations.

Those views were continued and widely substantiated by Krempel, the author of the most extensive work on relations in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. He tried to prove that *secundum dici* relations possess exclusively logical status, as no real relative beings stand behind the concept. The only substantiation of the content embraced by the concepts signifying this kind of relationality is the act of intellect, which creates some abstracts useful in describing some, difficult to describe, dimensions of being, particularly the dimensions conceived of as necessary, which, however, do not have any direct translation into the real states of things; even in the case of conceptually grasped necessity, its only source, according to Krempel, is the intellect. A good example of that is to identify in the being the lack or the potency—which we get to know just through their opposites, but that does not mean that a lack is really dependent on the thing without the lack, or potency on act. Between potency and act, lack and a thing there is no real relation which could be the basis of the concept of some necessary relation. And Volke goes further—he excludes any possibility of a real difference within any aspects of the structure of such relations, and so within their subject, foundation, terminus as well as within the area of connection itself. We cannot help but notice that such a conception of relations seriously narrows the understanding of the internal structure of being, eliminating from that structure such factors as matter, form, essence, existence, act and potency, and that opens the door to the danger of ontological monism.

Meanwhile it seems that St. Thomas Aquinas, while using the term *relativa secundum dici*, also referred to the relations connecting the intra-ontic factors, which are really related to each other so much that one factor cannot be comprehended without the other, but also one factor cannot exist without the other. At the same time, those factors are not subjected in something other, so they cannot be labeled as accidents, though they are also not substances, but only correlates joined to each other, constituting an aspect of being, and their realness realizes itself by mutual subordination.<sup>30</sup>

However, the strict relatedness of the above mentioned intra-ontic factors does not have to signify the lack of real difference between particular relatives. The real difference cannot be reduced to being separated like things are, but it may acquire various forms, depending on the nature of the factors between which it takes place. In the case of *secundum dici* relations, such a difference is characterized by the fact that on the one hand those factors make up some definite ontic unity, but on the other hand they are not identical with each other. Traditionally, this kind of the difference was described as “real inadequate,” since, besides the distinction, a real combination is indicated here.<sup>31</sup> This is not, however, a univocal difference, because in each case of being it may realize itself in another way. That is why in metaphysics we speak about the analogousness of such difference, which matches the analogous nature of the factors making the difference. All attempts to univocalize both a difference and factors, although they may be cognitively useful, in the field of metaphysics they distort cognition, because they generally do not take into account the entire specificity of the ontic structures distinguished in this procedure. So it is dif-

---

<sup>30</sup> G. Manser, “Begriff und Bedeutung der transzendentalen Beziehung,” *Divus Thomas* 23, (1945), 355. Cf. A. Alessi, *Metafisica* (Roma: LAS, 1992<sup>3</sup>), 183 f.

<sup>31</sup> Krapiec, *Metaphysics. An Outline of the History of Being*, 214.

difficult to speak about the univocally determined structure of the *secundum dici* relations, since in beings they realize themselves in an individualized and unrepeatably way. Nevertheless, on the grounds of metaphysical cognition, there is a possibility of identifying some elements which cannot be ruled out of this kind of relations. This problem was undertaken by such thinkers as Horváth and Krąpiec.

Horváth, as already mentioned, distinguished the two fundamental features marking *secundum dici* relations: 1) a well-defined direction (*tendentio*), and 2) a factor-principle, which gives direction or determines the destination of the relation. Those features, as we may suppose, indicate some dynamism that is strictly connected with the being. Also, Krąpiec points out the two elements in the most general scheme of the real *secundum dici* relations—those are: 1) the kind of beingness (substantial or accidental), and 2) subordination of this beingness to the other something. Additionally, he notes that particular types of the relations discussed here depend solely on the character of the being constituted by them, and not on the subject alone, or the terminus. There are as many of the relations of this kind as there are contingent beings and their component parts, so it is difficult to go beyond general schemes and construct concrete models of structures of such relations, because ultimately, they should be apprehended based on the real states of things. And Krąpiec emphasizes that mainly this kind of relation decides about the analogy of being, that is, about the real realizations in particular beings of some features, which are different because of the concreteness of a given being, and at the same time they are similar or common because of the “common” way they constitute a given aspect of being. For this very reason, one can speak about the relational nature of being, since it always possesses a compound structure and as such it is given to cognition, starting with the first cognitive apprehension in which we simultaneously grasp both some concrete existence and the content proportional to this existence. So relations cannot be separated from beingness, because relationality is some specific type

of beingness as far as it is realized through subordination of something to the other something. Therefore, the beingness itself cannot be understood without relation, since it is the relation that constitutes beingness.

As stated by Krapiec, the most interesting scheme or model which makes it possible to comprehend the *secundum dici* relations, is the act and potency relation. It is because act and potency factors, and through that the relation which takes place between them, fulfill the above-mentioned features of the relational structures of being. Act and potency indicate both the definite direction of the relation, and the factor-principle determining the direction, and also they always constitute some particular aspect of being, which is always proportionally subordinated to the other something. It is also characteristic that in the structure of act and potency, all kinds of *secundum dici* relations can be included—i.e., as Krapiec notes, everything that is some kind of such a relation is also a case of act and potency, so the relation of act to potency can be considered as transcendental. This does not mean that *secundum dici* relations are always transcendental; they are such only when the factors creating them occur in every being.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless those relations play an impor-

---

<sup>32</sup> The *secundum dici* relation of form and matter, for example, is not transcendental, because it does not take place in every being. It, obviously, does not occur in the spiritual beings, while the act and potency *secundum dici* relation does occur in such beings. A truly transcendental act and potency relation, as Krapiec points out, includes all other relations, among them the form and matter *secundum dici* relation, which means that the latter one can be “translated” into “the act and potency” relations, but not vice versa (Krapiec, *Teoria analogii bytu* [The theory of analogy of being], 205). Thus, the human spiritual soul, as the form of the human material body, can also be comprehended as the first act of this body. Without applying act and potency of the *secundum dici* relation, it is impossible to see and to highlight the specificity of the essentially human acts of mental cognition and free will, their spiritual character, their transcendence over the physical body, over sensuality and emotions, over the material world, etc. No wonder Karol Wojtyła so extensively uses act and potency as a “tool” in his analy-

tant role in identifying transcendental relations, because every transcendental relation is at the same time a *secundum dici* relation. The only case when a transcendental relation goes beyond *secundum dici* relatedness is the relation between the Absolute and the contingent being; this relation is usually understood as the relation of creation, and it is rather inconceivable to claim that a *secundum dici* relation exists within the Absolute Being—to imagine that would mean denying His simplicity. But this topic requires a separate study.

Now in the case when the relation *secundum dici* constitutes a categorical aspect of being, we have to do with an exclusively categorical relation, though not in the meaning of an accident coming “from outside” to a complete, fully constituted being. Because even in the categorical aspect the *secundum dici* relations are constitutive; this is why they exist, and why they are cognized neither “before” nor “after” the beingness they constitute, but only together with it. This means that *secundum dici* relations are the necessary ones, though this necessity is always proportional to a given aspect of being constituted by a specific, concrete *secundum dici* relation, which, for example, looks different within an accident than within a substance. So, one can repeat here Krąpiec’s statement that relation “is necessary as much as necessary is the being itself.”<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

To sum up our considerations, we should note that in St. Thomas’ metaphysics, relations are not to be reduced to the intellect’s acts (i.e.,

---

sis of the human person’s essence and the human person’s acts. See K. Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, trans. by G. Ignatik (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 165 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Krąpiec, *Teoria analogii bytu* [The theory of analogy of being], 204.



to logical relations) or to the categorial plane of being (i.e., to categorial relations). This is so because there are relations which constitute the being as well as its components in its necessary aspects. These kinds of relations are named by Aquinas *relationes secundum dici*, and he evidently distinguishes them from *relationes secundum esse*, which, just as in Aristotle's thought, are one of the accidental categories of being. Thus, the *secundum dici* relations are not a separate category of being, but—to use Krapiec's previously quoted words—they are “ingrown” into particular beings and the elements of being, so that they constitute its manifold structure, which founds the compound whole of a being. These kinds of relations cannot be separated from the beings constituted by them, as that would annihilate the very beingness of things, and together with this—the beingness of relations. The most important type of the discussed relations are transcendental relations, which constitute being in its most basic aspects, deciding therefore about the whole of metaphysical cognition, since they determine the most basic cognitive grasp of reality.



### The Specificity of *Secundum Dici* Relations in St. Thomas Aquinas' Metaphysics

#### SUMMARY

In this article, the author discusses the issue of the understanding of so-called *relationes secundum dici* in St. Thomas Aquinas' metaphysical thought. This is a specific type of relations with which commentators and continuators of Aquinas' philosophy have usually had some difficulties. The very name of the

---

The article was funded by the Minister of Education and Science (Poland) within the program under the name “Regional Initiative of Excellence” in 2019-2023 (project number: 28/RID/2018/19, the amount of funding: 11 742 500 PLN).

relations—*relationes secundum dici*—has caused problems, since, at first sight, it indicates that at stake there is just a problem of predication about things (beings) and it has nothing to do with the ontic problem of the beingness of being as such. Until now, there has been no common agreement as to how we should interpret the kind of relations under discussion. And the issue is extremely important, since this is a key element of St. Thomas' metaphysics, because it is the interpretation of *secundum dici* relations that the solution of many basic metaphysical questions depends on. In the article, an attempt is made to reach an understanding of *secundum dici* relations—i.e., the understanding of St. Thomas himself. At the beginning, some of Aquinas' statements are presented in which he directly speaks about *secundum dici* relations. Next, the most prominent interpretations of these relations throughout the history of philosophy are sketched. Finally, the author tries to specify how the *secundum dici* relations should be understood.

**Keywords:** being, categorial, relative, *secundum dici* relations, structure, Thomas Aquinas

#### REFERENCES

- Alessi A., *Metafisica*. Roma: LAS, 1992<sup>3</sup>.
- Breton S., *L'«esse in» et l'«esse ad» dans la métaphysique de la relation*. Rome: Sculoa Tipografia Misionaria Domenicana, 1951.
- Cavarnos C., *The Classical Theory of Relations. A Study in the Metaphysics of Plato, Aristotle, and Thomism*. Belmont: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1975.
- Deely J., *Purely Objective Reality*. Berlin-New York: Mouton Gruyter, 2009.
- Duma T., *Metafizyka relacji. U podstaw rozumienia relacji bytowych* [The metaphysics of relations. At the basis of understanding the relations of being]. Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2017.
- Głowala M., "Co wyrażają predykaty relacyjne? Jan od św. Tomasza oraz Bartłomiej Mastri i Bonawentura Belluto o czterech typach rzeczywistości

relacji” [What do relational predicates indicate? John of St. Thomas, Bartholomew Mastri and Bonaventure Belluto on the four types of reality of relations]. *Studia Philosophica Wratislaviensa* 7, (2012): 57–70.

Horváth A., *Metaphysik der Relationen*. Graz: Moser, 1914.

Joannes a Santo Thoma, *Cursus theologicus*, vol. 4. Paris: Desclée et Socci, 1946.

Kalka R., “Structure metaphysique de la relation chez Thomas d’Aquin.” *Rocznik Tomistyczny* [Thomistic Annals] 6, (2017): 26–46.

Kemple B. A., *Ens Primum Cognitum in Thomas Aquinas and the Tradition: The Philosophy of Being as First Known*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2017.

Krąpiec M. A., *Metaphysics. An Outline of the History of Being*. Translated by Th. Sandok. New York etc.: Peter Lang, 1991.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Teoria analogii bytu* [The theory of analogy of being]. Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 1993.

Krempel A., *La Doctrine de la relation chez Saint Thomas*. Paris: Vrin, 1952.

Manser G., “Begriff und Bedeutung der transzendentalen Beziehung.” *Divus Thomas* 23, (1945): 351–360.

Martin G., *Wilhelm von Ockham: Untersuchungen zur Ontologie der Ordnungen*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1949.

Rosińska G., “Spór o relację transcendentálną (Próba oceny stanowiska A. Krempla)” [The dispute over the transcendental relation (An attempt to assess A. Krempel’s position)]. *Roczniki Filozoficzne* [Philosophical Annals] 9, no. 1 (1961): 121–123.

S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Quaestiones disputatae De potentia*, in *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Quaestiones disputatae*, vol. 2, cura et studio P. Bazzi [et al.], 10. ed. Taurini: Marietti, 1965; English edition: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Power of God*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (<https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~QDePot.Q7.A10>. Rep8).

\_\_\_\_\_, *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate*, in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, vol. 22/3. Roma: Editori di San Tommaso, 1976; English edition: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions On Truth*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (<https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~QDeVer.Q21.A6.C.2>).

- \_\_\_\_\_, *Scriptum super I Sententiarum*, ed. by P. Mandonnet & M. F. Moos. Paris: Lethielleux, 1929; English edition: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Sentences I*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (<https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Sent.I.D26.Q2.A1.C.2>).
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Summa theologiae*, in *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, vol. 4–12. Rome: S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888–1906; English edition: St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (<https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST.I.Q13.A7.C.4>).
- Simons P., “Relations and Truthmaking.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 84 (2010): 199–213.
- Thomas de Vio Cajetanus, *In De ente et essentia d. Thomae Aquinatis commentaria*. Taurini: Marietti, 1934.
- Volke G. W., *Sein als Beziehung zum Absoluten*. Würzburg: Triltsch 1964.
- Wojtyła K., *Person and Act and Related Essays*. Translated by G. Ignatik. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021.