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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

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Bertini, Daniele and Migliorini, Damiano (eds.), *Relations: Ontology and Philosophy of Religion*. Mimesis International, 2018, 300 pp.

The book is a collection of selected and invited papers joined by a common interest that is the concept of *relation*, as the title clearly shows. It is the result of the reworking of the contents of a conference held in November 2016 at the University of Verona, dealing with ontology, one of the main fields which studies relations, and the philosophy of religion. The book is divided into four parts which in turn could be divided into two: the first half dedicated to ontology and the second to the philosophy of religion, mirroring the book's subtitle. Its introduction, written by the editors, aims at highlighting the context from which the book has originated and its consequent structure. Editors named the four parts: History of philosophy, Ontology, Philosophy of religion, and History of religious doctrines — names that probably express their contents and intents better than the official titles they were given. The book seems to have two reading paths. Although Part one and Part four may appear extremely distant, an in depth reading of the book shows that they are skillfully interwoven. Indeed, the structure is the following. Part one deals with the history of philosophy (of relations) with a look both at the origins of the debate identified in English idealism (see chapter 1 by Guido Bonino), and in the Russell-Bradley's dispute, which is a recurring theme in the text. The latter is more widely recalled by Michele Paolini Paoletti in chapter 6, but it is an indispensable landmark of the entire book. Chapter 3, by Sofia Vescovelli, begins dealing with some theological features that will be helpful later on in the text and it moves on to examine process metaphysics, which understands reality in dynamic and thus in relational terms. Part two, in a way, narrows the field of investigation as it deals with the ontology of relations itself, i.e. a peculiar field in contemporary ontology able to give fruitful accounts of reality. Here we find not only references to Bradley's regress, but also a taxonomy of relations (see chapter 5 by Jani Hakkarainen, Markku Keinänen and Antti Keskinen) which explains another of the cardinal points of the whole book, namely the difference made by contemporary analytical philosophy between internal and external relations. It will allow the reader, in the following parts, to understand how and why this branch of philosophy can be applied to the study of religion, but also, for example, to society with an openness to social ontology, cognitive psychology, and ethology in chapter 8 by Daniele Bertini. Parts three and four examine the last words of the book title, namely "philosophy of religion" respectively dealing with the question of relations in this area of philosophy and the specific use that has been made of it, especially in traditions different from the western one. It can be said that in Part three, there is a greater attention to the analytical philosophy that begins to join up with religion. In fact, Mario Micheletti's paper (chapter 9) changes the register of the text, introducing the theme of God from the very first line. In this case there is a negative final note regarding the application of analytical philosophy to the concept of *God* which, the author says, is blind to certain risks it could produce. The reference to a specific philosophical and analytical debate, however, is clear. Damiano Migliorini's chapter and Ciro De Florio' and Aldo Frigerio's one exemplify the mixture of the two areas,

that is the focal point of the text — the former comparing different metaphysical positions with theological ones through a clearly analytical method, the latter with a specific focus on the metaphysics of time. In Part four, on the other hand, we have an openness to religious conceptions outside Christianity (see chapters 14 and 15, by Elisa Freschi and Jeffery D. Long, both dealing with oriental religions, and chapter 16, by Jaco Gericke, where the Old Testament and the Jewish word *elohim* are taken into consideration). The last paper, by Basil Lourié, probably represents the apex of the whole subject. For this very reason, I found its position really appropriate. Indeed, it leaves the reader with the desire to know more, but at the same time it brings together the key elements of the book. In fact, it deals with the philosophy of religion, in particular the trinitarian dispute in Hierotheos and Bryennios, showing the relationships that exist between the three trinitarian figures, i.e. Father, Son, and Spirit, and rendering this relationships in formulas of a paraconsistent logic. In this way, it highlights how the presence of the two fields in a single book is not a mere juxtaposition but can find meaning, even with very different developments, and needs further research. Therefore, for many reasons the book is undoubtedly original as indeed the reader can see from the very first pages. First of all, because it is not so usual that analytical philosophy is concerned with religion: of course a tradition of analytical philosophy of religion exists and it is briefly outlined by Marco Damonte's paper (see chapter 12). For this very reason, perhaps, the paper could have found space before in the book organization although its conclusions as well as its content dealing with both analytical philosophy and the philosophy of religion let us better understand its position in Part three. Its conclusions, indeed, if not negative are at least dubious towards the application of a philosophy of relations to the philosophy of religion, at least as it has been proposed so far. However, finding exponents of an analytical philosophy of religion is not so easy, especially if we think about other branches of philosophy. Secondly, and above all, the originality of the book is due to the fact that the contributions collected here are very different from each other. In addition to the papers already mentioned, in Part one, for example, there is Agostino Cera's paper dedicated to the *Mitanthropologie* by Karl Löwith — an author who, certainly, cannot be considered a classic exponent of analytical philosophy — which is still useful in the structure of the book to have a broader vision of the subject dealt with. Of particular interest, then, is the openness to feminism with chapter 10 by Vera Tripodi, dedicated to feminist theology and its attempt to reconcile an ontology of being with an ontology of becoming, which turns out to be a special case worthy of attention. Again, Paolo Di Sia's paper (chapter 7) deals with quantum physics and its interpretations and applications, in order to ask how its principles can be applied to a kind of philosophy of religion or, more generally, to the concept of God. Reference to quantum physics is really appropriate and very popular, when contemporary philosophy and ontology of relations are at stake. This diversity of themes and approaches, as noted above, should not suggest a simple juxtaposition of scholars who in some way deal with relations. The common thread that works as a plot of the book, in fact, is firmly tightened and is well expressed by a quote by Bertrand Russell that the reader can find in the book, in Federico Perelda's paper (chapter 2), but also, precisely in order to underline its importance, on the back cover:

The question of relations is one of the most important that arise in philosophy, as most other issues turn on it: monism and pluralism; the question whether anything is wholly true except the whole of truth, or wholly real except the whole of reality; idealism and realism, in some of their forms; perhaps the very existence of philosophy as a subject distinct from science and possessing a method of its own.¹

We can broadly state that philosophy is divided into two great branches: on the one hand philosophers who give priority to objects and subjects and on the other hand those who give priority to the relationships that exist between them. It is a very fundamental partition with enormous metaphysical implications that, more or less clearly, each philosopher has to make. Although this does not intend to diminish the variety of individual positions, such a distinction is needed, as any neat and manichean dichotomy, to bring out a fundamental philosophical choice with a never-ending importance. Recently, for example, it has resurfaced with the New Realism debate, but even within interdisciplinary fields as the philosophy of biology, the philosophy of physics, or generally speaking with philosophy joining science.

1 Russell Bertrand, *Logic and Knowledge. Essays 1901-1950* (Routledge, 1992).

Indeed, the question whether science (and philosophy of science, consequently) has to do with interrelated objects or with structures *simpliciter* is a very fundamental one. This is not the proper question at stake in the book, but the background positions and debates could be fruitfully recalled. However, a book entitled “Relations” leaves no doubt about its front. The book, therefore, more than clearly stands among those who give priority to relations and, in addition to this, it investigates what theological consequences as well as metaphysical ones are entailed by this choice and which kind of advantages it has on its philosophical enemy; namely it has the purpose to show how an ontology of relations can be fundamental to the philosophy of religion. As a consequence, we could not agree with the authors’ choice, but once we accept it, it is coherent and widely explained. Indeed an account which focuses its attention on becoming, process, presentism and endurantism, external and internal relations, etc. is able to confront itself with the philosophy of religion and with historical religions too, trying to solve some typical theological problems, but also new ones. Obviously, since the book is a collection of papers, it is not possible to find an unequivocal answer to the question, as if it were the result of a single head. For example, it takes two options into account: the option for which relations are more fundamental than objects, and the one which simply states that they have ontological dignity, i.e. they have to be conceptualized by philosophers and counted in the list of what there is in the world. Rather, the reader can find solid foundations and interesting clues whether they have extensive knowledge in one of the two areas — either ontology or the philosophy of religion — and are willing to confront themselves with the other discipline; however they would find it attractive even if less open to this kind of commingling, as the book provides the opportunity to examine more in depth the theme of relations and understand its ample range. To think that a single volume can cover the vastness of the theme in the whole history of philosophy would require great ingenuity, but from the specific perspective through which the theme is analyzed, the lines are clear and exhaustive — though any good analysis cannot but give rise to new and fruitful questions.

