

**Locke**

**Ideas of relations, relations between things**

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History of sciences was divided by Ernst Cassirer in two parts: in the first, the world was explained in terms of *substances*, in the second in terms of *functions*. According to Cassirer, Locke was on the border of the two, transitioning from one to the other but remaining on the old side. Cassirer explains<sup>1</sup>:

[According to Locke] *Knowledge* (in the precise meaning of the word) may be used only when the properties of objects ... will all be perfectly intelligible and certain, thus only when it will be possible to bring out immediately and to determine a priori the whole of their modalities. Now ... such a command cannot be satisfied by what is taught in the sciences of Nature... [In reality], modern science has accomplished in part only the ideal Locke has drawn; first, modern science was constrained to give to this ideal a new orientation: [modern science] thinks in agreement with Locke that it exceeds the real aim of the most exigent empirical knowledge to deduce the distinctive qualities of corporeal substances from their 'substantial being'; but, so far, modern science does not renounce to build a network of concepts aiming to systemise the empirical data themselves.

Certainly, Locke stresses the importance of the notion of substance in philosophy, even if he harshly criticises its constitution by 'common apprehensions', which turns what is in reality a pure "complication of many ideas" into an existing entity. Even if Locke criticises the notion of

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<sup>1</sup> Ernst CASSIRER,(1910), *Substance et fonction*, trad. Française: éd. De Minuit, 1977, pp. 252-253.

substance, he nevertheless deduces from it his criteria of knowledge: it would be necessary to know all the primary qualities of a body and its relations if one wants to acquire knowledge of this body; so, because we cannot know the internal real constitution of things, we have no knowledge at all in this field. But, as Cassirer describes, another solution, which gives new possibilities to pure knowledge, would have been possible: considering the relations between things instead of the hidden constitution of each substance would have permitted an authentic knowledge.

Some of Locke's contemporaries, such as Newton and Leibniz, were the first heroes of modern science because they stressed the role of relation in knowledge; but Locke on his side, was still writing according to the traditional version of science, because he does not give relation a real importance in his philosophy. In the *Essay*, there is no mention of any law of physical nature, nothing like Newton's confession that if "I have not been able to discover the cause of those properties from phenomena", nevertheless "to us it is enough that gravity does really exist and acts according to the laws which we have explained"<sup>2</sup>. In the *Essay*, there is nothing like the Leibnizian series and Locke could not agree with Leibniz's commentary to his own definition of relation: "Les relations et les ordres ont quelque chose de *l'être de raison*, quoiqu'ils aient leur fondement dans les choses; car on peut dire que leur réalité, comme celle des vérités éternelles et des possibilités, vient de la suprême raison.." (*New Essays*, 2.1.25).

The main argument for Locke's traditionalism is not so much his concept of substances, as maintains Gibson<sup>3</sup> — because Locke explicitly criticises the scholastic notion of substance — but the poor importance given to relations: first of all, relation is reduced to an act of thought, as Locke defines it: "*The nature therefore of relation*, consists in the referring, or comparing two things one to another; from which comparison, one or both comes to be denominated" (2.25.5)... and: "...it be not contained in the real existence of things, but something extraneous, and superinduced..." (2.25.8) and, secondly: relations do not constitute any part of substances, and seem to have no foundation in them: "if either of those [terms of the relation] be removed, or ceases to be, the relation ceases, and the denomination consequent to it, though the other receive no alteration at all" (2.25.8). When the relation ceases, the substances related are not at all altered; relation has no part to substances and thus no reality. Locke's theory of causality in 2.26 for instance is not so far from Hume's: causality seems to be a pure custom of the mind facilitating the appearance of one idea when the other one is present.

But in the same *Essay*, Locke says "that most of the simple *Ideas*, that make up our complex *Ideas* of substances, when truly considered, are only Powers ... all which *Ideas*, are nothing else, but so many relations to other substances; and are not really in the Gold considered barely in itself" (2.25.37): things, to us, are mainly powers and powers are relations, so relations constitute, as it seems, the greatest part of substances. And what is

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<sup>2</sup> *Principia*, book 3, General Scholium, translation Motte-Cajori, University of California Press, 1966, vol II, p. 547

<sup>3</sup> James GIBSON, *Locke's Theory of Knowledge and its historical relations*, Cambridge University Press, 1931, p 190 ss.

said in book 2 about ideas is transferred to things in book 4, in a section apparently in total agreement with Newton and Leibniz<sup>4</sup> :

This is certain, Things, however absolute and entire they seem in themselves, are but retainers to other parts of Nature, for that which they are most taken of by us. Their observable Qualities, Actions and Powers, are owing to something without them; and there is not so complete and perfect a part, that we know, of Nature, which does not owe the Being it has, and the Excellencies of it, to its Neighbours; and we must not confine our thoughts within the surface of any body, but look a great deal farther, to comprehend perfectly those Qualities that are in it.

Is Locke a “traditionalist” giving to substances a fundamental place in Nature and to relation the status of a thought without reality, or is Locke a “modernist”, defending the thesis that substances are only popular notions, hiding the true reality of the world which is made of relations? Is relation an idea or a real link between things? Gibson propose to see Locke as someone accepting “the traditional ontological scheme” according to which “Reality [is] conceived as exhaustively comprehended under the categories of substance and quality”<sup>5</sup> but, according to Gibson, Locke is drawn to incoherence because “the living force of Locke’s own thought runs counter to his inherited metaphysics” and “the importance of relations forces itself upon him”<sup>6</sup>. Even if I agree with Gibson’s views that Locke is on the border of two worlds, I will propose another interpretation of his position about relations: Locke does not contradict himself on this point, because he gives some precise meaning to the term *relation*; to this semantic thesis, I will add a philosophical one: during Locke’s evolution, this semantic position is made coherent by the way of a more explicit kind of phenomenism. The semantic thesis is true for most of the philosophers in Locke’s time, because it is current then to consider relations, I do not say as unreal, but as an effect of thought. The philosophical thesis is particular to Locke, because lot of philosophers assert that relations, although objects of some thought, are as such also outside of the human mind; Locke’s intention is to oppose such philosophers, in accordance with his opposition against innate ideas, and against (what may be called) intellectual intuition: it is impossible to perceive any order in the objective world and to perceive more than phenomenal connections and links between things; even if the hypothesis of the reality of connections is the most probable, it is only an hypothesis that we cannot observe. But it is man’s duty to exert his reason and reconstruct a thought world where what Locke calls *relations* (to distinguish them from *connections*) take place. My thesis is that according to Locke there is no external relation because a relation in his time is a thought, and man cannot perceive the thought organising the world but has the duty to re-construct an hypothetical one. To argue this interpretation, I will go through five steps: the textual basis and their usual interpretations, the use of *relation* in Locke’s time, the use of *relation* in Locke’s *Essay*, and the evolution of the text from the *Drafts* to the last editions

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<sup>4</sup> *Essay*, 4.6.11.

<sup>5</sup> GIBSON, *Ibid.*, p. 193. In reality, the traditional Aristotelian view considered that substances only are truly real, and that qualities, as well as relations could have a real foundation in things

<sup>6</sup> GIBSON, *ibid.*, p. 195.

## 1. Texts

Most of the texts about the relations in the *Essay* are evidences for the thesis that relations are acts of the mind, and, on the other hand, most of the relations between things are only induced by scholars from what Locke says.

Relations appear in two fields, ideas of relation, and knowledge of relation between ideas. First, ideas of relation, are “not contained in the real existence of things, but something extraneous, and superinduced” (2.25.8) where *superinduction* is the result of an act of the mind, a comparison of two ideas:

The understanding... can carry any *Idea* as it were, beyond itself, or, at least look beyond it, to see how it stands in conformity to any other. When the Mind so considers one thing, that it does, as it were bring it to, and set it by another, and carry its view from one to t’other: This is, as the Words import, *Relation* and *Respect*; (2.25.1).

Understanding acts by itself, through what is called *consideration*, the same ‘power’ as the one used in abstraction (*consideration* is an important act of mind for epistemology at this time). Here, consideration is extended from one idea to another, which are brought together, and ‘set by one another’, so as the mind “takes a view of them at once, without uniting them into one” (2.12.1). This explanation is a kind of ‘image by image’ reconstruction of what is supposed to transpire in a few moments, and is unobservable in fact – but the important fact described here is the activity of the mind. The same fact is described elsewhere (2.28.1, 2.28.14,.....) and the act is defined as *comparing* (2.11.4) which is one of the ideas of reflection, clearly distinguished from others: composing, enlarging and abstracting, every one examined in the same chapter as various sources of, maybe, complex ideas (cf. 2.11.14, 2°), opposed to perception and discerning – (and retention ?) - as powers of simple ideas; the difference between comparing and the others powers is precisely the fact that the two related ideas are maintained consciously separated and, could we say, complexity is not inside of the idea but outside of it: it is a (perhaps simple) idea of relation between two separated ideas, a “mongrel” idea<sup>7</sup>; which may be a problem for the unity of the class of complex ideas, and a problem, too, for the distinction between ideas of relation and knowledge of relations: where is the difference between the two if the ideas are maintained distinct in both cases?

The two objects have a relation “in our minds” (2.26.1) and so the relation is not between things. Such a state is the principle of relation’s (relative) clearness (2.25.8): as ‘archetypes’, they cannot be hidden from the mind which is their creator; they have the same status as mixed modes, “having no other reality but what they have in the Minds of Men” (2.30.4). For the same reason, the ideas of relation are real and adequate, and as such

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<sup>7</sup> See the interesting discussion on this point by Stewart, 1979, *The Locke Newsletter*, 11, pp. 51-55; reprint in *Locke*, 2002, ed. Udo Thiel, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Company pp. 119-123. The definition given in 2.12.1 shows why they are complex : two ideas kept separated but taken in one view — a very inadequate definition of a relation.

opposed to the complex ideas of substances, whose archetype is outside of the mind, in the reality itself, and so unknown. If relation would be a part of things, it would be out of the reach of knowledge, just an object of judgement – point to be discussed later.

Second, relations between ideas produce one of the four “sorts” of agreement (4.1.3). Locke acknowledges that his division is not perfect, because at least two of the other sorts “are truly nothing but relations” (4.1.7); as a matter of fact, the definition given for relative agreement can be used for the two other sorts, because it is: “the Perception of the relation between two *Ideas*”. The reason for the distinction is that the two other sorts: identity and coexistence, “are so peculiar ways of Agreement, or Disagreement of our *Ideas*, that they deserve well to be considered as distinct Heads, and not under relation in general”; and what are those peculiar ways “will easily appear to anyone who will but reflect on what is said in several places of this Essay”. But, Locke does not say what is so peculiar: I suggest that it is precisely the fact that, for identity<sup>8</sup> and coexistence, knowledge is attained through intuition (4.3.8) or sensation (4.3.9-10, 14 and 16), that is to say, immediately; so the two ideas do not stay as much separated as in proper relations, where, as is said elsewhere (4.3.18): “this part of knowledge [is] depending on our sagacity, in finding intermediate ideas, whose co-existence is not considered”: strict knowledge of relations needs reasoning through intermediate ideas. It seems that the character common to the ideas of relation, and knowledge of relation, is precisely that separation is maintained, and that the gap is bridged only by the mind considering both. Thus, the mind seems a necessary element for relation in its strict meaning. Relation between ideas is always an act and an idea different from the two related ideas, which are only *occasions* or *foundations* of the relation; relation is the knowledge of a kind of ‘bridged separation’.

A distinct but related question is that of the internal or external status of the idea of relation. Two separate cases must be distinguished: 1) Concerning knowledge, the question means: are relations internal or external to the ideas compared; that is to say, do the related ideas imply the idea of a relation with the other, and is the relation that the mind expresses a relation determined by the two ideas? With regard to the question of relating as an act of the mind, the answer seems to have to be *no*, to preserve the activity of the understanding; and indeed, Locke stresses the fact that the mind exerts itself independently of the immediate determination of the terms; this is

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<sup>8</sup> It may be objected that identity is nevertheless an idea of relation (2.27.1); thus identity cannot be object of immediate knowledge, distinct from knowledge of relation. But 1) Locke himself makes explicit the fact that identity is a relation due to considering twice the same reality, “as existing at any determined time and place” and “existing at another time”: mediation is artificially introduced to produce the idea of identity - and concerning knowledge of identity, as Frege told, it is a non-trivial assertion to say that ‘morning star is the same as evening star’, even if the evidence is afterwards understood as evident; 2) Locke too gives time and place as examples of ideas relation even if in the *Essay* (we will see later that in the *Drafts* it is not the same) they are mainly examined as simple ideas; we know that the chapter on identity has been introduced in the second edition and that there very few analysis about relation itself; the chapter is more about individuation than about identity; those may be two reasons why *identity* has been presented until the fifth edition as idea of relation and not as simple idea.

explicit, as we have just seen, regarding the knowledge of relation, distinct from the knowledge of identity and coexistence. But, in reality, a kind of relation, that which will be later called “*a priori* knowledge” “forces it self immediately to be perceived” (4.2.1) and<sup>9</sup>

In some of our ideas, there are certain Relations, Habitudes, and Connexions, so visibly included in the Nature of the *Ideas* themselves, that we cannot conceive them separable from them. ... Thus the *Idea* of a right-lined Triangle necessarily carries with it an equality of its Angles to two right ones. Nor can we conceive this Relation, this connexion of these two ideas, to be possibly mutable, or to depend on any arbitrary Power, which of choice made it thus, or could make it otherwise”

Surely, here the relation between ideas exists before the consideration by any mind; but, 1) it is a relation between ideas and not between things, and 2) it is a relation assumed by a mind which perceives the relation between ideas and not a relation subsisting in itself between things (4.9.1).

Concerning Ideas, many ideas imply some internal relations, but only from a point of view alien to what Locke explicitly says: Stewart mentions that the difference between *generation, creation, alteration*, is not in the relation but in the things related (2.26.2<sup>10</sup>); thus, here relation does depend on the ideas (and perhaps things) related. Another argument: precisely where Locke says that relation may be clearer than related substances, he adds that we must know the aspect wherein we compare the two substances<sup>11</sup>: relations are not arbitrarily instituted; only some are possible and ideas (and beyond, things, perhaps) determine the field of possible relations amongst which mind gives to some a name and uses them. Even if Locke says that “there is *no one thing ... which is not capable of almost an infinite number of considerations*” (2.25.7; cf.2.28.1), the list cannot be strictly infinite (2.25.7 says “almost infinite”, and 9: “a great number”) as is shown by the fact that Locke gives a list (unfinished) of relations for Man, but does not include many other names (*mother* cannot be a relation for the substance *man*). Moreover relations are said to be dependant of the culture or morality of the society (2.28.2).

There are, it is true, some places where Locke seems to speak of relation as relations between things; but it is useful to examine precisely what his wordings are. Speaking about secondary qualities, Locke defines them as powers, that is to say “*Ideas*[which] are nothing else but so many relations to other substances” (2.23.37,3°); Locke’s thesis is explained by the following words: the primary qualities give bodies “a fitness, differently to operate, and be operated on by several other substances”; so, it is evident that in this quotation secondary qualities, which are, first relations between substances, and second between substances and mind, are not the product of an intentional thought, but a pure sensitive effect. So it seems that we have a

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<sup>9</sup> 4.3.29 ; cf. 4.13.1-3

<sup>10</sup> Stewart, *op.cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> “A Man, if he compares two things together, can hardly be supposed not to know what it is, wherein he compares them: So that when he compares any Things together, he cannot but have a very clear *idea* of that Relation” (2.25.8).

case of relation without consideration. But note that, at least, effects cannot be found in exterior things: they are “not really in the Gold considered barely in itself”; and relation is not a self-evident fact, it is an element of Locke’s theory on reality. It is interesting to remark also that the ‘true’ real cause, which is the status of primary qualities, is described not in terms of relation, but in terms of dependency: “...though they *depend* on those real, and primary qualities of its internal qualities...”. *Depend* is used instead of *related*, and even if their meanings seem identical, Locke’s usual wording is worth noting. Indeed, as far as I know, in the other cases where Locke describes secondary qualities as powers produced by the dependency of substances and mind (2.23.9, 10; 4.6.11, ...), Locke does not use the term *relation* but terms as *to depend*, *to produce*, *connection*, *operation*, .... It is true that speaking of *depend* means what we would call now ‘a real causality between things’, and that Locke asserts in those texts the existence of what could be called now ‘a real causality’ (Locke is not Hume); but the point is that Locke does not usually call *relation* this dependency between things. The same could be said about similitude, which exists outside<sup>12</sup> but is not worded as *relation*.

Some other expressions seem to imply that relation itself is between things. For instance: “I have a clear *Idea* of the Relation of *Dam* and *Chick*, between the two Cassiowaries in St. *James*’s Park” (2.25.8): to have an idea of something seems to imply that this something is outside of the mind (except for Berkeley). But, if this were true, all of the occurrences of *idea of relation* would have the same status, and Locke’s definition of relation in 4.25.10 would always be contradicted: every relation would be outside of the mind. The right interpretation of this assertion, even if it is a liberal one, must be based on the principle that *idea of relation* and *idea of the relation between ...* are both ‘subjective genitives’ (I mean a phrase where *relation* qualifies *idea*, a phrase synonymous of *relative ideas*) and not objective genitive (as if the *idea of relation* would be the idea of an objective relation)<sup>13</sup>.

The same interpretation seems possible about knowledge. When Locke says that knowledge of relation is knowledge that one idea “has this or that Relation to some other *Idea*” (4.1.7), relation between ideas seems to exist before consideration by the mind<sup>14</sup>, just as coexistence or identity exist before considering them. But, again, the interpretation can be that knowledge of relation is an subjective genitive, instead of an objective one, *knowledge of relation* being similar to *knowledge by relation*.

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<sup>12</sup> 3.3.13: “... the *sorting* of [things] under Names, is the *Workmanship* of the *Understanding*, taking occasion from the *similitude* it observes amongst them ...” . Cf. also “Equality, Excess”, in 2.28.1.

<sup>13</sup> 2.28.2 “another occasion of comparing Things... makes the Relations ... as lasting as the Subjects to which they belong” may be considered from the same standpoint: the relation *belongs* to the subjects, but only through the comparison.

<sup>14</sup> Interpretation proposed by Perry.

Regarding moral relations<sup>15</sup>, Locke uses a phrase which can be interpreted in favour of the objectivity of those relations: “the agreement or disagreement observable in that which I compare with [the rule] makes me perceive the relation”. It can be argued that if the relation is perceived, it must exist by itself between entities; indeed, the expression is puzzling because it looks as if there could be an intellectual intuition of complete propositions, which Locke always refuses. But, first, all of Locke’s critics would have mistaken his thought when they accuse him of making morality artificial instead of natural; and second, the relation here is clearly the result of a comparison, and if to say that perceiving an agreement between two ideas would be acknowledging the pre-existence of the agreement, knowledge would be a pure recording of the facts; which it is not, according to Locke.

There could be a last argument in favour of the externality of relations. Quite often Locke describes that there are *occasions*, *grounds* or *foundations* in things for relations<sup>16</sup>. Do those expressions imply externality of relations? *Occasion* does not signify that relation is observed in the things instead of proposed by the mind: it means only the things or ideas which can be a matter for relation. Is it the same for *foundation* and *ground*, which may signify that the relation is present in the things before consideration by the mind? First, it is true that *ground* or *foundation* are presented on the same level as *occasion*, linked by a simple *or* (2. 25.6). But, second, when the purpose is more technical, Locke chooses his phrases carefully: in 2.28.1-3, for instance, he lists the different moral relations: the two first are natural (simple ideas and natural facts); then Locke speaks about “occasion” because the relation is ‘superinduced’ to the occasions; the third is instituted, and then Locke speaks about “foundation”, because the foundation here is an human act relating to ideas, and not a natural relation which would have to be known<sup>17</sup>.

## 2. Interpretations

Locke is thus precise enough in his vocabulary: he uses *relation* almost only when there is a consideration by the mind, and does not assert any externality of relation or when he does so, one can show that it is linked with his fundamental theory of idea, always linked to the reality which has produced it. The question then is why does he do so?

The question has rarely been asked, first because there are relatively few papers about Locke and relations<sup>18</sup>. Amongst those who note the opposition between the unreality of relation, asserted by Locke and his

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<sup>15</sup> Even if the object is here ‘ideas’, this relation must be examined in this section about knowledge, because of the fact that here relation is an agreement between acts and rule – the field of knowledge, or judgement

<sup>16</sup> 2. 25, 6; 2.28.1; 2, 3, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Ground foundation, used for the notion uniting two things separated; cf. 2.28.19 (*ground* linked to *notion*); 2.25.8 (foundation = notion) 2.26.3 (time and place, foundations); 2.28.3 (act).

<sup>18</sup> Bibliography: Aaron, Gibson, Annand (1930), Perry (1967), Oldegard (1969), Stewart (1979), O’Connor, Forest, Vienne, Flage, Specht.



theory about secondary qualities and powers, there are several justifications, all agreeing in that Locke would be inconsistent.

Gibson's answer begs the question: according to him, "The admission that relations to one another entered into the being of substances would have been fatal to the self-contained and independent existence which these were thought to possess"<sup>19</sup>. And Locke remains a traditional philosopher according to whom reality is either substance or mode – so relations can only be unreal<sup>20</sup>. But, in fact, Locke affirms quite often that there are dependencies between things, which are conditions for the nature of everything.

Annand explains Locke's inconsistency by the opposition between *Ideas* on the one hand as 'given', and thus 'real' and introducing some aspects of reality, among which relations, and *Ideas* on the other hand as facts of the mind, which include no relation if the mind does not create it<sup>21</sup>. But we have seen that Locke does not deny that there are *causality, dependence, influence, similitude, equality, excess, connections, and links* between things (and between ideas) before considering them, but he does not call them *relations*.

Perry recognises that Locke denies ("sometimes") the reality of relations and adds that Locke is inconsistent in that: "His views commit him to the rather untenable position that extramental things provide a foundation for framing ideas of relations, but lack actual relationships"<sup>22</sup>. This inconsistency is explained by three reasons: influence of the scholastic dichotomy of entities (like Gibson), parallelism with mixed modes<sup>23</sup>, and failure to be entirely clear in the matter of whether he is discussing ideas or things. As we saw, Locke can be saved from inconsistency if his vocabulary is precisely examined – except for a few phrases where Locke, as Perry has seen, identifies the idea and its object.

But, even if there is no fundamental inconsistency in Locke's theory of relations, it is still necessary to justify why Locke is so cautious to reserve the word *relation* for the mental comparison between things or ideas and why he uses other words to speak about connections, or links between things or ideas. Two different reasons can be given, all concurring to rewritings of the *Drafts* and the *Essay*. The first is the philosophical context (and not only the scholastic one mentioned by Gibson); the other is the aim of the *Essay*, as written in this background context. If we find consequences of those two related causes in the various corrections of the text, the interpretative hypothesis will get some foundation. After those two first parts which are founded on texts, the three following parts of this paper are no more than hypothesis, based on analogy (according to Locke, a good source for opinions). And I would like to show in those three following parts that, according to Locke, an important point is to 'downgrade' the importance of

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<sup>19</sup> Gibson, *op.cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>20</sup> Gibson, *op.cit.*, p. 193-195.

<sup>21</sup> Annand, *op.cit.*, (ed. Ashcraft), p. 302-3.

<sup>22</sup> Perry, *op.cit.* (ed. Ashcraft), p. 321.

<sup>23</sup> But the argument seems ill-constructed: Perry starts from the subjectivity of relation, which is the thing to be proved and deduces from it that ideas of relations, as well as mixed modes, cannot be inadequate to things – a conclusion which mistakes the meaning of *real* in the case of relations and modes (see p. 320).

what he calls “connections” or “links” in knowledge of natural things: Locke attributes them to judgement (probability) instead of knowledge (certainty)<sup>24</sup> :

Thus finding in all parts of the Creation, that fall under humane Observation, that there is a gradual connexion of one with another, without any great or discernable gaps between, in all that great variety of Things we see in the World, which are so closely linked together, that, in the several ranks of Beings, it is not easy to discover the bounds betwixt them, we have reason to be perswaded, that by such gentle steps Things ascend upwards in degrees of Perfection. ... This sort of Probability, which is the best conduct of rational Experiments, and the rise of Hypothesis, has also its Use and Influence; and a wary Reasoning from Analogy leads us often into the discovery of Truths, and useful Productions, which would otherwise lie concealed.

### 3. The historical context

It is first necessary to note that the vocabulary was not the same as it is now: *relatio* was used in Latin scholastics, for instance, to treat of the names of God (opposing reality which is absolute and the names which are used to say who God is as He relates to us<sup>25</sup>) or to cope with our knowledge of the Trinity (where there is one absolute substance and three persons defined as relations<sup>26</sup>). As such, the question of relations may be akin to the traditional and very disputed theory of distinctions, where the question is for some (as Suarez and Descartes): are they *de re*, *de ratione* or *modal*<sup>27</sup>. The problem is: how can we speak with distinct abstract words about what is actually concrete, that is to say “what is growing up together”. A theory of relation by someone contemporaneous with Locke, Richard Burthooge, makes it explicit, because he says the things more naïvely and with scholastic words<sup>28</sup> :

Faculties and powers, Good, Evil, Virtue, Vice, Verity, Falsity, Relations, Order, Similitude, have Foundation in Realities”, “not that in their own nature they have any Realities in themselves, but they have their Grounds in those that are; they are real (as a School-man would express it) not formally, but fundamentally; they are inchoately and occasionally in the things, but not consummately and formally but in the Faculties; not in the things, but as the things relate to our Faculties; that is, not in the things as they are *Things*, but as they are *Objects*

After Aristotle<sup>29</sup>, Occam, for instance has long chapters in his *Summa de Logica* to show that *relation* is only a name, and a name of *secondary*

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<sup>24</sup> 4.16.12.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas of Aquinas, *Theological Summa*, Ia, q. 13, a. 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 28.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance Leibniz’s criticism of Locke’s definition of relation quoted supra : « they are entes de ratione... » (*New Essays*, 2.1.25).

<sup>28</sup> *Organum Vetus et Novum*, §13 ; Chicago, London : The Open Court Publishing Company, 1921, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> *Categories*, 7 ; *Metaphysics*, D, 15.

*intention*, that is to say a name signifying other signs, and it is dangerous to make relations real and so to multiply the entities.<sup>30</sup>

Thus *relation* is not originally an ontological notion but a logical one, which is the point underlined by Gibson, even if the question of his ontological import may be asked. A limited sample survey – which must be completed – suggests that the word *relation* cannot be found in books written by Locke’s contemporaries, except in the logical parts of them: One can find the word *relation*, for example, in Scipion Dupleix’s *Logique*<sup>31</sup>, in Gassendi’s *Syntagma*<sup>32</sup>; Arnauld or Malebranche<sup>33</sup> do not use the French word *relation* but they use the phrase *idées relatives* which confirms relation as a logical notion. I did not find the word at all in Descartes, Hobbes<sup>34</sup>. Two exceptions that worth noting are: Cudworth’s *Treatise Concerning Eternal And Immutable Morality* and More *An Antidote against Atheism*, and we will consider them later.

On the other hand, some akin words can be found in the metaphysical or physical treatises; in Malebranche, the word *rapport* is found frequently, and sometimes as the ontological parallel to *terme relatif* or *idée relative*<sup>35</sup>. In Latin, the ontological correspondent is often *ratio* and Locke himself knows the English *reason* with the meaning of *cause* “and particularly the final cause”, which he criticises or, at least, avoids using<sup>36</sup>. Three other words can be found in English philosophy contemporary to Locke: the Greek *skesis*, the Latin *habitus*, and the English *harmony*, all referring, since the time of classical philosophy, to internal relations providing the structure for some entity; and the three words can also be found in the writings of authors like Cherbury, More, Cudworth and Shaftesbury.

Thus, when Locke sets aside *relation* as a term qualifying ideas intentionally produced, he may be more conforming to common use than introducing a new concept. But, at the same time, he may be choosing a different system from those of Cherbury’s, Cudworth’s, More’s or Shaftesbury. Even if Locke has not read some of those books, it is interesting to look into a concept of relation which was defended in various circles around Locke<sup>37</sup>.

Two books written by some one related to Locke give a good idea of a contemporary conception of relation as real entity. Cudworth’s *Treatise*

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<sup>30</sup> *Summa de Logica*, I, cap. 49-54

<sup>31</sup> Livre III, ch. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Pars 1, ch.2, canon XVI.

<sup>33</sup> *The Search after Truth*. Arnauld et Malebranche both use *relation* only as meaning *ratio*.

<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, one can find in Hobbes a conception that is not so far from Locke’s: “Reason is not as science, and Memory, borne with us; nor gotten by Experience only, as Prudence is; but attained by Industry... Whereas Sense and Memory are but Knowledge of Fact, which is a thing past, and irrevocable; Science is the knowledge of all the consequences of names appertaining to the subject in hand”. (*Leviathan*, I, chap 5)

<sup>35</sup> See for instance, *Recherche*, VI, I, Vrin, t. 2, p. 288 ; see also *ibid.*, p. 347.

<sup>36</sup> 4.17.1 ; *Examination of Malebranche’s...* § 52.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. the letter by Lady Masham, criticising as Shaftesbury the unreality of Locke’s ethics and his conception of relations in this field.

*Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality*<sup>38</sup> concerns in fact epistemology as well as ethics, and *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* introduces Cudworth's conception of the physical world. Trying to 'christianise' Epicurus, and atomism and to offer a Christian corpuscularism, Cudworth maintains three related theses: according to the first, relations between atoms cannot be received through sensation; sensation offers only isolated qualities and all the remaining constituents of knowledge, mainly relation, are thus created by the mind on the occasion of sensation:<sup>39</sup>

That there are some Ideas of the Mind which ... must needs arise from the Innate Vigour and Activity of the Mind itself, is evident ... in that there are, *First*, ... Ideas of Wisdom, ... Verity, ... Justice... *Secondly*, in that there are many Relative Notions and Ideas, attributed as well to Corporeal as Incorporeal things that proceed wholly from the Activity of the Mind Comparing one thing with another. Such are Cause, Effect, Means, End, Order, Proportion, Similitude, Dissimilitude, Equality, Inequality, Aptitude, Inaptitude, Symmetry, Asymmetry, Whole and Part, Genus and Species, and the like.

Relation is the intellectual dimension, which matter cannot create nor transfer to the mind.

Cudworth adds a second thesis<sup>40</sup> mainly against Hobbes' conventionalism: the mind which creates relations is inside of matter (and not only in the human soul) through what is called *Plastic Nature* in *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*: *Plastic nature* is an intellectual constituent of the world, and the world cannot move or cohere without it; and in his *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* he introduces a similar notion, here called *relation*. By itself "the corporeal World in its naked Hue, is nothing else but a Heap of Dust or atoms, of several Figures and Magnitudes variously agitated up and down"<sup>41</sup> and by their relations only do things get their "charm, relishes and allurements"; "Relations and habitudes to one another (founded in some actions of them as they are cogitative beings) and by order all conspiring into one thing"<sup>42</sup>. Relations, according to Cudworth, are what constitutes the internal cohesion of everything, either individual things or the whole *kosmos*. "As for example, an house or palace is not only stone, brick, mortar ... heaped together, but the very essence and formal reason (*ratio*) of it is made up of relative and schetical notions, it being a certain disposition of those several material into a whole". Speaking about this kind of relation, Cudworth, who likes to insert Greek words in his texts, uses *skesis* the very same word the neo-Platonist tradition used to oppose the materialist Stoïcian tradition; the most famous of them, Plotinus, for instance, says: "Stoicians, themselves, driven by Truth,

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<sup>38</sup> Edition by Sarah Hutton, Cambridge University Press, 1996. The following is a summary of J.M.Vienne, 'Skesis et relation, du platonisme à l'empirisme', *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context*, G.A.J. Rogers, J.M.Vienne and Y.C. Zarka (eds), Kluwer, 1997, p. 111-126.

<sup>39</sup> *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (= *TEIM.*), 4. 2.1-2, p. 83-4.

<sup>40</sup> Newton will defend it in another context.

<sup>41</sup> *TEIM*, 4.6.9.

<sup>42</sup> *TEIM*, 4.2.10.

give evidence that, beyond bodies, a kind of superior soul is necessary, since they admit that their ‘Breath’ is intellectual that it is an intellectual fire; ... this *skesis* is in matter and if it is itself immaterial... it must be some *logos*, which is not body but some other nature”<sup>43</sup>. So according to the neo-Platonist tradition, relation is internal, and works as, in Kant's words, an internal teleology. Cudworth defended such a conception of the world.

The second thesis, which sustains the reality of relations, may be made consistent with the first only if relations are considered as the intellect itself working inside of the world. Here is a foundation for the third thesis: the human mind can know the external relations between things and inside things: because it finds its own *analogy* there. Relations are grasped by the human mind, but not by the senses, as Cudworth says with phrases which recall the scholastic debates about *de re* versus *de ratione*: “something that never came from sense ... which, though it be not merely notional or imaginary, but really belongs to the nature of that thing, yet is no otherwise than intellectually comprehended”<sup>44</sup>. On the other hand, on the subjective side, relations must be innate ideas: “If we prove [that relative notions or ideas] cannot be the impresses of any material Object from without, it will necessarily follow that they are from the Soul her self within, and are the natural furniture of humane Understanding.”<sup>45</sup> About this intellectual nature of relations, Locke has the same opinion as Cudworth and More, but he nevertheless refuses the consequences they draw from it, the theory of innate ideas: relations as well as principles and maxims are not in the mind before, but only after its exercise. Empiricists renounce intellectual intuition and admit only sense-data; it is the reason why they ignore external relations.

This similitude between human reason and the “reason of things” is the common thesis of the whole neo-Platonist trend of that century. Shaftesbury opposed Locke’s conception from this standpoint: he criticises Locke who “has taken all the ideas of order and virtue away from the world, and made them pure conventions”<sup>46</sup>. On the other hand, Shaftesbury makes it the philosopher’s duty to consider and know the mutual dependency, the relations of everything, the union and the cohesion of the whole<sup>47</sup>.

This conception was defended by a philosopher Locke criticised: Malebranche, as he criticised one of his followers, John Norris. According to Malebranche, order, and “*ratios*”<sup>48</sup> which constitute it, force themselves on God himself. Note that Malebranche use the French word *rapport* but that the 1694-5<sup>49</sup> English translation uses the English word *relations*—So,

<sup>43</sup> *Ennéades*, IV, 7, 4, 14. Cf. *Timée* 69b; and. 37 b,c.

<sup>44</sup> *TEIM*, 4.2.10, p. 92.

<sup>45</sup> Henry More, *An Antidote Against Atheism*, Book 1, Chap. VI, § 1., which continues: “All which relative Ideas I shall easily prove to be no material impresses from without upon the Soul, but her own active conception proceeding from her self whilst she takes notice of *external Objects*”.

<sup>46</sup> *Life and Letters*, ed. Rand, 1900, p. 403.

<sup>47</sup> *Exercices*, § 16, Rotterdam, 1698 – ed. Jaffro, Paris, Aubier, p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> *Relation* was the translation used in Locke’s time for the French *rapport*. As we said *relation* is mainly used in logics and in the phrase *relative ideas*.

<sup>49</sup> London: J. Dunton and S. Manship

according Malebranche, in his English translation at least, relations constitute the world and must be known as much as possible by men<sup>50</sup> :

It is certain that God holds intellectually in Himself the perfections of every being He has created or He can create, and that it is by those intelligible perfections that he knows the essence of everything... Now, those perfections are also immediate object for the human mind. Thus, intelligible ideas, or perfections which are in God, which represent to us what is outside of God, are absolutely necessary and immutable. Now truths are only relations of equality or inequality which are between those intelligible beings.

In God, those relations are known clearly when they are relations of magnitude (number and extension) and confusedly when they are relations of perfection,<sup>51</sup> or between substances or qualities<sup>52</sup>. But on principle, knowledge of relations constituting the world is open to the human mind seeing them in God and asserting them in a true proposition which is a relation of equality between two terms:<sup>53</sup>

Truth is nothing else than a real relation, either of equality or of inequality... Truth is what it is... One never mistakes when one sees the relations which are; ... there are three kinds of relations or truths: relations between ideas, between things and ideas, and between things only. ... Among those three kinds of truth, those between ideas are eternal and immutable, and because of their immutability, they are also the rules and measure of all the others.

As a matter of fact, we cannot *know* relations or truths themselves, because truths or relations do not exist as such: only ideas exist in God – so we can know God’s ideas of the relations between things, or ideas of truths: “For Ideas are real, but the Equality between the Idea’s, which is Truth, has no reality”<sup>54</sup>. So, even if Malebranche defends a theory according which relations are out of the human mind, the relations cannot be out of any mind: they are relations inside God’s mind: a relation implies the action of a mind as a ‘substratum’: if it is not the human mind, it must be God’s. Even though they differ on its location, Locke and Malebranche agree on the fact that relation must be ‘internal’ to some mind.

The possibility of seeing ideas in God was also criticised by Locke in the posthumous notes he wrote against *The Search after Truth* and Norris’s writings. It is not only a reaction against their theory of Ideas, it is also a reaction against the capacity to see the relations constituting the world (what

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<sup>50</sup> *Search for truth*, Eclaircissement X, ed. Robinet, Paris, CNRS, III, p. 136-137.

<sup>51</sup> *Entretiens de Métaphysique*, VIII. 13.

<sup>52</sup> *Search*, Elucidation X, *ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>53</sup> *Search*, Elucidation X, *ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>54</sup> *The Search after Truth*, 3.2.6 (transl: London: J. Dunton and S. Manship, Vol. 1, 1694): “We believe that Truths, even those that are Eternal; as that twice two are four, are not so much as absolute Beings: So far are we from believing that they are in God. For it is visible, that that Truth only consists in a relation of Equality, which is between twice Two and Four. Therefore we do not say that we see God in seeing Truths, as St. Austin says, but in seeing the Ideas of those Truths: For Ideas are real, but the Equality between the Idea’s, which is Truth, has no reality.”

Idea means for Malebranche and in the neo-Platonist conception). Against Norris<sup>55</sup>, Locke underlines that “Truth lies only in propositions” (§ 19), that the knowledge of relations between ideas is not always present to the mind (§ 29) and therefore not really eternal: according to Locke, relation is an act of the mind, and as such it must be reproduced, even if the same thought can be reproduced each time, and be eternal in that derived way – which is the definition of *eternal truth* in the *Essay*<sup>56</sup>.

That objective and knowable reality of relations is what Locke refuses; even if Nature is by itself ordered, this order cannot be known, and may be different from the order of our thoughts. Order outside of the mind must be interpreted and a new artificial order must be built. The *Examination of P. Malebranche’s opinion*, makes the basis of the answer to Norris more explicit: examining the tenth Elucidation<sup>57</sup>, Locke rejects the notion of universal reason with three arguments: 1) universal reason is nothing but individual power used by various people in the same way: “Men have to consider the ideas they have, one with another; and by thus comparing them, find out the relations that are between them”; 2) that individual power is limited because human understanding discovers relations by reasoning: “this way ...of finding truth, so painful, uncertain, and limited, is proper only to men or finite understandings”; 3) That human reasoning is not divine intuition: “God has given me an understanding of my own...I think it more possible for me to see with other men’s eyes ... than with God’s”<sup>58</sup>.

Nevertheless, in the same section, Locke seems to give *relation* a status which contradicts the unreality established in the *Essay*: he says that “these relations [between two ideas, which can be proved by anybody] are infinite, and God who knows all things, and their relations as they are, knows them all ...” Some other phrases in the same section go the same way<sup>59</sup>: relations are between things and are infinite. But, concerning infinity first, it is understood by Locke as infinity in quality and by Malebranche as infinity in quantity – and Locke never agrees with the other Malebranchian attributes of relations: necessity, eternity.... 2) Concerning relations, he gives them (using Malebranche’s phrase ‘universal reason’) the same definition as in the *Essay*: “Universal reason ... seems to me nothing else but the power men have to consider the ideas they have, one with another, and, by thus comparing them, find out relations that are between them” – and

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<sup>55</sup> *Remarks upon some of Mr Norris’ Books.*

<sup>56</sup> *Essay*, 4.1.9 ; 4.11.13.

<sup>57</sup> *Search after Truth*, Elucidation X, *ibid.*, pp. 129-133.

<sup>58</sup> *An Examination of P. Malebranche’s opinion of seeing all things in God*, § 59, Works, London, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 1759, t. III, p. 429. Cf. my edition : *Locke, Examen de la vision en Dieu de Malebranche*, Vrin, 2013

<sup>59</sup> Cf. also when Locke tries to make sense of the phrase *we see all things in the infinite reason of God*: “For if he means that they consider a part of those relations of things, which are infinite, that is true” and “ But ‘if this infinite reason which we consult’, be at last nothing but the infinite, unchangeable relations, which are in the things, some of which we make a shift to discover, this indeed is true

when he speaks of relations between things, it can only be in agreement with this opening definition<sup>60</sup>.

Relation is the production of human understanding, considering, comparing or reasoning. The Universe cannot exhibit an order, which human mind could grasp. There can be only occasions for human mind to put external things in order and find out relations in that order. That order is only a hypothesis and the only known relation is between ideas. It must be noted that, in the *Essay*<sup>61</sup>, Locke does not use the argument from design to prove the existence of God, but only the argument from the existence of the thinker: it would have been contradictory to give a proof of God from design, order and external relations, and to criticise Norris and Malebranche on the reality and knowledge of relations. The neo-Platonist argument of the evidence of exterior relations is what Locke refuses, as well as he refuses innate ideas of logical principles and of moral maxims. Against dogmatism, Locke propose the Enlightened maxim *sapere aude*; according to Enlightenment, relation is an act of thought, perhaps even the first.

#### IV. The function of Relations in the *Essay*

Even if Locke's opposition to Malebranche and Norris mainly concerned epistemological matters, the question of ethics is fundamental in his position on the problem of relation.

It is widely agreed that even though Ethics in itself receives little attention in the *Essay*, it was at the back of Locke's mind all the time as he wrote. Concerning Ethics, Locke deals with relation first in book 1, when he criticises moral maxims: the fact that there is no universal consent on this point proves that they are not innate and that they are propositions which need to be proved, that is to say they must be deduced, with the use of intermediate ideas, so as to connect two terms. Afterwards, Locke repeats several times his central contention that Morality can be demonstrated.<sup>62</sup> But to demonstrate it, determinate and adequate ideas are necessary, at least in their part linked by the relation. So, determinate, adequate ideas are important mainly for morality (2<sup>nd</sup> rule for relations: 2.28.19). Also, it is important, mainly for morality, that all ideas come from simple ideas (of sensation or reflection), that is to say from experience (1<sup>st</sup> rule for relations, 2.28.18); thus based on experience, they are not intellectually intuited, nor immediately revealed; and because every complex idea is composed by the mind, complex moral idea is what it is aimed to be, and everyone can know what constitutes one's moral ideas (4.4.9).

But relations have a more important function in Ethics, for the constitution of moral ideas as such: "being that which denominates our moral Actions, and deserves well to be examined, there being no part of knowledge wherein we should be more careful to get determined *ideas*, and

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<sup>60</sup> Though uncertain, this agreement can be based on the fact that *relation* is used as Malebranche's *rapport (ratio)*: which means that he insists more on the objective side of the relation, the foundation it has in things.

<sup>61</sup> Locke uses it in the *Essays on the Law of Nature*.

<sup>62</sup> 3.11.16-17 ; 4.3.18 ; 4.12.8.



avoid, as much as may be, obscurity and confusion.” (2.28.4). Moral ideas are those which receive the most extensive treatment in the *Essay*<sup>63</sup> much more for instance than cause and effect. Moral Ideas are founded on mixed modes, but to which is added a relation to some kind of law, the relation of rectitude. By themselves, mixed modes have no value (2.28.15): they become good or bad through a relation of rectitude; they become *virtue* by being related to the law of opinion, they become *innocence* by being related to the civil Law of a country, they become *duty* by being related to the law of God.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> rule for relations (2.28.20) says that the relation itself is only a comparison; so it is necessary to find the other side of the comparison, the true rule to which one has to relate the one's acts — and that is a job for deduction, the deduction of the true ethical law, work initiated in Book 4: deduction of the true moral law is the only application of demonstration by relation “which is the largest Field of our Knowledge”, illustrated by algebra, but applied only to ‘more useful parts of contemplation’: that is to say Morality (4.3.18). There will be several critics against Locke's theory of morality, but most of them concern the artificiality of Morals; Locke's contemporaries saw what the point in his theory was: the unreality of relations as applied to ethics. The unreality of relations makes sense in his application to that field.

This theory had consequences in other areas too; a lot of ideas are not called relations: powers, secondary qualities, space and time are ideas which have “secret” relations to other things; most of them are considered as simple ideas for two reasons: Locke's interest is not for reality in itself, but for what appears; what appears simple and positive may be complex and relative or privative; it does not matter what the idea in itself is designed for: the whole of chapter 8 in the second book may be looked on as a plea for considering complex ideas — and mainly relative ideas — as simple ideas.

In conclusion, Locke's opposition to neo-Platonists, to enthusiasts, and to religious dogmatists, the priority given in Ethics to conscious analysis and composition, the use of relations in order to elaborate a rational morality, are by themselves without any other consideration, arguments in favour of the unreality of relations.

## V. The genesis of the *Essay*

The last piece of evidence may be found in the changes between the 1<sup>st</sup> *Draft* and the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Essay*. The alterations may be interpreted as signs of the importance and the property of the relation in Locke's thought. Let us see what is Locke's evolution about the status of causality, time and Ethics.

First, concerning *causality*: As early as in the *Draft A*, Locke examines what is the relation of causality (§ 15-16); he explains that even if there has to be a cause for every effect, even if I have observed that usually one fact follows from another, it is nevertheless impossible to express a

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<sup>63</sup> Ideas of identity and diversity excepted, but they were added later, also for ethical purposes.

relation of causality between the two. From the first *Draft*, Locke assumed that causality is a relation because it cannot be observed but ‘superadduced’ to experience<sup>64</sup>.

As a consequence of the unreality of causality, Locke treats of the relative status of powers and qualities, a question he mentions quite often in the *Essay* as we have seen, but in the *Essay* he does not expound the reason for his opinion as clearly. Here (§ 17), he explicitly mentions the reason: because the real cause is out of reach, it is impossible to say that such-and-such power is the effect of such-and-such particles with such-and-such figures; for instance:

the idea of white ...being produced in me ... without any relative consideration but as one simple positive idea & when our senses are conversant about any object we take noe notice of any relation between the thing & our senses we ought to consider them as positive things, the uncertain philosophical cause of such a sensation being not here enquired into ....

So, the consideration of powers and qualities as simple ideas instead of relative ideas is founded, first on the unreality of the relation of causality; the other foundation is the way to consider things: the philosophical (or scientific) cause is not asked here: we must stay at the common level of observation, where *white* is a simple idea. Thus, unreality of cause(s) and phenomenism are the two reasons of letting aside the question of real ‘relations’ in qualities and power. As a result, in the *Essay*, power is mentioned in the chapter concerning relations (2.26.6) but not as a relation: it is only an occasion for explicit relations: *weak*, *strong* for instance

Let us now move on to relations of time and place. They are only mentioned as relations from *Draft B* onwards. In *Draft B*, relation is extensively analysed from § 96 to the ultimate section, § 162. But several headings were later added, giving the title *relation* only to some sections and *simple ideas* to others; so the original unity was altered and the sections concerning time and extension receive the heading: *simple ideas*<sup>65</sup>. Those ‘new’ structures were kept in the final *Essay*, where time, extension, are presented as simple ideas received from immediate experience (2.5; 2.7.9), instead of *relation*. Distance in the *Essay* is not a relation, but is seen immediatly (2.13.2). However, traces remain from the previous structure: time and extension are still mentioned as relations (2.26.3-5), not as such, but as occasions of relation (dating from Christ’s birth, *young*, *old* and so on). The fact that “abundance of words ... stand only for relations (and perhaps the greatest part)” is just mentioned as an illusion of ‘first sight’ (2.26.6). Once more, what now seems in the *Essay*, to be of paramount importance, is to describe what “at first sight” is and not “in reality”; there may be “secret relations” (2.21.3) as powers, qualities (as there are “secret

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<sup>64</sup> Most of the time, here as in the *Essay*, when Locke speaks about the real cause-and-effect relationship, he only uses the word ‘to depend’.

<sup>65</sup> The alteration seem to be from *relation* to *simple ideas* as is proved by § 101, where simple ideas is added with a new redaction of the section about time, which suppress the notion of comparing (that is to say of relation) as constituent of any idea of time.

references”<sup>66</sup>) but in the final version, *relation* generally<sup>67</sup> excludes what is phenomenally simple, and seems reserved for what is an act of the mind. The shift from the ‘attentive’ or learned consideration of powers and qualities as constituted of relations between things, to the common opinion of qualities as simple ideas, this shift, constitutes one of the choices of the final version of the *Essay*; not an easy choice, as is shown by several sections apologising for it, or by Locke’s attitude on Molineux’s question.

The most important relation, as we have seen, is moral relation. Moral relations are presented in *Draft A*, before the considerations on knowledge in § 226, but *Draft B* ends abruptly after that presentation. The main difference with the *Essay* is that mixed modes haven’t been invented as a category to classify moral ideas yet. Without that category it is not so clear what moral ideas are: ideas of acts are related with ideas of a rule, and moral ideas are ideas constituting the rule itself (*Draft B*, § 160, 161); so relation is outside moral ideas. The *Essay* gives another, more rational, classification: mixed modes and the law are in themselves purely positive<sup>68</sup>: and relation only introduces morality: the relation of agreement between 1) the collection of simple ideas which constitutes the mixed mode of acts and 2) the collection which constitutes the law is, according to Locke, the place of morality. Mixed modes become moral (or immoral) only by a relation established by the understanding between them and a law. The autonomy of the moral agent is conditioned by the unreality of relations. Improving his classification from the *Drafts* to the *Essay*, Locke developed a capacity to clearly distinguish between what is phenomenologically positive and what is by essence relation, which necessarily depends on individual human understanding: morality.

To conclude on this evolution in the description of relations through the twenty years: powers, time, extension are progressively called *simple ideas*, because the relations which constitute them does not appear to consciousness: the word *relation* is reserved to what is instituted by the understanding – even where the ideas force him to do so. The only interesting relation becomes the ethical one, and ethics becomes more and more clearly an explicit relation between some mixed modes and a law; and relating explicitly the two makes the condition of true morality.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to show that Locke is still a traditional philosopher, as far as he gives to relation a traditional status: relation is unreal. But relation is unreal because in his time relation can only be the result of an act of some mind. So to agree on the fact that there are external

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<sup>66</sup> 3.2.4; 3.2.8; 3.10.17.

<sup>67</sup> Generally, because some expressions seem ambiguous: does ‘whether any one will take Space to be only a relation resulting from the existence of other Beings at a distance’ refer to a conscious relating?

<sup>68</sup> 4.28.16; « there is often no distinction made between the positive idea of the action, and the reference it has to a Rule. By which confusion, those who... take names for things, are often misled in their judgment of actions » and for law 2.28.14: « This rule being nothing but a Collection of several simple Ideas ».

relations between the things would be to agree on the fact there is a thought inside of matter. This thesis is supported by neo-Platonists and one of the main point of Locke's philosophy is to oppose that conception of the world and the theory of innate ideas which goes with it. Locke criticises the external relations to support the modern mechanist conception of the world against the old spiritualist one. So by a kind of modernity, he denies what will make the modern science.