Chapter 13

How Morality Comes to Be: On the Germ of Being and Normativity in the Action of Signs

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Introduction

When confronted with an argument for some theory of morality in which an "is" turns into an "ought," a contemporary reader of philosophy is likely to recall immediately David Hume's prohibition of such moves. Hume observes that

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, it's necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the

> distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason.[1]

In other words, there is what one might call a *modal difference* between normative or prescriptive statements, and descriptive or positive statements, and Hume does not observe a manner in which the writer may make a such a modal leap. However, I believe that a modal conversion of a particular kind *does* take place between being and normativity, does so *pervasively* in the universe, and is immediately observable. In this chapter, I defend the nature and empirical observability of this modal conversion in even physical interactions between nonmental objects.

The presentation to follow is of a modal conversion in the *action of signs*. When the action of signs is pursued as an avenue of inquiry in its own right, rather than under the rubric of "semiotics" or any one of many other perspectives, it implies a perspective all of its own.[2] I contend, in this chapter, that *normativity is a reality within and constitutive of the natures and interactions of physical entities*, and to experience this, one must understand these entities through the lens of sign action. Moreover, the model by which is manifest this elementary normativity within being is a basis to explore further how value and morality emerges within the sociocultural world of human beings.

Synopsis of Doctrinal Sources

The biography of the ideas in this chapter is not widely known in mainstream professional philosophical circles, and so it will be profitable to summarise it briefly. In order to locate a naturally emerging normativity in what I will call a "kenotic" aspect of sign action or *semiosis*, I rely on my own prior extension

1 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1739), §1, 469–470.

2 The philosophically doctrinal implications of the perspective implied in the action of signs is explored in Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). In this chapter, I focus on its physical and empirical implications.

and modification[3] of the work of John Deely on so-called "physiosemiosis,"[4] which is the thesis that sign action is not confined to merely cultural, mental, or biological activity, but is operative also in any physical system, rendering sign action a *pervasive* activity in the universe. This claim is itself an ambitious extension of the founding biosemiotic work of Jakob von Uexküll[5] and Thomas Sebeok,[6] which extends significantly beyond semiology or "semiotics" in the linguistic, anthropocentric sense of the term popularised by Saussure and others of the twentieth century Continental tradition. To sketch the landscape further, this theoretical backdrop draws upon the semiotic work of Charles Peirce in the late 19th century, in particular his concept of an "interpretant."[7] More significantly though, the recent discovery by John Deely and Ralph Austin Powell,[8] in the years between approximately 1977 and 1985, of the revolutionary potential in John Poinsot's treatise on signs (1632) has provided the field with a systematic theory of signs of extreme terminological precision. Poinsot, also known traditionally as John of St. Thomas, is claimed to be multiply revolutionary: he provides grounds to transcend

3 Principally in Arlyn, Culwick, '"Machine Code for the Universe:" How the Action of Signs Pervades Everything'. https://academia.edu/39709311/_Machine_code_for_the_universe_-_how_the_action_of_signs_pervades_everything.; Culwick, 'A Fissure in the Foundation'. *Reality*, 2024. https://realityjournal.org.

4 John Deely, 'The Grand Vision'. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Spring, 1994): 371–400

5 Jacob von Uexküll, "A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men," in *Instinctive Behaviour: The Development of a Modern Concept*, trans. by Claire B. Schiller and Claire B. Schiller (New York: International Universities Press, Inc, 1934), 5–60 (14).

6 Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding*, 663 adverts to Sebeok's work in this area going as far back as 1968 in Thomas A. Sebeok, "Goals and Limitations of the Study of Animal Communication," in *Contributions to the Doctrine of Signs*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 59–69.

7 Charles S. Peirce, "'Lowell Lectures on the Logic of Science; or Induction and Hypothesis', Lecture VII," *in Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition, Volume 1: 1857-1866* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982), 4644–65.

8 John Poinsot, *Tractatus de Signis.* Edited by John Deely and Ralph Austin Powell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1632). Biographical notes on the origin of the discovery are found in Deely, "The Semiotic of John Poinsot: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow." *Semiotica* (1988), 79–80.

the idealism–realism dilemma[9] and to permanently repudiate nominalism.[10] He advances an experientially-driven[11] realism in a tradition generally thought to consist of mere medieval Aristotelianism, all the while avoiding invoking the perennial stumbling block of the failed modern era, the so-called "problem of the external world."[12] What is of interest to me in Poinsot, who I shall rely on principally, is more technical and rather narrow in scope, namely his terminology and his realisation that Boethius's[13] two exhaustive categories of relation, transcendental and ontological relation, have greater scope than the Aristotelian categories of being, extending over both being and nonbeing (that is, mind-dependent being) and providing sign action with truly universal scope.[14] These resources are adequate for the task of elucidating (a) how the action of signs generates normativity, and (b) the root of the normative principle, in the heart of sign action, which I term "kenosis."

Philosophical Method of Exposition

If I am to make a claim to the *truth* of this chapter's claims, then the manner in which it is ordered to truth is of principal importance. To make manifest a modal conversion in the real relating between things, I shall rely principally upon an *image*,

9 Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding*, 443.

10 See, for example, Ralph Austin Powell's development upon Poinsot's concept of "ontological relation" that not only are some relations real, but real relations are directly experienced and thus knowable without need for further inference, e.g. Powell, *Freely Chosen Reality* (Washington D.C: University Press of America, 1983), 81.

11 "Doctrinally, Poinsot's work achieves a new, entirely experiential point of departure for the enterprise of philosophy, and reconciles in so doing the seemingly opposed orders of nature and "culture" (Deely, "Poinsot, John,'' in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics, by Thomas A. Sebeok* (Berlin/ New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1986); https://www.ontology.co/semiotics-ontology.htm.

12 Deely, "The Quasi-Error of the External World," *Semiotics* 10, no. 1 (2001), 31n.12.

13 Boethius. "In Categorias Aristotelis Libri Quattuor," in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus 64, Series Latina,* ed. J.P. Migne (Paris: 1844), 195-294.

14 Deely, 'The Semiotic of John Poinsot: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," 77, 80.

upon which the theory rests, and this image relies upon the reader's everyday understanding of the following:

- objects affecting other objects,
- objects being distinct from other objects,
- objects having or acquiring some significance.

Thus, the image stands or falls on the appropriateness of applying the reader's everyday understanding to the subjects of relations and signs. I am unaware of other dependencies.

I claim that the image to follow is admissible as an interpretive, framing or context-giving element of this chapter's argument, because I believe that deferring explanatory power to the above dependencies puts the image "above reproach." Relying upon common experience enables this chapter to make no special claim to knowledge, as its claims are verifiable by any reader. Moreover, any potential bias in my understanding may be spotted and distinguished from a reader's own immediate experiences of objects. Furthermore, it empowers a community of readers to signal their (non-) acceptance of the chapter, and so to reach rough consensus regarding its claims, and in so doing to construct an empirical proof of this chapter's truth.[15] Concerning the mode in which the image operates, it demonstrates *mechanically or concretely*, as far as a thought experiment can simulate concreteness and physical mechanism. It is thus an *analogue* model[16] serving to ground and animate the abstractions from

15 This understanding of how scientific proofs operate originates in the work of Karl Popper, and, pertaining to how such proofs can obtain actual knowledge, is advanced in Powell, *Freely Chosen Reality*. In Culwick, "How to Render Freedom Empirically Verifiable: Ralph Austin Powell's Radically Scientific Thomism." *Academia.Edu*, 2020; https://www.academia.edu/38466994/How_To_Render_Freedom_Empirically_Verifiable_Ralph_Austin_Powells_Radically_Scientific_Thomism, I have attempted to recover Powell's method of empirical proof from historical oblivion, and argued that his method makes testable many philosophical questions that traditionally have unfortunately remained speculative exercises of reason.

16 Sun-Joo Shin, *The Iconic Logic of Peirce's Graphs* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002) is exemplary on the difference between analogue and digital models. In brief, an analogue model is first grasped as a whole and can then be read analytically into component parts, while a digital model is first grasped in its parts, which can then be

which the exposition is crafted. As for the *function* of the image, it is to manifest immediately (that is, without further inference) how relations function, including what marks the difference between the following:

- relating and nonrelating
- relating in one respect and not in another respect
- being something *versus* being nothing in particular
- coming into relation as a reduction from potentiality to actuality

The image's immediate manifestation of the above furnishes the reader's model of relating with a grounding for the concepts and terminology to be set forth.

Finally, concerning the completeness of the method of attaining truth, a chapter of this length will not permit an empirical proof, nor a fully specified set of falsifiable claims. But what there *is* scope to provide for is (to use a term introduced later in this chapter) a material[17] fundament of such a proof, such that this chapter contains, latent within it, such a proof, which can be made manifest to the reader upon consulting the relevant material.[18]

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synthetically assembled in order to grasp the whole and to perceive the context in which each part operates. For example, an analogue clock is read by understanding the position of its hands against a circular backdrop in which they rotate; it is necessary to grasp that they rotate full-circle around a centre, and then (analytically) to use the hands' positions to divide the circle, and so to tell how much time has elapsed or remains of a given day, hour or minute. In contrast, a digital clock is read by understanding numerical values on a screen; it is necessary to know how high a given number (e.g., that representing minutes) goes before it simultaneously increments another number (e.g., that representing hours) in order to tell the time. As such, the parts are given first, from which one *synthesises* the whole via imaginative effort. Analogue models, such as images and concrete examples, are especially useful in abstract exercises such as philosophical reasoning where many "parts" (e.g., terms and concepts) are given and where the imagined organic whole in which their figure is usually difficult to grasp.

17 See note 25 for details of this term.

18 See note 15. For a concrete application of the method to a hitherto speculative question, see Culwick, "An Empirically Testable Causal Mechanism for Divine Action.in The Second Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics, Andrew Pinsent characterises this interaction

The model: what relations are like and how they work

Universes

Our point of departure to discuss the emergence of being and normativity in the universe is to imagine a collection of objects, none of which can have any kind of relation to another. To construct this image, do not attempt, in one breath, to visualise a collection of objects that can have no relation to each other. Rather, by a process of abstraction, begin to consider such a scenario, and as soon as you notice any respect in which the objects might be related, rule it out. Are they related in space? No. Do they both have shape? They could not. Do they both have a surface? No. And so forth.

Now, in what respect could these objects comprise a system? *In no respect, since there is no means by which the objects can be related.* There would be nothing over and above their existence by which they could comprise a system. And bare existence is self-evidently not a form of relatedness, since it is not being-towards, but simply being absolutely. Thus, the objects do not suffice to establish a system.

Universes Necessarily Are Systems

Now, universes necessarily are systems, however scantily related their components might be, or else there would be nothing to make a universe an entity in its own right, over and above its components. If one were to argue the contrary, the only basis by which a universe could be anything would be by force of describing it in language or in thought. As such, however, it would be a mere nominalism. Without a mind-independent basis intrinsic to the

in terms of mutually empathic relations that serve to \"infuse\" virtues and other attributes into a person. Such interaction requires that causal relations exist between a necessary being and the contingent universe. This paper addresses a central problem of special divine action: that the empirically identifiable causes of physical events are modally ill-suited for (and epistemically distinct from" *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 6, no. 4 (2020). https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2020.v6n4.a10.

universe in question, there would be no way in which a universe could be anything in its own right.

From the perspective of being a universe and not just a relationless "heap" there is no difference between there being no objects at all and each object being nothing to any other object: in either case the outcome is identical: since a universe requires some way of relating – some "principle of unity" – there would be no way to be a universe.

It would not help, either, to recur to the merely linguistic and mental fact that by thinking of things as being a "heap" they are thereby related in thought. After all, either thought stands outside of the real, in which case it does not bear upon the scenario, or it is real in its own right, in which case it constitutes yet another respect in which the objects are related, which must therefore be abstracted out from the thought experiment.

Therefore, a universe does not arise if objects can have no relation to each other. In this respect, *relation is fundamental to a universe in the sense of it being the principle or form of universehood*.

Objects Necessarily Are Systems Too

Let us now turn our focus onto the objects themselves in the thought experiment. For anything to be an object, it would have to be a system of interactions in its own right. If you are in any doubt about this, it appears to be the case for the actual universe. As a case in point, the following regress occurs in the physical sciences:

1. A theory – say, gas laws – explains (and predicts the behaviour of) an object or system of objects in terms of relations between aspects, components, or attributes it has (in the case of gas laws, molecules).
2. Since relations necessarily have terms, the objects or systems embodying these terms are then empirically investigated, resulting in a theory that describes their internal relations. For example, molecules are in fact atoms (or rather ions) interacting.
3. These new relations' terms (e.g., the atoms) are investigated, resulting, of course, in a further theory that describes the

behaviour and constitution of the object in question in terms of further relations between new terms, *ad infinitum*.

4. Thus, gases are relations between molecules, which are relations between atoms, which are relations between electrons, protons, and/or neutrons, which are relations between quarks, leptons, and bosons.

The latter three are called "fundamental" particles not because they are known to be indivisible "building blocks" of reality, but merely because it is not established that they have parts in relation like everything else in the universe. It is possible that at smaller scales there are no further parts or "particles" (that is, entities identifiable by energy level, spin, etc.), but this is not to say that there would necessarily be *nothing*. There would be something – perhaps simply a vague fuzz of relations between relations, with no term having intrinsic specification of any kind. Such a scenario is theorised under the name "quantum foam" to be interspersed by particles (and their complimentary antiparticles) momentarily popping into existence and then annihilating themselves, giving spacetime a granular texture that otherwise would be "smooth," that is to say, having nothing to cause enough disturbance to quantise out a particle. This scenario suggests thoroughgoing fundamental relationality that, at this tiny scale, lacks the continuity to sustain a mechanism to produce "stuff" reliably.

Thus, the picture suggested by the progress of physics is of a world both primarily and pervasively relational, with each term (or object) turning out to be simply another set of relations. It would be relations "all the way down," to a point where no mechanism is present to cause discrete entities to exist. Beyond this point, the very principle of the universe (as defined) would break down, as it would imply that there would be relations and no "stuff," which is plainly impossible since relations necessarily must have terms, or else there would be nothing to relate. This point, logically implied by our image, would be a limit case for the possibility of objects, and the lower bound of the universe itself.

This suffices to show that any object in a universe must consist of relations between parts. Since our image requires that there be no relations, it must now require that there be objects

that lack relation. But from this it follows that there could be no objects at all, since being an object requires having parts in relation. Therefore, my thought experiment can feature neither objects nor a universe. In other words, the scenario must contain "nothing" at all.

Relative Nothing and Absolute Nothing

It must be clarified, though, that although I denote a very high grade of nothingness by the term "nothing," I do not mean nothing *absolutely*. After all, it is perfectly conceivable that something exists beyond the human capacity to imagine its being, involving in itself neither relation nor matter, nor a universe.

However, such an entity would not have parts; it would not have attributes; it would not be an object; it would not be a relation. There could be no content of *any* kind by which one might think of such an entity, other than the bare property of existence. Nonetheless, there are no grounds to rule out the existence of such an entity. Therefore, the above scenario only reveals that there can be "nothing" in terms of the capacity for human thought to imagine how things can be, rather than nothing absolutely. As such, "relative nothing" is the most basic content to the term "nothing" that can be employed concerning the universe, since it cannot be ascertained whether absolute nothingness obtains, and so "relative nothing" is an acceptable grade of nothingness for tackling the question of how being and normativity come to be.[19]

Relating in All or Some Respects

To put it simply, in a universe, a thing is only something if it is something to something else. But things are not related in every way. Thus far, the contrast between being something and being relatively nothing implies being part of, or not part of, the universe. But it is also possible for a thing to relate to another in one respect, but not in another respect. And "nothing" can be shown to play a local (non-universe-wide) role here.

19 The subject of "relative nothing" is dealt with in considerably greater detail in Culwick, "A Fissure in the Foundation."

Modify our image to comprise a universe consisting of only two things, where one thing is something to the other thing in one respect but is nothing to it in some second respect. If the thing is an object in the actual universe (as per Section "Objects are necessarily systems too"), then the "second respect" is either imaginary or it is a relation intrinsic to the being of the thing. In the latter case, then it is merely "locally" nothing, that is, nothing to the other thing; but it is something to at least one other part of the first thing, and so it is part of the universe.

In the former case, or if the things are individuals (that is, they have no parts), it follows that the second respect *is not part of the universe*. This obtains directly from the fact that universes consist essentially in their principle(s) of unity. There is nothing to relate to the second respect, and so it is not in the universe, thus imaginary.

Identity and Distinctness

This state of affairs may be unfamiliar ground to the reader, and so it could be fruitful to attend to a limit case: identity. I distinguish identity from relatedness by testing whether there is at least one respect in which things are unrelated, such that if things are related in *every* respect, then there can be no respect in which they are distinct or independent, and so they are one thing.

It appears to me, on the basis of our image, that this is its principle of distinctness: a thing's distinctness from another thing originates in there being at least one respect in which they are *not* related. For our two objects are not related in the above "second respect," and so they do not determine each other in this respect. And if they do not determine each other in a given respect, then they are distinct from each other in this respect.

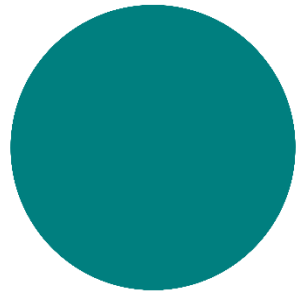

Figure 1: Identicality modelled in relational terms. Source: Author

Attributes and Relations

When something *does* respect something else (according to some attribute(s), of course), the relation has within it certain roles, to which we now turn. For example, a relation of parenthood requires one person to possess the attribute of being a parent and another to possess the attribute of being a child. In Poinsot's terminology, the relation is "founded" upon the attribute of being a parent and "terminates" at the attribute of being a child. And because no relation is actualised in a universe unless "something is something to something else," this (logically) third entity "to which" something is significant is termed by the scholastics a "knowing power." In the nineteenth century, Charles Sanders Peirce proposed a generalisation of the concept to include mind-independent things and termed this the "interpretant" of the relation.[20]

We learn further from John Poinsot[21] that, in the inner workings of any relation, there are in fact two complementary facets in the connections between interpretant and fundament, and between fundament and terminus. It is the same two facets

20 Peirce, "Lowell Lectures on the Logic of Science; or Induction and Hypothesis," 464–465.
21 Poinsot, *Tractatus de Signis*.

that are observable, whether between one or another extreme of a relation.

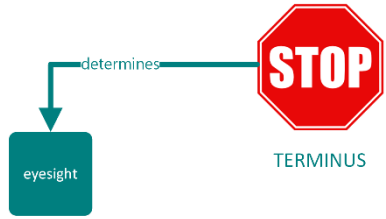

Figure 2: A relation of determining. Source: Author

The first facet is known as *determining*[22] and is the effect of a relation's fundament upon its interpretant, and its terminus upon its fundament.[23] For example, a stop sign cannot terminate the thought that it is rectangular, since it is octagonal. What a terminus does is *delimit the scope of possible ways it may be related to*. In this way, a terminus determines its fundament by having a certain nature, which cannot be what it is not, and so cannot support a fundament that is unable to relate to its attributes.

22 *Tractatus de Signis*, 166-192 (Book 1, Question 4).

23 This chapter must necessarily be brief on the inner workings of relations, but the idea that a terminus "determines" a fundament in the same way that a fundament determines an interpretant is confirmed in Poinsot, *Tractatus de Signis*, 194/31-37, 195/3-9, 195/18-29, 202/46-203/14.:

> [The] sign [-vehicle] strictly keeps to the order of "objective causality" or of the formal causality of knowledge, not of efficient or productive causality. When a sign [-vehicle] produces an effect it is never by virtue of being a sign [-vehicle]. The sign [-vehicle] is not even the efficient cause of the knowledge of the thing signified; it **makes it known only by standing in lieu of the object [i.e. significate] within the cognitive faculty to which it brings the presence of the object**, thus functioning **in the same line of causality as the object itself** (formal causality). (Maritain's translation, in Jacques Maritain, *Language: An Enquiry into Its Meaning and Function*, 52.

Maritain here describes a sign-vehicle determining a knowing power in the same rationale as a significate determines a sign-vehicle in the definitional context of determination.

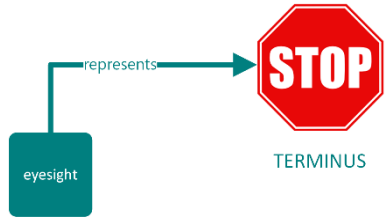

Figure 3: A relation of representing. Source: Author

The second facet is known as *representing*.[24] It is the effect of an interpretant upon a fundament, and of a fundament upon a terminus, and runs in the opposite causal direction to determining. For example, when you see a stop sign, your perceiving it represents the octagonally-shaped stop sign – and thus you are guided to recognise that it is a stop sign. And in turn, the stop sign represents the command to stop. In this way, fundaments represent their termini by having attributes that are represented – by some interpretant – to represent the terminus.[25]

In every actual relation, determining and representing occur together in a two-way causality, which I term *founding*.[26] To put determining and representing together in an example, the stop sign's physical attributes determine a driver to represent it as a stop sign, which is a recognition not only of its being as an object, but also that it further represents a command to stop. This determined recognition thus *founds* a relation to the rules of the road, such that the stop sign *signifies* to the driver the command to stop.[27]

24 Poinsot, *Tractatus de Signis*, 26 (Book 1, Question 3).

25 On this point, I must again be brief on the inner workings of relations, but fundaments, prior to being in relation, are not fundaments formally and actually, because only the attribute(s) founding their being in relation exist. This is traditionally known as the "material" aspect of a fundament. As such, it is the material fundament that determines an interpretant, and the formal and material fundament that represents a terminus. Detailed discussion of this area is in Culwick, "A Fissure in the Foundation."

26 Introduced in Culwick, "'Machine Code for the Universe:' How the Action of Signs Pervades Everything," 17. Detailed technical discussion in Culwick, "A Fissure in the Foundation."

27 The term "sign" is used somewhat interchangeably with "relation" in this chapter, due to their differences not being essential to my

Freedom and Change

When something is undetermined in some respect by at least one thing but determined in that respect by at least one other thing, then I term the latent possibility of change engendered by the undetermined respect *freedom*. That is, this form of freedom consists in the indeterminacy of one thing relative to another in some respect(s). Where there is indeterminacy, there is not only distinctness between things (as manifested in Section "Identity and Distinctness"), but also freedom to move and change independently of other things. Indeterminacy, as described, creates considerable scope for change to occur, since each respect in which a thing is not determined is a degree of freedom of the overall system.

Change, within this conception is, naturally, some alteration in relating. For example, a respect in which an object is undetermined could become determined if a new relation were to arise; a relation can cease to be if some attribute (itself constituted by relations) ceases to be. The more respects in which things do not determine each other, the higher the grades of freedom they have from each other. For example, an asteroid moving in space does not determine the direction or velocity of another asteroid (excluding, for the sake of argument, their tiny gravitational attraction), which is why it is acceptable to say that they can collide by "accident";[28] their motions are largely determined freely of each other (until they collide, of course). Moreover, other of the asteroids' attributes are entirely undetermined by each other's, like, say, their colour and the type of rock they are made of. Thus, even in a fully (so-called) deterministic Newtonian

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thesis. However, there are differences. Briefly, a sign is something that signifies something other than itself to some third thing, while a relation is any sort of "being-towards," and can have any kind of (imaginary) configuration. *But any relation that actually exists is a sign.* Not all signs are real relations, but all real relations are signs. For some signs are virtual or potential, and these are not a real relating in the here-and-now. Detailed discussion in Culwick, "A Fissure in the Foundation."

28 I believe I owe this example to Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding*, though I am unable to find the paragraph in which I recall his making this example.

system, bodies are not determined in every respect but have freedom from each other.

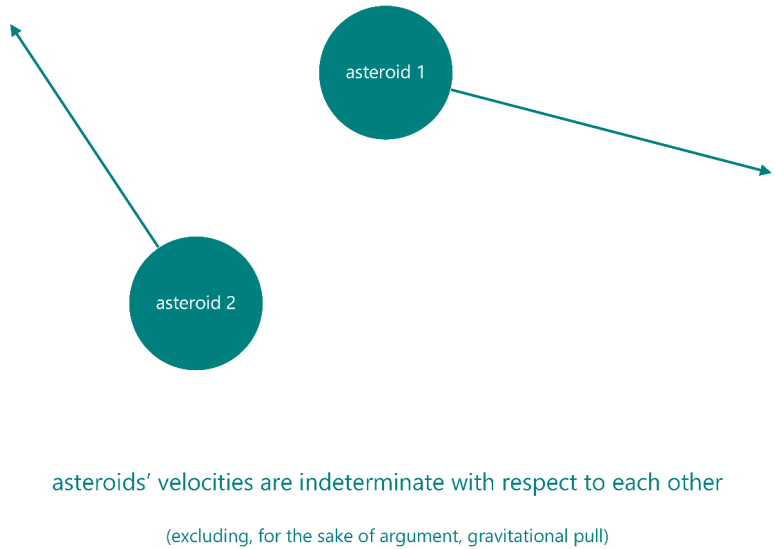

Figure 4: Indeterminate (free) motion in a deterministic Newtonian system. Source: Author

Change and Relation

Change, as accounted for thus far, has only been allocated "space" to occur within undetermined respects; but it is one thing to make space for something, and another thing for it to actually occur. What is it, then, that causes an "alteration in relating," as I have described it? To manifest this in our image, it is necessary to pay closer attention to what takes place when something relates to something else. In the case of the asteroids, whose velocities are indeterminate with respect to one another, if they were to happen to collide, then these velocities would become determined by their relating during the collision. For example, the momentum (relative velocity multiplied by mass) of one asteroid would cause a proportional change in the other's momentum. This is a positive sense of "change" supplied by the relation.

That relation is the driver of change can be shown in the details of the collision. There are numerous attributes that directly determine the second asteroid's final velocity, and it is their presence or absence, and their particular magnitudes, that determine the particular change – for example, whether the second asteroid is struck a glancing blow or is hit head-on, the amount of energy its material reflects back at the first asteroid in rebounding off it, the maximum energy it can absorb before deforming, the specific angle of impact, the specific angle of the surfaces that make impact, and in what order, and so forth. Now if these properties were to be modified, then the change that would take place would differ. As such, the specific change that takes place is determined by the intrinsic natures of the things in relation, but – as shown above – not by just any attribute, but by the attributes actually relating in the here-and-now, which come to correlate and determine some particular new set of attributes.

The Modes: Potentiality, Actuality, and Virtuality

The interplay between things' indeterminacy with respect to one another, and their changing, in which things or attributes become determinately actual, renders identifiable certain (meta-) attributes concerning their status as regards possibility and actuality. That is, our image manifests *modes*.

There appear to be three modes. "Actual relating" I term *actual*, and it includes all here-and-now relating (of the kind manifested in Section "Attributes and Relations" and "Change and Relation"). "Locally relative nothing" I term *potential*, and it comprises the latent physical potentiality for change in a universe (as manifest in Sections "Relating in All or Some Respects" and "Freedom and Change"). "Universally relative nothing" (as per Section "Relative Nothing and Absolute Nothing") I exclude from the modal scheme since such attributes are not part of the universe.[29]

29 "Universally undetermined" attributes, though imaginary, have an important function: they limit the modal scheme and thus answer the question, "why not more than three modes?" They do so by defining, in effect, a limit beyond which possibility is no longer real in a universe. For when some thing's attribute is not only "locally

The third mode in my conceptual scheme is *virtuality*, and this mode is in fact the most common mode of relating. Now the definition of "virtual" is to not be some thing, yet to have the actual efficacy of that thing,[30] and it is exceedingly common for something nonexistent to be signified (e.g., a unicorn, a work of fiction, a dead person, aether, or the Ptolemical motions of the universe) and, in so doing, to have an actual effect on some interpretant (e.g., a listener). In such a situation, the terminus is nonexistent and so cannot determine the fundament; as such, there is no real relation, only a relation "subjective" to the interpretant. Yet something is still actually interpreted as a fundament, prior to which the fundament has determined the interpretant, and thus does it have the usual effect of a fundament upon the interpretant. Systems in each modes are *real*, but not in the same way. The case is self-evident for actual relations. Potential relations are *not* relations; they are real possibilities, that is, they are potentially relations in the same physical sense implied by the potential energy of a rock perched atop a hill (as per Sections "Relating in All or Some Respects" and "Freedom and Change"). Virtual relations, too, are not relations, and neither are they latent physical possibilities. They are, instead, some possible scenario as represented by some interpretant, which could perhaps be actual in the right circumstances (e.g., aether if electromagnetism in fact propagates through a medium, or Ptolemy's theory if the earth were the centre of the universe).[31]

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relative nothing" (that is, it is nothing to some particular thing), but it is also "universally relative nothing" (that is, it is nothing to anything in the universe), then the attribute is neither something to something else, nor (as per Section "Objects Necessarily Are Systems Too") something intrinsic to the thing. And there is no other manner in which it can be anything. Therefore, they are imaginary and not a way in which things (or attributes) have being in a universe.

30 Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce,* eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: InteLex Corp, 1994 [1958]), 6.372. See also http://www.commens.org/dictionary/term/virtual.

31 To return again to the matter of defining the limits of the modal scheme, it is instructive to compare "universally relative nothing" to virtual relations, for both are "imaginary" in the sense that nothing in the universe possesses attribute(s) to terminate a relation, and yet I have claimed that virtuality is real. The difference, I believe, turns on some interpretant being actually

The modes correspond also to the presence or absence of one or another extreme of a relation, for a virtual relation has a

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affected in some minimal way, such as "subjectively." For if something is nothing to anything else in the universe, then of course nothing is affected, not even subjectively. In contrast, virtuality is modelled as follows.

Imagine a universe consisting of only two things, where one thing is something to the other thing in one respect but is nothing to it in some second respect. Moreover, imagine that the second respect is not an intrinsic attribute of the second thing. It is thus *not part of the universe*.

Imagine now that this respect is an extrinsic attribute, denominated by some interpretant. In such a case, it would be "subjective" to the interpretant.

And now imagine that no interpretant exists, but that, *if* one were to be present, the extrinsic attribute would accrue to the second thing relative to the interpretant. Take, for example, the attribute "knowable":

1. Water is *knowable* under the concept H_2O in the event that something or someone comes along with both the concept and a means of identifying water as H_2O.
2. To possess the attribute "knowable if someone were to come along (etc.)" is:

2.1 an attribute extrinsic to the being of a thing, since it is a relation, and

2.2 not the same as being actually known, but merely for something else to be able in principle to detect or experience it.

3. Historically, nothing was known to be H_2O until the relatively recent past, and yet, all along, the molecule possessed the mind-independent nature requisite for it to be known in this way, and so it was *knowable*. In such a case,

3.1 inferring from Section "Relating in All or Some Respects", the attribute was not in the universe.

3.2 But all along, it was mind-independently an attribute of water.

This perplexing situation is not easy to resolve. A sceptical reader would likely object to 3.2. on the grounds that, in order to be knowable, it is necessarily to imply a relation to a knower, and if a knower is absent in the actual here-and-now, the attribute could not arise. To this I respond (*contra* Poinsot, *Tractatus de Signis*, 138) that to be knowable has a mind-independent *material* aspect and a mind-dependent *formal* and actual aspect. That is, the intrinsic nature of the thing possesses the attributes that found being knowable, but it does *not* actually possess the attribute "knowable" in the absence of an interpretant. (I have explored this area in great detail in Culwick, "A Fissure in the Foundation".) Therefore, knowability is mind-independently present only as a material fundament, but not as an actual and formal fundament. Modally, this places "knowable" outside the real, in the "imaginary" and "universally relative nothing" class. But if an interpretant were present, then it would actualise a relation; and in the event that no terminus exists, the relation would be virtual.

nonexistent terminus and a potential relation has no interpretant. An actual relation has an interpretant, fundament, and terminus.[32]

Modal Filtering

When change occurs, systems undergo *modal filtering*. For coming into relation is a movement from virtuality or potentiality to actuality, in which an infinite or indefinite number of potential attributes are sacrificed for a determinate actuality. For example, prior to coming into some new relation, an asteroid has an infinite number of "universally" undetermined attributes, which are not (yet) real in any mode. It could accrue the attribute *…rebound off…* if it were to make impact with another asteroid; it could accrue the attribute *…is mined by…* if it is composed of enough rare earth elements to justify the risk and expense; it could acquire some unknown new attribute under the crushing gravity of a black hole; and so forth.

No less limited in principle, but limited by interpretants' ability to seek out significance, are the imaginary attributes of the nonexistent termini of virtual signs, which nonetheless really affect interpretants. More limited, but still indefinite in number, are the "locally" undetermined attributes of a thing (that is, attributes not being determined by some other particular thing). For these accrue actually to a thing as a result of ongoing relations constituting its being intrinsically and extrinsically, which have filtered the infinite number of imaginary and virtual attributes to produce the set of real and undetermined attributes "free" to found, terminate or interpret some new relation. (For example, the asteroid has spatial extension, a certain mass, and so forth.) This set comprises the thing's latent physical potential. Most limited in number are a thing's actual attributes in actual relation in the here-and-now.

Below, I graph the modes. Circled letters are attributes, rectangles are subjects, and arrows signify what a given interpretant takes a subject to signify. Interpretants (not shown) function to bring attributes from the blue circle or the

32 The subject of the parts of a relation is explored in considerable detail in Culwick, "A Fissure in the Foundation."

orange-brown circle into the green circle. Unreal (universally undetermined) attributes are not shown, because they are not in relation to anything and so are not a mode.

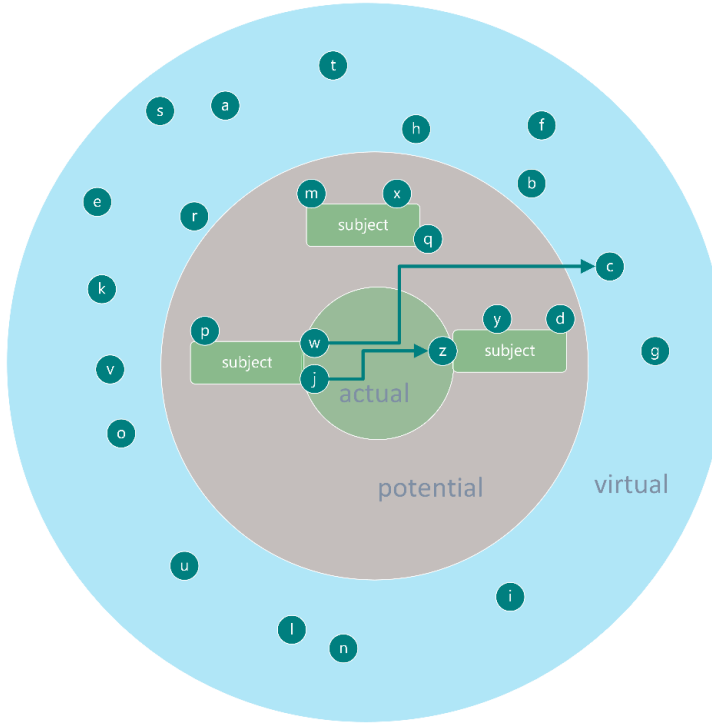

Figure 5: Modalities of attributes, and the filtering effect of relations. Source: Author

Moreover, movement from potentiality to actuality is observable in terms of either of the two “facets” introduced in Section "Attributes and Relations", “determining” and “respecting.“ Modal filtering can thus be further characterised in their terms. It is these characteristics from which normativity can be rendered observable in immediate experience as a “kenotic” principle.

The Emergence of Normativity

In order to draw out more clearly the sense in which normativity is involved in modal filtering, an example in a more familiar human

setting will be given. The human and familiar setting is that of love. Now love necessarily involves two aspects: an aspect of self-sacrifice on the part of the lover, and an aspect of hospitality or receptivity on the part of the beloved. For example, let's say I take time out of a busy morning to wash the dishes for my wife. The act involves a sacrifice of my time and effort, and it involves my wife's benefitting from it. In order for the act to be loving, it is necessary for me to have done the act in love, but also for my wife to actually be loved – that is, for her good to be attained – by the act. This entails a relation between an active and a passive term: the former loves, and the latter possesses the capacity to be loved in the manner that the former loves.

It might be objected that the passive term is not necessary. For example, would it not be love even if my wife took offense due to her feeling that I had, say, washed the dishes as if to imply that they had been neglected by her? In response, I assert that my act certainly was loving, but that her good was not in fact attained. Therefore, a *relation* of loving did not arise, for the act had no real terminus.

One might further object that even if, in some convenient and technical sense, a "relation" of love might be said not to arise, it is still true that I actually and really love my wife by washing the dishes, for to love is to want the good of the other, not necessarily to succeed in achieving their good. To this I respond that to love without happening to achieve their good is indeed love, since it represents the act of washing dishes as being for my wife's good in precisely the same way that to speak of unicorns is to signify really and actually, namely without terminating at anything actual. That is, I would actually love, but a real *relation* of love would not arise.

Moreover, if my love was not insubstantial, then when I notice when it is misdirected, I would tend to try to work towards more consistently acting for my wife's good. That is, loving her motivates me not to have my love languish in mere virtuality, but to actualise it. The same is apparent in unrequited love, where the lover naturally strives to turn virtuality into actuality – that is, to reduce a wide range of possibilities as to who the lover and the beloved may end up loving down to a single determinate actuality:

their loving each other. Thus does modal filtering operate in this instance.

To bring out more clearly the nature of the passive role in love as a filter, a further example shall be given. Imagine that you are drafted into the military for a war. The military thus *designates* you a soldier. If you were to accept the designation, you would exercise hospitality: you are welcoming a relation which strips your being of indefinitely many other potential designations (lawyer, priest, model train hobbyist, etc.). The respect in which this is a stripping away of potentialities would be made even more clear if you had a commitment to a different potentiality – and especially if you did not believe in the war. Nonetheless, your being designated is not a "sacrifice" in the same sense as the active role, since strictly speaking you are not actively sacrificing anything. Rather, you are being passively designated a soldier, by virtue of purely abstract attributes of your person which determine the relation, like possessing legal status, age and citizenship. No action on your part is required to possess these attributes, and thus no action on your part is required to be designated a soldier.

To clear up a potential source of confusion, when it comes to answering the call and taking up arms, action on your part is of course required, but this is consequent upon the designation, not part of it. This is clear from the fact that you would not be answering a call if you were not designated a soldier; but once designated, you are then free to play an active role by taking up arms or by objecting. Contrastingly, in situations where you voluntarily become a soldier without being conscripted, then you would be the active party, not the passive party, and your role in the relation would therefore not be one of hospitality, but of self-sacrifice.

At this, one might object that it is not clear how determining is necessarily like hospitality, for a tyrannical ruler may represent you as a slave and treat you brutally. Under such conditions, you would not typically be exercising hospitality, you would probably be exercising the greatest reluctance! I respond that the respect in which a tyrant might commit you to slavery does not bear upon your wishes, but upon your perceived usefulness. Unfortunately

for you, your broader personhood is not the object "represented"; rather, attributes like being able to do certain work, and being coercible, are what *determine* the relation, and it is these that exercise "hospitality" by actually determining, that is, being *amenable* to being represented as worthy of enslavement. As a general guide to employing this model, it is the real relations – those actually in play – in which one may identify what is functioning to determine and to represent.

As such, whether actively being self-sacrificial, or passively being hospitable, a stripping away of possible ways of being occurs. To be caught up in a relation of love – or of conscription or any other relation – is to exchange a rich array of possibilities for a limited, determinate actuality. Without remainder, these are instances of the complementary relational facets of determining and representing, and when they are both present, of founding.

There is a term adequate for signifying either the "self-sacrifice" of representing and the "hospitality" of determining: *kenosis*. "Kenosis" originates in the Greek κενόω, which means "to empty out," and within the Christian tradition, St Paul's use of ἐκένωσεν ("ekénōsen") which, in English, is translated "Jesus made himself nothing" (NIV) or "he emptied himself" NKJV)[33] is traditionally interpreted to signify God's self-sacrificial love, either in being reduced to human incarnation in the person of Jesus, or in his giving his life for ours. Now within this historical usage of "kenosis," both "hospitality" and "self-sacrifice" are manifest, for God "determines" the being of Jesus as the Word,[34] who is thus "the exact *representation* of [the Father's] being.[35] and who self-sacrificially gives his life for the world. "Kenosis" thus adequately encompasses the meaning of either "determining" or "representing," and it does so in historical *usage*, that is, without imposing a dependency upon the Christian tradition's truth-claims.

33 Phil 2:7

34 John 1:1-3 and 14: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [...] The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

35 Hebrews 1:3 (*New American Standard Bible*), italics added.

Kenosis: How "ought" Comes from "is"

How, then, is modal filtering normative? Most generally, it is normative because for any interpretant, there is something "at stake" – something significant – to it. Even in a collision between asteroids, there emerges *value* of a minimal sort, namely, in the respect that one asteroid *is something to* the other one. And if no interpretant is present (i.e., in a given potential relation), a given system is pregnant with the potential to be reduced to some significant actuality (as with quantum foam). And if no terminus is present (i.e., in a virtual relation), signification may proceed regardless, for interpretants may found virtual signs. It is as if there being something at stake surpasses in importance even the reality or unreality of the relation. The universe appears ordered to significance *first*, and the rest are details.

As for the more principal matter, namely the observable physical process by which normativity emerges, it appears on the basis of our image that "self-sacrifice" and "hospitality" are plainly instances of the facets "representing" and "determining." After all, to be conscripted is plainly to be the terminus in a relation of conscription, in which your imminent role as a soldier is signified, and so some of your attributes (e.g., suitable age or citizenship) serve to *determine* the relation. Likewise, my washing the dishes founds a relation signifying love for my wife, and so the sacrificial act of washing *represents* the respect in which my wife is beloved. And if her good is in fact attained, then that *determines* the fundament of the relation, terminating and thus actualising the relation. As such, on the basis of our image, *all being can be seen immediately to manifest kenosis*, in a manner analogous to acts of "self-sacrifice" and "hospitality," specifically in the complementary facets of representing and determining. Moreover, *kenosis is pervasive*. For there is no instance in which relating occurs that does not involve determining or representing, and the principle of being a universe is relation. And *there is no normative activity which is not kenotic*. For to be in relation is to

be something to some interpretant, which is to have at least a minimal sort of value to the interpretant.[36]

That said, value of this elementary sort does not have universal scope. That is, something is not significant to everything in the universe. It is, rather, relative strictly to the interpreting entity. At this elementary level – at the very earliest and faintest whisp of normativity – no grand moral principles or public ethics emerge. Nonetheless, our image manifests that it is due to kenosis – the receptivity to and stripping away of a great richness of possible ways of being – that value emerges in a universe. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to put forward a positive theory as to how kenotic relating develops into the multitude of norms, moral systems, legal systems, and economic relations, but provided these activities take place in the universe, they are without exception sign action, constituted dynamically by kenosis.

36 To clarify, the presence of an interpretant does not imply *teleology*, nor that the theory of value advanced here requires teleology. In Culwick, "A Fissure in the Foundation,'' I explore the causal mode of determining, and confirm Poinsot's thesis that it is extrinsic formal specification, not final.