

How Involved Do You Want To Be In A Non-Symmetric Relationship?

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ABSTRACT: This world into which we find ourselves thrown is a totality of related things—a breathtaking abundance of things arranged thus-and-so rather than so-and-thus. We can posit non-symmetric relations to explain things being so related, but simply acknowledging their bare existence isn't enough. If non-symmetric relations are to be anymore than a theoretically inert posit, we need an account of how these relations apply to the things they relate. One way to give such an account of relations is to provide a discursive analysis of how they pull off the trick of arranging things thus-and-so rather than so-and-thus—to deploy a richer range of concepts at some deeper level of analysis to explain how they accomplish this feat. But another way is simply to accept the application of relations as primitive. I will be concerned in this paper to advance an account of the second variety. The capacity of a non-symmetric relation R to apply to the objects a and b it relates so that aRb rather than bRa must be taken as ultimate and irreducible. Accounts that purport to provide discursive analyses of how relations apply are no better off in point of real explanatory power.