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Becoming enlightened about relations

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Some sixty years ago Raymond Firth thought it necessary to point out that social relations could not be seen by the ethnographer, they could only be inferred from people's interactions: abstraction was required. -- Others have thought that making relations concrete was rather the issue. -- At the same time Firth unproblematically talked of relations in the abstract when he was comparing (for example) economic and moral standards. The issues would have not been unfamiliar to Hume, and other luminaries of the Scottish Enlightenment, who dwelt on the power of relations in (human) understanding and (scholarly) narrative, as well interpersonal empathy. At what was an early stage of the conference, it seemed appropriate to evoke an antecedent period in the European Enlightenment at large, among other things for its interest in narratives of the unknown. We also find in this epoch some peculiarities in the English language that many Scots were making their own. These usages thicken the plot as far as 'relations' in the eighteenth century go, with implications that still tease us.

At a threshold of sorts with the founding of the ASA in 1946, Raymond Firth called the first chapter of *Elements of social organization* (1961 [1951]), ‘The meaning of social anthropology’ -- its value, import, character. A decade later he introduced his third edition with comments that it was a moment when there was, across the disciplines, more ‘understanding’ of what the anthropologist did than ever before. At the same time, anthropologists’ own efforts *at* understanding were not straightforward. How do they know what they know? When he describes how they set about reaching their primary objective, ‘correct observation’, he at once identifies a problem of method. The problem is acute when it comes to social relations. Social anthropologists might be said to study society, Firth says, but that is not what they observe. ‘They do not even observe social relationships; they infer them’ (1961:22, emphases omitted). He makes the obvious point that anthropologists -- and he is thinking of them as fieldworkers -- abstract ‘types’ of social relations out of continuous behaviour in which the observer ‘is a moving point in a flow of activity’ (1961: 22). The key term, ‘social process’, draws attention to the ever changing, ever growing, nature of such activity. It is indeed obvious.

Yet, if we think about it, the argument does not really need the observer, let alone fieldworker, to make the point about relations. Relation is in and of itself an abstract concept. It refers to a state of co-existence imagined as a link or tie, entities and entailments unspecified. It is not just that *social* relationships have to be inferred: *any* statement of relation proceeds by inference. This includes logical or epistemic connections, as when Firth writes of ‘the relations between economic and moral standards’ (1961: 138). In English, as he implies,¹ the language of relations is very much part of the language of knowledge-making. Now the issues would not have been unfamiliar to David Hume, and other luminaries of the Scottish Enlightenment, who dwelt on the power of relations in (human) understanding and (scholarly) narrative. This is the thread I want to pull upon. And on the threshold of this conference, it seems appropriate to also evoke an antecedent period in the European Enlightenment at large, among other things for its interest in narratives of the known and unknown.

I have my own interest in the unknown. If truth be told, I want to talk about something that didn’t happen – in fact by the time it didn’t take place it probably could never have. It is a counterfactual that comes from social anthropology largely as the subject has developed

since the ASA was founded. So only in retrospect might we sense its after-effect, the jolt of realizing something had never been there. Even if I use the language of what-could-have-been, I am not inferring any specific premonition of it. But let's see if I can eventually convey something of that jolt.

I Abstractions and their counterparts

Varieties of abstraction

It is almost in the genre of anthropological arrivals (Firth thus began *We the Tikopia* in 1936) that the historian Natalie Zemon Davies introduces us to a seventeenth century artist and naturalist: Maria Sibylla Merian, boarding a boat in Amsterdam bound for a Dutch colony in Suriname.ⁱⁱ It was 1699; she stayed in South America for two years. Originally from Frankfurt, she was already in her 50s (her daughter was with her), and already had a reputation as a skilled painter – ‘not only could she render flowers, plants, and insects with perfect naturalness; but she was also a knowing observer of the habits of caterpillars, flies, spiders, and other such creatures’ (Davis 1995: 140). She had published on the feeding habits and transformation of caterpillars, which she bred as well as painted and engraved, and it was their tropical counterparts that she was now seeking. Merian returned home with specimens and drawings: ahead of her was a double volume, on the insects of Suriname, which secured her position among Amsterdam scientists and collectors.

It was not unusual for naturalists to go to distant places for the sake of the unknown, but it was unusual to have no official sponsorship – Merian sold a collection of her paintings to raise funds – and once there the sugar planters of Suriname could not understand her preoccupation. ‘People ridiculed me for seeking anything other than sugar’, said Merian (1995: 173). But then as Davis also drily remarks, resident Africans and Amerindians assisted her more than European planters, and Merian drew on the knowledge (‘testimony’) of both slaves and Arawak / Carib ‘Indians’. What is interesting is that the reader *knows* this was the case. Naturalists in Europe rarely mentioned the servants who assisted them with their research; from Merian we hear of conversations she had and (in Davis’s phrasing) her ‘texts were filled with ethnographic nuggets’ (1995: 187). Davis comments on the distinctiveness of the conversational tone Merian adopted. She did not go on, as did the marine biologist Haddon two hundred years later, and turn from an interest in natural life to an interest in the residents. Nonetheless Davis emphasizes that ‘Merian’s scientific

style and conversational exchange encouraged ethnographic writing indifferent to the civilized / savage boundary' (1995: 190), a marked divergence from that of the travel literature of the time.

Merian became very well known; my interest was initially aroused by Davis's discernment of her incipient ethnographic sensibilities. Consider how this painter-naturalist presented the South American insects to people at home. Her *Metamorphosis of the insects of Suriname* (1705) has been described as belonging to a new form of planetary consciousness on the part of Europeans (Davis 1995: 180-1, quoting Pratt [1992: 31]), as one by one plant 'life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order ... into the language of the system'. Abstracted, in other words, through observation, naming and classification.ⁱⁱⁱ At the same time, and this is Davis's (1995:181, my emphasis) point, Merian's 'ecological eye and hand leave much space for Surinamese insects and plants to flourish *in local terms and relations*'. Her overall narrative strategy was one she had deployed before, 'artfully moving the European reader back and forth between the familiar and the strange' (1995: 180). However, what she took to a new level was her interest in the life-cycle, in the origin and transformation of insects and the food on which they lived, in short, in 'nature's processes and relationships' (1995: 179). In the preface to her new book Merian stated that what had been missing from the overseas collections of specimens she had until then seen - - from the Americas, Africa, the Pacific as they had come to Amsterdam through Dutch traders -- were precisely the origins and transformations of the insects. 'The beautiful specimens were stilled, wrenched from context, lacking process' – context, process, these are of course Davis's words (1995: 167), just as Firth might have put it. In her own words, Merian was moved to take a long and costly journey to Suriname.

She wanted to do for South America what she had done in earlier volumes, where, across copious copperplates, insects were depicted from life. Their immediate environment was present, as in the many pictures organized around a flowering or fruiting plant showing the leaves on which caterpillars fed and where eggs were laid. Says Davis (1995: 149), she was not -- as was the practice of many still-life painters -- striving for metaphor or allegory; rather 'her insects and plants were telling a life story ... to evoke a particular and interconnected process of change'. Her vision was ecological;^{iv} her subject a set of events (the metamorphoses or transformations). It was, we might say, the relations involved in the

metamorphosis of these living forms that were her concern. For the illustrations themselves followed no recognized classificatory order; the observer was instead directed to look within each ‘life’, and appreciate how the process was repeated, insect after insect. The effect insisted, Davis concludes, ‘on nature’s connections’ (1995: 154).

Tearing an individual specimen out of its living habitat is a compelling image of ‘abstraction’, rendering information useful to the comparison of general forms. *However, what followed was surely another mode of abstraction.* If indeed Merian was focusing on process and context, as modern parlance would put it, this too entailed abstraction of a kind. It was an inference about connections. Had Merian been writing in English (rather than German, Dutch or Latin), she might have used this very term, ‘connection’, which since the beginning of the seventeenth century had indicated a bond of interdependence or coherence in the linking together of ideas. Indeed, well embedded as it came to be in Enlightenment speech, it acquired the status of an abstract principle. Adam Smith’s notable observation of 1795 deployed it thus: ‘Philosophy is the science of the connecting principles of nature ...’, he wrote, ‘by representing the invisible chains which bind together ... disjointed objects’ (quoted in Porter 2000: 150).^v

Perhaps it was not necessary to introduce Merian to arrive at this point; exactly what Merian is doing in this account will become more apparent by the end.

Abstract or concrete?

Now, in Smith’s idiom, in order to introduce order into the ‘chaos of jarring and discordant appearances’ – as one might have taken a creeping caterpillar and a fluttering moth – philosophy must *represent* the principles of coherence. There is a conundrum here. For in being presented to the imagination, an abstraction acquires a concrete form. This is of course the story of Baroque sensibilities in art and science (Corsín Jiménez 2013); it is also the story of the Enlightenment savant concerned with the nature of understanding. If in being discerned an abstract principle makes a concrete appearance, then what is abstract and what is concrete fold into each other: that which is inferred from observation comes to have its own ‘observable’ characteristics. For some twentieth century anthropologists, for instance, when relations were conceived as parts of a system, ‘relations’ acquired a concreteness even as ‘system’ emerged as the new abstraction.

Available at once as a synonym for connection and introducing its own nuances, the term / concept of 'relation' when used in a logical or epistemic sense is familiar to English-speakers in two registers. It refers both to the connecting of ideas, events and other entities, and to the narration of a story. Let me bring this latter connotation to the imagination. While any story becomes a narrative of connections [relating relations], a philosophical or scientific story puts particular weight on demonstrating – 'representing' -- the connections as such. The question of how one knows what one knows, how one verifies an observation, was obviously an issue among Enlightenment thinkers; when it came to scientific experiments, it was solved in part by the counterpart verification of the standing of patrons and witnesses. And here there is an interesting twist to the relation. For a period the term relation was also widely used for a concrete type of story, best understood as a report, one that had a certain status in and of itself as a narrative that -- despite often being about the unfamiliar -- was believable. In other words, the genre carried something of its own authority.

Known to historians as *relazione* (*relazioni*, from the prototype, Venetian diplomatic reports),^{vi} a relation in this sense became increasingly common across Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, most famously for the anthropologist including the reports sent back by Jesuit missionaries from New France. It was to a large extent overtaken by subsequent conventions of writing (such as the kinds of reports encouraged in England by the Royal Society in its *Philosophical Transactions*), and fell into disuse. But in their heyday *relazione* served among other things as a device to bridge the known and unknown through the authentication of the author presenting his (and it would have been mainly his) observations. By no means everything that related or narrated occurrences counted. According to Cohen and Warkentin (2011: 9), *relazione* were set apart from treatises, meditations and essays in the way that the author cited 'the authority of experience'. They were meant to establish a relation of trust between author and reader. And what subsequently overtook this form of relation -- what 'brought the relation [*relazione*] down' -- 'was the transfer of trust from the teller to the investigation itself' (2011:15).^{vii} Cohen and Warkentin have called this Descartes' victory: trust the method, not the investigator. That indeed was what experimentation aimed to do. In England the natural philosophers of the seventeenth century had turned their representation of the connections by which they knew things along different paths.^{viii} But why do I bring them in?

There is some interest in the English-speaking corner of Europe at this particular time, in that the ferment and intellectual alliances encouraged by natural philosophy -- the scientific revolution so-called -- was arguably England's counterpart to the Scottish Enlightenment. Otherwise one might wonder where it was! Among the thinkers and experimenters of the eighteenth century, the Lunar Society flourished in the English Midlands, but historians can claim that there was nothing comparable to the Scottish 'movement'.^{ix} In this light we might listen to Peter Gow's (2009: 24) characterization of what made the Scottish Enlightenment distinctive from its European cousins, namely the way in which it 'was specifically scientific and contributed to the Age of Improvement'. In any event, English idiom was the medium of the Scottish Enlightenment.^x

The particular connotations of *relazione* might be fading, but the English 'relation' remained in use as a substantive for narrative, as well as being, broadly speaking, a synonym for connection, or for association in the sense of linkage. And if in English the language of relations was very much part of the language of knowledge-making then that included Scotsmen's English too. Hume's *A treatise of human nature* (1739-40 [Norton and Norton eds, 2000]), subtitled *The experimental method and the science of human nature*, begins with what we need to know of the workings of the mind in order to know how we know anything [with understanding understanding]. His thesis famously turned on what he took as a self-evident and ubiquitous facility, the connection or association of ideas, and with how one may typify different kinds of 'relations' created thereby.

Relations were crucial to Hume's engagement in a long-standing debate about the particularity or individuality of ideas as such, and we may well ask how as an idea they [relations] were brought to the imagination -- 'figmented' in Tim Ingold's (2013: 737) felicitous borrowing of the epithet, where in his earlier Firth lecture he [Ingold] talks of the work that dragons did in medieval knowledge-making.

We may start with Hume's own discussion of abstractions, and the vexed characterization of 'ideas' as abstract, that is, as general rather than particular in character. 'Tis evident, that in forming most of our general ideas ... we abstract from every particular degree of quantity and quality, and that an object ceases not to be of any particular species' (1739-40: 1.1.7; Norton 2000: 17).^{xi} Evident this process might be, he set it against the impossibility

of forming an idea, as in the idea of an object, without also summoning some particular impression of it. Consequently, although it is quite possible for ideas to be general in their representation, they are invariably particular or individual in themselves. – Individual I should say in the sense in which Nigel Rapport (e.g. 1997) uses the term. -- Hume instances ‘figure’ as a general term that is brought to the imagination by circles, squares, triangles and so forth, and indeed the mind may ‘run over’ several individual examples without resting on any one.^{xii} It is the capacity to connect ideas that allows the sense of generality. ‘A particular idea’, Hume says, ‘becomes general by being annex’d to a general term; that is, to a term, which from a customary conjunction has a relation to many other particular ideas, and readily recalls them in the imagination’ (1.1.7; 20; correct spelling).

The notion that what we might find abstract and what we might find concrete is a relative matter obviated earlier discussions of essences and substances.^{xiii} We have already had an example. It was to concretize or make a figure of relation as narrative that I drew on the *relazione*. For what might have seemed to us an abstract type of discourse could equally appear as a particular instrument, specifiable through its conventions. As we heard, its authority was to be effaced by later genres of reporting with their own sources of (anti)authority. Relating as story-telling can nonetheless be brought to the present-day imagination through a historically particular form of it, the *relazione*, a concrete embodiment of what was once widespread reporting practice. It is not something one would ordinarily summon into view these days. A dragon in a manner of speaking, even if rather a tame one. So let me return to how other kinds of relations might be brought to the imagination.

Varieties of the concrete

Speaking of social relationships, Firth, you will recall, said that anthropologists can only infer them from people’s activities. From this viewpoint, abstraction is necessary. He opposes the abstract and the concrete: the ‘more one thinks of the structure of a society in abstract terms, as a group of relations or of ideal patterns, the more necessary it is to think separately of social organization in terms of concrete activity’ (1961: 35-6). It could almost have been as a rejoinder to Firth that Meyer Fortes offered a very different observation about relationships to chew on. Here is Fortes (1969: 60-61, my emphasis):

Textbooks always remind us that social relations are abstractions, since they are not directly visible or tangible, as individuals and activities are, but have to be

established by inference. ... 'Siblingship' is manifested in kinship words, in eating customs, in incest taboos ... etc. *But let us turn the matter inside out.* We can then say that in order to be at the disposal of [including, bring to the imagination of] those who engage in them, social relations *must become* discernible, objectified. They must be bodied forth in material objects and places, in words, acts, ideas, attitudes, rules and sanctions ... Ego knows that he is B's sibling and acts accordingly ... He signifies his engagement in the relationship by the nomenclature he uses towards and about B, by his attitudes, claims, and conduct ... It is distinctive custom that makes a social relation signifiable by those who participate in it and cognizable by those who are external to it.

It is concretization that is necessary! In other words if abstraction is one form of objectification, so too are all the ways in which a concept is made to appear, as Fortes suggests is evident in the customs or conventions people observe. His example is the otherwise abstract idea of 'siblingship'. The reader can turn this around even further. After all, in drawing attention to relations between siblings Fortes is himself offering a concrete instance of siblingship, siblingship in turn being offered as a concrete instance of (social) relations.

Given Fortes's interests in kinship,^{xiv} the example is hardly surprising. However, an evocation of kin ties does not have to be restricted to 'social' relations. As I have remarked elsewhere (Strathern 2014), the seventeenth century English philosopher John Locke also evoked kin ties in order to illustrate the character of relations in general. I do not repeat that here, but note that when Hume was dilating on the nature of understanding fifty years later, and on the troubled notion of an idea, he made the same move.^{xv} Here is Hume talking of the connections and associations of ideas, and the especially powerful relation of cause and effect, in the way the imagination runs from one idea to another:

[T]wo objects are connected together in the imagination, not only when the one is immediately resembling, contiguous to, or the cause of the other, but also when there is interpos'd betwixt them a third object, which bears to both of them any of these relations. ... Cousins in the fourth degree are connected by causation, if I may be allow'd to use that term; but not so closely as brothers, much less as child and parent (1.1.4; 13, emphasis omitted).

Kinship thickens his discourse again when he comes to describe the abstract notions of attraction or resemblance by asserting the affect they carry. He has been writing on how objects or circumstances can arouse emotions, and draws easily on interpersonal relations [not his phrase] in this regard.

Whoever is united to us by any connexion is always sure of a share of our love, proportion'd to the connexion, without enquiring into his other qualities. Thus the relation of blood produces the strongest tie the mind is capable of in the love of parents to their children, and a lesser degree of the same affection, as the relation lessens. Nor has consanguinity alone this effect, but any other relation without exception' (2.2.4; 228).

He then runs through varieties of acquaintances – countrymen, neighbours, those of the same trade or profession -- for it is clear that otherwise than by degree he does not differentiate the emotions insofar as they flow towards any person who is an object of attention.^{xvi} At the same time, in the very manner in which he represents this knowledge, the terms connection and relation seem to be concretized by the discussion of persons, and particular kinspersons at that. But what kinds of persons are they?

The editors of Hume's *Treatise* on whom I have been drawing, comment at this point that 'Hume is discussing two kinds of relation: those between individuals who are relatives or closely associated, and those between impressions and ideas. An experience of a person with whom we are closely associated always produces a double relation of impressions and ideas' (Norton 2000: 511).^{xvii} In Hume's illustrative conjunction of relations and persons, we might specifically ask what kind of *kin*person he is talking about.

This brings us to the second part, in which I hope to make good my claim to describe an event that never happened.

II Persons and relations

Interpersonal sympathy

Given the distinction already established in eighteenth century classifications of knowledge, Hume's general address was to persons as moral agents rather than as physical entities (Demeter 2012: 17). The conditions for, and what counts as, human flourishing included the sensibilities informed by people's inclinations and feelings towards others, and we seem to be in a thoroughly recognizable world. Acquaintances and friends are as

significant as kin. And in part what appears recognizable about it is precisely the kinship in this milieu.

Although Hume refers to specific relationships – fourth cousins for instance -- he was using blood ties to illustrate an abstract quality, namely degrees of intensity in relating. (And he points out that contrary to the common parlance of the day distance is itself a relation.) If we infer that he apprehends bilateral kin reckoning in terms of circles of kin at ever more close or remote degrees of distance, that was of course a model Europeans had long encoded in the kind of rules and sanctions Fortes might have had in mind (for example, marriage prohibitions concerning consanguines and affines alike). However, what is modern about this rendering are two, interrelated, components. First is the way in which emanations of sentiment and feeling are not solely calibrated to proportions of kinship distance, but also find exemplars in connections of acquaintance and friendship. Hume seems to be evoking a general sphere of interpersonal relations of which kinship is a part. Second is the way in which connection itself becomes the calibrator of degree. As he said, '[w]hoever is united to us by any connexion is always sure of a share of our love, *proportion'd to the connexion*, without enquiring into his other qualities'. In other words a connection in and of itself is sufficient to carry affect, and does not have to be further specified.^{xviii} It is almost as though it had a concrete presence as such. In eighteenth century English, we might add, connection was used of kin, just as today English-speakers use the term 'relative'.

Hume's narrative seems to achieve a double effect. While examples drawn from kinship may make concrete otherwise abstract notions of relations, thinking of kinship simply in terms of a close or distant connection surely flattens or generalizes the connotations that summoning blood ties might otherwise carry.^{xix} The same double effect is true of the term 'relation' itself. Hume pairs (and sometimes elides^{xx}) relation and acquaintance. 'There is another phaenomenon', he writes (2.2.4; 228; emphasis omitted; correct sp.), 'viz, that acquaintance, without any kind of relation [glossed here as 'blood relationship'], gives rise to love and kindness ... These two phaenomena of the effects of relation and acquaintance will give mutual light to each other, and may be both explain'd from the same principle'. Now in English, the nouns 'relation' and 'acquaintance' can refer simultaneously to the idea of a connection between persons, and to those persons so connected, as in reference to one's acquaintances or one's relations. This dual usage of acquaintance was long

established; relation as a substantive for persons who are kin was largely a seventeenth century innovation. Both generic forms allow attachment of moral regard for others without the terms having to specify the nature of the tie involved, or indeed without indicating the identity of those so connected (Tadmor 2001).

We could almost say that, in *this* light, there is no ontological difference being posited between relations (kinsfolk) and acquaintances. It is against such an Anglophone possibility that I would put Janet Carstens's broader re-thinking of personhood and kinship, and her resounding call to appreciate people's 'everyday sense of relationality' (2004: 107). The question then, as she makes very clear, is how the world ever made just such an appeal to relations necessary? Was it an outcome of what didn't happen as well as what did? Could it possibly flow from, among other channels, the seventeenth century event that never took place? If that non-event endures as a kind of after-effect, maybe we can record its reverberations. I think we do so in Hume's writings; I must try your patience further by delving a bit more into them.

Degrees of the familiar

Hume was not alone among writers of the Scottish Enlightenment to dwell on the power of the relation in (human) understanding and in (philosophical) narrative, but through his interest in the connection of ideas he seems to have displayed something of a scholarly affection for it. Indeed we might add interpersonal sympathy to the trio. – Whether we should be thinking of sympathy or empathy I leave to later discussion in the conference.^{xxi} - The language of attraction that had served the natural philosophers witnessing the effects of materials upon one another could be equally deployed to indicate the morality of interpersonal sentiment in the formation of human nature. When Hume titles a chapter 'Of the love of relations', he draws together all the benign principles of association by which people understand familiarity, resemblance or likeness, and sympathy with others, so that the very conception of, the very idea of, such a nexus is *itself* 'peculiarly agreeable, and makes us have an affectionate regard for every thing that produces it, when the proper object of kindness and good-will' (2.2.4; 229). This is where he is talking about relations of blood, and as we have already heard, added that it is not consanguinity alone that has this effect, 'but any other relation without exception. We love our countrymen, our neighbours, those of the same trade ... [and] [e]very one of these relations is esteem'd some tie, and gives a title to a share of our affection' (2.2.4; 228). By relation he has

already indicated he means whoever is united to a person by a connection, the recognition of the connection leading to claim or entitlement.

In the same chapter we also hear what could almost be Fortes on the need for concretization, except that when Hume refers to ‘custom’ he refers to something closer to habituation than convention. Hume is discussing the ‘double sympathy’^{xxii} of the special relationship we have with relatives and acquaintances that comes from its durability over time. ‘Custom also, or acquaintance ... strengthens the conception of any object. ... And as reasoning and education concur only in producing a lively and strong idea of any object; so is this [durability] the only particular, which is common to relation and acquaintance. This must, therefore, be the influencing quality, by which they produce all their common effects; and love and kindness being one of these effects, it must be from the force and liveliness of conception [idea formation], that the passion is deriv’d’ (2.2.4; 229). All this is an instance in turn of a general proposition, namely ‘[w]hatever is related to us is conceiv’d in a lively manner by the easy transition from ourselves to the related object’ (2.2.4; 228-9).

This is breath-taking -- is it not? And I don’t think it only has to be anthropologists, with their global knowledge of kinship systems of all kinds, who might admit to that effect. Let us take it in two stages.

First, consider Hume’s delineation of non-specific sentiments, of the kind that had by the 1740s been cultivated for some time in public life, to be found expressed in associations and ‘societies’ of all kinds, consociations formed on the basis of common interests, such as social class, or inclinations, or found in shared pursuits. Hume himself observed that ‘people associate together according to their particular tempers and dispositions, ... [and may] remark this resemblance between themselves and others’ (2.2.4; 229). He then draws us back into an epistemological observation: for where, he says (2.2.4; 229), ‘they remark the resemblance, it operates after the manner of a relation, by producing a connexion of ideas’. In other words, both the ideational formation and the sentiment one has for others are matters of human nature. Reiterated here are all the ingredients of that generalized notion of the person whose alliances and affinities are determined by degrees of similarity to and dissimilarity from others.^{xxiii} He could almost be following Bacon’s formula apropos the systematic attention to the ‘likeness and unlikeness of things’ in the natural

world.^{xxiv} For all that Hume's subject matter is benign sentiment, this is also the kind of lethal premise that underlines the worst European excesses of us / them thinking on the basis of similarity and difference.

And, second, consider the very evocation of kinship that had initially provided Hume with a concrete exemplification of relations. Compelling one would think for its specificity, it becomes swept up in this non-specific field of generalized human sentiment, with its differentiations attuned to relative closeness and distance. When his discourse on persons' interactions with one another included talking about kin, it was rarely to introduce an ethics of kinship that retained any kind of distinctiveness, let alone to attend to particular modes of linking or reckoning of connections.^{xxv} We know such distinctiveness from other writings, in other genres such as the novel or theatre, or in works on household economics and property relations, but here it was seemingly off stage. Hume refers to ties between father and son because they afford a good illustration of proximate relations. The particular and potentially thick example is applied with the thin-ness of a generality, at least insofar as all that is implied is that intimacy and fond feelings can be experienced to a greater or lesser degree.

Without making too much of it, we may note in passing that Hume rarely draws on the generic terms 'kin' or 'kindred'.^{xxvi} [In my discussion, the usage of 'kin', along with 'kinship', a much later invention, remains mine.] Yet he would have found in 'kin' and 'kindred' a description of the kind of human nature he was delineating. Since Anglo-Saxon usage these terms had long been generics not only for family and blood relations but for a 'natural' group of which a being is a member (a 'kind'), or for a class of persons, and thus for persons allied through nature or character. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries kindred became a general term for an affinity with respect to resemblance or agreement, as when entities sharing some feature or characteristic may be described as 'akin' to one another.^{xxvii} Such a generic idea would seem to have answered so many of his purposes. Maybe Hume simply was not thinking of kinship as a domain of relations to be specifically demarcated. Maybe he wanted to avoid specifying the feelings that 'kinsmen/women' or 'kinsfolk' have towards one another, or at least in any way that presupposed kin were different from close acquaintances. In short, in theorizing on human nature, maybe he did not want to emphasize that there was anything qualitatively distinct about kin in terms of interpersonal connection. For where kin ties *were* thought to be

qualitatively unique, they posed a problem in certain kinds of loyalties and bonds his contemporaries were still concerned to shake off.

A bit like arguments for the circulation of money, the European Enlightenment was at the time regarded as continuing the apparently liberating process of freeing public life from patronage and patriarchy, and freeing persons from the bondage of kin ties.^{xxviii} Making an address to a publicly lived life beyond the sphere of family matters must have seemed unremarkable. Hume was writing a philosophical treatise, indeed, not a novel or personal diary. Concomitantly, the inclusion of references to relatives in the passages I have cited would have been equally unremarkable. English-speaking kinship conventions had for a while entertained a certain understanding of interpersonal ties, which on the one hand valued a generalized or public sympathy for others, and on the other hand classed diverse relatives (kinsfolk) through their connections – their relations -- in terms of consociation, social recognition and permitted or desired familiarity. We have seen the way Hume refers to specific kinspersons. Through, for instance, comparing what happens to a relation between child and parent according to whether it is the father or the mother who marries for a second time, he illustrates how the reciprocal flow of relations between objects may or may not be affected by their independent relations with third parties (2.2.5; 230-1). But he seemingly has no use for notions of kin or kindred as separate objects of attention. Albeit sometimes qualified by ‘blood’, and he also talks of ‘ties of blood’, he uses that then much more up to date and diffuse generic, ‘relations’.

What never happened

That Hume was building on the work of Locke – as well as the Newtonians^{xxix} -- is generally acknowledged. We have already touched on an intriguing echo in Locke’s illustration of a point about relations with reference to kinship ties [my term]. For present purposes let me treat him as a predecessor. For it is at his door that I wish to lay what never happened. If Locke was writing at a time when the concept of relation became generally used as a term for kinsfolk, this was an old term with fresh usages. Terms were also coined, and one that ushered in a new concept was that of ‘identity’. In fact ‘the riddle of identity’ (Porter 2000: 166) was something of a philosophical preoccupation.^{xxx} Here is Locke.^{xxxi}

Personal identity or the self, Locke declared in 1690, 'is not determined by identity or diversity of substance, which it cannot be sure of, but only by identity of consciousness' or understanding (1690: bk.2, ch.27, 23; Nidditch 1975: 345).^{xxxii} Not surprisingly, others found the same instability in consciousness that Locke did in substance, or 'flesh', arguing for example that perception was discontinuous and divisible (Porter 2000: 167). While not mincing words over various bizarre aspects of Locke's arguments, the twentieth century political scientist Taylor reflects on Locke's stance at large 'as a new, unprecedentedly radical form of self-objectification ... [enabling us] to see ourselves as objects of far-reaching reformation. ... To take this stance is to identify oneself with the power to objectify and remake, and by this act to distance oneself from all the particular features which are objects of potential change. ... This power reposes in consciousness' (1989: 171-2; cf. Balibar 2013).

As with Hume, in the 'person' Locke is dealing with a 'thinking, intelligent being' (bk.2, ch 27, 9; 335). He is concerned with the relationship between such a person and what later parlance would call the human being, an individual organism or his 'man'.^{xxxiii} When he addresses the permanent sameness of the latter, he concludes that the identity of the individual human organism is no different from that of plants or animals. 'For in them the variation of great parcels of matter alters not the identity; an oak, growing from a plant to a great tree, and then lopped, is still the same oak ... [For a] plant which has... an organization of parts in one coherent body, partaking of one common life, ... continues to be the same plant as long as it partakes of the same life'. As far as fixing their identity applies (the objectification to which Taylor refers), a single question is being asked of plants, animals and 'man' on the one hand and on the other to the 'person'. However, although we 'know that, in the ordinary way of speaking, the same person and the same man stand for one and the same thing' (bk2, ch. 27, 15; 340), thought on the matter reveals a radical divergence between the way the identity of persons and the identity of human beings is formed.

Here is the jolt! We are drawn into the discussion about personal identity and living organisms without noticing that there is not a single reference to kinship. Well, why should there be, you may ask. Only because it is present elsewhere. The absence draws attention to where that elsewhere is.^{xxxiv} Locke drew in kinship freely enough in order to provide concrete examples of an otherwise abstract conception, but it was not of persons

and mankind. Rather, it was to provide examples of *relations*, and their relativity. Could Locke have taken his argument in a different direction if he had thought about persons and selves as kinspersons, or about the procreation and nurture of human beings? These attributes of kinship could have been the link that brought relations to mind. As it is, and deliberate or not, questions about the identity of persons or man never get to be questions about relations. That is what didn't happen.

Do you see what *is* happening? Locke's text introduced kinship to represent an arena of self-referential relations (though kin relations are by no means his only example). He does not mention kinship in the context of his discussion of identity; neither 'man' nor 'person' is conceived as held in place by their relations with others; instead the former has natural characteristics such as 'life', 'an organization of parts', the latter quasi-theological or moral ones such as 'consciousness'. Otherwise put, relations are concretized through kinship (relatives); men / persons are concretized respectively through life and through consciousness. Each constellation of ideas appears extraneous to the other in this formulation: understanding relations is not intrinsic to understanding either man or person, and vice versa.^{xxxv} In either case, then, we are invited to imagine a being whose relations – including those of kinship – lie outside.

Yet that is to understand 'kinship' in the way specific ties of blood or marriage have been used as illustrations. Standing back, as an anthropologist, one might wish to take the very implication of rendering relations external both to the individual organic being and to the conscious person or self *as* an emergent modelling of kinship. It is intriguing that the notion of an entity with (external) relations attached echoes the way people of the time were apparently coming to think about kin ties. What was to take off in the eighteenth century, and across Europe at large, although admittedly in fits and starts (Sabeian and Teuscher 2007: 16), were new kinds of relations. In the words of these two historians of Europe (2007: 16), 'the structures stressing descent, inheritance, and succession, patrilineal, agnatic lineages, and clans, paternal authority, house discipline, and exogamy gradually gave way to patterns centered around alliance, sentiment, interlocking networks of kindred, and social and familial endogamy'. In my mind this is concretized in the image of a being with (external) relations attached, a 'family' (now meaning a conjugal family) looking outwards to its (cultivated, class-laden) 'connections'.

The writings of Locke -- and subsequently Hume -- were but moments in a cascade, and have no particular priority.^{xxxvi} But they do show us something that did not occur, a link never made and, whether unremarked or deliberately avoided, a dissociation of ideas about human beings and personal identity from ideas about relations. One might say that treatises on knowledge and human nature were not the place to find anything different. Or, to the contrary, that they were surely the very place! In any event, we may note of these particular arguments that the person's identity or selfhood does not depend on relations but is concretely apprehended in its consciousness; even if not materially concrete in the way man (the human being) is, the effects of consciousness can be particularized. Conversely, it is relations that can come to appear abstract, insofar as they have to be the subject of intellectual work to be visible at all (concrete references to kinship are introduced to colour an abstract notion). In such a line of thought, relations become an observer's inferences. What was it Firth said? The more one thinks of a society in abstract terms as a set of relations, the more it is necessary to think of social organization in terms of concrete activity -- and he glosses 'the idea of organization' as that of people getting things done by conscious [his word is 'planned'] action (Firth 1961: 35-6).

III Conclusion

We might ponder on the diverse ways in which relations are invoked for purposes of exposition, the concept of them abstracted as an object of knowledge. Hume dwells especially on relations of interest to philosophers, to explicit knowledge-makers, which arise though intellectual work done on them, as in the comparison of ideas.^{xxxvii} If that focus was already presupposed in arguments of the day -- and I brought in Locke as a notional predecessor -- it also looks forward to a contemporary understanding that has been the very devil in English-language attempts to get to grips with some of the materials anthropologists deal with.^{xxxviii} The absence of any address to interpersonal relations, let alone kinship relations, in discussions of the self and personal identity makes *invisible*, for example, the process of intersubjective self-creation of the kind that Christina Toren (e.g. 2009) has consistently had to bring to our attention.

If in the eighteenth century milieu to which the Scottish Enlightenment addressed itself one could talk about kinship in a way, and of course not the only way, indistinguishable from

general observations of human nature and the conduct of interpersonal relations, perhaps it was precisely because the person could be imagined as separate from its relations to others. A person whose identity is secured through consciousness has relations aplenty, but they seem in the first instance extrinsic. Those external relations become a source of intense ethical reflection – as Hume’s writings make abundantly clear^{xxxix} – and from this emerges a particular kind of moral person. It is one who reaches out and reaches outwards to others, whoever they are, and in this spontaneously reaches out to others *alike*. We may recall the concomitant premise that degrees of similarity and difference indicate closeness and distance, that likeness or similarity is the basis of solidarity and common feeling, while difference leads to strangeness and estrangement. Now I am not making particular Enlightenment thinkers responsible for these views -- and this is not the place to enlarge on changing conventions of sociability in general -- but they did provide a framework of thought for perpetrating them.

This brings me back to the painter-naturalist Maria Sibylla Merian. We might ask what she was doing at the beginning of my account. She was there in part for the ethnographic eye an anthropologist might appreciate about her endeavours. Yet not just for that. And not just as an allusion to the observation sometimes made that the sources of Scottish Enlightenment were as much Dutch as English. Nor, for that matter, simply as an example of the seventeenth century era of collecting and recording specimens of natural history that was the harbinger for an interest in human curiosities, as the collections at the British Museum subsequently attested (Sloan 2003a). Nor even because of her direct contribution: the most notable English collector of the time placed Merian’s two volumes on the insects of Suriname at the top of the stairs in Montagu House, the predecessor of the Museum, for visitors to look through (Sloan 2003b: 19). Initially she was there for the abstractions, for her pictorial description of stages in the lives of caterpillars and moths that we might conceptualize as processual and relational.

Merian was illustrating a series of moments linked by a causal chain, as the philosophers tried so hard to make causal chains out of ideas. At the same time those, processes and relations were made concrete in her depictions, and I am not referring to the drawing or to the colouring. Rather, just as *relazione* reported specific occurrences, so observations were verified insofar as they were encoded in recorded events, summoning memorable geographic locales or times of the year. Event is the word: as Davis remarked, Merian’s

subject was a set of events. Conversely, as well as the transformations / metamorphoses that put temporally distinct moments together, her visual recording of the caterpillar feeding, the crocodile snapping, made an event of each observational moment. I labour the point insofar as one historian (Dear 2001: 139; cf Shapin: 1994: 197) of the scientific revolution emphasizes the event in the new genre of reporting adopted by the Royal Society,^{x1} whose purpose was to narrate an occurrence located in place and time. However this is not quite the end of the story. Merian was also present, for me, with regard to something else.

I hope I have conveyed the jolt I experienced in realizing that philosophical conventions of the day could engage in discussions about personal identity and human beings without any reference to kinship. What was (and seemingly instead) present was a discourse of sociability and the elevation of common / shared feeling or sympathy that went with it. The old pre-Enlightenment logic of resemblance may have been superseded in classificatory schema by a new emphasis on the systematic comparison of similarity and difference, yet it seems that in some quarters at least ‘resemblance’ continued to flourish, or flourished all over again, as an ethical value in human affairs. We have met this in the brief excerpts from Hume’s works, where conventions of sociability became seen as a basis for (to use an anachronism) sociality as such. The assumption that sociality can be ‘represented’ as based on similarity – along with its negation, dissimilarity -- is an Enlightenment legacy I do not find necessarily benign. Indeed the very possibility of formulating similarity and difference as ‘likeness and unlikeness’ perpetuates similarity as a key modality of relating.^{x1i} Consider Merian, then, and what she was putting together on one page in the early 1700s.

I take her illustration of the life cycle of a (Surinamese) frog.^{x1ii} Bringing several events together, it depicts a frog releasing eggs, tadpoles at diverse stages, the plants on which they lie or under which they shelter, the watery environment. The life-cycle – of a frog -- how banal! Or, how very *not* banal. In the plants that attract insects, as in the frog’s dinner painted in one corner, we have here a depiction of species interdependence. However, what is striking, in a thoroughly conventional way – it used to be routinely introduced to English children as one of nature’s wonders – is that if you look at each of the animals you see quite distinct forms (and elsewhere she draws the different-looking stages of plants as well). The distinct forms are of course related by the unfolding of life, what Firth called a

system of interlocking concrescent processes,^{xliii} possibly an intimation of development, progress and the discrimination into lower and higher forms of life that other schemas of classification were to bring. But I draw out an altogether more simple point. What Merian has done, concretely in her illustrations, is to show that resemblance and similarity are not the only possible markers of intimate relationships. Quite radically different beings may metamorphose into one another.

Now Locke had mentioned this in talking of the oak tree, his attention being in the identity of an organism over its life-span regardless of the material form in which it exists. It is precisely those material forms themselves that Merian's pictures thrust before our eyes. Of course, in the case of frogs and butterflies it may be hard to see beyond a present-day familiarity with the idea. And Merian's juxtapositions of distinct forms do not amount to the kinds of relations of alterity anthropologists are accustomed to pondering upon in some kinship / knowledge systems. Nonetheless, to a latter-day eye, her illustrations draw attention to un-likely manifestations of life, where a premise about *degrees of 'similarity'* would be supremely inadequate for understanding relations.^{xliv} You could not infer the relations between these forms on the premise of discerning the likeness and unlikeness of their attributes. So, and I hope in the spirit of the conference, she is here as another source of illumination -- an alternative note, a side-long glance, a present-day comment on the persistence of this particular premise amidst all that we might otherwise value from the Enlightenment impulse.

[End]

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NOTES

ⁱ (For example) ‘If it be argued that form is nothing but a specific order of relations, then it can be said that what the anthropologist compares [through the comparative method] are differences of relational order’, and what it is that is compared can only be determined by the ‘degree of abstraction’ engaged (1961: 19).

ⁱⁱ Davis’s delightful account is my sole source; among other things, it offers insight into the opportunities and constraints of female artists of the time (1995: 142-3). No one else travelled as Merian did.

ⁱⁱⁱ The mid-seventeenth century was a period of exploding knowledge about insects, the new entomology drawing on knowledge of anatomy and on the power of the microscope, although Merian herself had no more than a magnifying glass.

^{iv} Where for others taxonomy was the first concern, along with the instinctual behaviour of animals and insects and the usefulness of different parts of nature to one another [citing English naturalist Ray], ‘Merian centered on interactions in nature and on transformative organic processes’ (Davis 1995: 151). Davis adds (1995: 154) ‘and to represent them properly meant crossing the line between orders and putting the plant and animal kingdoms in the same picture’.

^v In drawing on Smith’s *Essays on philosophical subjects*, Porter notes how reminiscent of Hume the formulation is. In ‘An inquiry concerning human understanding’, Hume’s section on the association of ideas begins: ‘It is evident that there is a principle of connection between the different thoughts and ideas of the mind’, and he goes on to introduce three principles of connection among ideas, namely resemblance, contiguity, cause and effect (n.d. [1748]: 320-1). We may add that in the following section he refers to diverse ‘relations of ideas’ governed by these principles (including what is now the ‘relation’ of cause and effect).

^{vi} This comes from Davis’s Foreword to a special issue on the subject (see Cohen and Warkentin 2011), and I am most grateful to her for the reference. She points to the way relation was used in German, Italian and French: apropos the latter, *relation* indicated political and religious news, while the older *discours* might also include ‘the shocking, piteous, miraculous or uncanny event’. (An original connotation of the Latin *relatio* was a deposition before a judge [Cohen and Warkentin 2011: 10].)

^{vii} Needless to say there was a complex history to the disbelief in ‘trust’ (as in warnings not to take things on trust) alongside the need to develop strategies of trustworthiness as far as evidence and testimony were concerned. (On verification by authoritative persons, see further Shapin 1984, and on the questions this later posed for verification between long distance correspondents, Biagioli 2006.)

^{viii} Very generally, and I quote Gow’s (2009: 24) words, on the European Enlightenment at large, they endorsed ‘an epistemology that rejected the acquisition of knowledge through authority in favor of its acquisition through reason’. One of the contributors to the special issue noted above (see Cohen and Warkentin’s summary, 2011: 22) argues that *relazione* itself subsequently evolved into other forms, ‘such as the colonial survey, the naturalist’s field papers, or the ethnographic report’.

^{ix} In terms of a ‘common framework of ideas, which had no parallel in England (Rendall 1978: 25; also Herman 2001). Again, the Scottish centres of ‘enlightened civilization in Edinburgh and Glasgow ... [were] an achievement which was not rivalled in England’ (1978: 1), and Rendall adds ‘where [in England] there were no similar centres of intellectual activity, where the universities failed to respond to the challenge of new ways of thinking’. Edinburgh and Glasgow were often paired, with Aberdeen the third point of an influential triangle.

^x Not to speak of emulation of things English (Rendall 1978: 14). Herman refers to the sense of inferiority Scots felt in early part of the eighteenth century, and the need to match pronunciation with the fluent English many were to write in the later eighteenth century (2001: 113-115). Leading figures of the Scottish Enlightenment saw themselves as Britons, a ‘modern community created by the Act of Union’ [1707], and some dropped the term Scots altogether in favour of ‘North Briton’ (2001: 62).

^{xi} References to Hume 1739-40 / Norton 2000 hereafter shortened in format, e.g. (1.1.7; 17)

^{xii} Geometric figures seems to have been part of the argumentation to which this alludes (and see Ingold’s reference to Galileo’s description of the book of nature as written in ‘triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures’ [2013: 740]). In acknowledging Berkeley’s discoveries about abstract ideas, Hume is here following his criticism of Locke, who used the idea of a triangle to argue the converse

point (namely that it is possible, with some contrivance, to think of a triangle without thinking of it in any particular form) [Norton 2000: 432].

^{xiii} As in Locke's chapter from *An essay concerning human understanding*, 'Of abstract and concrete terms' (1690: bk.1, ch.28; Nidditch 1975: 474). [For citing this work of Locke, I draw on a modernized but undated version (n.d.), followed by a reference to Nidditch's edition of 1975.]

^{xiv} Here it is particularly in the crucial role played by rules ('customs'), which introduces his own perspective on abstraction. '[T]he one element that is constant and critical through all these vicissitudes of generic, specific, and optional activities is the relationship as such. It is always ... identifiable by terminology and by norms, rules and customs', to which he appends a footnote: 'That is why ... kinship relations, like all social relations, can be referred to and discussed in abstraction from any actual situations in which they emerge' (1969: 62).

^{xv} Much could no doubt be said about the general antecedents to the Scottish Enlightenment in the 'stranglehold' of the Locke-Newton axis as Israel (2001) describes it.

^{xvi} And with whom one thus has acquaintance. 'When we have contracted a habitude and intimacy with any person; tho' in frequenting his company, we have not been able to discover any very valuable quality ... yet we cannot forbear preferring him to strangers, of whose superior merit we are fully convinc'd' (2.2.4; 228).

^{xvii} This is not to be confused with Hume's version of a widely-held distinction between two senses in the use of relation (1.1.5; 14): he contrasts 'natural' usage that flows from ideas being (naturally) connected in the imagination, and 'philosophical' usage that arise from deliberate acts of comparison. The difference seems to be in the activity of relating, not in the types of relations (thus cause and effect may be related in either sense). [See below note xxxiii.]

^{xviii} Hume writes generally: 'The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos'd specifically different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects [themselves]. Generally speaking we do not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute to them different relations, connexions and durations' (1.2.6; 49, original emphasis omitted). One can have a relative idea -- conceive of relations affecting things -- without otherwise knowing the identity of what is related.

^{xix} This approaches from another angle a speculation made elsewhere (Strathern 2014).

^{xx} Thus at 2.2.2; 219, para 13) he uses 'relations' specifically for kin, referring to a son or brother. However, on the same page he also has used it for kin and acquaintances alike (para 11). For the purposes of the (thought) experiment he is conducting at this juncture, he initially supposes a person who is 'my son or brother, or is united to me by a long and familiar acquaintance', the difference being immaterial provided the person is 'closely connected with me either by blood or friendship'.

^{xxi} A reference to Kath Weston's 'The ethnographer's magic as sympathetic magic', in panel, *Reason and passion: the parallel worlds of ethnography and biography*, convenors J Carsten, S Day and C Stafford, ASA conference 2014.

^{xxii} Entailing both impressions and ideas. 'Custom and relation make us enter deeply into the sentiments of others' (2.2.9; 250)

^{xxiii} Demeter (2012: 22) comments on Hume's perspective thus: one of 'our' basic ideas is recognizing *resemblance*.

^{xxiv} Quoted by Huxley (2003: 82) from M. Hunter, *Science and society in restoration England* (Cambridge 1981).

^{xxv} He who elsewhere says so clearly that ‘distance’ is also a relation, has nothing for example to say about the categorical valorization of difference. ‘Difference’ appears as the simple converse of an interest in degrees of similarity or likeness (dissimilarity or unlikeness implied).

^{xxvi} One context is a discussion of public esteem, where people may avoid ‘their friends and country’ to seek a livelihood among strangers. He refers particularly to escaping the contempt of those who are both ‘related to us by blood, and contiguous in place’ or are at once ‘kindred and countrymen’. Among strangers someone still has ‘relations of kindred [elsewhere] and contiguity [present neighbours]’ but as the persons are not the same, there is a diminution of effect ‘by the separation of relations’ (2.1.11; 209-10). Note first the bracketing of kindred with neighbours; second that this is primarily an argument about the effects of close ties.

^{xxvii} As Locke for instance deploys ‘kin’ in the sense of closeness: thus, apropos two abstract words, ‘how near of kin soever they may seem to be ...’ (bk.3, ch.8, 1; 474) [see n. xxxii]. For a latter-day example, consider Foucault’s use of ‘kinship’ to mean likeness or shared state of being, when he writes of the ‘empirical domain which sixteenth century man saw as a complex of kinships, resemblances and affinities ... [With] the substitution of analysis for the hierarchy of analogies ... the activity of the mind ... will therefore no longer consist in drawing things together, in setting out on a quest for everything that might reveal some sort of kinship, attraction, or secretly shared nature within them’ (1970: 55, emphasis omitted).

^{xxviii} Primarily male persons; female persons were instead being conjugalized into ‘family’ life. In the background were changing conventions of kin relations that had once been the source of ‘public’ alliances, networks and political action, not to speak of women’s freedoms. A fleeting allusion to this is given towards the end.

^{xxix} Or the ‘post-Newtonian methods of natural inquiry that became dominant in Scotland in the first half of the 18th century’ (Demeter 2012: 21, after Wilson 2009). It hardly need be said that the general comment applies as much because of, as despite of differences between aspects of Hume and Locke’s arguments.

^{xxx} As in the case of one of Locke’s pupils, Shaftesbury, ruminating on the circumstances under which “‘I [may] indeed be said to be lost, or have lost My Self’” (Porter 2000: 166). Hume’s self was described as in perpetual flux (Appendix to the *Treatise*; Norton 2000: 399).

^{xxxi} In a fuller version one might wish to mention Hume’s reasoning on the question of personal identity (1.4.6; 164f.). Like Locke he discusses the mind and how it arrives at imagining that things or persons are the ‘same’ over time, in different circumstances, etc. He *does* refer to relations, but that is because of his theory about how the mind works through the connections of ideas and impressions is already in place (a discussion that also seemingly obviates need to talk separately about consciousness). The abstract relations of ideas to one another are there; he does not bring to mind kin relations at all.

^{xxxii} Subsequently shortened to format of bk.2, ch.27, [section] 23; 345, in distinction from references to Hume’s 1739-40 work.

^{xxxiii} Substance as a mass of matter has its own type of identity; here is talking of the identity of an individual organism that has a typical and distinct form, what he calls ‘individual identity’ or what we may gloss in the case of man as referring to the ‘human individual’ (Balibar 2013: 57). Attending to its textual location and context in arguments of the time, we may add that Balibar credits Locke with inventing the concept of consciousness.

^{xxxiv} In the passages with which I have been concerned; in some of his political writings Locke deliberately and polemically separates kinship from politics (see Zengotita 1984), but such a banishment is not at issue here.

^{xxxv} They are we might say ‘external’ relations. This is not to overlook the fact that Locke’s concept of identity can be construed as ‘a relation’ (Fausto 2012: 36, after Balibar [2013]). Many thanks indeed to Carlos Fausto for drawing Balibar to my attention.

^{xxxvi} At the same time, it is important not to under-emphasize the popular power of both Locke and Hume, whose works went into numerous editions, including ones for the general reader. These two influential writers will have contributed to an agenda concerning the appropriate subjects matters of (philosophical) reflection.

^{xxxvii} ‘The word *relation* is commonly us’d in two sense considerably different from each other. Either for that quality, by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination, and the one naturally introduces the other ... or for that particular circumstance, in which, even upon the arbitrary union of two ideas in the fancy, we may think proper to compare them. In common language the former is always the sense, in which we use the word, *relation*; and ‘tis only in philosophy, that we extend it to mean any particular subject of comparison, without a connecting principle’ (1.1.5, original italics; 15) i.e. with intellectual effort. [See above note xxvii.]

^{xxxviii} For a recent example, see Jacob’s (2012: 160) observation on the legal and bio-ethical literature on transplant patients, which attends to *either* the functioning bodily as a ‘biomedical whole-parts aggregate’ *or* to ‘the thinking, reflexive person’. The person that is neglected in her view is the one (relationally) shaped by bureaucratic legitimation, kinship and the market.

^{xxxix} One may consider, for example, his diverse ‘experiments’ in the company of persons -- in thinking of how people behave when confronted with various relationships and circumstances. ‘Let us suppose ... that the person, along with whom I make all these experiments, is closely connected with me either by blood or friendship. He is, we shall suppose, my son or brother, or is united to me by a long and familiar acquaintance. Let us next suppose, that the cause of the passion [under study] acquires a double relation of impressions and ideas to this person; and let us see what the effects are of all these complicated attractions and relations’ (2.2.2; 219).

^{xl} By contrast (he says) with Bacon’s methods that justified experimentation but still left a lot to be taken for granted, in that he was often writing about what happened (in general) rather than what had happened at a particular observational moment. They [members of the Royal Society] might be quoting Bacon but were following different methods (Dear 2001: 139-40).

^{xli} (And contributes to its positive tenor.) This was already penned before I encountered Raffle’s (2010: 165) compelling description of Merian’s own after-life in the ponderings of the nineteenth century French historian and naturalist, Michelet. Refusing the idea that the butterfly is the fulfillment of the caterpillar, he was struck instead by the impermanence of form, a reading Raffles (n.d.) suggests that came from his studies of European revolution. I am very grateful to Hugh Raffles for both these illuminations.

^{xlii} Merian’s paintings are widely reproduced. The one I have in mind, a watercolour made in Suriname 1699-1701, is illustrated in Huxley (2003: 81, plate 68).

^{xliii} ‘If the underlying activity of nature is a system of interlocking concrescent processes, each developing and realizing its appropriate value, then human activity partakes of the same general character; it is part of the dynamic process of the world’ (1961: 18). [see note ii.]

^{xliv} There is no space to develop it here, but we might question attempts to compare ‘kinship’ relations in terms of similarity and difference; while remaining within the discourse on persons, one could talk rather of the way kinship renders one person as many persons, or of a person as several subjects in Sahlins’s (2011) formula. Raffles (2010: 166) writes of Michelet’s contemplation on metamorphosis [see note above]: ‘He is a moment in the midst of many connected lives. Occasionally he catches himself making a gesture, an intonation, and feels his father alive inside him. “Are we two? Were we one? Oh! it was my chrysalis”’.