Here is a fragment of an investigation into Plato’s Phaedo General Theory of Forms, Relations, and Particulars. Here I report on two small related discoveries. First, I offer the historico-philosophical report that in the Phaedo Plato did put forward a theory of relations and relational facts, and I set forth that theory. Second, I offer the purely philosophical result that such a theory is logically sound and ontologically viable.

Contrary to the monolithic consensus among Plato scholars, in the Phaedo Plato did distinguish, and soundly, between relations and qualities, and dealt with genuine puzzles that arise in attempting to understand the nature of relational facts. The reason why Plato’s theory of relations has hitherto remained hidden to his commentators is this: his commentators have either not understood the nature of relations, or, more recently, they have adopted the dogma that a primary or simple relation is just one atomic or indivisible entity that generates facts by being instantiated at once by an ordered \( n \)-tuple. This is the view perspicuously represented by the standard notation ‘\( A(x_1, \ldots, x_n) \)’ of the predicate calculus, where ‘\( A \)’ stands for an \( n \)-adic relation and each of ‘\( x_1 \), \ldots, \( x_n \)’ stands for an entity that has a fixed place in the ordered \( n \)-tuple \( \langle x_1, \ldots, x_n \rangle \), which is the instance of \( A \). It might be suggested at this juncture that a nominalist as described by Quine does not countenance such entities as relations, because he does not quantify over predicates (or properties). Such a nominalist must, nevertheless, distinguish between a thing \( a \) being longer than another thing \( b \), and the former being heavier than the second, and this distinction must lie in facts themselves, in nature. So, whether he quantifies over the grounds of the distinction or not, the truth of the case is that there are those grounds in nature, and those grounds are the atomic entities I am talking about.

Now, interestingly enough, it is astonishingly easy both to break away from the dogma of the uniqueness of the relational entity and to arrive at the proper appreciation of Plato’s view. Thus, here we can enjoy the
blending of a refurbishing historico-philosophical insight with a cathartic philosophical vision.

This essay is divided into five parts. Part I contains a fragment of my exegesis of the much maligned passage Phaedo 102B3–D3, in which Plato adumbrates a nice theory of relations. Part II formulates some principles of that theory. Part III discusses a trivial Platonic predicate calculus. Part IV contains the formulation of the appropriate semantics for a non-trivial Platonic predicate calculus. Since Plato’s general theory of Forms is not presented here, I discuss only what I call Platonic relational structures. It is an easy matter to adapt for the Platonic predicate calculus a Henkin-type of completeness proof. Part V is the conclusion. The Appendix collects some of the most recent expressions of the well-entrenched view that Plato did not distinguish between relations and qualities at all, or not well enough.

I. TEXT AND EXEGESIS

Here I am not at all concerned with Plato’s general theory of Forms. My only interest is to understand the theory of relational facts or propositions Plato is adumbrating in Phaedo 102B7–C4:

\[ \text{’Αλλά γάρ, ἡ δὲ δόξα, δι’ ἐκείνης τὸ τὸν Σιμμίαν ὑπερέχειν Σωκράτους οὖν ὅς τοῖς δήμασι λέγεται οὕτω καὶ τὸ ἀληθὲς ἔχειν. οὐ γάρ ποτὲ πεφυκέναι Σιμμίαν ὑπερέχειν τοῦτο τῷ Σιμμίαν εἶναι, ἀλλὰ τῷ μεγαθεὶ δ} \]

\[ \text{τυγχάνει ἔχων. οὐδ’ αὖ Σωκράτους ὑπερέχειν, διὶ} \]

\[ \text{Σωκράτης ὃ Σωκράτης ἔστιν, ἀλλ’ διὶ συγκρότητα ἔχει ὃ Σωκράτης πröς τὸ ἐκείνου μέγεθος; Ἀλμήκῃ.} \]

The existing translations of this passage manage pretty well to convey the sense of the original Greek. What is needed is not so much another translation, but a philosophical exegesis. As a first step of the exegesis, we must unravel the ellipses of the text. I use square brackets to provide expressions that make the English clearer, angular brackets to supply ellipses in the Greek, and parentheses to furnish synonyms or preserve a Greek locution. Thus, a useful unliterary literal translation runs as follows: