

The Missing Second Person

The Relaton Framework and the Hard Problem

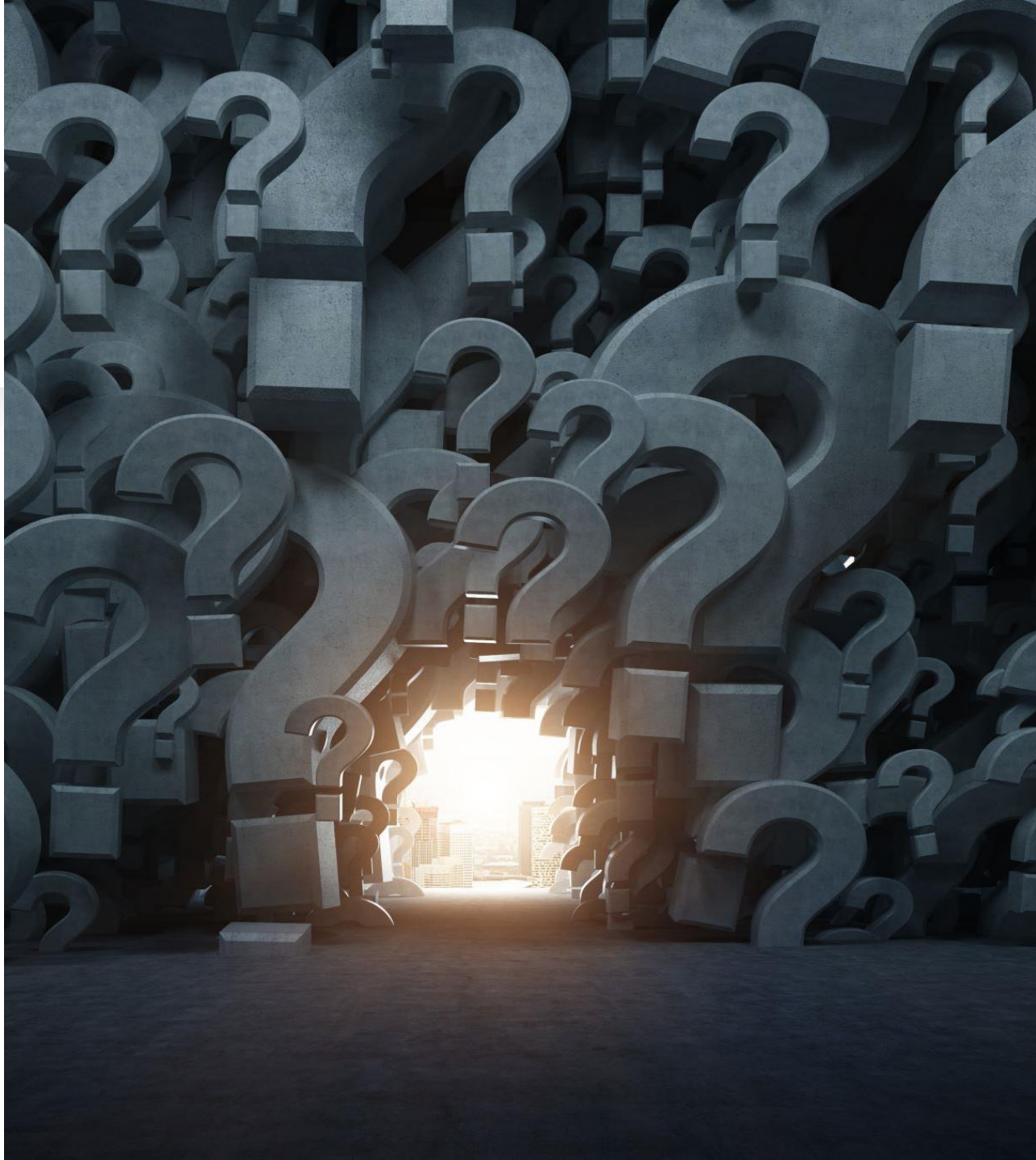
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The Hard Problem

- Why is information processing in the brain accompanied by subjective experience?
- Or: what is the relationship between qualia and physical events?
- The key word here is **relationship**.
- In philosophy, relationships are often abstracted into **relations**.
- In this talk, we will make some of these relationships **concrete**.



What makes a relationship concrete?

- We begin in an unusual place: **Dialogue**.
- Dialogue establishes a relationship—or, more precisely, a concrete relation between You and Me.
- Dialogue is an example of an **intersubjective relation**, usually a symmetric one.
- We will call such a concrete relation a **Relaton**.
- Dialogue is a **(2,2)** Relaton denoting second person participation.



A Contrast with AI

- $(2,2)$: Immediate and present Dialogue between two subjects.
- But what about sustained Dialogue with a chatbot?
- I may participate in **second-person mode**; I do not attribute genuine first- or second-person participation to the AI.

$$\boxed{(2,3)}$$

- The dialogue is real; second-person participation need not be reciprocal.
- The reality of a relationship and the ontology of its participants are different questions (Voloshinov).
- **I–AI** is different from **I–I**—or **II**.

The Relaton Vocabulary

- We have introduced $(2,2)$ and $(2,3)$: But, what is a Relaton?
- A Relaton is a **concrete relationship** represented (for now) as a **2-tuple**, with each pole participating in a mode.
- $(1,3)$ is the familiar **subject–object** relation: *I see a Tree*.
- $(3,3)$ is an objective physical event.
- And the Hard Problem?

$$(3,3) \xrightarrow{?} (1,3)$$

The Hard Problem Begins Too Late

- Why should we begin with **subjects and objects**?
- What if we began with **concrete relationships** instead?
- Why do we tacitly treat $(3,3)$ as foundational—and then ask how $(1,3)$ arises from it?
- Instead, begin with a set of concrete relationships and ask:

How did these relationships come about together?

- The **second person** reveals what the usual formulation overlooks: concrete relationships are already part of what must be explained.

The Zeroth Person

- “I see a tree.” But do I?
- Prior to a subject apprehending an object, there can be **bare awareness of phenomenal content**—a recurring intuition from Buddhism (Taguchi) to phenomenology.
- Call this the **zeroth-person mode**:

$$(0,3) = \text{Awareness-Quale}$$

- The subject arrives too late: Before $(1,3)$ there is Presence:

$$\boxed{(0,3)}$$

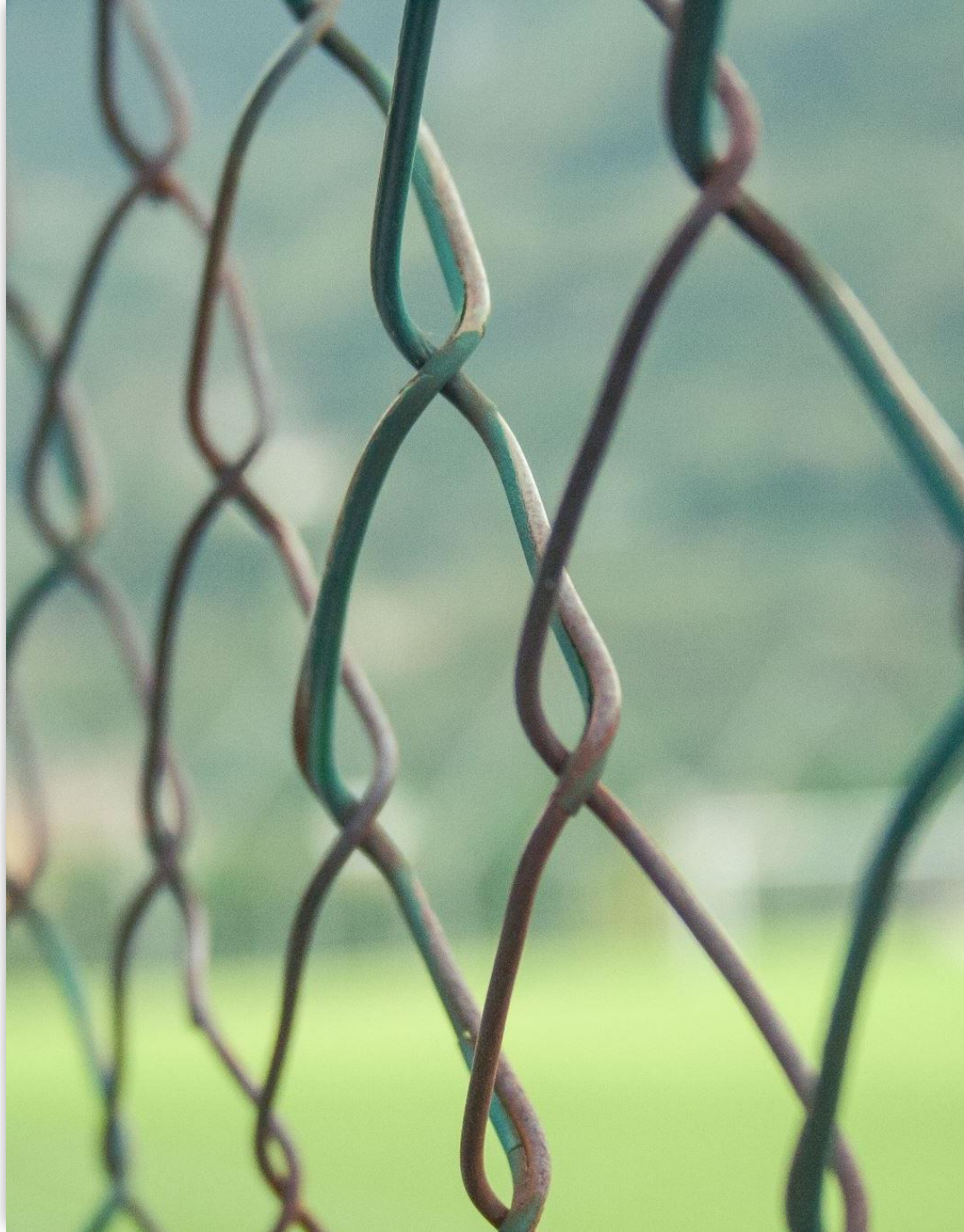
- Relaton Modes: **0**: Awareness, **1**: Agency, **2**: Dialogue, **3**: Description

The Selfon

- We now flesh out other aspects of the Relaton framework.
- Consider the familiar subject–object Relaton $(1,3)$.
- Familiar—but is it?
- The $\mathbf{1}$ denotes the **first-person mode of participation** at one pole of the Relaton.
- We call the first-person pole, represented by $(1, -)$ a Selfon.
- The dash indicates an unspecified second pole; a Selfon is not itself a complete Relaton.
- The Selfon resonates with Galen Strawson's **Thin Subject**, in contrast to the Cartesian **Thick Subject**.

The Boundary Problem for Diachronic Selfons

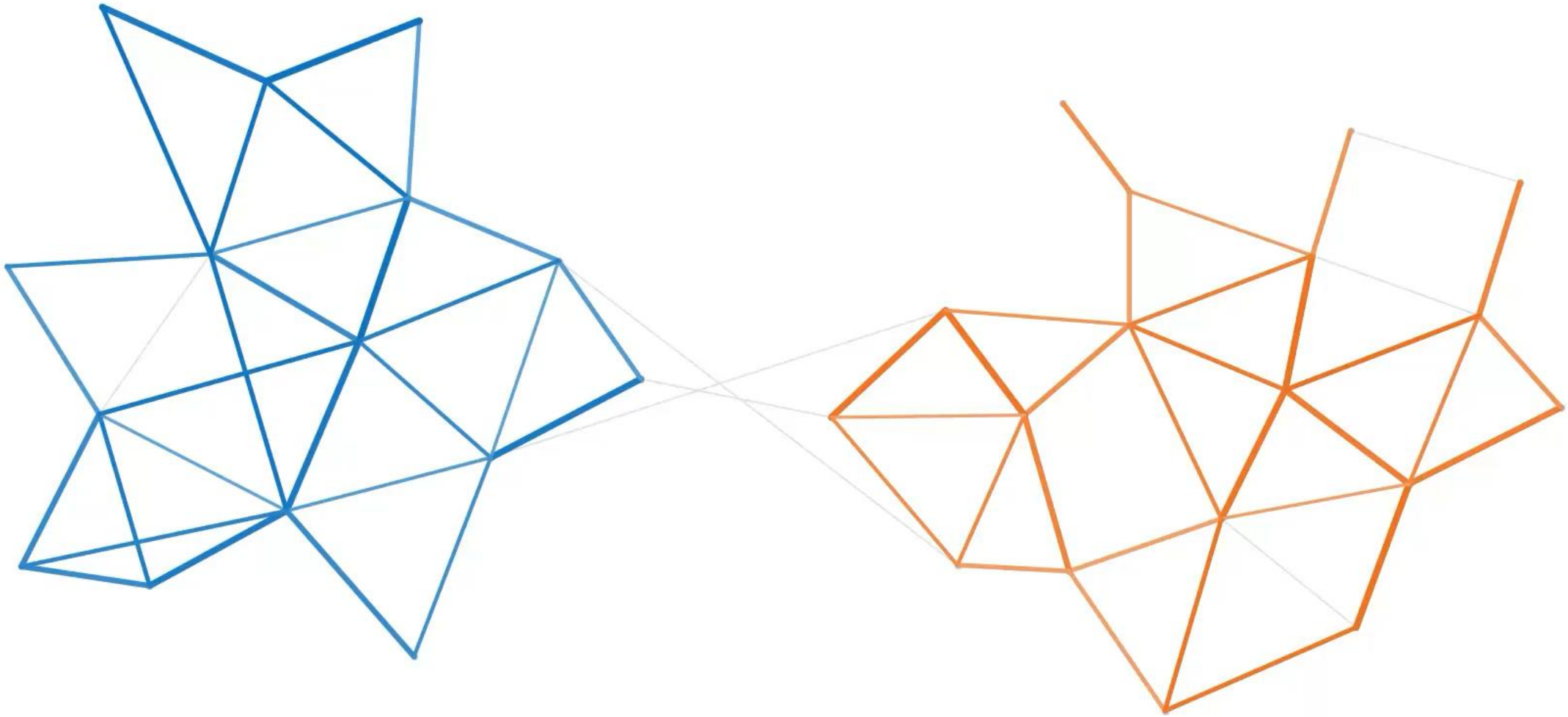
- Perhaps Heraclitus was right. We might update him: **“There is only Relaton Flux.”**
- But what about the diachronic *me*? I experience myself as the same person over time.
- Look for recurring patterns of organization among Selfons, with $(1, -)$ providing a center of plausible first-person identity.
- But what determines the **extent** of these patterns?
- Bodily continuity should be reflected in the organization of Relatons.
- Yet where does the pattern end?
- We face the Boundary Problem: What constitutes the Relaton pattern that is me?



Identity and Boundary

- At each moment in time, there exists a pattern of Relatons.
- Even in a Heraclitean flux, we can expect some continuity: the pattern does not change radically from moment to moment.
- As **midlevel beings**, we can also expect centered patterns to become increasingly dissimilar as we move away from a hypothesized center.
- Following Locke and Parfit, we can now formulate a problem: Find the Center (**Identity**) and Extent (**Boundary**) of a Relaton pattern that constitute a Person.
- For now, our aim is to **formulate the problem** rather than advocate a solution.

Relaton Flux…And Constancy



Hetero-Narcissism: An Editorial

- LLMs are capable of remarkably sophisticated (2,3) Relatons.
- These Relatons can develop in **unexpected, complex** directions far beyond where the conversation began.
- But they remain (2,3) Relatons—and can produce a **hetero-narcissistic** state that is difficult to acknowledge. Think of the **Mirror of Erised**.
- (2,3) Relatons cannot replace genuine (2,2) Relatons—however chaotic and painful those may be.



Source: gamerant.com

Conclusions

- **Relatons:** Begin with concrete relationships, not already constituted subjects and objects.
- **The Missing Second Person:** Dialogue provides our paradigmatic example of a concrete relationship.
- Immediate contrast with AI: **I-AI≠I-I** or **II**.
- **The Hard Problem Begins Too Late:** How do Relatons come about together?
- **Presence and the Selfon:** The zeroth- and first-person modes suggest alternatives to beginning with an enduring Cartesian subject.
- **The Person:** Identity and boundary become problems of organization within Relaton flux.

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