

## Introducing Bernard Lonergan's Philosophy of Relations<sup>1</sup>

### Preliminary Remarks

If, in the context of a systematic theology of the Trinity, we want to move from considerations that have attended to the existence of two processions within God (processions that have been understood on the basis of an analogy which refers to intelligible emanations as these exist with respect to our acts of understanding), it is another thing to turn our attention to the whole question of relations as this applies to God. According to Christian belief, one God exists in three persons. Each person is divine in an unrestricted sense. But, each person shares in a common divinity that is mutually shared by each person. The divinity exists as an undifferentiated, non-distributed substance. It is a simple, undivided thing. It is a simple, undivided reality (if we want to use this kind of language in order to talk about it). No one person is divine in any individualistic sense. No act of the Father as God is other or can differ than the act of the Son as God. Nor does any act of the Father as God differ from any act of the Holy Spirit as God. Amongst all three persons, a perfect form of cooperation exists. The cooperation is so perfect that God's divine oneness exists as an absolute. This oneness can never be questioned or doubted.

Now, if the postulation of two intellectual processions allows us to understand how it is possible for us to understand the kind of unity which can be said to exist within God (how one person comes from another person without entailing any divisions or real distinctions within God), a second major question now arises if we want to understand how, from two emanations, we can move toward a unity that exists amongst three divine persons. Each divine person exists fully as God. No divine person can be reduced to another divine person. Each enjoys a real form of existence. The differences which distinguish one person from another cannot be said to be either verbal or conceptual. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not different names for the same thing. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not exist as terms of acts of thinking and supposition which, in the end, apply or refer to the same reality or the same thing. Each person shares a common divinity but in a manner which cannot be individualized (as we have just noted). But, if a real distinction exists between one divine person and another divine person and if God exists in a perfectly simple undivided way, some means must be found to move from a unity which is found to join the two processions which exist within God to a unity that can explain why we can speak about three divine persons which are to be distinguished from each other in a way which refers to relations but in terms of relations which manage to preserve the real unity which exists among persons with respect to God.

God the Son comes from God the Father and God the Holy Spirit comes from a point of origin that refers to God the Father and God the Son. If we focus on just one relation, if we attend only to the

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<sup>1</sup>Please note that this introduction to Bernard Lonergan's philosophy of relations is best understood if it is read as an explanatory commentary with respect to what Bernard Lonergan has to say in his *The Triune God: Systematics* when he speaks about the nature of relations as this is given in a third appendix: cited as Appendix 3 Relations (pp. 687-737). This exegesis covers what we find in pp. 687-689. Constructive criticism and helpful suggestions are most warmly welcomed.

procession of God the Son from God the Father, we find one procession. We postulate that this procession is best understood if we think about the procession of an inner word which springs from an act of understanding. God the Father exists as a point of origin and God the Son exists as the term of a proceeding. God the Father is linked to God the Son as a point of origin and God the Son is linked with God the Father as the term of a procession. God the Father as God the Father is related to God the Son in a certain way and God the Son as God the Son is related to God the Father in another way. In other words, we have one procession but two relations or, if we want to speak about intellectual emanations, we have one intellectual emanation and two relations that can be specified if we refer to this one intellectual emanation. To understand more fully the meaning of an intellectual emanation in terms of its ramifications, we should attend to the question of relations and ask about what relations mean when we talk about a given divine person coming from another divine person or, in other words, how the reality of one divine person exists as a function of the being or the reality of another divine person. No son exists without a father and, for our purposes, no father exists without a son. The more fully we seek to understand how intellectual emanations exist in God as processions, the more fully we should move into questions which ask about relations and the nature of relations.

However, if we are to move into a tentative understanding of relations as these exist with respect to the inner life of the Trinity, for pedagogical reasons, it would be good to begin with a starting point that first attends in general to the nature of relations. From a philosophy of relations, we then move into a theology of relations as this applies to the Blessed Trinity. By this means, it is less likely that our understanding of relations as these exist within God will be troubled by any misunderstandings which could be coming from any inadequate understandings that are had about the nature of relations. Before entering into a discussion that talks about real divine relations, we best begin with Lonergan's Appendix 3 which speaks about "Relations" in a series of seven questions which begin with a Question 33 and which conclude with a Question 38 to which there is attached "a brief question" which is then briefly answered.<sup>2</sup>

## Relations

When entering into a discussion about relations, we naturally begin with an initial meaning that is commonly known whenever we encounter language which talks about relations or which refers to relations and the connections which exist between things. From a commonsense understanding of relations, we can then shift into a technical species of understanding where a meaning for relations is much more precisely understood and specified (though this meaning might not be too obvious).

This shift occurs by the further questions that we can ask. As has been already noticed, the asking of further questions has indicated that three different kinds of distinction can be distinguished from each other. Something is other than something else in three different ways. Hence, if something is other than something else in three different ways, conversely or reflexively, something can be connected or related to something else in three different ways. In other words, by our questions and as one question leads to another, we move from three different kinds of distinction to three different kinds of relation. Different meanings for relation are distinguished from each other as we work from the different kinds

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<sup>2</sup>Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, pp. 686-741.

of distinction which can be made and which we employ in many different contexts. From a perspective that knows about the differences which exist among three different kinds of distinctions (be they verbal, conceptual, or real), we can speak about relations that fall into a similar order of denotation and meaning.<sup>3</sup> A first kind of notion or meaning refers to relations as this is simply given to us in our ordinary experience and sense of things. In the context of our acts of sense, we encounter concrete relations. A second notion or meaning for relation refers to something which emerges as the term of an abstracting act of understanding (an act of understanding which refers to a direct act of understanding). An intelligible relation has been separated and drawn from prior sets of conditions which refer to how, through sense, we encounter concrete relations within the data of our sensible experience. The relation which exists between acts of sense and acts of direct understanding explains why it can be said that two components exist within any given set of concrete relations: an intelligible, primary component which refers to the possible presence of an explanatory law (a law which has yet to be fully understood and known by us through a reflective act of judgment); and a sensible, secondary component which refers to variations as these exist among contingent empirical conditions (some events occurring in a random manner and others occurring according to schedules of probability that can be known through differing applications of statistical analysis). A third notion or meaning for relation refers to something which exists as the term of an act of reflective understanding (existing as a judgment). An intelligible relation which is affirmed by a reflective act of understanding is to be regarded as a true explanatory law. We refer here to the presence of a regulative law or the presence of a normative law of nature (whether we speak about laws which exist within science and which are discovered through the methods of scientific procedure; laws which exist within mathematics and the conduct of mathematical operations; or laws which exist with respect to the basic principles of our human reason and the union which exists between these laws and the basic laws or the basic principles of a critical metaphysics). Each of these different meanings for what can be said about relations is known as, firstly, we move from our acts of sense experience into our acts of speculative understanding, and then from these to our acts of reflective understanding and as, secondly, within our self-understanding, we experience and think about the differences which exist as we experience and as we move through these different kinds of conscious act (moving from one level to another: from sense to understanding and then to judgment). An explanatory meaning or an explanatory understanding about the nature of relations can then be attained as a proper derivative.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 514.

<sup>4</sup>Given then what is known about the structure of human cognition and the existence of different levels which exist within it, we can then say that a relation which is specifically known through an act of sense is a relation which exists as an association or a conjunction of differing parts or differing elements. This happens to go with that. A relation is perceived or seen. It can be regarded as a “being of sense,” or as an instance of sensible being. A relation, however, which is grasped by an abstracting, speculative act of understanding exists initially or perhaps only as a conceptual relation. It exists as a “being of thought” or a “being of reason” (in Latin, *ens rationis*). Cf. Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), p. 179; pp. 188-189. It is a conceptual species of being which has been discovered and so it exists as an intellectuality which has been understood but which exists as something which exists no more than as a being of possibility. What has been understood might not be valid or true. On the other hand, if, prior to any initial understanding, a relation is merely supposed or if it is proposed by our speculative acts of thinking or guessing, it exists as a notional relation and not specifically as a conceptual relation. However, this kind of relation also exists as a “being of thought” or a “being of reason.” The difference between them points to two different kinds of mental or intellectual relation (two “beings of reason” which can

To begin then with a commonly accepted understanding or meaning about the nature of a relation, it is a given that, in our language, we say that a relation exists when we speak of something in terms of its being joined or connected to something else. Given x and given y, we do not say that x and y exclude each other. In the language which Aquinas uses to speak about this notion of relation in a context which refers to Aristotle's categories of predication and which speaks about how some of these categories are to be understood in a context which refers to the study of motion, it is said that a relation refers or "consists only in being related to another."<sup>5</sup> Whenever we refer something to something else or whenever we speak of something in terms of how it refers to something else in some kind of way, we speak about the presence of a relation. As Aquinas goes on to note: since our human knowing be properly distinguished from each other).

However, later on, if a relation which has been proposed in an act of thinking or if a relation which has been grasped in an initial, abstracting act of understanding is affirmed through a later act of reflective understanding (as this exists in a judgment of reason), a notional or conceptual relation is converted into a real or true relation. A "being of reason" becomes a "being of fact" (a "real being" or a "true being"). However, within this context, other kinds of relation can be distinguished in a manner which recalls the existence of other kinds of distinction (which are other than the simple existence of verbal, conceptual, and real distinctions). In a mixed relation, an idea or thought is joined to a truth or, more precisely, it is joined to a reality which is known through a truth which has been affirmed and which is known to be true. In any given situation, when a real relation is not clearly distinguished from the possible presence of other kinds of relation, what is known as a relation is known as a problematic relation. However, with further analysis and growth in understanding, problematic relations can be reduced in number and significance, and with time, they can be eliminated. Cf. *Insight*, p. 514.

With further additional analysis, we can also distinguish between which relations always hold (they exist as primary relations) and which relations vary (they exist as secondary relations or, in other words, as secondary determinations) as we move from one set of spatial temporal coordinates in a given instance to another set of spatial temporal coordinates in another instance. The correlatives of some relations do not change as we move from one frame of reference to another although we will find changes or variations if we move from a relation which exists as a generality to a relation which has been concretized to some extent in a given context and which exists as a specific determination. While primary and secondary relations are both expressed in terms which refer to ratios of proportion, the ratio or proportion of a primary relation (the ratio of a primary relativity) refers to a ratio that can be defined in terms which refer to a numeric designation which can be possibly assigned while, on the other hand, the ratio of a secondary relation (the ratio of a secondary relativity) refers to a ratio which has been defined in terms which refer to numeric designations that have been duly and properly assigned.

To understand the complexity of the kind of analysis which is required here, see what Lonergan says in *Insight*, pp. 515-516, when he distinguishes between relations which exist as primary relations and relations which exist as secondary relations. Primary relations "survive" as explanations within an explanatory perspective: an explanatory perspective which refers to the presence of what we find when we think about the role of an explanatory metaphysics. Within any given set of concrete conditions and concrete relations, a primary relation of some kind always exists (a relation between potency, form and act) and it can always be found, depending on the kinds of what or why questions we

begins with sense experience (with our initial acts of sensing and not with any ideas that already exist innately within our minds),<sup>6</sup> relations are first known through properties or through conjugates which refer to material co-ordinates that are sensed through our acts of sensing. In the sensing which occurs, incidental conjunctions or relations are experienced or noticed as these are found among groups of material coordinates.<sup>7</sup>

As Aquinas argues more specifically in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, “sense grasps a thing in its exterior accidents, which are color, taste, quantity and others of this kind.”<sup>8</sup> Through the exterior senses and from their derivative descriptive contents, a set of categories can be drawn which refer to how we

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have been asking. But, if we attend to secondary relations, these exist within primary relations in a context which attends to presences of difference. For example, if we attend to the science of ballistics and the movement of projectiles through space as this occurs in the firing of military ordinance, in the movement which occurs when a given shell moves down to fall on an intended target, we will find a movement which, to some extent, evidences the intelligibility of a general law in physics (Galileo's law for the fall of falling objects as objects fall close to the surface of the earth). However, if we focus on the peculiarities of a given movement as this movement occurs in a given instance and on the concrete relations which exist among a set of concrete correlatives, we will find a relation which clearly differs from the general relation or the primary relativity which also exists and which we find when we refer to a general law within the science of movement which exists when we refer to the science of physics (here, we refer to a general abstract law which Galileo had discovered in his day when he discovered the nature of the free fall of a falling object falling near the surface of the earth). The presence of a primary relativity within what is given to us in a given scientific explanation which has been verified points to the presence of a real internal relation which exists both within the form or the texture of our understanding and whatever it is that we are understanding in the context of a given science. Within the order of our human knowing, an identity exists between a form which exists within our understanding and judgment and a form which exists within something other which is being understood and known by us through our acts of direct understanding and judgment. The primary relativity *as a form* exists initially within the data of our experience as this is given to us within our various acts of sense although, if the context of our experience is a specific asking of scientific questions (the conduct of a scientific investigation), the data which belongs to our acts of sense will be a set that is adapted or shaped in a manner which removes it from the kind of experience that is simply given to us when we are not engaged in any kind of scientific inquiry. Cf. Lonergan, “Letter to Fr. Gerald Smith, S.J.,” *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 739; Ronald Shady, conversation, October 23, 2012. Primary relativity or primary relativities as these are discussed in Lonergan's *Insight*, pp. 515-520, are to be correlated with internal relations as these are discussed by Lonergan in the context of his philosophy of relations (the understanding which he articulates within his philosophy, functioning as a point of departure for what he says later on in his systematic theology of the Trinity).

<sup>5</sup>Aquinas, *Sententia super Physicam*, 3, 1, 280. In the Latin as this is cited by Owens, , p. 179: *relatio... consistit tantum in hoc quod est ad aliud se habere...*” In Aristotle's *Categories*, 7, 1; 6a 36 (according to a translation that is given by Charles A. Hart in his *Thomistic Metaphysics An Inquiry into the Act of Existing*, p. 232), it is said that Aristotle speaks about relations in terms which speak about “those things whose very entity itself we regard as being somehow of other things or to another thing.” More tersely and awkwardly in English, in his *Introduction to Logic*, p. 64, n. 11, Joseph translates Aristotle's words as saying: “what are said to be that which they are *of* another.” In other words, a *relative* is something which exists because it exists *in a relation* with something else.

describe any object which falls within the range of our sensible experience.<sup>9</sup> Relation is but one category which we find within a general listing of categories that Aristotle provides in his *Categories* (sometimes referred to as the *Ten Categories*). Ten attributes or predicaments (*predicamenta*)<sup>10</sup> speak about anything which initially engages our interest in the context of our sense experience and as we begin to enter into a scientific investigation that can lead us toward a possible scientific explanation about what it is that we have been experiencing. If we begin with a notion of substance as something which exists in itself and not in another, we can say about a thing *as a substance* that it is connected to an external world or to a set of external conditions in various and sundry ways. We can say, for instance, that a connection exists in terms of what is the action and passion of a given substance.<sup>11</sup> What does a given thing do as a subject which then connects it with things that are other than itself and

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Relations define the meaning of relatives and, if we work from what we know about the meaning of relatives, we can determine what kind of relation exists amongst a set of relatives. A relation defines relatives and relatives, a relation. A bit further on in the *Categories*, 8a 32, Aristotle tries to clarify what he had meant earlier on when he had spoken about the meaning of a relative. A relative refers to that “for which to be is the same as to be related in some way to another.” Cf. Joseph, p. 64, n. 11, citing Aristotle. Here and there in various texts, Aristotle admits that an overlap exists between the meaning of some categories and the meaning of relation as a category of predication. In his *Metaphysics* 1088a 21-25, it is noted, for instance, that predicates which refer to qualities and quantities presuppose relations which exist in some way as a base or point of departure. Without relations, we cannot speak about the applicability of certain predicates.

6Aquinas, *Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 11, 758; *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 6; David P. Lang, “Aquinas’s Impediment Argument for the Spirituality of the Human Intellect,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 11 (2003): 111.

7*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 6, ad 2; *Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 1, 581. “Relations are sensibly perceived only *per accidents*” is how Owens summarizes Aristotle's position as best as this can be determined by referring to what Aristotle says in his *De anima*, 3, 1, 425a24-27. Cf. Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics: A Study in the Greek Background of Medieval Thought* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1951), p. 370, n. 97. In the explanation which one can find in Aristotle's text and by way of the physiological example that Aristotle uses: if, as a knower, we look at bile which has been secreted by the liver, we receive a sense of it which refers to an experience of totality. The perception does not exist in discrete parts on a one by one basis where we first perceive one aspect or part and then we perceive another aspect or part at another, later time. A number of descriptive characteristics are seen or perceived at the same time (by one look, by one apperception) and, in this type of perception, we tend to notice a conjunction or a relation which apparently exists between a number of different material characteristics (color, shape, odor, and so on). Sometimes, in his language, Aquinas speaks about sensible forms and the receptive perception of sensible forms. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 2; q. 78, a. 3. A certain type of external relation is known because of how it is being perceived (because of the way that it is being known through a patterning which exists in the receptions which exist within our acts of sensing). Compare an experience of noise with an experience of music. In our experience of noise, a haphazard experience of external relations indicates how one sound is joined to another. But, in our experience of music, a different kind of external relation is experienced in terms of how one sound is joined to another. In either situation, a relation exists in an external kind of way (it exists as an external relation) because it is known through an extroverted form of human consciousness as this is found to exist in extroverted acts of sense which are orientated toward perceiving a datum that comes to us from without (a datum which therefore functions as an external agent object to elicit an operation as this may exist in the

what does it receive from the activities of things which exist outside itself? Where a substance exists as a being by itself (as, for instance, an *ens per se*),<sup>12</sup> with respect to substance (the being of a substance), the other categories (quantity, quality, *relation*, action, passion, place, time, posture, and habit) all exist as differing modifications of the same substance. They exist as accidents (as *differentiae*).<sup>13</sup> Accidents exist as accidental acts or as conjugate acts (if, with respect to conjugate acts, we prefer to use the kind of terminology which Lonergan preferred to use). They inhere or they exist within the overarching unity of a substance. They are affirmed of a substance. In the inherence of accidents within a substance, we necessarily speak within this context about a relation which exists between a given thing and the attributes which it happens to have in terms of its possible sensible qualities.

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receptive operation of an act of sense). While, admittedly, from the simple perception of an external relation, we cannot always conclude that a given conjunction necessarily exists in a purely circumstantial or incidental way (without any kind of reason that is able to provide an explanation), it has to be admitted that, if we want to discover reasons, we must move into acts of understanding and there grasp relations which can only be known as the terms of our acts of understanding and which can never be known as the terms of our acts of sensing. Some external relations can exist in a purely circumstantial and incidental way. Or, more accurately, we can say that this seems to be the case if we choose to limit our understanding of relations to what can be known within a limited explanatory perspective that is not open to explanations which can be grasped if we move into a higher order of meaning (an order of meaning which refers to an explanatory perspective which transcends the inadequacies that are present in lesser explanatory perspectives). No external relation needs always to exist in a purely circumstantial manner. To find explanations for things, we can move into spheres of meaning which transcend the different kinds of meaning which we have know and which exist at lower levels of experiencing, understanding, and knowing.

<sup>8</sup>*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 11, 15.

<sup>9</sup>*Caring About Meaning: patterns in the life of Bernard Lonergan*, eds. Pierrot Lambert, Charlotte Tansey, and Cathleen Going (Montreal: Thomas More Institute Papers, 1982), pp. 65-66.

<sup>10</sup>Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 380, nn. 1-2; Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup>In his *Sententia super Physicam*, 3, 1, 280, Aquinas also speaks about how relation works when we want to speak about the size or quantity of a thing. If we want to say that something is bigger or smaller or that it consists of so many units, we proffer a measurement that is obviously determined by the size or the quantity of other things. In employing very many variables, references exist which point to relations between one thing and another. Our contingent world is full of relations in the connections which so obviously join one thing with another. Is there anything that is not related to something else in some kind of way? The omnipresence of relations accordingly argues that we must introduce differentiations within all the many relations which exist if we are to reduce our experience of relations into an order which reveals an intelligibility within the many relations that we can experience. As one kind of relation is distinguished from another, given kinds of relation become more meaningful and we discover relations which, before, had been unknown. We find relations which exist between relations.

<sup>12</sup>Hardon, "Substance," *Modern Catholic Dictionary*, p. 523.

<sup>13</sup>Andrew Beards, *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth and Meaning* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), p. 83; *Insight and Analysis: Essays in Applying Lonergan's Thought* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), p. 223.

In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine speaks about these aforementioned categories in a way which reveals their descriptive heuristic character as this can be derived from our analysis of ordinary linguistic usage in terms on how subjects and predicates are related to each other. As Augustine wrote:

The book [*The Ten Categories*] seemed to me to speak clearly enough of substances, such as a man is, and of what are in them, such as a man's figure; of what quality he is; his stature; how many feet tall he is; his relationships, as whose brother he is; where he is placed; when he was born; whether he stands or sits; whether he is shod with shoes or armed; whether he does something or has something done to him; and the innumerable things that are found in these nine categories, of which I have set down some examples, or in the category of substance.<sup>14</sup>

By way of example and if one applies this schema to the study of St. Augustine as a substantive being, we can say about Augustine, as regard relations, that he "had countless relations with others; men and

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<sup>14</sup>*Confessions*, 4, 28 (Ryan translation). In his *Insight*, p. 420, Lonergan also speaks about Aristotle's ten categories in a way which attests to their heuristic descriptive character.

A naturalist will assign the genus, species, and instance (substance) of an animal, its size and weight (quantity), its color, shape, abilities, propensities (quality), its similarities to other animals and its differences from them (relation), its performance and susceptibilities (action and passion), its habitat and seasonal changes (place and time), its mode of motion and rest (posture), and its possession of such items as claws, talons, hooves, fur, feathers, horns (habit).

Later, in *Understanding and Being*, p. 199, Lonergan speaks about Aristotle's categories in a manner which clearly differentiates them from explanatory properties or explanatory conjugates which are properly to be found in scientific explanations of things:

We arrive at Aristotle's categories most simply by going into the woods, meeting animals, and asking, What kind of an animal is this? How big is it? What is its color? What relations does it have? and so on. They are categories of descriptive knowledge, and descriptive knowledge is science in a preliminary stage. It is something entirely different from science that has reached its explanatory stage. Aristotle himself had a very clear idea of the difference between these descriptive categories, which he sets up in an elementary work, and causes; consequently, he thinks of science as knowledge through causes. However, there has been a tendency to conceive of metaphysics as knowledge, not through causes, but through the predicaments. On the other hand, if one conceives metaphysics as concerned with the total heuristic structure of proportionate being [being defined as what of reality can be known by human acts of experiencing, understanding, and judging], one must be concerned with causes and not at all with predicaments, because a heuristic structure aims at what is known through understanding.

other things.” He was “a son, a brother, a father, a disciple, a master, a priest, and a bishop.”<sup>15</sup>

However, as Aquinas argues in a manner which points to cognitive limitations that are present in what is known through our acts of sense, descriptive conjugates or “external accidents” [*exteriorum accidentium*]<sup>16</sup> do not reveal why a given thing exists as it exists with the descriptive conjugates that it happens to have. They do not reveal a thing’s inner essence or nature (its quiddity [*quidditatem rei*] or its “whatness”): what a thing is with respect to its inherent intelligibility, its meaning or form, or why it is what it is and why it engages in certain activities and why it cannot engage in other sorts of activity. In Aquinas's own words:

When sense knows a thing through a form received from things, it does not know it as effectively as the intellect. Sense is led through it to a knowledge of external accidents but the intellect reaches to the essential quiddity of a thing.<sup>17</sup>

Hence, if we want to speak about relations which influence or which, in some way, determine what a given thing is from within and which can sometimes explain why a given thing is joined to other things by way of external relations that are perceived and not understood or, in other words, if we want to speak about relations in a manner which sheds light on the intelligibility of a given thing or on the intelligibility of a given event, we must move to a notion of relation which has ceased to think about itself as an external, sensible relation. We must move toward a notion of relation that is grasped by an act of direct understanding, by an act of our minds that is somehow able to know something in terms of how a thing or an event exists from within by way of a connection which exists between a set of inner formal principles (inner constitutive principles which exist as elements that, together, form a unity which refers to the identity of a distinct set).<sup>18</sup> On this basis, we can begin to think about the possible

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15John K. Ryan, ed., Augustine, *Confessions*, pp. 380-381, n. 2. Citing Ryan's full text:

Thus Augustine himself through the course of his life grew in size: an instance of the category of quantity. He acquired certain vicious habits that were in time replaced by virtues. He acquired great skill as a writer and great learning: virtues, vices, skill, and the like come under the heading of quality, as do colors and certain other aspects of our being. Augustine was taught by other men (passion) and he in turn instructed students (action). He existed at different moments (time) and in many places (place). He had countless relations with others; men and other things. He was a son, a brother, a father, a disciple, a master, a priest, and a bishop (relation). He was clothed in various ways and equipped with tools or armor at different times (habit, in the sense of wearing a monk’s habit or a soldier’s uniform). He assumed various positions, such as kneeling in prayer (posture).

16*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 6, ad 2; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 11, 15. Where Aquinas speaks about external accidents, Lonergan speaks about experiential conjugates (descriptive conjugates). Cf. *Insight*, p. 102.

17*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 6, ad 2; my translation. In the *Summa Theologiae* 2a-2ae, q. 8, a. 1 & ad 3, Aquinas reiterates this thesis when he argues that “sensitive knowledge is concerned with external sensible qualities” while “intellectual knowledge penetrates into the very essence of a thing.”

18Recall the meaning of understanding in term of its etymology. To understand, *intelligere*, is

proper existence of internal relations. Initial questions ask about the possible existence of internal relations. We try to understand a given internal relation that we want to know about and, once understood, later questions can ask about the determining influence of an internal relation. Our desire yearns for growth in the extent of our understanding. We want to know more about the meaning of a given internal relation. What is its impact with respect to the existence of a given thing and what is its impact with respect to any operations which can be regarded as proper to the life and being of a given thing? In understanding a given internal relation, we attend to a relation which exists between external and internal relations. External relations do not cease to exist after we have decided that we should attend to the kind of reality which can be known if we attend to presences of internal relations that are inwardly constitutive of the being of a given thing, the being of a given situation, or the being of a given event.<sup>19</sup> From an understanding of internal relations, we move toward an understanding of external relations.

### **Are there internal relations?**

In dealing with a question which directly asks about the possible existence of internal relations (and which distinguishes internal relations from external relations), the beginnings of an answer seem to lie in how Lonergan initially defines his terms as the meanings of his terms derive from his prior acts of sensing and understanding. From the intelligibility of a relation, we derive an intelligibility which

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to “read within” or to “read inwardly” (Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 304, n. 22), or to “gather inwardly,” to “grasp inwardly,” or “to see into” as in *intus legere*. Cf. Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 595; *Early Latin Theology*, trans. Michael G. Shields, eds. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), p. 485. We move through or beyond what is known through our acts of sense and any kind of experience that is given to us as a specific datum of sense.

<sup>19</sup>In Owens's discussion of external relations in his *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, p. 189, n. 32, we find little that is directly said about external relations. However, Owens summarizes how, in a current conceptual way, external relations have been distinguished from internal relations (although whether or not this conceptuality is of much help in engendering an explanatory understanding of the difference which exists between external relations and internal relations is a question which each of us must ponder from within ourselves). According to Owens's summary:

In modern philosophical vocabulary, relations required by a thing's nature are called “internal relations,” while relations that do not pertain to or necessarily follow from its nature are regarded as “external relations.”

Owens cites two bibliographical references for articles about the difference between external and internal relations: C. G. Kossel, “The Problem of Relation in Some Non-Scholastic Philosophies,” *The Modern Schoolman*, 23 (1946): 68-81; and George Edward Moore, “External and Internal Relations,” *Philosophical Studies* (London, 1922), pp. 276-309.

refers to the meaning of an internal relation.

With respect then to the meaning of a **relation**, it is said that, in a relation, something is joined or connected to something else because it is somehow *ordered* to be connected or joined to that other thing. A *proportion* of some kind (within the context of our scientific understanding) points to the presence of an abstract general law (the possible being of an abstract law which exists as a primary determination that has yet to be grasped and known by us through the reception of a direct act of understanding) although, once understood (or if it is understood), then, through it, we should know about a ratio of some kind which could be given a numeric designation which, as a definable ratio, would point to a form or a structure which is to be equated with the presence or the meaning of a specific inner relation).<sup>20</sup> An ordination or an inclination of some kind explains why a given thing or a

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<sup>20</sup>Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 515; Ronald Shady, “Notes on Primary Relativity and Secondary Determinations,” p. 1; Conversation, November 6, 2012. Please distinguish between an abstract notion of quantity which exists as a proportion or abstract law and a descriptive notion of quantity which is to be correlated with apprehensions as these exist in our various acts of sense. Apprehensions of size refer to description apprehensions of quantity but we do not speak about sizes when we refer to quantities as these are suggested when we refer to the correlations which exist within presences of abstract law.

In coming to know about relations which exist within the order of being which are proportionate to our differing acts of sense, understanding, and judgment, in this context we speak about primary relations or abstract laws which we can only understand if we can begin to think about possible frequencies and possible correlations and how much or how often a given element can possibly be correlated with how much or how many of some other element. In any given equation, we might say, for example, that, for every “x,” we could have or should have two of “y.” In the mathematical symbolizations which we find, for instance, within physics and chemistry, we work with mathematical formulas and we construct these same formulas in a way which refers to quantities (quantities not as they are directly known by us through our acts of sense and any acts of measurement which are to be correlated with our acts of sense but quantities as they can be specified by us through technical symbolizations which exist whenever mathematics is used to speak about a possible relation which could possibly exist among a number of different variables). Within the order which exists within these mathematical symbolizations, the terms or variables in their meaning determine a given relation while, at the same time, the relation which is given in its meaning determines the meaning of individual terms or individual variables. In the orderings of meaning which we have, an internal mutuality or an internal causation accounts for existences of meaning which can be said to define themselves. An implicit definition is said to exist in a manner which refers to relations which define terms and terms which define relations. From the meaning of a given term, we should be able to determine the presence of a given relation and from the meaning of a given relation, the meaning of a given term. Terms with relations and relations between terms are all ordered to each other in the meanings which they all have. A technical meaning for structure refers to an ordering of meaning which, in turn, refers to a species of function. “There is no part that is not determined by the exigencies of other parts” and the whole forms a unity which is self-constitutive. Cf. Lonergan, “Cognitive Structure,” *Collection*, p. 206. It endures over time and no new element can be introduced without destroying the power or the unity which exists within a given internal relation.

For an example that we can point to, we can refer to how Galileo speaks about a law which refers to the free fall of a falling object that is falling near the surface of the earth. Some kind of

given event is orientated or directed to another thing or another event. In other words, if you have a given thing or if you have a given event, a happening, or an occurrence, a probability of some kind would indicate that we cannot usually dissociate this element or this variable or this event from this other element, this other variable, or this other event. We cannot have one without the other or, normally, usually, we cannot have this one without this other one. If you just have a jumble of variables, elements, or events, we cannot properly speak about any kind of relation which would refer to some kind of intelligible unity (a universal)<sup>21</sup> that exists among a number of different elements, variables, or events: a unity which refers to an order of elements, principles, or conditions which may not be too obvious at first but which can become quite obvious to us if emerges as the term or the content of a direct act of understanding. Bluntly put, if something exists because it exists as the term or

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numeric ratio exists between time and distance (a ratio which is potentially determinable and which exists as a primary relativity or primary determination but which is only concretely determined in specific instances if, through experiments, we can assign specific numbers to specific variables). In this context, we should be able to see how abstract apprehensions of quantity are to be found amid primary relativities as these exist within the so-called “hard” sciences of physical, organic nature. If a correlation between distance and time loses a regularity which is peculiar to the free fall of a falling object falling near the surface of the earth, we can no longer speak about the presence of the free fall of a falling object falling near the surface of the earth.

However, as we turn from the sciences of nature to the sciences of man, to an increasing extent within the practice and understanding of human scientists, we will find equations which are used in a manner which can point to possible relations which can exist between a given act or activity and another species of act or activity. So many incidents of “x” occur in conjunction with so many incidents of “y.” A certain number of “x” goes with a certain number of “y.” Within the human sciences, proportions can also be determined through equations which can be constructed in a manner which can point to ideal numbers or ideal frequencies which can indicate that we can have so many incidents of “x” if we have so many incidents of “y.” We might have a given “x” if we have twice the number of “y.” Qualities can be specified and determined in a manner which is joined to numbers and quantitative designations if we can speak about frequencies and numbers of different acts or operations which condition or which bring about a state of human affairs which, otherwise, would not exist. For example, an annually issued report is produced by the United Nations which speaks about the quality of life (or QL) as this exists among different nations and as we would move from one nation to another. Sets of statistics speak about a large number of different variables: for instance, what can be said about income levels, hours of work, cost of living, vacation benefits, health benefits, and the costs of education and, by establishing statistical correlations, we can determine with a degree of probability which countries are able to give their citizens a higher quality of life than what can be found in other countries. No immediate correlation exists, for instance, between levels of personal income and the quality of life that can be enjoyed by the citizens of a given country.

While material determinations cannot be used in a manner which directly refers to immaterial determinations of reality (a real distinction always exists between material determinations of being and immaterial determinations of being), material specifications can be used as points of departure for questions and reflections which can speak about realities which transcend presences of material condition. If, within the order of our human cognition, apt images function as points of departure for the possible reception of self-transcending acts of understanding (or, in other words: if, within our human cognition, an order which exists within an apt image points to an intelligible order which exists

as the consequence of a relation, an understanding which knows about the nature or the form of a given thing or an understanding which knows about the nature or form of a given event also understands or knows about an internal relation which is constitutive of the nature or the form of a given thing or the nature or form of a given event. The relation exists within the understood nature or the understood form and, if we try to remove the relation or to subtract any element or part from the structure of a given relation, we will destroy the being or the reality of a given event or the being or the reality of a given thing.<sup>22</sup>

In moving, however, toward a greater understanding about what is understood when a relation is known as the term of a direct act of understanding, an understanding of order should accordingly present itself to us as a fundamental requirement. Order, as understood, determines the possible meaning of an intelligible relation. A search for order engenders inquiries which can lead to acts of ordering which exist within our acts of understanding and to an order which thus exists as a consequence or as a result of the acts of direct understanding that may come to us (as they are given to us as receptions of understanding or insight).<sup>23</sup> As Aquinas speaks about these matters in the kind of language which he

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as the term of an act of direct understanding, an order which exists at a higher level of meaning and being), in this way we can speak about how material determinations of data can be assembled and gathered in a way which function as points of access for what we might say or possibly know about specifications of being which exist at a higher level or at a remove from what is given to us in our acts of sense. We admit that immaterial determinations of being are not to be equated with determinations of quantity although immaterial determinations of being can be known about through material determinations which have been adapted and collated in a manner which can refer to presences of quality. If qualities are known by comparing a this with a that, the plurality which exists when we refer to a this and a that (the this and the that do not refer to the same thing or the same entity), then, by this means, through the comparisons that we make, we realize that we can understand qualities if we can speak about quantities and if we can attend to quantities of one kind or another.

21 Distinguish between the kind of transcending which occurs in acts of understanding when we move from experiences of material multiplicity to an experience of intelligible unity (that which exists as a universal) and the nature and being of a form which refer to universals as a consequence of metaphysical reflection and analysis. Cf. *Verbum*, p. 133.

22 Hence, within this context, we understand why, in Aquinas, a real internal relation can be understood to exist as a *cause*. Cf. Ronald Shady, Notes on Primary Relativity and Secondary Determinations, p. 1.

23 With respect to the ordering which exists within our acts of understanding, recall what Aquinas says about this when, in the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 22, a. 1, ad 2, he speaks about a “reason of order,” a *ratio ordinis*, which refers to all that God intends in the providential care which he exercises in governing all which he has created within the world of our experience: God directly wills, God indirectly wills, and God also permits. Everything is set up in such a way that everything works together to achieve a greater good that only God understands and is able to implement. The ordering which God knows about exists in his understanding. We might speak about it as a term of his understanding. The ordering which God achieves through his understanding, and the performative understanding which exists as a way of speaking about how God wills the good – all this is an order which only God fully grasps and knows.

See also Martin Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason: A Thomist View of Moral Autonomy*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), pp. 11-12, where it is

uses, an act of understanding initially works from a multiplicity of things that are first sensed and, by a kind of inward act which exists within a knower and which moves into the interiority of something whose sensible qualities are already known, it reduces an experience of external multiplicity (“empirical multiplicity”)<sup>24</sup> into an experience of inner, intelligible unity.<sup>25</sup> The unity refers to an intelligible relation or a proportion which exists as an interior order (or which reveals an interior, inner order). In this order, two or more elements are joined into a oneness which is not seen but which is understood and which can only be known or experienced if, in fact, it is understood. Data of sense (of empirical consciousness) are reduced to a datum of intellectual consciousness or, in other words, in a differing way of speaking, we can say that a perceived lack of unity which exists at a lower level is turned into a unity which is to be found at a higher level.<sup>26</sup> In the correlation or in the unity which

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argued that, in Aquinas's understanding of human reason, we can find a philosophy of mind which refers to the ordering activities of reason (whether we speak about our human reason or the reason of God). A natural ordering of things occurs within the activities of our created human reason and, if this is so, we can then argue that natural law can be properly identified with human reasoning in its acts of ordering and directing. In his own thought, Lonergan makes a point that can be adapted to how we can speak about what happens in the activities of our human reasoning and understanding: without an intelligible order of some kind, if an ordering of elements cannot be achieved or brought into effect, a first cannot be distinguished from a middle or from a last. Without order, “there is no cause, as there is no effect and no means.” Cf. Lonergan, *Incarnate Word*, p. 388.

24In his own language, Lonergan prefers to speak about empirical multiplicity rather than about external multiplicity. Empirical multiplicity can be identified or correlated with what is meant when we speak about material intelligibility. Cf. *Insight*, p. 544.

25*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3, 91, 3; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 115, a. 3.

26To understand this question in a different way (using a different conceptuality and a different set of insights), we can perhaps go back into the history of Greek philosophy and think about the early scientific thought of Heraclitus. Heraclitus had said that everything, absolutely everything, is always flowing or changing. Cf. Adler, *Aristotle for Everybody*, p. 30. “All things flow.” However, we can only know and state that the water of a river is constantly flowing if we are beholding the flow which exists in water from a point of view which is itself not flowing, moving, or changing (relative to what is continually flowing, moving, or changing). “Only from a reference point which is not in flow can one state that everything else is in flow.” Cf. Roland Krismer, “Lecture introducing Metaphysical Principles,” Sogang University, Seoul, Korea, June 8, 2011. As Heraclitus had noticed in his experience, we realize that water is constantly flowing if we are standing on the bank of a river which, as a bank relative to the water, is not itself changing or flowing.

With reference then to what our experience tells us about how things exist in the world, we notice that, in things, we find parts or ingredients. A classic example refers to the ingredients of a cooking recipe. If a certain kind of dish is to be produced, we must work with a prescribed set of ingredients. However, when we attend to how a given dish is brought into being, by themselves, the parts or ingredients of a thing do not explain the existence or being of a given dish. They do not explain the existence or being of any given thing. What explains the being of a given thing is how separate parts are combined with each other and the code or formula of this combination is not a part or an ingredient but an intelligent ordering of parts which refers to an intelligible relation. The intelligible relation belongs to a different order of being (a higher order of being) and it possesses a stability or fixity which is not found at lower orders of being. If we try to understand why a given thing exists, we best proceed not by reducing a given thing into parts, elements, or ingredients but by finding and

exists between an interior order and the presence of an interior relation, as we have already noted, if we eliminate any given variable, we immediately eliminate the relation and, as a consequence, the being of a given event or the being of a given thing. Hence, on the basis of what we might know about the meaning of a particular variable, we should begin to know something about a meaning which refers to the presence of an intelligible inner relation. Adequately understanding the meaning of an inner relation comes from adequately understanding the meaning of any given element which exists within the context of a constitutive relation. Each leads to the other: element to relation and relation to element.

On a basis then that is grounded in a shift which occurs in our cognitional operations, a new notion of relation accordingly presents itself: an interior notion of relation which obviously differs from any kind of relation which is known by us through our acts of sense (as the term of our acts of sense) and which we can identify with what we experience and know about the existence of external relations. In other words (and as we refer to an insight which Aristotle had had about the difference which exists between demonstrables and indemonstrables),<sup>27</sup> as we begin to think more about the many connections that exist among very many things which belong to our world (the attributes or properties of things which belong to an order of being that is directly proportionate to the order of cognition that we have as contingent knowing beings) and as we begin to discover that our thinking minds cannot function within supposing the existence of relations and that these are to be found by our direct acts of understanding, we are tempted to think that relation exists for us as a species of first principle or first postulate. Relation seems to exist as a first principle or a first postulate which belongs to our reasoning activity since, from the context of our own viewpoint, it seems that no acts of thinking and reasoning can occur without relations. It seems that relation cannot be derived from something which is more evidently known (something which is other than a relation). It seems that no analysis of relations can find anything which exists in a more basic or primitive manner. Without an ordering of some kind which can point to an intelligible, rational relation of this to that, in the kind of language which Lonergan uses, a first cannot be distinguished from a middle nor from a last nor can an effect be distinguished from its cause.<sup>28</sup>

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specifying the species of relation which joins parts or elements into a unity which is to be correlated with a thing's being or nature: a being or nature which refers to the presence of an explanation. In other words, yes, to understand how or why a thing exists, by way of analysis, we reduce a being or an event into its constitutive parts or elements but then, in a second step, we need to determine what relation, order, or proportion exists among these elements in order to identify it and to explain it. The reduction to elements needs to turn toward the relation (the proportion) that connects these same elements into a oneness which can exist amid a number of different elements. In this way, we understand what is meant when we say that "the whole is always more or greater than its parts." Cf. Krismer, "Lecture introducing Metaphysical Principles."

<sup>27</sup>Some things can be proved or demonstrated from a knowledge of something else. These are demonstrables. But, on the other hand, by way of a contradistinction, other things cannot be proved or demonstrated because, in some situations, we cannot work from a knowledge of something which is more thoroughly known and understood and which none would dare dispute. Indemonstrables exist as indemonstrables because they cannot be proved by arguments which move from A to B. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4, 4, 1006a6-11; Aquinas, *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 4, 6, 609; *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 4.

<sup>28</sup>Lonergan, *Incarnate Word*, p. 388. In the ordering of reason thus, when this ordering is used to refer to a complex dialectic which is constitutive of the gamut of human history and which

However, if, through our self-reflection and the kind of reductive analysis which can occur in our self-reflection, we begin to think about relations in a way which transcends the existence of *every kind of relation* (in other words: if we work with a reduction which conceives of things in a manner which prescind from any kind of talk that refers to presences of relation),<sup>29</sup> we discover that relation does not, in fact, exist as a primary postulate or first principle that we can group with the basic laws of human reason as these refer to the first principles of identity, contradiction, excluded middle, and sufficient reason. At best, when we think about relations and relation, we refer to a derivative that emerges on a basis which is conditioned by these aforementioned principles of identity, contradiction, and excluded middle. In attending to the first principles that exist thus with respect to identity, contradiction, and excluded middle, we discover that, in understanding these principles, we cannot avoid attending to negative judgments which exist (which we make), for instance, whenever we say that A is A and that A is not B. As we remember about the principle of contradiction: A and not-A cannot both be at the same time and in the same manner. Through negative judgments, we speak about things not in terms of how they are related to each other but in terms of how they differ from each other and how they exist apart from each other. Things exist apart from each other before we can begin to speak about how they are connected or related to each other and this is true even as we realize that, in the context of our world, within the order of secondary causes, distinct beings exist as a consequence of prior relations which exist among variables or prior relations which exist between things.

In distinguishing thus between presences of relation and absences of relation, we find, on the one hand, that we can speak about a thing or a being in terms of how it is related to itself (we refer here to a relation of reason or the presence of a conceptual relation),<sup>30</sup> and, on the other hand, we can also speak

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refers to the realization of an all encompassing divine plan or idea which exists within the depths of God's understanding, by way of analogy as this relates to the ordering which occurs in our reason, we can then speak about a divine "reason of order," a divine *ratio ordinis*, that encompasses what God intends and what he also permits in terms of what human beings do and how they might participate in the ends that God intends. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 22, a. 1, ad 2; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 79, 12; Peter Beer, "The Redemptive Vicarious Suffering of Christ: An Inquiry," *Australian Lonergan Workshop II*, pp. 137-8; Lonergan, *Topics in Education*, p. 257. Cf. Serroul, p. 239; p. 248. From the ordering that is endemic to our human reason in the functioning of its created operations, we conclude to a like ordering which, in some way, must exist within the actuality or the fullness of God's own understanding. The ordering which human reason is able to do and which it does and effects reflects the being of a far more powerful and wise ordering which is endemic in the happening and being of God who exists as an unrestricted act of reason (an unrestricted act of understanding).

<sup>29</sup>Owens, *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, p. 179, n. 1. See also Lonergan, *Early Latin Theology*, p. 97. For further discussions, see Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 38 & n. 9. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 25, 10, Aquinas had noted that "being through itself is not included in the definition of substance." Cf. <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/ContraGentiles1.htm#25>, October 23, 2012.

<sup>30</sup>*Relatio alicuius ad seipsum est ens rationis* [the relation of anything to itself is a being of reason]. Hence, in this type of situation, we cannot speak about presences of truth (i.e., presences of reality which are mediated to us through presences of truth) since, in this context, intellectual acts are only related to themselves through their terms and not to anything which could be other than themselves (things which are other but which are yet joined to our acts of direct understanding and judgment through what is given to us as terms which are present within our acts of direct understanding and judgment). We recall here a traditional principle which says about truth that it is defined in terms

about a thing or a being in terms which prescind from any kind of talk which wants to speak about presences of relation (conceptual or otherwise). In speaking about something which thus exists apart from the being of any kind of relation which it can have, we work with determinations of being which differ from relative determinations of being. We can speak about essences or substances in a manner which totally excludes the presence of any relations and the determinative influence of any relations (“essences simply speaking”)<sup>31</sup> and so, by doing this, we break from a point of view which tries to say that everything can be understood in terms of relations and the presence or being of relations. In understanding relations in a manner which thus tries to discover any preconditions which must exist if any relations are to exist in any kind of way, we end up with determinations of being which refer to essences or substances which exist as absolutes and not as relatives (which exist only if we refer to presences of relation).<sup>32</sup> In effecting this species of analytic reduction, we accordingly find that some things – whether, in our terminology, we speak about essences or substances – certain things exist apart from the presence of any kind of relation which could be present and the order of constitution which exists whenever we refer to presences of relation.<sup>33</sup>

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which speak about an *adaequatio inter intellectum et rem* [by a conformity which exists between an intellect and a thing]. Cf. Ronald Shady, Notes on truth, email, November 20, 2012.

31Lonergan, *Early Latin Theology*, p. 97.

32Lonergan, *Early Latin Theology*, pp. 95-97; Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, pp. 60-61.

33To understand a bit better what is being meant here, think about the order of being which exists within metaphysics (the order of being which should exist for us when we engage in a form of reductive analysis that takes us to what exists as a possible first principle within the order of concretely existing things). We know about first principles as these exist with respect to our acts of reasoning and understanding. But, if we think about the order of concretely existing things that exists apart from our acts of understanding and judgment (even if the order of concretely existing things is known through our acts of understanding and judgment), we find that we can speak about some kind of first principle which exists as an ultimate, remote principle of operation for everything which exists within our world and which, as operative, would account for the operation or the causality of all other operations that later come into being within our concretely existing world (operations which are not remote but which are more or less proximate to ourselves, although, admittedly, we speak about varying degrees of proximity). Cf. Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 45.

This most remote first principle can be identified in terms which can speak initially and equivalently either about the presence of an essence (existing as a conceptualized form) or the presence of a substance (even if we should decide to speak about these presences apart from the kind of presence which exists when we refer to the presence of an act of being or the presence of an act of existence). Admitting the presence of an act of being or an act of existence would immediately convert an essence or a substance into a concretely existing essence or a concretely existing substance. In any case, whenever our thinking turns toward an essence or a substance which would account for existences and activities which exist within our experienced, concrete world (a world that is known by us through our proportionate acts of human cognition), we inevitably turn toward some kind of essence or substance which exists in some kind of transcendent manner. In its being or according to the nature of its being, it is not ordered to the being of anything else. Cf. Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 61; Lonergan, *Early Latin Theology*, p. 95. When we advert to the existence of a contingently existing thing or the existence of a contingently existing operation, we notice that no contingently existing thing and no contingently existing operation is able to explain the fact of its own existence and so, if we turn to the necessity of a reason or the necessity of an explanation which can join us to an understanding which we

If thus, in every relation, variables are referred to each other on the basis of some kind of reasonable or rational hypothesis which functions as a kind of derivative first principle which is invoked to explain why this variable can be properly joined to this other variable, if we attend to the basic structure or order which exists in any given relation, we find a set of elements which must always exist in any given relation (in any given order which is present within a relation). A **subject** refers to what is being related to something else (whether we speak about a body or thing in terms of its being related to another body or thing, or whether we speak about a property or attribute in terms of its being related to another property or attribute or something which exists either as a body or as a thing).<sup>34</sup> When we move from a subject to something else which is being referred to, a subject can be referred to in a

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can think about and ponder, we inevitably turn toward the necessity of some kind of essence or the necessity of some kind of substance which we might not entirely understand but which must exist in some kind of necessary, real way. The necessity would exist without the presence of any conditions or without the presence of any restrictions. A necessity of meaning (existing either as an essence or a substance) would be accordingly joined to a necessity of real being and the absence of a real distinction that would exist between an essence or a substance and the fact of its being or existence.

However, as we turn toward the order of being which exists within our concretely existing world and the contingencies which exist within our world, we find that an order exists with respect to different kinds of operations and different kinds of existences. Before anything can engage in any species of operation, it must first enjoy a form or species of being which is to be regarded as basic and primary. Operations which come and go presuppose an enduring act of being or an enduring act of existence which refers to the reality of a specific center of activity (a center of activity or, in other words, a “functional, active unity” which refers to the being of a concretely existing thing which exists as the subject of these same operations and which also exists as a receptor or as a receiver of other operations which are proper to it). Cf. Beards, *Philosophy*, p. 83. By first attending to the being or the existence of such subjects, we can then attend to the subsequent being of operations which are to be regarded as accidental operations (or conjugate operations) if we are to distinguish them as other or as different from the kind of operation or activity which exists when we only refer to presences of acts of being or presences of acts of existence which bring a potential center of activity into a condition of real being from a prior condition of non-being. We move from one kind of being to another kind of being as we move from acts of being belonging to subjects to acts of being which refer to differing operations which subjects can engage in or which subjects can experience as receptors. In both cases, a transition involves a shift which moves from potency to act: with respect to essences or substances which exist as possible centers or subjects of activity and reception, we move from substantial or central potencies to substantial or central acts; and then, with respect to accidental or conjugate operations, we move from accidental or conjugate potencies toward accidental or conjugate acts. As potencies, accidental or conjugate potencies can be referred to in a manner which also refers to presences of operative potency (a species of potency which exists when we think about how accidental or conjugate potencies have already been informed by presences of accidental or conjugate forms, these unions of matter and form existing as an orientation which is receptive to actuations which can come to them from presences of accidental or conjugate act). Cf. Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 145; p. 312, n. 36. In an algebraic species of notation which can be used to speak about proportions and the existence of proportions, we can say here that A is related to B as C is related to D. In both cases, since no essence or substance needs to receive a proportionate act of being or a proportionate act of existence (the meaning of a given essence or the meaning of a given substance does not imply the necessity of its actual, factual

manner which speaks about the presence of a **base**.<sup>35</sup> A base obviously refers to a point of departure. The something else that is being referred to in turn points to the **term** or *terminus* of a relation which can be understood as a base if we want to think about a relation in terms which move in a converse or contrary direction: from what had been initially a term to what now functions as a base.<sup>36</sup> The point or principle which refers to why it can be said that one thing is being related to another refers to the “**ground** or basis (*fundamentum*) of the relation.”<sup>37</sup> Lonergan speaks about a “term of comparison.”<sup>38</sup> Owens speaks about the “cause” of a relation.<sup>39</sup> The ground, source, or *fundamentum* of a relation can be either a datum of sense (as this can be given in a standard unit of measurement which is then applied to measure other quantities)<sup>40</sup> or, on the other hand, if we want to speak about an internal relation and not about an external relation, it can be a datum of consciousness as this is given to us as the term of a

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existence) and since, in a similar way, we cannot say that accidental potencies necessitate actualizations which would refer to operations of one kind or another that are present, for this reason, we can speak about essences as substances and about other essences which exist as accidental potencies in a way which says that both kinds of potency exist as specifications of a common form of potency: a potency which is to be equated with the presence of an accidental passive potency. Cf. Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 38; p. 46.

From a way of thinking which thus leads us toward a transcendent first principle which exists in an utterly absolute way (we can think about it in a way which prescind from any talk about the presence of relations), in a converse way of thinking and understanding (according to an order of synthesis which is to be equated with an order of teaching or an order of doctrine), we can also move from something which exists as an absolute toward things which exist as a consequence of relations and of orderings which exist among differing sets of relations. A first and primary species of ordering refers to how a conditioned finite essence or a conditioned finite substance relates to its proportionate act of being or existence and then a second species of ordering refers to how accidental or conjugate specifications of essence are related to an order of realization which refers to operations that exist, in themselves, as accidents or conjugates (according to the terminology which we can use and which we can adapt for our own purposes). In descending from what exists as an unconditioned absolute down to what exists as an essence or substance before it is considered in terms of how it can exist as a subject of operations and/or as a receptor of operations, a wider web of relations is to be discovered and known (a wider web of relations which grows in complexity as we move from what exists apart from the presence of any relation to what exists because it has been constituted by a growing number of very many relations that differ from each other).

<sup>34</sup>Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 689. Please note that, if we want to fully understand what is meant when we speak about subjects (possible subjects of relation), we need to enter into an inquiry which distinguishes bodies from things. Cf. *Insight*, pp. 270-295. A body is known for what it is through acts of sense. It is experienced as something which is encountered in an outward or external way. But, a thing is known for what it is through acts of understanding which transcend what is known through acts of sense. We begin from an experience of body and through this experience, we move toward thing. In our understanding, things are discovered to exist within bodies. A thing is experienced as a datum of intellectual consciousness or it is known through a datum of intellectual consciousness. A thing explains why a body exists in the way that it does and why it has the set of sensible characteristics which it happens to have. By way of a quick illustration, a human body is not to be equated with a human person but, by initially encountering human persons through their bodily existence, we can begin to move from an apprehension that knows about a human body to an apprehension that knows about a human person. In other words or, better put, as a consequence of

specific act of direct understanding. For an example, we can think about the circulation of water as this exists in our physical world. In terms of sense, water is seen to come in the form of rain and, in heat, it is seen to disappear. But, if we can go beyond these experiences to an understanding that is able to grasp how a number of distinct variables relate to each other in an ongoing kind of way, we can distinguish a number of variables which, together, constitute an ongoing cycle or an ongoing circuit. Omit any variable and the circulation of water ceases to be. Omit the relation and the circulation of water also ceases to exist. In this type of situation, from an act of understanding which functions as a *fundamentum*, we apprehend a relation which is not so much seen as now it is understood.<sup>41</sup>

As a datum of sense, a *fundamentum* would obviously point to the presence of an **external relation**. It

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these differences, on the one hand, if a subject exists as a body and if we want to speak about relations which have to do with bodies, we must attend to external relations. But, if a subject exists as a thing, in order to speak about things, we must advert to inner conditions and the internal relations which connect inner conditions, one to the other. Inner conditions through their inner relations explain why bodies exist in the way that they do.

35Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 514.

36Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 514. Hence, “if the relation 'father' has Abraham as its base and Isaac as its term, the converse relation 'son' has Isaac as converse base and Abraham as converse term.”

37Owens, p. 179.

38Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 689. In *Verbum*, p. 122, Lonergan refers to Aristotle where he notes that, in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, three types of ground can be distinguished in understanding the existence of relations: “quantity, action and passion, and measure and measured.”

39Owens, p. 179.

40In the example which Owens gives in his *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, p. 179, a relation of equality can be adverted to if we want to speak about a relation in terms of size which can exist between two sugar cubes. Each cube can share in the same size which the other has. The ground or basis of a possible relation is the issue of size (the size of the two cubes). From the size of one cube, we move toward the size of the other cube and we use a common measure to determine what kind of relation can be specified as regards the question of size (more, less, or the same). And then, when we find that the size of the first cube is the same as that of the other cube, we can speak about a relation of equality.

41Recall perhaps the early scientific insights of Thales of Miletus (*fl. c.* 585 BC) who purportedly first postulated that all things which exist in the world emerge or come out of water. Water exists as the first principle of all things. Cf. W. K. C. Guthrie, *The History of Greek Philosophy*, Volume 1, *The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 54-58.

Now, on the one hand, if we are to understand this postulate, we can say that Thales says this because of what his senses have reported to him. It is recorded of him that he had travelled to Egypt and that he had noticed how crops grow as soon as the floods of the Nile recede from the land areas of the Nile Delta. Perhaps too he had noticed that frogs and worms appear wherever it had just been raining. On the basis then of what he has seen and what is given to Thales in his acts and data of sense, if then, with Thales, we postulate that change exists and that change is to be distinguished from chaos (since there must be some thing which changes and something which does not change), we can then raise questions about the identity of what this unchanging thing could be. Descriptively speaking, what substance can be said to lie under grass so that grass can be transformed into milk? Since it seems too

would determine an external relation. Add an external relation to a subject and nothing is added to the reality of a given subject. Take away an external relation and, similarly, nothing happens to what had been the subject of a given relation. A subject is not lessened in the reality which it has (the reality which already belongs to it). In the ontological order of things, if, for instance, our father or mother were to die, we would still be the human beings which we have been. We continue to exist as before. Our existence in terms of existence is unaffected. However, as we shift to the psychological order of things, a different story often presents itself. External events and external relations can trigger changes which can occur from within a person. If death removes a parent, we can cease to be the kind of human being which we have been. A change can occur from within our beings: a change which is not directly seen but, as occurring, it effects a reordering of conscious elements within ourselves to reshape

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that Thales was familiar with the four traditional elements of air, fire, water, and earth, in assuming thus that all things can be ultimately reduced to one of these four elements, water accordingly emerged as the most obvious substance which can be identified. It can undergo very many transformations. In fact, is there no change that it cannot undergo? Rivers turn into deltas, water into ice, and then back into water. Water can then be changed into steam which becomes air, and air, in the form of wind, fans fire. Hence, with Thales, we can say that all things are composed of water. This thesis presents itself to us as an obvious explanation for what goes on in the world given the constant experience which we have of growth and development and about what happens if water is not present. As Aristotle had testified about the thesis of Thales (*Metaphysics A*, 983b20ff):

Thales...says the principle is water (for which reason he declared that the earth rests on water), getting the notion perhaps from seeing that the nutriment of all things is moist, and that heat itself is generated from the moist and kept alive by it...., and from the fact that the seeds have a moist nature, and that water is the origin of the nature of moist things.

However, if we also note that Thales was regarded as the “father of demonstrative geometry” (he first introduced geometry into ancient Greece and he is credited with making advances in mathematics which moved beyond purely pragmatic concerns to theoretical generalizations that were expressed in theorems and that he also correctly predicted the solar eclipse in 585 BC), we can wonder if, in Thales, we can find an explanatory understanding about the circulation of water in the physical order of things and that it is this understanding which best explains why Thales could venture into an early form of metaphysics when he claimed, as a scientific truism, that water exists as the primary substance of all things. In other words, if we look at all that Thales accomplished within his life and work (to the degree that we know about these accomplishments), can we rightly say that the empiricism of Thales best accounts for the alleged empiricism of his conclusions? Can he be properly viewed as an empirical philosopher, as an empirical thinker? Yes, certainly, a strand of empiricism exists within the manner of his procedure. But, it does not adequately explain Thales's understanding of things and how he came to the understanding which he came to have about the existence of a unity amid differences and the appropriateness of concluding that water exists as the first principle of all things. From an understanding which can begin to speak about how this event is related to this event (how this is ordered to that), on the basis of this kind of understanding, we can then begin to speak about how all things exist in the way that they do because our reasoning has reached a conclusion about the identity of some kind of first principle. The first principle, as it is understood, refers to some kind of relation that exists among a number of elements, variables, or events. While, in a way, this first principle can

the consciousness which we have had as human persons, a reshaping that refers to a new relation of elements which now exist as the acts of a person. A new reality can emerge, a new exemplification of personhood (a reality which can be referred to as a “new relative reality”).<sup>42</sup> By way of contrast thus, when the *fundamentum* of a given relation happens to be a datum of intellectual consciousness or, in another way of speaking, as a new *fundamentum* begins to emerge within the conscious life of a person, this change points to the presence of an **internal relation**. It determines a new internal, interior relation. As a common denominator, all three elements (subject, term, and *fundamentum*) constitute the structure or the form of every elementary relation although, as relations grow in complexity, we must speak about orderings which transcend the kind of simple ordering which exists when we only speak about one subject and one term.

In contrast with any kind of thinking that thinks about relations, whenever we speak about anything apart from how it is related to anything else, then, as noted, we speak about things in terms which refer to the presence of an **absolute**.<sup>43</sup> While, in our world, things come to exist as a consequence of prior, conditioning relations (no contingent thing is able to account for its own existence),<sup>44</sup> if the existence of contingent things is to be understood in a manner which does not refer to the presence of any conditioning influences or the presence of prior causes (if, in this context, some kind of intelligible explanation is to be proposed which speaks about how a given thing simply exists), then, for all intents and purposes, we must speak about something whose existence is regarded simply as a given (and, as a given, it is to be regarded as an absolute: it is to be regarded as a species of unconditioned). In the general scheme of things, only God exists as an absolute who exists in a manner which is bereft of any conditions. All other things exist because they have been brought into being. However, once the existence of a given thing is given or is granted, in a *de facto* kind of way, it exists as an absolute and we can speak about it as if it were an absolute.<sup>45</sup> No conditions or relations need to be adverted to if we do not wish to do so although we can speak about relations which exist or which can come into being if we work from a point of departure which wants to think in terms of something that already first exists. In the general scheme of things, from a point of view that is determined by the presence of a metaphysics, relations exist because they exist as a consequence of what first exists in an absolute manner. Conditioned things or conditioned events are explained by unconditioned things or unconditioned events.

On the basis then of this kind of thinking, we can more readily understand why Aquinas argues that “a relation is always founded on something that is absolute...”<sup>46</sup> In speaking about relations, we initially

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be experienced as a datum of sense, it cannot be known *for what it is as a first principle* apart from the reasoning that we engage in and which leads us to a conclusion which occasionally refers to what is known or what can be experienced by us within a given datum of sense or a collection that is known within a datum of sense.

<sup>42</sup>Owens, p. 181.

<sup>43</sup>Recall earlier discussions about the nature of relative and absolute determinations and how one best distinguishes between these two kinds of predication.

<sup>44</sup>Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 41.

<sup>45</sup>Recall how Lonergan distinguishes between God who exists as an absolutely unconditioned and all other things which exist as virtually unconditioned. Prior conditions explain why all other realities exist. But, if requisite conditions have all been fulfilled, a given reality exists. It can be spoken of as if it were an absolute.

<sup>46</sup>Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 4, arg. 4 in contr. Cf. Owens, p. 180.

begin with the existence of a given thing (we first acknowledge a thing's existence) and then we speak about relations. In point of illustration, before we can speak about a possible relation of equality that can exist between two sugar cubes, before a given sugar cube can be related to another sugar cube, each cube must first exist. Existence precedes relation. Contingent things can thus be spoken about in either of two ways. One form of predication explicitly refers to relations. Relations constitute the meaning which we find within this kind of predication. Relatives are constituted by relations. A human being, for instance, can exist either as a son or daughter of a certain set of parents. The sonship of a person says something about the kind of person that one happens to be. As a son of human parents, a person exists as someone who happens to have a human nature. On the other hand however, we can speak about a human person as someone who simply already exists. We can begin with a factuality of existence which is viewed or taken as a given. We go from there. Nothing needs to be said about the presence or the role of any kind of relation although, if we want to speak more fully and comprehensively about the existence of a given person, we must begin to speak about relations and what is emerges or what is constituted by the presence of relations. Adequately understanding the individuality of any given thing requires an understanding that inevitably attends to the presence of relations.