

Lonergan's arguments about internal relations¹

In turning to arguments which would conclusively prove that internal relations exist, Lonergan offers nine arguments which individually seek to prove that internal relations exist (although each argument seeks to prove the reality of a different kind of internal relation). In each argument, a sequence moves us from something which we know toward something which we had not known but which now, through a conclusion, we now know. In each argument also, it is held that the existence of a given reality presupposes the existence of a relevant internal relation (an internal relation which is specific to the existence of a given reality and which is constitutive of the reality that we happen to know about through our acts of understandings, direct acts of understanding lead to reflective acts of understanding). Deny the reality of a given internal relation or deny the reality of any term that is joined to another term within the context of an internal relation and we necessarily deny the existence of a given reality that we have been understanding, defining, and affirming.²

Please note also that, in attending to each argument and as we think about each argument, we can ask if internal relations can be properly regarded as a species of indemonstrable. If relation *per se* exists as an indemonstrable (since all attempts to prove that relations exist presupposes relations which must be accepted or adverted to in an operational manner if, in any argument, we are to move from point A to point B), can *internal relations* be regarded in the same light? In our thinking and understanding, within ourselves as human subjects, are we not experiencing and working with internal relations in a manner which shows that one kind of conscious act is necessarily and intelligently ordered to another kind of conscious act? Each act follows another but all acts are properly ordered to each other. As we thus attend to our arguments and as we think about the different kinds of argument which can be made, by reflective self-analysis, we should all eventually realize that a pre-existent ordering already exists within us: a pre-existent ordering which exists within our cognitive consciousness and which grounds all the specific probative arguments which we can make and which wants to speak about the existence of different kinds of internal relation. The differing arguments all point to differing intelligibilities which, in turn, point to differentiations which exist within internal relations. In other words, internal relations exist as a genus and different internal relations exist as different species of this genus. In other words, when speaking about internal relations, we can admit to elements of indemonstrability and, at the same time, we can also admit that arguments about different kinds of internal relations can add to the depth and the range of our understanding. The differing kinds of internal relation suggest that each kind of internal relation can function as a base for analogical acts of understanding which, later on, can be used to think about relations as these exist within the blessed Trinity.

Accidents as a Specification of Internal Relation

A first argument attends to accidents. A definition of accident is proposed (it is articulated). Then, from a concept which speaks about what an accident is, it is then said that accidents exist as real things. We move from a notion or concept (a conceptual order of meaning) to the affirmation of a truth or a fact (a real order of meaning). Or, to avoid misunderstanding, as a better alternative, it is perhaps best to say that accidents exist as realities. Once we admit that accidents really and truly exist, then, from the reality of accidents, we can then deductively conclude that an internal relation necessarily exists as a reality. An internal relation exists not only as a reality but also as a presupposition since the meaning

¹Please note that this discussion exists for the purpose of explaining how Lonergan speaks about internal relations in his *The Triune God: Systematics*, p. 689.

²Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, pp. 689-695; Conversation with Ron Shady, March 14, 2012.

of an accident (once understood) presupposes the meaning of an internal relation. Hence, as we move from speaking about the presence of a meaning to a presence which refers to a reality, the reality of an accident presupposes a judgment which also knows about the reality of an internal relation. Summarily put, if we truly understand what an accident is and if we admit to ourselves that accidents really and truly exist, we must admit that an internal relation also exists as a reality (an internal relation which refers to how an accident is inherently and intelligibly joined to a substance, given too what we know about the meaning of a substance and the truth or reality of this meaning).

Loneragan's analysis does not directly attend or begin with an act of direct understanding which grasps what an accident is. As noted, he starts with a definition although, in his understanding of human cognition, it is a principle with him that all concepts somehow derive from initial, prior direct acts of understanding. Acts of conceptualization or definition come from prior direct acts of understanding. An understanding always exists as an insight into something that, in its concreteness, is specific and particular in the manner of its individual existence. Our understanding (a direct act of understanding) works from a phantasm or an apt image of some kind that is given to it as a suggestive point of departure. A universal meaning is detached from a particular experience of data that is given to us through our acts of sense (from something that exists within space and time). In the later forming of an adequate definition, a universal formal content is joined to a species of material content that is not limited to any specific, given instant. Recall the difference which exists here between specific, particular matter and the universalized specification of matter which refers to an understanding of common matter.

Hence, in thinking about accidents, from a metaphysical insight that adverts to one form or way of existing (how certain things exist in one way versus how other things exist in another way), it is said that something exists in an accidental way if it exists only by being within something else (if it exists as a modification of something else and not by being apart from something else).³ Certain things cannot exist other than by being within something else. Hence, certain things cannot be understood if we do not refer to how something else exists as an other and how one thing exists within another.⁴ The intelligibility of one thing exists as a function of the intelligibility which belongs to another thing. If, for instance, we think about human beings, we know that the sensing, thinking, and understanding of human beings is something which cannot exist independently of who human beings are and how human beings exist. A human being exists in a finite manner. A human being exists as a finite being. We do not cause ourselves. Yet, in the existence which we have simply as existing, we exist in a way which says that we do not exist as a part or as an aspect of something else. What exists without being an aspect or a part of something else refers to the simple or the mere existence of a thing or a substance. But, on the other hand, an accident (or conjugate) refers to what only exists if it is a part, an aspect, or a modification of something else (if it is a part, an aspect, or a modification of a thing or a substance). Modifications of being occur without there being any change in the mere or simple existence of a given thing (a given substance).⁵ As accidental changes occur, or as modifications occur in how a given thing exists, the changes which occur refer to how a given thing exists in a manner which transcends the

³Loneragan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 689; Owens, p. 144.

⁴Bernard Lonergan, "The Notion of Structure," *Early Works on Theological Method 3*, eds Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour, trans. Michael G. Shields (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), p. 165. Lonergan quotes Aquinas to the effect that "what is intrinsically ordered to some else 'cannot be understood apart from that other'."

⁵When Aristotle uses *symbebēkos* to speak about accidents, note its original etymological significance: it is a "going along with" or an "occurring with." Cf. Owens, *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, p. 155.

condition or the being of its mere or simple existence. By attending to the being of things and by then attending to differing realities which inhere in the existence of a given thing (which come and go *as activities or as receptions* in the existence of a given thing), we can then go on to distinguish between the being of this kind of accident versus the being of this other kind of accident. Some accidents are proper and some are circumstantial. It is proper and typical for a human being to engage in acts of sense which interact with acts of understanding to effect growths in our human acts of cognition. But, it is not proper *per se* (given the nature of a human being) that a given human being should have a particular color of hair or a particular color of skin although it is proper for human beings to have hair color and skin color.⁶

From an understanding which has thus grasped the nature of an accident and which has been able to propose a definition which adequately notes what an accident is, we can then determine that the idea or the concept of an internal relation is an idea or concept that is contained within the idea or the concept of an accident. It exists already as a given (as a given or presupposed meaning). We cannot speak about accidents (about the meaning of any accident) unless we suppose a meaning which also refers to the presence of an internal relation. Again, in this particular case, internal relations come across as a species of indemonstrable. Internal relations are presupposed in any talk that wants to speak about the nature of accidents.

Finally, as a last step, in conclusion, as soon as we happen upon a meaning for accidents and a derivative meaning which refers to internal relations, from an act of reflective understanding which speaks about the reality of accidents as a metaphysical category, we must conclude to a derivative judgment which says that internal relations also exist as realities. Briefly put, in Lonergan's own words: "if accidents are real, internal relations are real."⁷ If we would want to make any judgments which would speak about the reality of accidents, the best approach seems to be one which thinks about the reasonableness of our human acts of understanding. A prior act of understanding first distinguishes between an accident and a substance (a conjugate and a thing).⁸ Then, in moving to a reflective act of

⁶In thinking about the difference which exists between proper accidents and circumstantial accidents, one can also think about the difference which exists between descriptive accidents and explanatory accidents. Aquinas was not unaware of this distinction. Cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 4, 11, 15. When Aquinas speaks about exterior accidents, he works from a distinction which refers to the possible existence of interior accidents: accidents which cannot be known through any acts of sense but which can only be known through acts of understanding. Exterior accidents refer to the order of description; interior accidents, the order of explanation. Lonergan's *Insight* explicitly speaks about conjugates and in a context that distinguishes between exterior and interior conjugates. Cf. *Insight*, p. 462.

⁷Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 689.

⁸Please note that it is no easy no task to understand Aristotle's notion of substance and accident and then see how Lonergan takes this notion and transposes it when, in his *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, he speaks about thing and conjugate and not about substance and accident. The conception differs although, if we understand why the conception differs, we will understand why Lonergan's understanding of thing and conjugate can be regarded as a legitimate development with respect to what Aristotle had been attempting to say when speaking about the meaning of substance and accident and how they differ from each other in the meaning which each has. See what Lonergan says in "Insight Revisited," *Second Collection*, p. 272, for some brief remarks that distinguish Aristotle's notion of substance from Lonergan's notion of substance and how Lonergan's notion of thing can be viewed as an understanding that goes beyond what Aristotle had understood when speaking about his notion of substance.

understanding which thinks about the possible validity of this prior direct act of understanding, at some point we would have to conclude that, if accidents are not real (if they cannot be posited by us), then we would be unable to speak about variations which exist in the life of existing things (changes which occurs in things despite absences of change in who or what a given thing is as a substance or thing). By our acts of sense, we notice that change occurs in the data of sense which we are experiencing. But, by our acts of understanding as these may arise in response to the questions which we are asking, we can begin to speak about why certain changes are occurring in the data which we are sensing. We know about the difference which exists between an accident and a substance and about the reality of an inner relation which must exist if we are to speak about the reality of an accident and about how or why it exists as a consequence of how it is related to a species of being which we refer to when we speak about the being of a substance or the being of a thing.