

Finite Natures as a Specification of Internal Relation

To understand an argument that speaks about natures, accidents, and operations, if we stop to think about it, it is not enough to work with definitions if we want to understand any of these meanings in terms of their explanatory roots. Hence, in trying to understand Lonergan's argument, we best begin with by what is meant by *nature* and how nature emerged as a distinct object of inquiry within the development of scientific thought (scientific thought as this arose within the birth of Greek philosophy in the ancient world). In our understanding, we try to understand why we should speak about nature or natures instead of other possible objectives (other possible formal objects). Then, once we adequately understand what is meant by nature, we can move to speak about different kinds of nature. What distinguishes an infinite nature from a finite nature? Understanding this difference should more fully reveal what is meant when we speak about a finite nature (as opposed to an infinite nature). From the viewpoint of this perspective, we can then speak about connections that exist between a nature and accidents, a nature and operations. We move to understand the kind of proof or argument that Lonergan is claiming to offer.¹

With respect then to nature and determining how we come to an initial meaning for nature, a useful starting point can be adverted to if we advert to the kind of meaning which Aristotle had understood. In the *Physics*, Aristotle speaks about nature or *physis* in connection with movement and rest.² If physics

¹For help in these matters, see earlier notes written to explain the meaning of *natural*. The context is Lonergan's *Triune God: Systematics*, chapter 2: Intellectual Emanation, p. 141.

²Aristotle, *Physics*, 2, 1, 192b 21-22: "...nature is a source or cause of being moved and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily, in virtue of itself and not in virtue of a concomitant attribute." Cf. Lonergan, *Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, p. 41. In his commentary, Aquinas also refers to Aristotle's notion of nature as a principle of mutation that exists within things. As an immanent principle of motion and rest, nature is to be distinguished from what happens as a consequence of art or as a consequence of chance. Cf. Aquinas, *Sententia super Physicam*, 2, 1, 142. The reference to art refers to the imposition of a form from without. An external agent acts from without on the basis of a nature that exists within the external agent. But, the nature that exists as a principle of movement and of rest within an external agent is not to be confused with a nature that exists within something other which an external agent might try to act upon. What is acted upon has a nature of its own (a nature which refers to an immanent principle of motion and rest which differs from the principle of motion and rest that exists within an externally existing agent). Cf. *Sententia super Physicam*, 2, 1, 143. However, with regard to nature, an active principle of motion can be distinguished from a passive principle of motion. A given thing can do certain things in a completely natural way. A thing's nature points to a principle of explanation for characteristic forms of self-movement (even as one admits that other variables can be identified as causes which contribute to given instances of self-movement). When a given thing is able to receive movements from another in a manner which is completely natural to it, a thing's nature can refer to a species of potentiality which exists within a given thing (a characteristic form of potentiality that a given thing has). In Aristotle, according to Aquinas's understanding of Aristotle, nature can sometimes refer to matter when, by matter, one refers to the passivity or the potentiality which a given thing has. However, more often than not, as Lonergan notes, nature in Aristotle refers more frequently to the principle of form and less so to the principle of matter. Cf. Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 539.

Because in the nature of a thing an immanent principle of motion and rest is known, in this

is concerned with understanding motion (why things move and why things are at rest) or, in other words, if the science of physics is concerned with understanding what happens in the transitions which occur when an object moves from one state of rest to another state of rest, the object of inquiry in this type of situation is an explanation about why this is so. Movements of all kinds occur in our physical world. Movements occur in terms of locomotion and in other movements also which occur without there being any changes of place or location. Movements occur in the life of plants as leaves and branches grow toward a perceived presence of light. Roots move toward sources of water. Visible changes occur and, if we want to understand why these visible changes occur in the ways that they do (in the patterns which we perceive in the changes which occur), questions arise that seek understanding. If we then understand why a given thing acts in a way which generally characterizes

nature, an inner agent cause is also known: a second immanent principle which acts from within as an operative finality or as an operative final cause: a finality or catalytic final cause which, in Lonergan's language, is to be identified as an "operator" which, as known, points to the presence of a directed dynamism which exists as a first principle within things: a first principle which, if known, would explain why it can be said that an orientation exists within things and why this orientation is directed toward a later, greater intelligibility which would exist as a larger or "fuller intelligibility." It is what it is because it successfully reduces a larger number of parts or elements into a system which is known to be recurrently operative. The regularity which we experience points to an intelligibility which, now, we understand. Cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 506, cited by Christopher Friel, "An Introduction to Lonergan's Philosophy of Biology," unpublished paper, February 2014, p. 48.

This first principle, as an operator, exists as a principle of a series of succeeding operations. It moves a given being or a given thing from a lower level of development to a higher level of development through sequences that point to how a horizontal form of development at one level, at a lower level, can exist as a point of departure for a vertical form of development which would move the existence of a thing to some kind of higher level. If we know about what exists as the inner nature of a thing, if we know about what exists as a formal cause, then, from this knowledge we should know about what exists in terms of its finality or its final cause. We can think, for instance, about how the life and the development of caterpillars can lead to the development and the life of butterflies. A given individual which remains what it is as a given individual, through what exists as its finality or operator, moves through a number of different stages (from one stage to a second change) and, in this moving, one set of laws which explains the activity or the functioning of a given thing is replaced with a second set of laws which explains the activity or the functioning of the same thing. Cf. Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 506, cited by Friel, "Introduction to Lonergan's Philosophy of Biology," pp. 43-44; see also Friel, p. 61. If we know about the nature or the formal cause of a caterpillar, we should know about how, within this same nature, there exists a principle of self-transcendence which exists as a replicating principle of self-movement. It leads from the life and being of a caterpillar to the life and being of a butterfly. Cf. Friel, "Introduction to Lonergan's Philosophy of Biology," p. 38.

Please note thus that when we move from a conceptuality which speaks about final causes to a conceptuality which speaks about operators, we obviously move from a conceptuality which belongs to the ways and means of Aristotelian science to a new kind of conceptuality which belongs to some other kind of science. However, despite these differences, in either kind of science, in the world which is known through the analysis which exists in these sciences, it is possible to speak about how, in both our physical and natural world and also in our contingent human world, finality, as an ordering of causes and conditions, is to be admitted whenever we say that this exists for the sake of that or that, without

how it tends commonly to act and then, from there, if we also understand why is given thing is able to act in a way which generally characterizes how it tends to act and behave, a nature is grasped as the term of a received direct act of understanding. An immanent nature explains why certain potencies exist (potencies which exist as specifications of openness or as specifications of capability) and why certain acts or operations also exist as realizations of potency (why, in general, something happens in the way that it does).³ A nature can exist either as a proximate principle of operation and reception or, on the other hand, as a remote principle of operation and reception.⁴ A nature is proximate in terms of potencies or in terms of acts of movement and reception if no determinations or modifications are needed with respect to what could be the meaning or the intelligibility of a given nature.⁵ In identifying the presence of any nature, we apprehend a meaning for what is natural when we can say that something is natural (it is proper and suited to it) if “it falls within the proportion of a given nature.”⁶

this, this other cannot be. If certain things are to exist in a certain way, prior conditions must exist and these conditions must be met (they must be fulfilled) if, later, other things are to exist in the ways that they happen to exist and then, later on, other new things and the way that these things would exist in the way that they do. If developments of one kind or another are to exist in our physical natural world, if we are to argue that developments of one kind or another are to be admitted in how our physical and natural world exists, then, an order or a relation of finality needs to be distinguished and admitted if we are to understand why we should speak about the existence of contingent necessities: how or why a given level of existence conditions the emergence or makes for the possible existence of some other kind of thing or the possible existence of some other kind of being.

³Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 51.

⁴Lonergan, *Early Latin Theology*, p. 73; Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, pp. 145-149. If we want to understand why, in a given being, we can speak about presences of potency or presences of possibility which exist as accidental potencies or which exist as operative potencies (using other words), all these potencies existing in a condition of first act), we can speak about an immanent nature or an immanent principle which is remote in terms of the realization of acts or operations but which, on the other hand, is proximate if we attend not to acts or operations but to a prior existence of potencies and the understanding which we can have about the existence of these potencies. Cf. Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, pp. 49-51. Citing an example that is taken from theology, a “created communication of the divine nature” that is given to us as human beings (or which is placed within us as human beings as an effect of sanctifying grace) can be viewed as a remote principle of explanation for any later acts of human knowing and willing which, as acts, attain God “as he exists in himself.” However, if we want to explain acts of human knowing and willing which, in fact, attain God “as he exists in himself,” we can refer to how a created communication of God's divine nature can be given to us in a way which modifies our human nature, changing it or raising it in some way. This created communication creates a new habit of cognition and charity which exists within us as proximate operative potencies (relative to the actualization of any acts or operations which are proportionate to the existence of these new proximate operative potencies). These new potencies exist as proximate natures or proximate principles which explain why, now, it should be fitting and right for us (as human beings) that we can engage in acts of knowing which transcend our ordinary acts of human cognition as these exist within the context of our created incarnate human life and why also we can engage in acts of willing and doing which also transcend our ordinary acts of human willing and doing as these typically exist within the circumstances of our concrete human living.

⁵Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 146.

⁶Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 54. In a species of analytical definition which Lonergan provides for what is meant by natural, he says that the natural is “that which lies within the proportion

The nature of a dog explains what is natural to a dog in its acts and activities as, in the same way, the nature of a human being explains what is natural to a human being in its acts and activities and the nature or being of God explains what is perfectly natural and right for God to do and be. A given nature that is known exists as a datum (or as a term) of our intellectual consciousness and not as a datum or term of our acts of sense. In the world that we sense, understand, and know through our acts of sensing, understanding, and judgment, natures exist as intelligibilities within things or within events even as they are grasped by our direct acts of understanding. They have been abstracted by our acts of direct understanding from the sensibilities that exist in the form of apt images or apt phantasms.

If a given nature accordingly explains why a given thing engages in certain acts or operations that are properly suited to it in terms of its self-movement and also why certain acts or operations can be properly received from without, a nature which explains the presence of every kind of possible act or operation can be regarded as an infinite nature. It is an unrestricted nature. In such a nature, no limits exist with respect to the presence of intelligibility: its range, depth, and intensity. In an unrestricted nature, an unrestricted principle of causation can be adverted to (a principle of causation and power which refers to an unrestricted source of meaning). No other nature exists with more meaning than this kind of nature (existing as an infinite nature).

In working thus from determinations which advert to how we may speak about the properties of an infinite nature, we more fully understand what is meant when we try to speak about a finite nature and the properties of a finite nature. A finite nature cannot refer to anything that exists in an unlimited way. A finite nature cannot refer to God although it can refer to every kind of contingent being that exists whether, in one sense, we speak about angels or whether, in another sense, we speak about human beings. The self-movement of one kind of being is not the self-movement of another kind of being. A human being can engage in a species of self-movement which an angel is not able to do (lacking the nature of a human being) and similarly, an angel can engage in a form of self-movement that is closed to what a human being can do since a human being is not blessed with the nature of an angel. Each kind of being is able to engage in actions that come from a subject and each is not able to engage certain actions that can come from a subject. As subjects however, each is able to receive acts or operations which create conditions which, in turn, allow for characteristic forms of self-movement. Nothing having a finite nature is able to move itself (similarly, nothing having a finite nature is able to cause itself) unless factors and conditions act from without to elicit a characteristic form of self-movement which belongs to a given being.

In explaining why certain acts and operations can be properly done and why certain acts and operations can be properly received (in contrast with doing and receiving other kinds of acts and operations), every finite nature can be understood to exist thus as a principle of limitation. Finite natures impose restrictions in an unseen way (as we can see, for instance, if we think about a traditional saying in English which observes that “you cannot get blood out of a turnip”). Certain materials can be obtained from a turnip but, from a turnip, one cannot obtain any form of animal blood.⁷ In each their own way, acts and operations come and go in the life of any given being (sometimes in a way which we can see and sometimes in a way which we cannot see). However, because finite natures impose restrictions in a manner which is hidden from view (finite natures can only be understood), we can advert to a

of a nature; that which belongs to a nature either as a constitutive element of it, a consequence of it, or a necessary requirement of it.” Cf. Lonergan, *Early Latin Theology*, p. 79.

⁷See http://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin_board/51/messages/908.html, February 2, 2011.

species of internal, unseen relation which exists between a finite nature and any acts and operations which come and go as proper accidents (as proper conjugates).⁸ None of these acts and operations exist independently of an existing subject who, now at this time, is the subject or doer of this act or operation and who now, at this other time, is the subject of this other act or operation and who is also the recipient of this other act or operation (now at this time and now at this other time). When intelligibilities of some kind are linked to activities which sometimes can be experienced through our acts of sense, we cannot speak about an external relation. We must always speak about an internal relation which is understood by us in a direct act of understanding when, at the same time and in the same act, a finite nature is grasped by us within a direct act of understanding. Our direct acts of understanding *as direct acts of understanding* always take us toward a knowledge of relations which exist as internal relations.

If, from our point of view, external relations need to be explained, we look for an act of understanding which can reveal an internal relation which we can grasp within an initial direct act of understanding. In the inquiries which we engage in, external relations that we know about through our acts of sense are understood by us (they are explained in a tentative way) by two internal relations: by a first internal relation that exists among the elements or terms of meaning which are constitutive of an intelligibility that is given to us when we refer to the structure of a finite nature or form,⁹ and by a second internal

⁸Please note a traditional distinction which contrasts proper accidents with non-essential accidents which can be circumstantial or which can be fully improper or violent. They are non-essential because they do not belong to the nature of a given thing: a nature which distinguishes one species of thing from other species of things. Cf. Sullivan, *Introduction to Traditional Logic*, p. 43. It is proper for human beings, it is an intelligent and rational thing for human beings to ask questions and to receive acts of understanding. But, at the same time, a given human being can have a skin color which is brown, white, or black and, in this type of situation, we have an accident which cannot be derived from the rational nature of a human being although, in this type of situation, we can speak about a trait which does not jar or detract from any traits that belong to someone who is possessed of a rational human nature. On the other hand however, it is not proper, it is not an intelligent and rational thing for human beings to be treated in a disrespectful manner (to be subjected to forms of degradation which take away from the goodness of human living despite how often this may happen in the lives of given human beings). In his conceptuality, when Lonergan employs “conjugate” instead of “accident” or “accidental,” readers are encouraged to think more readily about how one term of meaning is connected to another term of meaning in a manner which is inherently intelligible and also about how this type of meaning is not so readily communicated when, in our choice of language, we should speak about accidents and not about conjugates.

⁹In every finite form, we find an ordered structure of two or more elements which exist as terms of meaning. Terms and the relations between the terms define each other. For examples here, think about how physical and chemical laws are expressed in a manner which employs differential equations. If we think about the nature of every finite nature which can be grasped by our human acts of understanding (existing as direct acts of understanding), and if we also think about how these natures as the proper objects of our understanding always exist as forms embedded within matter, we can understand why these understood finite natures always exist as composites or as an unseen but intelligible relation which joins two or more variables with each other. In metaphysical terms, every kind of physical being which exists exists as a composite of matter and form. No physical being exists entirely as matter (nor, of course, does any physical being exist entirely as form). If this were the case, a being would exist in a completely simple way. Angels exist as purely spiritual beings and God exists

relation that also exists between the meaning of a finite substantial nature and any natures or meanings which belong to differing acts or operations which exist as accidents or conjugates (acts and operations having natures of their own which we can perhaps discover and know about through new, complimentary direct acts of understanding). We think, for instance, about the nature of an act of sense and the nature of an act of direct understanding even as we know that these natures are not entirely or fully understood if we cannot think about how they relate them to the presence of a primary finite nature which refers to the nature of a thing (the nature of a substance).

The reality of internal relations as these refer to finite natures can then be verified through an act of reflective understanding (through a judgment) as, through our reflective self-understanding, we establish that a real distinction exists between a datum of sense that is the term of an act of sense and an intelligibility that is the term of an act of understanding and if we can also establish that intelligibilities exist within what is first known by us through our acts of sense. In understanding a specific finite nature which reduces an experience of multiplicity to a unity that is experienced in intelligibility and in then affirming the reality of an intelligibility that is given or reflected in what is meant when we speak about a finite nature, we move from an internal relation that is first experienced as a datum of our intellectual consciousness toward an internal relation which is now known to exist as a reality. Through judgment, an internal relation comes to exist as a datum of one's rational consciousness.

If we want to talk about finite substances and whether or not we can speak about internal relations which exist with respect to finite substances, an affirmative answer follows if we first move from a meaning which refers to a finite nature to a meaning which refers to a finite essence. A difference in

as a purely spiritual being. In our world, we know of no being which exists in an entirely material way. Every being which exists exists with a degree of determination which is explained by a presence of form. But, if every physical being which exists exists with a degree of complexity with respect to its constitution, for this reason, we must say that, in every finite nature, an unseen but intelligible relation always joins a minimum of two variables which, in themselves, are also unseen since they are understood (they are grasped by our act of understanding). By way of an example, we can think about "rational animal" which, in the Aristotelian tradition of thought, stands for a definition that is given for the whatness of our finite human nature (finite as limited). Hence, when we think about our human nature, we must refer to a presence of rationality and a presence of animality and about how these two principles are intimately linked with each other in a condition of mutual dependence (even as we need to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic forms of dependence). Human cognition does not exist in a disembodied manner. But, at the same time too, the animality of our human animality is something which exists in a qualified sense. We cannot speak about an unadulterated form or presence of animality as, in a similar way, we cannot speak about a pure presence of rationality. With respect to our finite human nature, when an understanding of this nature is transposed into the meaning of a definition, a universalized intellectual determination is joined to a second determination which refers to a universalized specification of matter. In cognitional terms, we recall how, in the reception of an act of direct understanding, an apt image triggers an insight, a direct act of understanding, an understanding which would not be received apart from a prior apprehension which refers to the presence of an apt image which functions as a species of material cause. While, admittedly, no material cause adequately accounts for acts of understanding which transcend the existence of material causes, the connection which exists with acts and data of sense is a connection which is preserved even if transmuted when, through later acts of conceptualization and formulation, the meaning of a finite form is understood in a manner which unites it with an abstract specification of matter as potency.

meaning exists here if, again, we attend to the difference which exists between an act of direct understanding and a consequent act of conceptualization. An act of direct understanding knows a finite nature if and as it detaches a form or meaning from what is given within a datum or data of sense. In this way, a finite nature is identified with a form (a finite form), finite natures or finite forms existing as terms that accrue to finite acts of understanding: finite acts of direct understanding. But when, as noted, through conceptualization, a form is rejoined or reunited with a material component or material principle (a material principle which refers to an abstracted specification of matter which refers to common matter),¹⁰ instead of a finite nature we can now speak about the presence of a finite essence. Within our understanding, instead of being in the presence of a finite nature, we are now in the presence of a finite essence. A finite nature has been transposed into a form of conceptual being which exists whenever we now speak about the presence of a finite essence. In the transition which occurs, the internal relations which exist with respect to a finite nature are retained although in a context of meaning which now refers to a finite essence.

10As previously noted, as previously suggested, common matter is never directly encountered by us as human beings through any acts of sense which we could have. Common matter exists as a species of metaphysical principle as does prime matter (to cite one example among others that we can possibly refer to). In this world, in our world, we never directly experience prime matter (sometimes cited as “matter itself”) since all instances of matter exist with a degree of determination or a degree of specification which precludes our having any possible direct relation with prime matter through an experience of it. But, by attending to what happens when our human cognition moves from acts of sense to acts of understanding and then, by understanding how our acts of understanding differ from our acts of sensing (each kind of act has a different nature), we discover metaphysical principles as our acts of self-understanding move from specific experiences referring to acts of sensing and acts of understanding toward conceptualizations which generalize what is known to exist about a structure or form that exists within the order of our human cognition. From this generalized order (which, for some, might not exist as more than an inner word as an inner datum of consciousness), conclusions can accordingly follow which generalize and point to a like order which exists in what is known as a consequence of our prior acts of sense and our prior acts of understanding. From a generalized notion which attends and works with acts of sense as a genus, we move toward a generalized notion which refers to the data of sense that, in their own way, also exist as a genus. Prime matter emerges as a distinct metaphysical principle and, similarly, when we work with generalized notions or concepts that refer to how our acts of understanding interact with our acts of sensing, we can begin to speak about the differences which exist between particular matter and common matter. These two kinds of matter are distinguished from each other. Common matter emerges as another species of explanatory principle though it can never be directly encountered by us in how we live and exist within the world that is given to us to our acts of sense. In addition or moreover, if we should attend only to our acts of direct understanding as these exist as a specific genus of cognitive act, we can similarly begin to speak about another generalized notion which refers to the data or the terms of our direct acts of understanding: a generalized notion which, as a concept, refers to a species of being which is to be spoken about in terms of pure form or pure nature. As with common matter and prime matter, we never directly encounter pure forms or pure natures (in our world). And yet, in the notion or concept of pure form or pure nature, we have an explanatory principle (an explanatory theorem) which we can use when we want to make certain distinctions: distinctions which can speak about presences of normativity which are to be distinguished from distortions or corruptions that detract from the kind of normativity which exists when we think about the meaning and being of a pure form or the meaning and being of a pure nature.

From finite essences and relevant internal relations, we can now move toward finite substances and the existence of real internal relations as these pertain to the existence of finite substances. In every essence, because two elements or two principles are joined together to form a unity, in the conceptualization which we find in Aristotle which talks about the formation of this unity, essences are identified as having a unity which is best referred to as a substance. A finite essence can be identified with a finite substance. Hence, in this context, we would say with Aristotle that “*this man* [existing as a finite substance] is composed of *this body* and *this rational soul* [existing as a finite essence], and...*this material thing* [existing as a finite substance] is composed of *this matter* and *this form* [existing as a finite essence].”¹¹ In Aristotle's understanding of how or why individual things exist, the explanation which is offered says that form, as an active principle, is received by matter, functioning as a passive principle. The result is the being or the substance of an individual thing.¹² A substance exists as a way of speaking about things. Substances exist as things. They exist as specific, distinct things.¹³ On the basis of these conclusions, we can then conclude that we can properly speak about internal relations as these refer to finite substances. Finite substances exist as a way of speaking about finite essences and, vice versa, finite essences exist as a way of speaking about finite substances.

Although Aquinas proposes a different understanding for the being of substances (substances exist when essences are joined with acts of being or existence or, to be a bit more specific when we speak about contingently existing substances, finite essences are joined with finite acts of being or finite acts

¹¹Lonergan, *Incarnate Word*, p. 145.

¹²Michael Novak, “A Key to Aristotle’s ‘Substance’,” *Substances and Things: Aristotle’s Doctrine of Physical Substance in Recent Essays*, ed. M. L. O’Hara (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), pp. 188-208.

¹³Please note, to avoid confusion, that Aristotle distinguishes between a first or primary substance and a second or secondary substance. Cf. Aristotle, *Categories*, 1, as cited by Lonergan, *Incarnate Word*, p. 143. See Aristotle, *Categories*, 1, 5 and *Metaphysics*, 3, 1028b33-1029a2; and, in addition, Aquinas, *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 7, 2, 1275. A first substance refers to a concretely existing thing that we can directly point to in an empirical way because it exists as a physically embodied being. It is a being that can be sensed before it can be understood. An order of constitution can be referred to: by an essence composed of matter and form and also by a contingent act of being or existence that is joined to it, a contingent thing contingently exists. Second substances, however, refer to what we know when we can move into a generalization, a generalization which refers to an abstraction. If we refer to a number of concretely existing substances which all possess the same form or nature, we can speak about these substances in a way which refers to a collectivity that is not directly sensed but which is abstracted or understood to exist as a form or nature that is grasped by a direct act of understanding and which can be rendered or put into a definition as the term of an act of conceptualization. “Man” or “cow” exists at a further remove (as a second substance) from “a man” or “a cow” (as a first substance). “Man” or “cow” differs from first substances which refer to these individual men or these individual cows which, through our acts of sense, we can know in terms which refer to their particularity or individuality.

of existence;¹⁴ a substance is not an essence, a *that by which it is*, but it is *what is* or a *that which is*),¹⁵ we can wonder if this difference in explanation effects any radical change in conclusions which would want to speak about the reality of internal relations as these exist with respect to finite substances. A nature of some kind continues to function as a principle of explanation (even as we admit that Aquinas adds act of being or existence as a principle of explanation to nature as a second, distinct principle of explanation). If we take Aquinas's notion of substance and if we take Aristotle's notion of substance, in both cases, we can move from speaking about finite substances to speaking about finite natures.

In addition, in both Aristotle and Aquinas, finite nature functions as a principle of limitation. With Aquinas, if we add a finite act of being or existence to a finite nature and as we think about what kind of relation exists between a finite nature and a finite act of being, we can speak about how a finite nature specifies what kind of act of being or existence can be received or accepted by a given finite nature. Finite nature determines or limits the scope of a finite act even as we admit that, from a finite nature, we cannot get a finite act (a finite act of being or existence).¹⁶ But, as we think about the role of finite natures as these relate to the kind of understanding which we find in both Aristotle and Aquinas, aside from considerations which have to do the reception of a possible act of being or existence, in both Aristotle and Aquinas, for both of them, a finite nature specifies why some actions and operations can be regarded as proper for a given thing (a given substance) and why other actions and operations cannot be regarded as proper for how a given thing lives and exists. For instance, we all know that it belongs to the finite nature of human beings that they enjoy acts of understanding (finite acts of understanding). It is proper to human beings that human cognition occurs through an interaction which exists between acts of sensing and acts of understanding. However, the nature of a human being sets limits on what kinds of acts of sensing and what kinds of acts of understanding can be enjoyed by human beings and when these given acts will occur and how their occurrence can exist in a pattern that

¹⁴Lonergan, *Ontological and Psychological Constitution of Christ*, p. 11. In the kind of language which Lonergan uses, it is said that finite essences as finite essences do not include their own act of being or existence, their own “to be.” If “you understand any finite essence, you do not understand being.” But, on the other hand and hypothetically speaking, if you understand an infinite essence which would refer to an understanding of everything which happens to exist, then, in this context, we would have an understanding that includes everything that has to do with acts of being or acts of existence. An understanding that includes everything would exclude nothing that is understood. However, as we compare what is grasped in acts of direct understanding and what is grasped in acts of reflective understanding, it should be obvious to us that, following our acts of direct understanding, a knowledge of being requires new questions and new acts of understanding (reflective acts of understanding) and the presence of this requirements suggests that it is easier to understand an essence than it is to understand why we can properly speak about an act of being or an act of existence.

¹⁵Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 29, a. 4, ad 2; 3a, q. 17, a. 1, ad 7; q. 17, a. 2 & ad 4; Lonergan, *Incarnate Word*, p. 151; p. 158.

¹⁶From potency, we cannot get form or nature. Similarly, from form or nature, we cannot get act. As form or nature exists as a kind of reception, act exists as a second kind of reception. Hence, we speak about a first and a second potency. First potency (essential potency) refers to the possible reception of a form or nature which can exist (and which would exist as the term of a direct act of understanding) while second potency (sometimes cited as accidental potency or operative potency) refers to the possible reception of an act or operation (existing respectively as an act of being or as an act which refers to an operation or an activity which supposes that something already exists as an active or receptive subject).

is typical of human behavior. No human being can experience acts of seeing that are akin to what a hawk is able to do in the acts of seeing which are proper to a hawk. The seeing of a hawk is far more acute and far more powerful. Similarly, angels enjoy acts of understanding that no human being is able to enjoy. To explain why a given thing is able to engage in certain acts or motions that are proper to it (whether a given act exists as a complete act or operation or whether it exists as an imperfect act: no coincidence exists between an act or action and the end or purpose of an act or action), we must point to internal relations which exist between an unseeable finite nature and attributes which refers to accidents or conjugates (which sometimes can be seen or not seen). If we want to account for some kind of external relation which we could be perceiving, we must refer to an internal relation which is understood and not seen.