

*Lonergan's Position on the Natural Desire to See God as Corroborated by Aquinas's
Doctrine of Creation by Participation and His Nominal Definition of God as Ipsum Esse*

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The question of whether humans have a natural desire to see God has a long and complicated history. There are two principal stances, that the desire is innate or elicited, and the metaphysical and semantic assumptions held by each stance contribute to make an apparently “irresolvable dispute.”¹ However, there is a solution to be had by acknowledging what Bernard Lonergan refers to as “vertical finality.” This concept is not well-known, and for this reason, among others,² Lonergan’s stance on the natural desire to see God has received only peripheral concern. Even in Lawrence Feingold’s second edition of *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters*, Lonergan is afforded scant treatment.³

Lonergan’s position, which is seen as paradoxical from a certain perspective, is more properly referred to as “intellectualist, dynamic, and existentialist.”⁴ Though Lonergan acknowledges an elicited desire for God, he holds that the true natural desire to see God is an innate tendency of the intellect that is equivalent to the unrestricted desire to understand that manifests itself in human questioning.

¹ Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 147.

² Lonergan was not a central figure in the debate following the appearance of Henri de Lubac’s *Surnaturel*. Additionally, the explicit question of the natural desire to see God does not appear in any of Lonergan’s major works. His treatment is more spread out. See the treatise, *De ente supernaturali: Supplementum schematicum*, ed. F. E. Crowe (Toronto: Regis College, 1973), and two short book reviews, the first of *The Eternal Quest* by William R. O’Connor, *Theological Studies* 9 (1948): 125-127; and the second of *Man’s Last End* by Joseph Buckley, *Theological Studies* 10 (1949): 578-580. Lonergan’s one essay explicitly on the question is an extremely compact lecture, “The Natural Desire to See God,” in *Collection*, CWL 4, ed. F. E. Crowe and R. M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 81-91, hereafter, NDSG.

³ Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas and His Interpreters*, 2nd ed. (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2010), hereafter NDSG. Feingold refers to the work of Guy Mansini: “Lonergan on the Natural Desire in the Light of Feingold,” *Nova et Vetera* 5.1 (2007): 185-198. It is quite surprising that Mansini seems to not understand the importance of vertical finality. He does not even mention the term, even though he refers his readers to J. Michael Stebbins’ *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1995), where in chapter five, which Mansini refers to, Stebbins deals with the false-assumptions of essentialism and conceptualism, the primacy of world order to finite natures, and the crucial importance of vertical finality.

⁴ Lonergan, NDSG, 86.

Therefore, humans are in vertical finality to know God's essence through the obediential potency of the intellect, and it can truly be said that humans naturally desire a supernatural end that is not owed to them.

Lonergan's position has received adequate treatment elsewhere,⁵ therefore this essay seeks to support Lonergan's position through other means. The question of the natural desire to see God is an anthropocentric question since it concerns the potency and finality of human nature, and Aquinas fittingly deals with the issue mostly in the *Secunda Pars* of his *Summa Theologiæ*. The larger debate has followed suit in this focus, but it is complemented by a more theocentric approach. By turning to Aquinas' doctrine of God, Lonergan's position is corroborated. The doctrine of creation by participation supports Lonergan's critique of essentialism and conceptualism, allowing for vertical finality to be more easily acknowledged, and the unrestricted desire to understand is more clearly seen as a natural desire for God vis-à-vis Aquinas's nominal/metaphysical definition of God as *ipsum esse*, which, following Lonergan's transcendental method, is referred to as the "unrestricted act of understanding."

The debate concerning the natural desire to see God originates from the more basic question of whether or not it is possible to "see God," a question that is complicated by conflicting scriptural passages. The Bible says that "God dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has or can see" (1 Tim 6: 16), yet it also says that we will see God "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12), and that "this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God" (Jn 17:3). Aquinas provided the classical solution

⁵ See Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative*, and Jeremy Blackwood, "Lonergan and Rahner on the Natural Desire to See God," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, n.s. 1, no. 2 (2010): 85-103.

by speaking of a natural desire to see God that can be perfectly fulfilled only through vision of God,⁶ in opposition to those who held that the blessed will only “contemplate certain *theophanies* made by Him in us.”⁷ This is in accord with what is highest in man, the intellect, that it possess the most intelligible object, God.

Granting Aquinas his argument, it is still extremely difficult to say precisely what the natural desire to see God is. Feingold points out that the elicited desire to see God is clear: man desires to know the essence of things; upon discovering that the things proportionate to his knowing are really effects, he naturally desires to learn of their causes; and having learnt of the existence of the first cause of all there is, he desires to know its essence. But, “the real question is deeper and more difficult. Does this natural elicited desire correspond to an *underlying innate appetite* for the vision of God?”⁸

To this question, various answers have been given, and among them, the positions of Scotus and Cajetan stand out. Following Aquinas, both advanced opposing positions and largely set the tone and the direction for the ensuing debate. In opposition to Aquinas, Scotus held that no “elicited act of the will can be truly natural. Therefore, for him the natural desire to see God can only be an innate inclination,” which is of the will, unconscious, and irrespective of knowledge.⁹ Cajetan followed Denis the Carthusian in rejecting Scotus’s claim, for a supernatural object requires a supernatural inclination, given by grace, since “we can only have

⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, I-II, q. 3, a. 8, hereafter citations will be made in-text as ST. See Feingold, NDSG, chapter three, for Aquinas’s other relevant texts.

⁷ John Scotus Eruigena, *De divisione naturæ* 1.8 (PL 122, 448b-c), cited in Feingold, NDSG, 27.

⁸ Feingold, NDSG, xxv.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

natural inclinations for perfections that are *proportionate* to nature.”¹⁰ Instead, humans have an obediential (meaning non-innate, elicited) potency for supernatural perfection.

The quarrel surrounding this issue became the “most bitter controversy within twentieth-century Thomism, and in Catholic theology at large,” especially following from Henri de Lubac and his *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (1946).¹¹ De Lubac read the key Thomistic texts “at face value,” so that “human beings have a *natural* [meaning innate] capacity for face-to-face vision of God, which however is granted only by a *supernatural* gift,” thereby stating that the long scholastic and neo-scholastic tradition had crucially misinterpreted Aquinas.¹² Intending to regain the patristic doctrine of the human person as *capax dei*, de Lubac was widely accused of “naturalizing the supernatural,” thereby removing the gratuity of supernatural beatitude so that grace was more or less owed to humans, since to deny grace would mean that nature was “in vain.”¹³

Knowledge of the foregoing is important for this essay, as Lonergan’s position does not neatly align with any other position. Lonergan holds that the desire is innate, seemingly aligning himself with Duns Scotus, but for Lonergan the desire is of the intellect and not of the will. Robert Doran says that Lonergan’s position “is in fundamental harmony with Henri de Lubac’s position in *Mystery of the*

¹⁰ Ibid., 82.

¹¹ Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 134.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The real question, of course, is whether such a claim is true of what de Lubac actually said, or merely of how people interpreted him. Rudi te Velde, in *Aquinas on God: The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa Theologiae* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 157, states that de Lubac “distances himself unambiguously from a naturalism of grace” and Steven A. Long says the same in “Obediential Potency, Human Knowledge, and the Natural Desire for God,” *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1, issue 145 (March 1997), 53-54.

Supernatural,” yet Jeremy Blackwood adds that “Lonergan’s grasp of vertical finality allowed him a better solution to the problem.”¹⁴

Either stance of the two principal schools of thought, so it seems, leads to a pitfall: positing an innate natural desire emphasizes the continuity between nature and grace, thereby collapsing the two and removing the gratuity of grace in light of the Aristotelian notion that a natural desire has to be naturally fulfillable, whereas positing an elicited desire emphasizes the discontinuity of nature and grace, thereby protecting the gratuity of grace only at the cost of making grace so extrinsic as to be wholly foreign, irrelevant, and unnecessary in light of a self-sufficient “pure nature.” An elicited desire is also accused of failing to explain how something so extrinsic can actually be given to man without destroying human nature and as being “an act without profound roots” in man and therefore being “without ontological interest.”¹⁵

Fergus Kerr refers to the larger theological debate about nature and grace as a possibly “irresolvable dispute,” but certainly the debate about the natural desire to see God seems to be in the same position. The impasse follows from an assumption that underlies the whole debate, that “there can be a natural inclination only to what is proportionate [to nature],”¹⁶ and that such an inclination must be naturally fulfillable. An innate appetite, therefore, must be “determined to one end; if the end is natural, there is no innate desire for vision [of God], and if there is a

¹⁴ Blackwood, “Lonergan and Rahner on the Natural Desire to See God,” 100, fn. 70.

¹⁵ Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946), 433, cited in Feingold, NDSG, 191.

¹⁶ Mansini, “Lonergan on the Natural Desire in the Light of Feingold,” 189.

desire for vision, there is no innate desire for a natural end.”¹⁷ To arrive at Lonergan’s position and how it differs from others, one must first ask how such things are known: why must “inclination, finality, and ordination all belong together”?¹⁸

Since the concept of nature holds a crucial place in the debate, it is worthwhile to inquire into how nature—and other concepts derived from it—came to be defined such that there can be a natural inclination only to what is proportionate to nature. Lonergan points out that for those in the debate about the natural desire to see God, the term nature is “had by an unconscious process of abstraction from sensible data ... over which we have no control.”¹⁹ Such a metaphysical term is conceived “precisely as abstract and universal” and as “fundamentally static, for natures and their exigencies do not undergo change.”²⁰ These natures together are then seen to make up the larger world order, as being logically and ontologically prior to the world order. As ontologically prior, they are also in some way distinct and non-overlapping. Thus, any finality must be contained within the nature, so to speak.²¹

Furthermore, Lonergan says that because terms are so important in this way of thinking, there is a philosophical intolerance for paradox. Michael Stebbins interprets Lonergan here to mean that man cannot have a *natural* desire to see—that is, to know—God’s essence because he cannot naturally have a term for such a

¹⁷ Ibid., 193.

¹⁸ Ibid., 189.

¹⁹ Lonergan, NDSG, 85-86.

²⁰ Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative*, 177; 172.

²¹ The foregoing does much to explain the decadent scholastic view of the natural desire to see God under the “two-story model” of nature and grace, that there is a naturally elicited desire for natural knowledge of God that is naturally fulfillable, plus a “mere non-repugnance” to grace which is a bonus that “does not constitute the perfection of any natural potency in the subject,” *ibid.*, 172.

thing.²² Aquinas' concept of God as *ipsum esse* is not sufficient since it is only a "nominal definition."²³

These perspectives or processes are identified by Lonergan as essentialism and conceptualism. The two terms do not refer to two different sides of the debate, but to the objective (essentialist) and subjective (conceptualist) sides of one erroneous way of thinking.²⁴ Stebbins nicely sums up Lonergan's outlook and major concern:

The debate over the existence of the natural desire to see God is at root a conflict between two incompatible ways of understanding both the order of the created universe in its relation to God and the very activity of the human intellect by which we come to know that order.²⁵

Following this line of thought reveals the fittingness of moving beyond the anthropocentrism of the debate.

Aquinas' doctrine of creation by participation further breaks down the presuppositions of essentialism and conceptualism through a notion of nature as *created* nature, which participates in a plurality of being. For Lonergan, this means prioritizing the world order over finite natures, which facilitates acknowledgement of Lonergan's key principle of vertical finality.

In the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiæ*, creation follows swiftly off the heels of the conception of God as *ipsum esse*:

²² Ibid., 173.

²³ Lonergan, NDSG, 82.

²⁴ Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative*, 174.

²⁵ Ibid., 161. The answer to the question of how one should properly come up with the terms, is along the lines of an "open intellectualism" that Lonergan mentions in NDSG, 86, which "stems from the discovery that knowledge is grounded not in concepts but in acts of understanding" (ibid., 174).

God is *ipsum esse per se subsistens* [sheer existence subsisting of his very nature]. And such being ... cannot but be unique, rather as whiteness would be were it subsistent, for its repetition depends on there being many receiving subjects. We are left with the conclusion that all things other than God are not their own existence but share in existence. (ST I, q. 44, a. 1, ad)

Conceiving creation of things in terms of their participation in God's existence sets the basic terms of relationship between God and creatures and provides a specific meaning to the fact that created beings are necessarily non-divine: creatures only share in existence.

This doctrine is clearly Platonic, offering evidence against neatly labeling Aquinas as an Aristotelian. Aristotle was strongly against the notion of participation, seeing it as

an empty metaphor, a way of speaking without any intelligible meaning ... an unsuccessful attempt to restore a causal link between the separate idea and the particular things which are named after the idea.²⁶

The key contrasting concept for Aristotle was substance (*ousia*), which is "a critique of the separate existence of the ideas."²⁷

With respect to the causal link between form and concrete, particular things that Aristotle detested, it seems that the one exception is for a subsistent form, like God. It is helpful to recall Aquinas's statement that God's existence is "as whiteness

²⁶ Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), xi. See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, 9, 991a19-26.

²⁷ Ibid., x. See David Burrell, C.S.C., "Analogy, Creation, and Theological Language," in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. R. V. Niewenhove and J. Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press) 81-82, for an excellent discussion of how Aristotle's *aporia*—the equation of form and substance—is bypassed by the revelation of a free creator that points out Aristotle's mistake in not asking why there is anything at all, thereby securing the real distinction between existence and essence.

would be were it subsistent,” for there is indeed a causal link between God’s essence (subsistent existence) and the existence of particular created things. This breakthrough by Aquinas is thanks to Dionysius and his treatment of participation, though this does not mean that Aquinas did not retain any Aristotelian insights. One must say that “the causality of participation constitutes a thing in its proper subsistence,” which allows Aquinas to “embrace the typically Aristotelian affirmation of the world of nature with its own ontological density and causal efficacy.”²⁸

It seems clear that Scholastics and Neo-Scholastics, especially following Cajetan, were hasty and erroneous in assuming Aquinas was a thoroughgoing Aristotelian, not thinking it was possible for Aquinas to break away from “The Philosopher” on such a crucial issue as participation. But when humans are seen as participating in existence as opposed to “owning” their own nature and existence, there cannot be an essentialist notion of nature, where the pride of place goes to the nature and how it is defined, as opposed to its place in the world order. The forms or natures of created things were not conceived as separate from other forms and natures; instead, “to be a creature means to exist in the plural and to be placed within a well-ordered whole,” since “the plurality of creatures [their natures included] is an essential part of the notion of creation.”²⁹

²⁸ Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 142.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 131. Aquinas is clear and persuasive on this point: “We must say that the distinction and multitude of things come from the intention of the first agent, who is God. For He brought things into being in order that His goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them; and because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided and hence the whole universe together participates the divine

The assumptions of essentialism and conceptualism are thus shown to be erroneous by Aquinas's doctrine of creation by participation. For Lonergan, not seeing Aquinas as a thoroughgoing Aristotelian allows one to see what others do not, that "concrete things" are in fact directed "toward an end beyond the proportions of their nature."³⁰ This reality is what Lonergan refers to as vertical finality, and it is crucial to his position on the natural desire to see God. For Lonergan, finality is "not the end but relation to the end,"³¹ and in addition to vertical finality there is horizontal finality (to the proportionate end of nature) and absolute finality (to God, as the absolute goodness that is the "ground and goal" of every good).³² It is only with the advent of modern science that the truth of vertical finality can be seen. For example, amino acids are in potency to contribute to the maintenance of animal life while still remaining distinct and intact as amino acids—this is a potency to an end beyond the proportions of a thing's nature. Furthermore, evolution specifically reveals that species are extinct, and this further proves that finite natures are not prior to the world order, because for the extinct natures to not have been "in vain," their extinction must be somehow for the good of the prior world order.

If things can participate in a higher order of being, then there can be a natural aspiration to a super-natural goal. However, vertical finality cannot properly be understood as the solution to the primary dilemma of either collapsing or

goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever," ST I, q. 47, a.1, ad.

³⁰ Blackwood, "Lonergan and Rahner on the Natural Desire to See God," 85.

³¹ Bernard Lonergan, "Mission and the Spirit," in *A Third Collection*, ed. F. E. Crowe (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 24.

³² Ibid.

separating nature and grace unless it is understood as a certain kind of potency belonging to a lower-ordered thing. Following Lonergan's complex comparison of different types of potencies is difficult, and space permits only a brief outline.³³

Vertical finality is a species of passive potency, which means that it is ordered to receiving an act as opposed to producing one. There is a type of passive potency where the act is in proportion to a thing (meaning it has an exigence for actuation of said potency), but this is not so with regard to vision of God, which is utterly beyond the proportion of human nature and requires further determinations to make it capable of receiving the supernatural act of vision of God. An organic compound also requires further determination (which can be effected by a finite agent) for the reception of a spiritual soul, but the spiritual soul is only relatively supernatural to the nature of an organic compound, whereas God is absolutely supernatural to humans and the only agent who can actuate the obediential potency to vision of God. In this way, Lonergan shows how the obediential potency of the intellect and will does not have an exigence for its actuation while situating it in man's essence.

It has yet to be seen precisely what the natural desire to see God consists of for Lonergan. Lonergan saw, with de Lubac, the "basic mistake of seeing in the natural appetite for the sight of God a conscious desire of the will."³⁴ The will, if defined as being an appetitive potency, is something that all animals possess: for

³³ For a full treatment of this issue, see Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative*, 143-149.

³⁴ Henri de Lubac, *Letters of Etienne Gilson to Henri de Lubac, With Commentary by Henri de Lubac*, trans. Mary Emily Hamilton (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 85-86, n. 7, cited in Steven Long, "Obediential Potency, Human Knowledge, and the Natural Desire for God," 57, fn. 40.

example, “a predator hunts its prey because it hears or smells or sees it.”³⁵ But to deny that there is a conscious, natural desire for God “says nothing about the possibility of a natural desire of the intellect to know God *per essentiam*.”³⁶ Furthermore, since the “object of the will’s act is the good as known by the intellect,” the will cannot have an innate inclination to God as Scotus averred.³⁷ Thus, the natural desire to see God is “an inclination of the human intellect to know the quiddity of God.”³⁸

However, for Lonergan, the natural desire to see God is inaccurately named, for knowing is not like seeing. If man really saw with his eyes in the beatific vision, he would only see Christ! More to the point would be “the natural and transcendental desire ‘to understand,’”³⁹ expressed elsewhere as the unrestricted desire to understand.⁴⁰ This desire manifests itself in the endlessness of human questioning, where answers only lead to further questions. Following our natural desire to know the essences of things, we ask the questions “what is it?” or “why is it so?” with respect to material things, yet even material objects are never fully known.

³⁵ Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative*, 151.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 165-166.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

³⁸ Lonergan, *De Ente*, 37, no. 72, cited in Mansini, “Lonergan on the Natural Desire in the Light of Feingold,” 189. This discussion brings up the issue of the relative primacy of the intellect and will, and although the foregoing is representative of Lonergan’s stance, Lonergan sees the need to go beyond metaphysical faculty psychology—where terms like intellect are abstractions that are not experienceable—to intentionality analysis, which deals with the four levels of intentional consciousness: experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding. See Lonergan, “Mission and Spirit,” 27-31, and *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 120-124. This approach avoids any intellectualism and has a place for feelings, especially being in love, which is an exception to the rule that knowledge precedes love (especially in the case of being in love with God). Through vertical finality the lower operations of conscious intentionality are sublated to the higher, and each of the four levels has a certain priority, as being higher or as being lower and therefore more foundational. Still, however, on the question at hand, the innate desire for God is of the intellect. More will be said on this topic in the conclusion.

³⁹ Mansini, “Lonergan on the Natural Desire in the Light of Feingold,” 192. See also Lonergan, NDSG 81-82.

⁴⁰ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, CWL 3, ed. F. E. Crowe and R. M. Doran (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1992), 659-662.

Things cannot be properly understood without knowing their cause, and our desire to know everything about everything, to “know all that belongs to the perfection of the mind” (ST I.12.4), is only accomplished with knowledge of God’s essence, since he is the perfect first cause.

Since the desire in question is to see God’s essence, a correct formulation of the natural desire to see God requires a certain understanding of what God is to understand how it could be that, following Aquinas, “the divine substance is not beyond the capacity of the created intellect in such a way that it is altogether foreign to it.”⁴¹ Speaking of God as “first cause” comes from the beginning of the *Summa Theologiæ*, from the *prima via* “proof” for God’s existence. The first cause, being fully act, contains all the perfections of the effects that flow from it, since “any perfection found in an effect must also be found in the effective cause of that effect” (ST I.4.2, ad). The intellect’s desire is at root a desire to know God, “for God is not just another object among a multitude of objects to be known but rather the ultimate explanation of every aspect of the entire universe.”⁴² If man really wants to know everything, then he really does desire God, that is, knowledge of God, not implicitly, but actually, since knowledge of God is the only thing that can satisfy his desire to know.

This metaphysical argument is good as far as it goes, but the connection can be made clearer between the desire to see God’s essence and his actual essence. One must first follow Aquinas’s “reversal” of the importance of being—from a weak property to what is in act and therefore highest (ST I.4.1, ad 3). Since “something is knowable in so far as it is actual” (ST I.12.1, ad) and “being is also unrestricted, for

⁴¹ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.54.

⁴² Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative*, 155.

apart from it there is nothing,"⁴³ it is the "primary intelligible" that "one knows when one knows anything."⁴⁴ As such, being is the objective of the unrestricted desire to know.

Lonergan follows Aquinas in holding that God is *ipsum esse*, but crucial to the discussion in chapter nineteen of *Insight* is that God is also *ipsum intelligere*. Aquinas explains the connection in the response to I, q. 16 a. 5, that God is the act of his intellect and understanding—an unrestricted act that matches the unrestrictedness of being.

More could be said about this subject, but for this essay it suffices to say that Lonergan shows that the unrestricted desire to understand of humans has an equally unrestricted object, being, and "only the content of the unrestricted act of understanding [i.e., God] can be the idea of being."⁴⁵ Thus, God, conceived of as the unrestricted act of understanding, is equal to the object of the unrestricted desire to know, and man indeed naturally desires to see the essence of God.

In conclusion, humans have an unrestricted desire to understand that is equal to a desire to see God's essence. It does not follow that attaining knowledge of God's essence is due to humans, since the obediential potency of the intellect is only in vertical finality to beatific vision, having no exigence for it. The truth of this position is difficult to see from an essentialist and conceptualist perspective, but

⁴³ Lonergan, *Insight*, 662.

⁴⁴ Long, "Obediential Potency, Human Knowledge, and the Natural Desire for God," 48.

⁴⁵ Lonergan, *Insight*, 666. The mystery of being is here connected to the mystery of God. Being is a mystery because asking what it is seeks to make it into an essence, which is impossible following the real distinction between existence and essence. David Burrell, in *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 46, points out that there is no absolute existence—there is only existence itself and that which participates in existence. The best route may be to follow Lonergan and simply say that the idea of being is equal to the unrestricted act of understanding.

Aquinas's doctrine of creation by participation clearly supports such an understanding—the hierarchical world order allows for the lower to be sublated to the higher. Further, paying attention to the implications of Aquinas's conception and Lonergan's elucidation of *esse* and God's essence more clearly reveal the connection between the desire to know and God.

If the preceding largely solves the “irresolvable dispute,” there are loose ends that remain, treatment of which space does not permit. A word can be said about perhaps *the* existential problematic of the debate, that based on a natural desire to see God, it seems that God owes grace to humans at least insofar as he is good and wants his creatures to be happy. Otherwise, humans are doomed to an “Augustinian restlessness” before the next life, both with respect to and irrespective of sin. A response from Lonergan can be found in *Method*, where he states that “just as unrestricted questioning is our capacity for self-transcendence, so being in love in an unrestricted fashion is the proper fulfillment of that capacity.”⁴⁶ On earth, we can through love rest in the mystery that is God, while still seeking to know him, and patiently await the beatific vision we hope to attain. To understand Lonergan on this point one must move beyond faculty psychology to intentionality analysis, therefore largely moving beyond the terms of this debate. His methodological shift allows for the operations ascribed to the intellect and will to be related and verified. The unrestricted desire to understand is only part of the general dynamism of human consciousness towards self-transcendence

⁴⁶ Lonergan, *Method*, 106.