

DE LUBAC AND LONERGAN ON THE SUPERNATURAL

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The author argues that Bernard Lonergan's work provides a useful foil for reconsidering the position of Henri de Lubac on the relationship between natural and supernatural. Lonergan agrees with the basic thrust of de Lubac's position, but the Canadian's approach to the interlocking of his thought on God with his analysis of human consciousness and history enables him to give a distinctive account of the issue.

HENRI DE LUBAC'S WORK HAS SEEN RENEWED INTEREST over the past ten years. The occasion for this interest was the centenary of his birth in 1996, and it has continued with articles marking the 60 years since the publication of his major works. In particular, one sees evidence of a continuing fascination with the thorny issues of nature and grace as first raised by de Lubac in his controversial book, *Surnaturel*.¹ In this work de Lubac put forward his approach on the cusp of a paradox between fulfilment and gratuitousness—fulfilment of nature and gratuitousness of grace—that has left aspects of his approach still unresolved and inviting comment even today.² In this article I draw into the discussion the views of Bernard

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¹ Henri de Lubac, *Surnaturel: Études historiques* (Paris: Aubier, 1946). This work was never translated into English, but a later, expanded version in two volumes appeared in English: *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (London: Chapman, 1967); and *Augustinianism and Modern Theology* (London: Chapman, 1969).

² Recent books in English on de Lubac are: Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000); John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005); Susan K. Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis and the Church in the Theology of Henri de Lubac* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998). For recent articles on de Lubac, one may consult those in *Gregorianum* 78 and 83 and in *Revue des sciences religieuses* 77.

Loneragan, bringing to bear some reflections that benefit from the progress of a later theology.

In his study of the supernatural de Lubac wrote with passion. He considered that the issue he wanted to raise went to the heart of the Catholic Church's confrontation with the secularism of his day, and notably with the two great atheistic ideologies, Naziism and Marxism, which had set the agenda for the tortuous history of most of the 20th century. His passion was all the more profound in that he proposed that the prevailing theology of the supernatural in Catholic schools carried within it a fatal flaw that left the Church all the more exposed to these adversaries, if not actually contributing to the mentality that lay behind them. He identified this flaw in the way "many could see salvation only in a complete severance between the natural and the supernatural."³ For him this rather refined point of theology was central to issues being played out in the concrete life and apostolate of Christians.⁴

The background to this position lies in de Lubac's study of patristics, and in particular in his conviction that his teaching was in line with that of Augustine: "You have created us, Lord, for yourself, and our hearts will find no rest until they rest in you."⁵ De Lubac saw this teaching passing into the great theologians of the 13th century, in particular Thomas Aquinas. They expressed this tradition by speaking of a natural desire for the vision of God. This phrase was the shibboleth for de Lubac's position.

Through a complicated history, which de Lubac traces in the first part of *Surnaturel*, an alternative approach began to emerge later in writers such as Cajetan and Suárez, according to whom any desire on our part for the vision of God could only be supernatural, not natural. This was the view that came to predominate in Catholic schools until challenged in the 20th century by a number of scholars, of whom the standard-bearer was de Lubac himself. He did not have an easy time in throwing down the gauntlet to the entrenched Scholasticism of the day. For a time he was suspended from teaching by his order, but after spending the 1950s under a cloud, he emerged in the 1960s as a leading peritus of Vatican II, which he always maintained had endorsed the basic thrust of his position, especially in its

³ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind* (London: Burns, Oates, & Washbourne, 1950) 166.

⁴ The situation in which *Surnaturel* was written and its implications for Christian life generally are well set out by Joseph A. Komonchak, "Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990) 579–602.

⁵ Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1.1.

teaching in *Gaudium et spes* on the sacred character of all human life and activity.⁶

THE HYPOTHESIS OF PURE NATURE

The first of the two issues I present from this controversy concerns the notion of a state of “pure nature,” which the received teaching of the schools considered to be necessary for the definition and vindication of the notion of the supernatural. This position saw the world in terms of what de Lubac called a dualism or a “two-tiered” universe. There is the reality of human nature defined by its orientation to a natural end in a state of natural beatitude. This is what Scholastics referred to as the state of pure nature. At a certain stage, if not from the beginning, this state was subsumed into the supernatural destiny revealed to us in the Bible. At the same time, our natural being remained as the foundational level of our existence. This latter level of being, according to this view, is perfectly intelligible in itself without any need of recourse to the supernatural. In such a universe, grace and the supernatural are seen as additions from beyond human nature to a nature perfectly indifferent to them. This is what Maurice Blondel, de Lubac’s precursor in this argument, had called an unacceptable “extrinsicism,” since grace and the supernatural are here understood as realities clearly extrinsic to human nature.⁷

De Lubac set out to challenge this dualism. He saw it as downgrading the faith and as contributing to the secularism of the day. It constituted support from the Catholic side for a notion of humanism as per se secular, and it reduced faith and grace to the status of being simply desirable additions to our humanity. Against this dualism de Lubac affirmed that in the present world order there is only one possible end for human nature: seeing God. He considered this conviction to be the teaching of not only Augustine but also of Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Scotus, summed up in the phrase “the natural desire for the vision of God.”

Two key points support de Lubac’s approach. First, he stresses the ways the spiritual nature of the human being marks us out among created natures. “There is nature and nature,” he writes.⁸ “We cannot apply univocally to it [human nature] any of the patterns of thought which we generally use to define relationships between beings in this world.”⁹ Elsewhere he writes: “The human spirit does not desire God as an animal desires its prey.

⁶ Henri de Lubac, *Athéisme et le sens de l’homme: Une double requête de ‘Gaudium et spes’* (Paris: Cerf, 1968).

⁷ Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1984) 37.

⁸ De Lubac, *Mystery* 179, 133–41.

⁹ *Ibid.* 114.

It desires him as a gift.”¹⁰ In this de Lubac was deliberately opting, in his own phrase, for a “mystical view” of the constitution of the person.¹¹ In opposition to what he called the Aristotelian view of nature and the human person, which he saw as too delimited and enclosed within its own order, he claimed to ground his own approach on the biblical and patristic doctrine of the human spirit created in the image of God and summoned by the divine Spirit to its destiny.¹²

The second key point behind his biblical and patristic emphasis is that “nature” is to be taken here more historically than ontologically. For Augustine “nature” refers to that state in which we are born (*nati*), whether that state be one of grace or not. In this approach there is a significance that does not at first appear. In considering the question of our ultimate destiny, de Lubac has moved from the essential to the existential order. For him the issue is not about what our destiny has to be in virtue of our finite nature as such, or what it might be in another world order, but about what it actually is in the only world order known to us, which is also the one revealed to us in the sources of the faith.

This is a point about which de Lubac has often been misunderstood and misrepresented. Some critics said he maintained that God could not have created a purely natural spiritual being.¹³ This has never been his position. He holds that the state of pure nature is impossible within the only world order known to us. The opinion attributed to him by such critics would be directly contrary to the teaching of *Humani generis* and has always been explicitly excluded by de Lubac, even before the encyclical was written.¹⁴

However, in his account of the development of the notion of pure nature, de Lubac traced how the idea of a purely natural fulfilment of the human race gained significance. This aspect was central to the establishment of the notion of pure nature as a self-contained reality, which he saw as closed in on itself and therefore conceivable as quite independent of any supernatural order. He conceded that the notion of such a natural end was mentioned by Aquinas, but, in de Lubac’s view, it was mentioned only to be set aside as without significance.

At the same time, though, it must be said that de Lubac exaggerated his Thomistic point. Aquinas does conceive of the possibility of such a purely

¹⁰ De Lubac, *Surnaturel* 483.

¹¹ De Lubac, *Augustinianism* 191; see also *Surnaturel* 117–19 and *Mystery* 126–30.

¹² See De Lubac, *Surnaturel* 435; and *Mystery* 139–44, 199–200, 205–6.

¹³ For a recent statement of this point of view see, e.g., John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005) 26 n. 10.

¹⁴ Henri de Lubac, “Le mystère du surnaturel,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 36 (1949) 80–121, at 104.

natural end of the race. Though for him this was only of marginal significance, it did have some reality—for instance, in the case of unbaptized infants in Limbo.¹⁵ In *Surnaturel*, on the other hand, de Lubac's refusal to allow any significant reality to the notion of a purely natural fulfilment of the race was unqualified; it was the kingpin of his rejection of the notion of pure nature and of any suggestion of its independence from the supernatural order. As this was the hub of his argument against the state of pure nature, so it came to be seen by many as the Achilles' heel of his entire approach. It was the point at which his distinction between natural and supernatural, between the gratuitousness of creation and the gratuitousness of grace, runs into difficulties.

Part of the problem has always been de Lubac's concept of pure nature. In his view, natural beatitude as the end of ungraced humanity is always seen as integral to the notion of human nature as found in the dualist approach. This is what he means by an Aristotelian view of nature as one closed in on itself and unrelated to any other possible state. Once de Lubac had dismissed the possibility of any such natural beatitude as irrelevant, the significance of human nature as such lapses into confusion as de Lubac opts instead for his so-called mystical approach to the human person.¹⁶ In this way de Lubac fails to do justice to the more general meaning of human nature as a reality in itself, common to any order of things on earth and as in fact open to more than one kind of actualization, as the course of history shows. The significance of this failure will be developed below.

THE DEFINITION OF THE SUPERNATURAL

The second main issue in the discussion of the supernatural concerns the very definition of the supernatural itself. For a long time Catholic theology generally had defined the supernatural by its gratuitousness in relation to the natural order. Indeed, this was one of the main reasons underlying the development of the notion of the state of pure nature in the first place. The very contrast between such a state and the supernatural helped to give meaning to the gratuitousness of the latter.

Having dismissed the relevance of the state of pure nature, de Lubac had to develop his own concept of the supernatural. This he did, not by a backward-looking contrast to a supposed state of pure nature, but by forward-looking anticipation of the beatific vision itself as the defining es-

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *De malo*, q. 5, a. 3. In a later work de Lubac acknowledged the case of Limbo, but it did not change his basic position; see *Augustinianism* 188 n. 73.

¹⁶ This confusion surrounding human nature as such has been picked out as a key weakness in de Lubac: see Stephen J. Duffy, *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1992) 78–80.

sence of the new order. For de Lubac the supernatural is the whole order of realities that are related to our final end in the beatific vision. Thus he could affirm that the supernatural designates the divine order of things in its contradistinction from, but in union with, the human order.¹⁷ It does not so much penetrate nature or prolong its momentum as transforms it.¹⁸

By this approach de Lubac had created a problem for himself regarding the gratuitousness of the supernatural. He insisted strongly on maintaining this aspect within his approach since he knew that it was central to church teaching on the matter,¹⁹ but having set aside the notion of pure nature and of any natural end for the human race, it became unclear how the gratuitousness of the supernatural was distinct from what belongs to the entire universe as the gift of God's creative freedom. Speaking of "the twofold marvel of gratuitousness," he began to acknowledge a double gratuity in things: that of creation and that of our orientation to God's vision. This even leads him, who had so criticized the dualism of the "two-tiered" universe, to speak of gratuitousness as existing on "two levels, two floors with no communication from the lower to the higher."²⁰

Notwithstanding these clear statements of principle, some commentators are of the opinion that these principles cannot be maintained within the context of general world order that other aspects of de Lubac's system seem to require. They speak of one gratuity collapsing into the other with his insistence on a single world order held together by a single all-permeating supernatural finality.²¹ The crux of the matter is de Lubac's unqualified refusal to allow any significance to a natural end and beatitude for the human race. His obscurely present references to the natural order are eclipsed by his emphasis on the concrete desire as supernaturalized in being and in destiny in the present world order.

If I might use the language of potency and act, which de Lubac generally avoids, I might say that, although he recognizes the potency in the human mind as such, once its actuation occurs, that actuation is supernaturalized—de Lubac's word is "transformed"—and so no purely natural actuation of our transcendent desire can be recognized in the present world order.²² The most that de Lubac would ever concede concerning the state of pure

¹⁷ De Lubac, *Surnaturel* 241; *A Brief Catechesis* 20.

¹⁸ De Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis* 81.

¹⁹ De Lubac, *Mystery* 102–12.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 169 n. 54.

²¹ See, for example, Guy Mansini, "Henri de Lubac, the Natural Desire to See God, and Pure Nature," *Gregorianum* 83 (2002) 89–109, at 95, 107; P. Ryan, "How Can the Beatific Vision Both Fulfil Human Nature and Be Utterly Gratuitous?" *Gregorianum* 83 (2002) 717–54, at 740–41.

²² The terminology of potency and act occurs in a sentence from Francis Toletus that de Lubac quotes with apparent approval: "Deus igitur est potentiae finis

nature was to say that it was an abstract possibility in a world order other than our own.²³ Whatever tendencies in the human being might seem at first to point to such an alternative world order are immediately transformed by being absorbed into the single supernatural finality of the actual world order.²⁴

Finally, regarding the general integrity of the natural order, it must not be thought that de Lubac's rejection of pure nature calls into question the philosophical elements that undergird our theology—what Lonergan calls the general categories of theology.²⁵ Certainly that is not de Lubac's intention. The supernatural, he writes, does not involve “any disregard either from the metaphysical or the moral point of view of what St. Thomas called the *ordo naturalis*.”²⁶ The transformation of the natural takes place only within the realm of spiritual-intellectual natures, which, as noted above, de Lubac always clearly distinguished from other created natures.

THE NATURAL DESIRE IN LONERGAN

At this point I turn to some considerations that emerge from Lonergan's writings.²⁷ In general Lonergan is sympathetic to the basic thrust of de Lubac's approach. At the time of vigorous debate surrounding de Lubac's work, Lonergan dealt with the problem of the supernatural in three particular places. In the autumn of 1946, the year de Lubac published his *Surnaturel*, Lonergan wrote a Latin treatise for his students in Montreal entitled *De ente supernaturali*.²⁸ Here, in an appendix to a thesis on obedi- ential potency, he devoted a long scholion to the natural desire for the vision of God, which he identified with an obedi- ential potency for the beatific vision. His second contribution to the matter came in the academic

naturalis, et actus et operationis est finis supernaturalis” (*Mystery* 151 n. 85); see also *Surnaturel* 122 n. 2 and *Augustinianism* 178 n. 28.

²³ See de Lubac, *Mystery* 77–78, 81.

²⁴ See *ibid.* 292–94.

²⁵ See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972) 285–88.

²⁶ De Lubac, *Mystery* 41; see also 41–47.

²⁷ In addition to references to the 1940s to be given shortly, I note the following works from Lonergan's early period: *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan (hereafter, CWBL) 18, ed. Philip J. McShane (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2001) 348–55; *The Triune God: Systematics*, CWBL 12 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2007) 645–59.

²⁸ These notes have been translated by Michael Shields, S.J., under the title “The Supernatural Order” (Toronto: The Lonergan Research Institute, 1992) and may be consulted in any one of the Lonergan Centers. Here references are to the pages of this version. It will appear eventually in CWBL.

year 1948–1949, during a course on grace, where he considered de Lubac’s view of the hypothesis of pure nature. These lectures are known to us only from student notes taken at the time.²⁹ Here he focuses on de Lubac’s view of pure nature as merely an “abstract possibility.” Lonergan is less emphatic than de Lubac that pure nature is only an abstract possibility, though in these lectures he regards the concrete possibility of pure nature as unprovable in our present world order. Later he spoke of pure nature simply as a “concrete possibility,” but as a marginal theorem in the work of Aquinas.³⁰

Lonergan’s basic position on the whole issue comes in a paper he delivered to the Jesuit Philosophical Association in 1949 entitled “The Natural Desire to See God.”³¹ The context for the discussion is provided by a consideration of the dynamism of the human mind, a factor that Lonergan and de Lubac had learned to appreciate from their studies of Rousselot and Maréchal. This dynamism is constituted by our desire for knowledge and is manifested in our ceaseless pursuit of questions, whether questions about existence (“Is it so?”) or about essence (“What is it?”). Such a desire for knowledge is unrestricted in its scope and finds no rest except in the answers to the various questions. Indeed, so unrestricted is this desire that, once the existence of God is known, God himself becomes the object of our questioning. This question as to the nature of God can be answered on two levels, the one natural, the other supernatural; the one philosophical and analogical, the other theological and, in this life, incomplete—but in the next life complete and beatific in the immediate vision of God.

This familiar piece of Scholastic doctrine yields one key insight for the solution to our problem. It gives us a way of identifying the end of human existence, namely in the knowledge and love of God, prescinding from whether that end is achieved in the imperfect beatitude of a natural state or in the perfect beatitude of supernatural fulfilment. Consequently, formally and as such, the desire for knowledge belongs to neither a purely natural nor a supernatural order but is simply human. In itself it is not specifically a desire for the beatific vision but for its own fulfilment. In so far as the desire for knowledge is innate and, in that sense, natural to our humanity, it retains its meaning as a desire with its own constitutive finality, whether our humanity exists in a purely natural or supernatural world

²⁹ An account of these lectures are found in J. Michael Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1995) 178–81.

³⁰ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Collection: Papers* (hereafter, *Collection*), ed. F. E. Crowe, S.J. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967) 94.

³¹ *Ibid.* 84–95.

order. As Lonergan succinctly puts it, “The end of man is God, in any case, but the mode in which man attains God may be natural or supernatural.”³²

At the same time, as I have noted, Lonergan refers to this natural desire to see God as an obediencial potency for the beatific vision. The language of obediencial potency came into use among Scholastics as a way of dealing with miracles. It is found in Aquinas, but not with the same frequency as among later medieval authors. De Lubac was opposed to applying the language of obediencial potency to our desire for the beatific vision. He defined obediencial potency by the notion of nonrepugnance or an absence of contradiction. If it were the case, for example, that stones should become bread, the stones could be described as being in obediencial potency to receiving the miracle of their change of nature.³³

De Lubac was unhappy with this mode of speech in the context of the natural desire. He believed that in equating the supernatural with the miraculous one lost sight of a certain natural orientation to the receiving of grace and ultimately the beatific vision, which for him lay at the heart of the natural desire.³⁴ In his view, once the desire is actuated at all, it can only be understood as heading for the beatific vision, since in his eyes the purely natural order is an irrelevant abstraction. In this matter de Lubac has been contrasted with Karl Rahner, who accepts the language of obediencial potency in this context while incorporating into it the notion of an orientation to God.³⁵ Lonergan follows a path somewhat similar to Rahner’s on this precise point, but on his own principles.

Obediencial potency is defined by Lonergan, not by invoking the aspect of nonrepugnance, but by the implications of the words themselves. It is an obediencial potency only in so far as it can be actuated by God alone—in “obedience” to his power. On the one hand, this potency is understood as more than nonrepugnance; every potency has some relationship to its eventual act, even if it can be actuated only by the Creator. On the other hand,

³² Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic* 355. In this principle one can begin to find Lonergan’s answer to the main problem posed by Ryan, “How Can the Beatific Vision. . . ?” 117. See also *Collection* 90–91 and the notion of sublation outlined below.

³³ See de Lubac, *Mystery* 182–83, 251; de Lubac, *Augustinianism* 224–33. Lonergan relates the notion of obediencial potency as nonrepugnance to essentialist thinking: *Triune God* 655.

³⁴ The phrase “natural orientation” translates the Latin “ordo naturalis,” which de Lubac uses here in this sense: de Lubac, *Mystery* 182–83; see also de Lubac, “Saint Thomas, *Compendium Theologiae*, c. 104,” *Recherches de science religieuse* 36 (1949) 300–305, at 303.

³⁵ See Max Seckler, “Potentia obediencialis bei Karl Rahner (1904–1984) und Henri de Lubac (1896–1991),” *Gregorianum* 78 (1997) 669–718, at 708. For de Lubac, see *Mystery* 251.

obediential potency does not differ intrinsically from a natural potency; the only difference is extrinsic, namely, in the power of God. Such potency is described by Lonergan as a remote passive potency for the vision of God.³⁶

If one contrasts this account with de Lubac's, despite a number of common points arising out of their sense of the dynamism of the mind,³⁷ a crucial point of difference arises once one considers what reality is to be granted to the natural order of things, even within the present supernatural order. Lonergan's notion of the questioning mind as a reality in any world order is the basis on which for him a purely natural order cannot be dismissed as an abstraction. The very concreteness of human questioning within our own experience underlines his conviction that notions of pure nature and of humanity's natural end retain some objective meaning and reality even within a supernatural order.

THE QUESTION OF FINALITY

A second aspect of de Lubac's thought that Lonergan illuminates is that of finality. This was a central point for de Lubac when he moved from an ontological to a historical notion of nature. It marked a transition from the essential to the existential order. Just as there is only one actual order of the world, so there is only one finality, a supernatural one, that permeates the whole order of being.

This truth is crucial for understanding how de Lubac explains the elevation of natural desire to a supernatural end. As seen above, whatever tendencies within us that might at first seem to point to a state of natural fulfilment are immediately transformed by being drawn into the single supernatural finality of the actual world order.³⁸ In explaining that "transformation" de Lubac points out that for Aquinas "finality is something intrinsic, affecting the depths of the being."³⁹

For Lonergan the aspect of finality is always important. He treats it at some length in an early essay on marriage, which does not explicitly mention the vision of God, but the article's subject-matter overlaps with aspects of our question. It comes up again in a later article on the psychology of grace.⁴⁰ In these articles Lonergan distinguishes horizontal from vertical

³⁶ See Lonergan, "Supernatural Order" 26–27, 31; see also Stebbins, *Divine Initiative* 159–60.

³⁷ See de Lubac, *Mystery* 169, 140–42.

³⁸ See de Lubac, *Mystery* 292–94; and de Lubac, "Duplex hominis beatitudo (Saint Thomas I-II, q. 62, a. 1)," *Recherches de science religieuse* 35 (1948) 290–99.

³⁹ De Lubac, *Mystery* 92.

⁴⁰ See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "Mission and Spirit," *A Third Collection: Papers*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe (New York: Paulist, 1985) 23–34.

finality. Horizontal finality is that of any finite essence on its own to its own proportionate end, namely, the end that results from what a thing is and what follows from it.⁴¹ Vertical finality arises where there is a hierarchy of entities and ends, namely, where a plurality of entities exemplifying different grades of being come together within an ordered whole. It can also be found among the different levels of being or consciousness within a single entity, each level having its own definition and activity, but so ordained that the lower is subordinate to the higher. Vertical finality is the up-thrust from lower to higher levels within a dynamic whole “in which instrumentally, dispositively, materially, obedientially, one level of being or activity subserves another.”⁴²

De Lubac’s discomfort with the notion of a human nature orientated to a natural beatitude can be seen as a problem of horizontal finality. Unfortunately he failed to do justice to the way a lower level of being, by being drawn into a plurality and higher unity (in our case, that of life in the Body of Christ), can acquire a higher finality (in our case, the beatific vision) that does not eliminate but elevates and fulfils on a higher plane its original horizontal finality. De Lubac does not distinguish these levels of finality, though the notion of an elevation of finality was not absent from his work. Lonergan explains such elevation as follows:

Horizontal finality results from abstract essence; it holds even when the object is in isolation; it is to a motive or term that is proportionate to essence. But vertical finality is in the concrete; in point of fact it is not from the isolated instance but from the conjoined plurality. . . . Vertical and horizontal finalities are not alternatives, but the vertical emerges all the more strongly as the horizontal is realized more fully.⁴³

In the case of marriage, vertical finality explains how a natural institution can have a supernatural end.⁴⁴ Similarly, our natural desire (which I will shortly identify with the dynamism of consciousness) becomes supernaturalized through its new finality in the Body of Christ, for “the more ultimate cause enters more intimately into the nature of the thing than the more proximate.”⁴⁵ Lonergan’s distinction of vertical and horizontal finality helps to vindicate the basic thrust of de Lubac’s position while doing justice to the integrity of human nature and its innate orientation toward its natural end. Vertical finality does not eliminate horizontal finality but enables it to be realized in a fuller way.

⁴¹ See *ibid.* 24.

⁴² *Ibid.* 21. Vertical finality is well explained by Stebbins, *Divine Initiative* 56–58.

⁴³ Lonergan, *Collection* 21, 47; see also *A Third Collection* 29.

⁴⁴ Lonergan, *Collection* 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 46–47.

TWO CONTRASTING WORLDVIEWS

One of the abiding features of Lonergan's work is the way it can reduce philosophical and theological problems to aspects of interiority. The subject matter of this article is no exception. In the course of his 1949 essay he remarks that for him the real issue is not the possibility of a world of pure nature but a fundamental line of cleavage between an essentialist-conceptualist tendency on the one hand and an existential and intellectualist tendency on the other.⁴⁶ The distinction between conceptualism and intellectualism is an issue for a philosophy of mind, which cannot be discussed here at any length, but I can draw on an account of the issue that Lonergan gave during a summer institute at Boston College in 1957.⁴⁷ The essentialist-conceptualist approach was described as proceeding by deductivist thought from a set of self-evident principles. What do you have, he asked, when you consider the ontological correlate of such a system?

You have a universe that consists of a series of noncommunicating strata. If your objective universe consists of a series of noncommunicating strata, you have nature at one end and the *finis* at the other, and you have an exigence of the *finis* in the nature. If you conceive *finis* in that fashion, as what the nature that is proportionate to the *finis* has an exigence for, then there is no possibility of a vertical finality. There is no possibility of the lower being for the sake of the higher.⁴⁸

The alternative view favored by Lonergan looks first to the whole universe within which the natures may subsequently be considered:

If you hold this second conception, then the ultimate end is the divine perfection, and what is for the ultimate end is the order of the universe, which is the external glory of God. . . . If this order is the highest of created ends, then everything within the universe is for the sake of this order. Consequently the ends of the particular natures are for the sake of that order. The end of a nature is not for the sake of the nature, as is implicit in the other notion that a nature is an exigence for its end. . . . If natures are for their ends, and the ends are for the order of the universe, then there is no possibility of any nature having an exigence for the end towards which it is directed.⁴⁹

Such essentialism, as Lonergan describes it, became the dominant way of thinking in Renaissance Scholasticism, and his account of it certainly throws light on the way the "pure nature" school focus on the dualism of natural essences with an exigence for natural ends on the one hand, and supernatural essences with an exigence for supernatural ends on the other.

⁴⁶ Lonergan, *Collection* 95. These terms are explained in the same essay, 87–90.

⁴⁷ See Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic*, Appendix C 348–55.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 348–49.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 349.

All this illustrates what Lonergan calls horizontal finality. It is the context within which objections arose against the natural desire for the beatific vision. De Lubac was not unaware of aspects of this issue. He realized that the essentialism of the 17th century was part of the problem,⁵⁰ but lacking the precision of Lonergan's analysis, his break from the old essentialism can be seen as imperfect and incomplete.

With his various distinctions, Lonergan found his way out of a problem that had often bedevilled the whole discussion. In his 1949 article he draws our attention to the paradox that human beings are born with a natural desire that can reach perfect fulfilment only in the supernatural.⁵¹ If one approaches this question with the assumption that natures are for their ends and that in this sense there is an exigence in the nature for the end, then if the only concrete end for human nature is supernatural, as de Lubac maintains, it seems one has posited in nature an exigence for the supernatural. Such an exigence would undermine the gratuitousness of the supernatural and in fact end up not just in a paradox but in a contradiction. Lonergan solves this dilemma with his distinction between horizontal and vertical finality, in the manner explained above. For de Lubac the problem is more acute.

Paradox is a favorite category for de Lubac. In one place he tells us that it is a necessary sign of truth,⁵² and in our context he speaks of the finite spirit as "made to seek the one end worthy of it in the one good totally beyond it."⁵³ The difficulty in de Lubac's approach to the apparent contradiction arises from the fact that not only does he not have the way out provided by the distinction between two kinds of finality, but he also has the problems associated with his reduction of pure nature to an abstraction. In his case the line between paradox and contradiction becomes more difficult to draw. Lonergan considers him "mixed up" on the point, particularly on the question of the natural desire as an exigence for the supernatural.⁵⁴

Lonergan's criticism of de Lubac reflects the contrast between two different styles of theology. Especially at this stage of his career, Lonergan is working within what he himself calls the systematic differentiation of consciousness, where the focus is on systematic meaning and on the relationships among things themselves rather than on their relationships to us. De Lubac, on the other hand, was always primarily a historian, and even

⁵⁰ See de Lubac, *Mystery* 82. See also *ibid.* 301–2.

⁵¹ See Lonergan, *Collection* 90.

⁵² See de Lubac, *Surnaturel* 484.

⁵³ De Lubac, *Mystery* 172.

⁵⁴ Lonergan, *Phenomenology and Logic* 350, referring to de Lubac, *Surnaturel* 483–91.

though *Surnaturel* was a most influential essay in speculative thought and contains significant work in the realm of theory, he himself refers to it as "my historical study."⁵⁵ This locates it predominantly within what Lonergan would call the scholarly differentiation of consciousness, where the focus is not primarily on systematic meaning but on the common-sense language of another time and place.⁵⁶ De Lubac would often remain content with symbols and paradoxes, and some may regard his tolerance of apparent systematic inconsistencies as one of his strengths;⁵⁷ yet when such tolerance is viewed against the background of Lonergan's distinction between common-sense realms and theoretic realms of meaning, anyone convinced of the importance of this distinction will want to get behind such inconsistencies to a more systematic and coherent viewpoint.⁵⁸

Perhaps this methodological comment will make more acceptable my now trying to put together some defense of de Lubac, again using language that he himself does not normally use, namely that of potency and act.⁵⁹ If one regards the human mind as simply potency, it is a purely natural reality. For de Lubac, in the present order of the world, the activity of the mind becomes supernaturalized once it passes from potency to act. This actuation is the desire in act, which is God's gift and call.⁶⁰ Such desire is *in* the nature but not simply *of* that nature, and one aspect of this desire is an exigence for a supernatural fulfilment, the exigence not arising from the nature as such but being received from God. This act of desire is now something like Rahner's supernatural existential, to which it corresponds.⁶¹ If this interpretation can be maintained, one can attribute more consistency to de Lubac than Lonergan gave him credit for, even though one may consider that the charge of a certain lack of clarity remains valid.

THE LATER LONERGAN

Commentators on Lonergan's work will often distinguish between the early and the later Lonergan in order to take account of the way his

⁵⁵ De Lubac, *Mystery* 65.

⁵⁶ See Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 233, 305. "Common-sense" is used here in Lonergan's technical sense; see *ibid.* 81–85.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology* 57–59.

⁵⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 81–83, 302–5.

⁵⁹ I have cited an indirect use of this language in a reference to Toletus in n. 22 above.

⁶⁰ De Lubac asserts: "The desire is the call" (*Surnaturel* 487).

⁶¹ Rahner's supernatural existential was born in reaction to de Lubac, but the latter dismissed it as an unnecessary "linking reality" between the natural desire and the supernatural order, claiming some support in Schillebeeckx; see de Lubac, *Mystery* 132 n. 2; Seckler, "Potentia obediencialis bei Karl Rahner" 709, 714; and Schillebeeckx, *The Concept of Truth and Theological Renewal* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968) 59.

thought developed from the more explicitly metaphysical and Scholastic style in which he had been educated toward a more existential and dynamic approach characteristic of modern thought. Lonergan's main explicit references to the issues raised by de Lubac fall within the earlier period of his work, so these figure largely in this article, but in fact, as I will show, the notion of de Lubac's natural desire is very much at home within the later period, though transposed into a new language.

The transition from the earlier to the later period comes with the movement from what Lonergan calls "faculty psychology" toward "intentionality analysis."⁶² A discussion in terms of faculty psychology names the potencies of the person in a static way—intellect, will, and emotion—without, of course, denying their operations. In his intentionality analysis, on the other hand, Lonergan focuses on the operations of consciousness—experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding—and on how these activities flow into the concrete unity of a whole living and active human being. Where formerly he had, with the rest of the tradition, spoken of the natural desire of the human intellect, he now speaks of the drive of the whole person for truth and value. He discerns a movement thrusting upward from one level of consciousness to another as each lower level feeds into the next higher level. He calls this movement one of self-transcendence. It culminates on the fourth level of consciousness, that of decision and freedom, if and when the person reaches the fullness of self-transcendence in an enduring commitment to the love of God, which then unfolds in the love and service of our fellow human beings.

Lonergan writes so eloquently of this movement of consciousness and with such a comprehensive grasp of its implications that the language of natural desire soon begins to seem weak by comparison. De Lubac's natural orientation of the mind has now become for Lonergan "a tidal movement that begins before consciousness, unfolds through sensitivity, intelligence, rational reflection, responsible deliberation, only to find its rest beyond all of these."⁶³ In another place Lonergan writes of "the passionateness of being" underpinning and accompanying this whole movement.⁶⁴ It begins in unconscious vitality and overarches the whole reach of conscious intentionality with "a call to holiness" that one's being may become a being-in-love, with the love of God as its crowning inspiration: "As the

⁶² Though Lonergan had been moving in this direction for some time, the shift became explicit only in 1959 in *Topics in Education: The Cincinnati Lectures of 1959 on the Philosophy of Education*, CWBL 10, ed. Robert M. Doran and Frederick E. Crowe (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1993) 82–85.

⁶³ Lonergan, *A Third Collection* 175.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 29.

question of God is implicit in all our questioning, so being in love with God is the basic fulfilment of our conscious intentionality.”⁶⁵

This dynamic and concrete vision can be described philosophically, but in fact Lonergan understands it as reaching sustained fulfilment only under grace and normally in a religious conversion, which for him is the anticipation of that beatitude revelation speaks of. All this becomes clearer in his later writings where he begins to speak of human development as a movement in two directions, upward and downward. The upward movement is that development toward self-transcendence that I have just described. It is one of the prime instances of vertical finality.⁶⁶ But normally we are not left on our own. God intervenes, and so there is a downward movement by which the grace of God envelopes us in the life of the various communities to which we belong—family, country, church. In this way we experience how the love of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and this disposes us to enter into the life of these communities and through them to make our contribution to the ongoing process of redemption in history.

This dynamic and existential approach opens up a whole new way for considering our questions about natural and supernatural. For Lonergan the distinction between natural and supernatural resides within the rather static context of metaphysics, but that is precisely the context he set aside—without denying its validity in its place—when he moved toward intentionality analysis.⁶⁷ In this more existential approach, the gift of God’s love is first described as a religious experience; it belongs in the first place not to a world mediated by meaning but to the unmediated experience of the mystery of God.⁶⁸ Only consequently is it objectified in theoretical categories such as natural and supernatural.⁶⁹ Two key notions in particular help to explain this overall scheme of things: emergent probability and sublation.

Emergent Probability

Emergent probability is one of the master ideas in Lonergan’s *Insight* and is used to explain how commonly development comes about, not according to classical and necessary laws, but according to statistical laws and schemes of probability. In *Insight* this idea was applied to Darwinian evolution and to what our author once referred to as “the long series of

⁶⁵ Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 240, 105.

⁶⁶ See Lonergan, *A Third Collection* 29.

⁶⁷ See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965–1980*, CWBL 17, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2004) 399.

⁶⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 112.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 107.

discontinuities reaching from subatomic particles to mankind.”⁷⁰ The analogy of merely natural process has some application to human affairs, though, as Lonergan admits, the analogy becomes less and less helpful, because in this case the human being is not only intelligible but intelligent.⁷¹

This emergent probability helps to throw light on one significant point raised by de Lubac. As I have shown, de Lubac always insisted on the aspect of the natural orientation of the mind to the beatific vision, so much so that he came to speak of a natural desire for the supernatural—which is at best an oxymoron, if not a contradiction in terms. If, however, one understands the emergence of the supernatural, not according to classical and necessary laws, but according to statistical laws and schemes of probability, then one can retain the intelligibility de Lubac was reaching for while disowning any intrinsic and necessary ordination of natural to supernatural. In this case, of course, the probability lies only minimally in the natural orientation of the human mind. According to the general pattern of obediential potency, the key factor has to lie extrinsically in the goodness of a loving God, where any predisposition in our favor cannot be more than a question of probability. Because God is love, one could conceive of a probability that he will raise his rational creatures to a supernatural destiny in the love of friendship, but it is no more a necessity in God than that there is a necessity in him to create the best possible world.

Sublation

The second helpful idea from Lonergan is that of sublation. The term comes from Hegel, but its content, Lonergan tells us, owes more to Rahner.⁷² It is particularly at home within the context of vertical finality, where one of its most notable applications is to our levels of consciousness. Here “sublation” refers to the way a lower level of consciousness relates to a higher. It is explained thus: “Each successive level sublates previous levels by going beyond them, by setting up a higher principle, by introducing new operations, and by preserving the integrity of previous levels, while extending enormously their range and significance.”⁷³

In this notion the key aspect is the way the higher level preserves the lower level in going beyond it. This is the pattern we have already seen in

⁷⁰ Lonergan, *A Third Collection* 23.

⁷¹ See Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, Greene, 1958) 210–11; 5th ed. CWBL 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992) 236.

⁷² On the debt to Rahner, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 241; on the contrast with Hegel, see *Insight* (1958) 422, (1992) 447.

⁷³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology* 340.

the relationship of natural to supernatural, and in particular how the orientation to a natural end is not suppressed but preserved by being fulfilled in a higher way. The natural end of human nature can be considered under two aspects. One is that of the orientation of nature to its natural end; the other is that of the natural end itself as an actual state. De Lubac's attention has been predominantly on the latter, which he regards as so illusory in the present world order that it is not worth serious consideration. His dismissal of it is so sweeping that the natural orientation to that end seems to be dismissed as equally irrelevant. For Lonergan and other authors,⁷⁴ the point about the natural orientation is always relevant at least as a structure of the concrete, whether it is ever fulfilled in an actual state or not. In brief and in the concrete, the supernatural order sublates the natural, theology sublates philosophy, Christian living sublates human religion generally, and our Christian desire for the beatific vision sublates our natural desire for God.⁷⁵

In Lonergan's scheme of things, while all the distinctions he has made along the way help to do justice to the complexities of the problem, the factor of sublation is a key element in explaining how all the various aspects come together on the fourth level of our unfolding consciousness and activity. Furthermore, on this level the upward movement of consciousness meshes with the downward movement of divine love and grace, and so both movements unite in engaging with our lives in the various fields of intersubjectivity and community. This is what corresponds in Lonergan to de Lubac's union of natural and supernatural, and it surely helps to vindicate one of the latter's central insights, namely, that our supernatural destiny is played out in the drama of ordinary living.

CONCLUSION

Toward the beginning of this article I quoted the famous statement from Augustine's *Confessions* that summed up the basic inspiration moving de Lubac when he first raised the whole question of the natural desire to see God. At the end of my article I return to that point to recapture something of the vision of things that so inspired de Lubac and has come to be shared

⁷⁴ One thinks of Rahner on the reality of human nature, even when it cannot be clearly designated in the concrete: Karl Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship of Nature and Grace," *God, Christ, Mary, and Grace*, Theological Investigations 1 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1961) 297-317, at 313-15. As for the point about not being clearly designated, while accepting it in principle, I agree with Mansini ("Henri de Lubac" 97-98) that Lonergan's emphasis on human questioning as part of any human order, natural or supernatural, shows how that principle can be pushed too far.

⁷⁵ See Lonergan, *Philosophical and Theological Papers* 358-59.

by so many theologians since that time, including Lonergan. Comparing and contrasting the two theologians I have shown something of the complexities of the issues involved. Teasing them out is only a way of vindicating and renewing for contemporary thought that basic vision of Augustine concerning the true pole of human happiness. This is the more necessary in our secular times when the forces of unbelief have been demonstrating a renewed vigor in their bleak program of life. Also at stake is the leading idea of Vatican II that is linked to de Lubac's position, namely, that sacred and secular, the "heavenly city," and the "earthly city" interpenetrate each other in a world where everything is sacred in its destiny.