

ON THE REALISM OF METAPHYSICS*

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IF WE WERE TO UNDERSTAND METAPHYSICS as the core of philosophy (since the theory of a generally analogous existence constitutes the basis of interpretation in other branches of philosophy) then the set of questions pertaining both to the fact and the possibility of the pursuit of metaphysics and the sense of its tasks, will form the fundamental problem of philosophy.

The *fact* of philosophizing, critical research of the *possibility* of practising metaphysics and the *sense* of the tasks of a possible and realistically practised metaphysics, are the subjects which were directly or indirectly discussed and unceasingly and ever more fully realized. That which we call the realism of metaphysics and through it the realism of entire philosophy, depends upon an appropriately understood and presented answer to the set of questions signalized above.

The fact of practising metaphysics has a much longer tradition than critical studies on the possibility of such practice. If such studies are basically connected with the position of Kant and his so-called “critical philosophy”, then philosophical thinking is as old as the *homo sapiens* himself because it is inseparably connected with human thinking as such. From the historical point of view, however, a separate philosophical thinking appeared together with the birth of Greek philosophy and especially the works of Aristotle.

This is the reason why, generally speaking, one can talk about two great traditions of philosophical thought and, at the same time, of a basic approach to the posing of metaphysical problems: the Aristotelian and

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the Kantian traditions. The Aristotelian tradition connected with the very *fact* of practising metaphysics (at times almost spontaneously) is, as a rule, of an objectivistic nature while the Kantian approach (transcendental) is connected with a critical reflection which, in turn, determines the conditions for the possibility of metaphysics as a qualitative cognition and is basically linked with the philosophy of the *subject*, and thus, according to contemporary understanding, with philosophical anthropology.

One should note, in anticipating a subsequent course of thought, that both philosophical traditions, the “objective” and “subjective”, fit into the same “field” of philosophical experience. The conviction peculiar to every man about the distinctness of the human subject in relation to nature as a whole, forms the context from which philosophical interpretation had developed. It is due to reflection that man notices he is different from the entire “rest”, that he has his own personal psychic life and that he differs from, and frequently opposes, his surroundings. Although man feels linked with the surroundings which make his life possible, in our deepest “being” we are in a way opposed to nature. We feel that we are a “subject” and thus a separate being, with its own personal and untransferable life, while everything which surrounds us is the “object” of thought and various activities. Quite spontaneously we place ourselves on the “axis”: subject-object. One end of this axis is the self recognized and felt as the subject of our psychic acts, a “centre” out of which our life flows and towards which—as if towards an “I”—everything which in any way I recognize as “mine” is directed. At the other end of the axis I deal with an object which is placed “opposite”, which at times I must overcome, and which frequently, because I psychically, or mentally, overcome (in a cognitive, voluntary, and creative way), becomes “my” object, directed towards me but separate from me even if I myself were to become it precisely in the course of an act of reflection. This is because wherever the reflective-cognitive moment appears there also emerges a division into the object and the subject.

In between these two limits (which embrace also the limits themselves: the subject and the object) of an *axis* there lies an enormous field of all that which has been called “being” and which in various systems is understood differently. This occurred in connection with the transfer-

ence of the accentuation of the meaning from an objective to a subjective direction and to such a large degree that in certain philosophical systems all that which is “an object” is called being, while in others being is constituted by the subject.

If all philosophical systems were based upon reflections supplied by data, then all systems could be placed within this broad field, determined by the poles of one subjective-objective axis.¹ One can risk the statement that philosophical thought in none of the heretofore known systems has gone beyond the field of existence marked out by the poles of the subject-object axis.¹ It could not transcend beyond them, because the starting point in philosophizing and the obligatory conception of cognition does not always make this possible. If reflective thought was always the starting point in practising philosophy, and philosophy as a whole was the development of data given by reflective thought, then it could not transcend beyond a field marked out in the most general way by the significant factors of reflection itself.

This does not mean, however, that that sort of general situation did not make a more or less objective or subjective approach possible. History of philosophy furnishes examples of extremely objectivistic or subjectivistic systems as, for instance, the approaches of Parmenides, Democritus and Aristotle in ancient times, as well as Lenin in modern times as far as objectivism is concerned; in subjectivism these would be the approaches of the Sophists in the past and Sartre today. It is precisely the objectivistic and subjectivistic approaches which in philosophy are at a starting point, i.e. at a point in which we determine or distinguish the correct object; they are basically significant and decisive not only for the character of all philosophical interpretations but also for the realism of philosophical thinking.

Thus, let us only draw our attention to the process of distinguishing the exact object of philosophical research, both on one (objectivistic) and the other (subjectivistic) side. It is obvious² that in the objectivistic trend

¹ This statement is too general to be accepted with a justification which, in turn, must take place both in history and in systematic research. I have prepared a dissertation on this subject.

² I also wrote on this subject in *Metafizyka* [Metaphysics], Poznań 1966, Lublin 1995, 3rd ed., Part I (*Metaphysics*, English transl. T. Sandok [et al.], New York 1991).

of philosophy two ways of determining the aspect of research (distinguishing the precise object of philosophy) are possible; these are either variously understood intuitionism or variously understood abstractionism. In intuitionism which appeared particularly during the first periods of the development of philosophy and in objectivistic a priori systems, the supposition most clearly formulated by Parmenides was that thought and being (that which one thinks) are identical and that it is sufficient to *notice* or *ascertain* in an intuitive way (empirically or intellectually) that a certain element or a form of reality is something important and basic for it to which all can be reduced actually or historically, and that it is given to us through various cognitions as real. Hence, one deals with an already prepared and determined object of philosophical research. History of philosophy can bring forward the examples which show how a significant element of reality was taken to indicate “infinity”—*psyche* or *apeiron*, symbolized by air or the four basic forms of matter: fire, air, water and earth; or qualitative states *homoiomers* or, finally, quantitative states—*atoms* or *ideas*, or an undefined *matter*, etc. Accepting precisely such objects of philosophical interpretation, noticed either intuitively or through a so-called “concrete abstraction”, it was easy to subsequently present the more or less concrete structure of a system (and the more coherent the less real would it be). Everything which appeared in the world was a state of a primarily observed object either more organized according to a priori determined laws or a more simplified one, which in itself was self-understandable and ultimately all explanatory.

It suffices to examine closely various philosophical systems mentioned above by way of example in order to be able to understand the more or less objectivistic systems without great difficulty. The world presented in an objective vision was explained ultimately through an “appropriate object” perceived in an intuitive way, understood as the main element-principle or a self-understandable structure of reality. Apart from this, in the objectivistic systems of the later periods, the data of primary intuition were interpreted on the basis of general laws, or laws deduced from the exact sciences, especially physics and biology. In this way, for example, the primary intuitionistic conception of matter (or its gnosiological definition) was in certain systems subjected to an intellec-

tual treatment in the light of the laws of physics and, as a result, was neither philosophy that would explain a real world nor physics or one of its branches, Aristotle, as regards intuitionistic traditions, undertook a basically different step in constructing, against the background of a discussion with his master, Plato the conception of abstraction according to which the intellectual cognition of man, both interpreted from the point of view of its functions and the object, is distinguished by an activity of the human intellect. However, this process does not mean that the human intellect construed the object of its cognition, but, that in sensually empirical data, it is able to find necessary, general and permanent contents, inaccessible to that same empirical knowledge, as a result of which the way of the existence of a thing and the way of its cognition differ³. This was a great event in scientific life since it enabled the emergence and the development of methodological rationalism, organically joined with genetic empiricism.

In philosophy the conception of third-degree abstraction was especially significant and it determined the development of philosophical thought for centuries to come. With the aid of metaphysical abstraction it was possible to interpret intellectually such aspects of being thanks to which reality is truly real, valuable and thus necessary, unchanging and general. According to Aristotle it was precisely this aspect of reality which was to be found in the *form* (the embodied correspondent of the Platonic idea) since thanks to it a certain real, self-existing being or substance is truly definable and valuable for scientific cognition. Intellectual operations aiming at the attaining of form itself with the by-passing of individual traits even though they were linked with so-called general matter given as a result of a physical abstraction (of the first degree), were to become operations distinguishing in a material world those significant bonds of being which realized themselves in each self-existing being (substance). The world, after all, is in its entirety a collection of self-existing beings and those, in turn, are actually beings through their forms. Thus, thought which reaches in empirical data the form itself, as a

³ On the subject of the abstraction by Aristotle, its sources and sense cf. A. Mansion. *Introduction à la physique aristotelicienne*, 2. éd., Louvain—Paris 1946, pp. 122-205.

factor decisive for the qualities of being and cognition—while by-passing in a creative way all other factors—was to be an abstract thought defining the object of philosophical analyses. Since every self-existing being has its form or is a pure form—act (in only one case it is the Aristotelian God), the interpretation of this form is decisive for practising metaphysics as a science about being in the aspect of its true existence (of course, all substantial beings are also linked together by cosmic movement discussed in “physics” and they represent a rational “cosmos”).⁴

The Aristotelian conception of abstraction, reworked by Avicenna, in connection with his unusually inspiring theory of the three states of nature (especially the “third nature” detached from any existence) and the reception of this thought by the metaphysics of Duns Scotus, became the basis of metaphysics concerned not with an interpretation of a concretely existing reality, but with an arrangement of states possible and necessary.⁵ Such metaphysics, detached from the existing reality, and especially solely on the subject of general and necessary contents “in themselves”, became ultimately thought lost in the clouds of unjustifiable abstraction. Existence, as a result of the third degree of abstraction, proved itself, in the thought of Duns Scotus, to be the broadest, undetermined and indisputable stratum common to God and His creatures. And according to Hegel, existence understood in this way and by-passing all determinations, could identify itself only with nothingness if it were to “be” and not to “become” in an unceasingly progressing dialectical movement.⁶

Of course, a concept taken from the empirical knowledge and made abstract or a number of concepts at the so-called first degree of abstraction were taken as the starting point for the abstraction of the third degree. If the abstraction of the third degree was to really take place, then one should already have had data, collected at least in a spontaneous way, as well as—according to Aristotle—not only a spontaneously but a methodically prepared concept in physical abstraction (since the science of

⁴ I wrote about these subjects more broadly in: *Arystotelesowska koncepcja substancji* [Aristotelian Conception of Substance], Lublin 2000.

⁵ Cf. É. Gilson, *L'être et l'essence*, 2. éd., Paris 1962, Chap. IV.

⁶ This subject is treated more broadly in *Metafizyka*, pp. 82-86.

“physics” preceded the science of “metaphysics”), in order to subject the abstraction of “the third degree” to further and already metaphysical treatment.

Concepts given and realized, as well as taken as the object of further elaboration, form the starting point of a typically reflective nature. Aristotle, in initiating the process of metaphysical abstraction, began from *de facto* reflective data. The starting point in philosophy is decisive for the future fate of a given philosophical system. The starting point from a field placed on a subject-object axis left a mark upon the Aristotelian system, a necessary mark (as one can prove without any great difficulty)⁷ known in the history of philosophy as the “tragedy” of Aristotle, the Platonic logician and the Aristotelian empiricist. If one chooses the philosophical starting point to be elaboration of data furnished to us in a cognitive reflection, then the ultimate results of cognition will also oscillate between the poles “object-subject” as the extremes of a cognitive, reflective axis. The inner division of the Aristotelian system was to repeat itself later in the history of various types of peripatetic thoughts.⁸

Under the influence of critical thought connected with the trend of the philosophy of the subject in a transcendental, i.e. Kantian version, there appeared attempts at making the traditional philosophical problem matter, originated from Aristotle, more critical. This process was carried out in a specifically Kantian spirit, i.e. the search in thought itself of a priori conditions necessary for the practising of reflective and critical metaphysics. Thus, “metaphysics” is still understood as traditional ontology touched upon, at one time, in book “8” of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and enriched by mediaeval “Christian Philosophy”. These attempts were initiated by J. Marechal and conducted by the German Jesuits; J. B. Lotz, K. Rahner, E. Coreth and others, who linked them with research on the subject of the method (especially the transcendental one) of practising metaphysics.⁹

⁷ I have pointed towards similar and related problems in *Arystotelesowska koncepcja substancji*, pp. 34-46.

⁸ Cf. E. Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, New York 1937.

⁹ Cf. a copious monographic study on this subject: O. Muck, *Die transzendente Methode in der scholastischen Philosophie der Gegenwart*, Innsbruck 1964.

Marechal¹⁰ perceived similarities between Thomas Aquinas' theory of knowledge and the transcendental philosophy of Kant. He thus began his justification of the possibility of practicing metaphysics, following the example of Kant, with the fundamental statement that the "object" is the opposite of the subject (the function of thought). An analysis of objectivity makes it possible to grasp and reveal the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of cognition and, as a consequence, the possibility of metaphysical cognition. Moreover, one should pose the initial question concerning the most constitutive conditions for the affirmative cognition of the object. However, an analysis of human cognition overcomes the limits set by Kant and reduces it to the acceptance and the establishment of *a priori* "forms" which interpret and organize the data of sensual experience. On the contrary, the basic "form" of human intellect is its significant subjection to an existential order which presents itself not in an abstract way but precisely in a concrete way, in a truly dynamic act of intellectual cognition which does not limit itself ultimately to the ascertainment of objects constituted in one or another type of interpretation of sensual data in *a priori* forms. This inner overcoming of Kantianism, which takes place through indicating that in a dynamic act of intellectual cognition we are always in a necessary relation towards existential order, is basic for the perception of a possibility of metaphysics itself. In what does it reveal itself? It reveals itself precisely in a statement which ascertains that something *is* of a certain type. This "is" is an outward expression of the essential subjection of objectivity to our subjectivity and thus to being in itself. The scholastic conception of abstraction or the Kantian "pure categorical synthesis" is, after all, nothing else but the awareness of the existence of an "object" which is the ultimate basis uniting all given "quantities". To put it differently, this subordination of the subject to the sphere of being in itself, expressed symbolically in the "is" of every

¹⁰ At this point I refer to the principal work of Marechal, *Le point de départ de la métaphysique*, 2-3 éd., 5 vol., Bruxelles 1944-1949; cf. especially Cah. V.: *Le thomisme devant la philosophie critique*, and the article: *Jugement «scolastique» concernant la racine de l'agnosticisme kantien* (J. Marechal, *Mélanges*, vol. 1, Bruxelles—Paris 1950, pp. 273-287). Also cf. Muck. op. cit. pp. 1-98.

statement, is also an expression of the purposefulness of each intellectually active subject. And thus, in the cognition of each “object”, God is contained already implicitly as the ultimate limit of the reference for the dynamic thought of the “subject-object”.

A starting point in transcendental metaphysics utilizing the Kantian method, understood in this way endows traditional terms of classical philosophy with a new character (sense). In the language used by Marechal the traditional conception of the adventitiousness of being pertains to objects ascertained in intellectual cognition as long as they are found in their relations to other object and to God as the ultimate unifying Being-Absolute. On the other hand, when we draw our attention to the limits of those relations one can call such a point of view analogous, and the affirmed *purposefulness* of the objects, related to the absolute horizon of existence, i.e. God, can also be called good. However, the same “object”, which is simultaneously the limit of our construing cognition and also points to the Absolute as to the final existential horizon unifying all objects, is what in scholasticism was called *truth*. When we undertake a transcendental deduction and pause in our thoughts over the ascertainment of the fundamental attribute of objects given to us sensually, then we state the basic condition of sensual perception: quantity, etc.

The reflective and critical starting point of metaphysics, according to Marechal, basically and essentially influences the entire conception of metaphysics and the sense of its statements. This “transcendent” (to put it briefly) way of practicing philosophy caused a lively repercussion among other thinkers.¹¹ Particularly important are: J. B. Lotz, K. Rahner and E. Coreth.

If Marechal, in his starting point accented cognitive and reflective data, then Lotz¹² is concerned more with the analysis of existence (under

¹¹ I am concerned here with such authors as: A. Gregoire, J. Defever, G. Isaye, A. Marc, J.B.F. Lonergan. Muck writes about them in his work quoted above.

¹² I refer to the three works by J.B. Lotz: *Das Urteil und das Sein*, Pullach 1957; *Metaphysica operationis humanae methodo transcendentali explicata*, Roma 1958, and *Ontologia*, Barcinone 1962. Cf. also the review by A. Wawrzyniak, “Roczniki Filozoficzne”, 14 (1966), no 1, pp. 143-147; cf. Muck, op. cit. pp. 179-197.

the influence of Heidegger). Lotz sees the essence of the transcendental method in the fact that man, as a cognitive being, is not determined and conditioned by the object but, on the contrary, it is he who determines the object. He is thus concerned with presenting the *a priori* conditions of cognitivity in the human subject. Contrary to Marechal, who took the dynamics of human cognition as his starting point and arrived at an existential sphere which revealed itself in judgment, Lotz chose the latter as the object of his analyses and subjected its structural elements to a pheno-menological analysis. According to him, only an absolute existentiality enables the very fact of judging itself. This is because the link of a sentence in a statement expresses existentiality not only in a categorical sense, as was the case in the philosophy of Kant, but precisely in a transcendental and thus supra-categorical sense. The moment existentiality in a transcendental sense appears as a condition of a necessary nature and *a priori*, making possible evaluating judgements, a subjective interpretation of our cognition is no longer possible. Transcendental existentiality is that which overcomes the subjectivism of cognition. Existentiality, being that necessary “*a priori*” does not present here any contents as yet neither real nor psychological but only a purely logical “*a priori*” which constitutes a cognizing man. Without it cognition or at least human cognition, would not be possible. This theory, according to Lotz, is expressed in an essential way in Thomas Aquinas’ doctrine on existence as the formal object of human intellect. In the Kantian theory it is found in the *a priori* categories of cognition, but those categories should additionally include being as something which conditions the possibility of human cognition as such.

Existentiality, as an *a priori* condition of human cognition, shows itself to be a phenomenological analysis of a statement. It is the latter which points to existence and expresses not so much whether it is only a link between the subject and the object but whether it pertains to the real objective connections expressed in the statement: *nicht in blossen Verbinden von Subjekt und Praedikat, sondern verleiht dem Urteilsinhalt gegenstand-bezogene reale Geltung*.¹³ And although the connective word

¹³ Cf. J.B. Lotz, *Das Urteil und das Sein*, p. 67.

“is” does not express the being of objects which actually exist, in fact it is subjected to it. The logical placing of connections expressed in the “is” of the sentence forms a “monument” of a real existential “placing”; this is because both “being-Sein” and “placing-Setzen” are interchangeable concepts. Something exists as long as it is “placed” in itself and as long as it is verified; it is also a being to an extent in which it is placed and verified.¹⁴

An analysis of a human statement is thus a sufficient basis for the possibility of a valuable metaphysics. It is embedded ultimately in an analysis of reflective cognition.

Rahner is another influential author who examined the possibility of practising metaphysics.¹⁵ His thoughts are also related to the Kantian conception of valuable cognition as well as to other transcendentalizing philosophers and to the phenomenological existentialism of Heidegger. He attempts to link this new intellectual pursuit with the mediaeval conceptions of St. Thomas.

In his work entitled *Geist in Welt* Rahner asked the fundamental question: in what way is it possible for human cognition, which, according to St. Thomas is spiritual (a spirit), to become present in the material world? Here again comes into being the question once posed by Kant about the possibility of metaphysics based on experience, given to us within the framework of time and space. Rahner found in St. Thomas' conception of the *conversio intellectus ad phantasmata* the foundation for answering in what way it is precisely possible to perceive the metaphysical understanding of being upon the basis of experience captured within the horizons of time and space. This understanding is given to us

¹⁴ “[...] hinter dem Kopula Sein immer das reale Sein steht, so enthüllt das urteilende Setzsein und Gesetzsein stets das reale Setzen und Gesetzsein des Seiendes selbst. Für beide Sphären gilt: Sein und Setzen sind vertauschbare Begriffe. Ein jedes ist oder hat am Sein Teil insofern und insoweit als es gesetzt ist und jedes ist insofern und insoweit gesetzt als es ist oder am Sein teilhat...” (ibidem, p. 65).

¹⁵ I take into consideration three works by K. Rahner: 1) *Einleitende Interpretation von S.Th. I, q. 84, a. 7 (Utrum intellectus possit actu intelligere per species intellegibiles quas penes se habet, non convertendo ad phantasmata)*; 2) *Geist in Welt*; 3) *Die Möglichkeit der Metaphysik auf dem Boden der imaginatio*. These works were published under the title: *Geist in Welt*, 3. Aufl., München 1964. Cf. Muck, op. cit. pp. 197-211.

together with the eye-witness experience of man as an historical being (a being which becomes) and his relation with the supra-temporal absolute. According to Rahner, metaphysics is nothing else but merely a conceptually expressed understanding of each given and necessary “pre-understanding” that man really *is* man. This type of a “pre-understanding” is always possessed by us as a necessary condition for cognition in general, while in metaphysics we become aware of it in acts of expressed reflection. This is because metaphysics is not a specialized knowledge or the cognition of something new, but a conscious cognition of what one has *always less consciously* known. This is also the reason why metaphysics can be built upon the basis of anthropology since the entire drama of metaphysical cognition takes place precisely in man. To put it more precisely, this is not metaphysics of being but metaphysics of cognition of man, whose essential contents is being. The possibility of cognition and cognition itself are the inner expression of being. There is no problem of any “bridge” between the cognizing spirit and the being on the outside; the true problem can be reduced to becoming aware of the way in which it is possible for a cognizing human spirit to become somebody or something else during the act of cognition.¹⁶

It is precisely man who proves himself to be the being that has the possibility of cognition or being “somebody or something” else. This is expressed, above all, in the fact of a *question*. A question is the necessary fulfilment of man and simultaneously points to him (man) as a creature which *must* ask. All the necessary conditions for understanding the very fact of questioning itself are, at the same time, conditions for understanding man.

Therefore, the necessity of posing questions does not pertain to any particular questions about definite objects; it is an internal necessity for man to ask the basic metaphysical questions concerning being. Each particular question is only a particularization of a single basic question. Each judgement is a fragmentary answer to the basic question. The question about being is embedded into the human conscious state because each of our statements is a statement about some concrete being and because it

¹⁶ This cognitive act was expressed by St. Thomas in “species”.

points to a *previously* given, although not always expressed, knowledge about being in general. Each statement is not only a synthesis of the subject and the verb but it is the connection of the intellectual synthesis previously arrived at with something which is in itself, “an sich”, i.e. with being as such. Everything which exists concretely and which concrete statements concern, exists only through existence and hence the question about the existence of concrete beings is essential for metaphysics.

The necessity of questioning the being of concrete ways of existence itself or, in other words, the necessity of a question about being in general, makes it possible to pose all questions. Only then is a question about a certain concrete and determined being possible when already previously we have a given awareness of being which reveals itself in metaphysics in the most varied relations. This awareness of being is the reason for co-gnitivity and the possibility for a realistic posing of questions pertaining to all beings. This is why man who has an awareness of being which co-appears together with conceptual experience thanks to the light of an active intellect, can practice metaphysics against the background of an experience of material objects. Such further practice is abstraction, i.e. a particularization and integration of the data of experience.

The possibility of metaphysics lies in the conditions of the cognizability and the posing of questions which presuppose the awareness of being.

The interpretation of the starting point of metaphysics presented by Coreth has proved to be the deepening of the position taken by Rahner.¹⁷ Coreth is aware of the fact that the starting point is decisive for the value of metaphysics and that, at the same time, it determines the problems of metaphysics. Referring quite consciously to the transcendental method of philosophizing he attempted, initially upon the basis of historical analyses, to perceive errors and faulty formulations or conclusions reached in connection with the use of the transcendental method of philosophy. This, according to him, made it possible to correctly determine the starting point of metaphysics. Similarly to Rahner this starting point is to be found in a question. At the beginning of metaphysics one must pose the question about the starting point itself which enables it to be-

¹⁷ I refer here to E. Coreth, *Metaphysik*, 2. Aufl., Innsbruck—Wien—München 1964.

come critical and borders on the more primary question. The question about the starting point is one concerning the possibility, and, at the same time, the necessity of metaphysics.

However, in order to make this initial question more critical it must become reflective, i.e. concern the possibility of posing a question about the starting point of metaphysics. The question about the possibility of posing a question is nothing else but a question about the necessary *a priori* conditions for a question from which the explanation of an initial answer is begun. At this point it appears that the *a priori* and necessary condition which makes it possible to pose a question about the starting point of metaphysics is precisely being itself. What all, even the most varied questions, have in common is the fact that they are questions concerning being about which we already know something but about which we must ask anew in order to include this knowledge into the system of metaphysics.

If being proves itself to be the necessary condition for a possibility to pose a question, then at the same time it proves itself to be a horizon for all questions and for “that which faces” the questioned thought. In sum, being is the “object” of a question; it is that which “is questioned”. Thus, being is a horizon which enables to pose a question about the possibility of a sensible question; it is also the first answer. If each answer is reduced to the fact that something “is”, then that “something” is placed in being and is a certain form of being. However, if an answer to the question about being reveals a difference about being and all it is not, then the basic ascertainment of identity and difference presents itself only in an entirety, being a statement concerning those same concepts which for the transcendental German philosophers were basic concepts. Between identity and difference there lies the possibility of posing further questions and the development of metaphysics.

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The representatives of a group of philosophers who used the transcendental methods in practising metaphysics, presented here in a general manner and only by way of example, correctly drew attention to the

starting point of philosophical research. This starting point was according to them, the unchangingly human cognizing subject in which they sought certain *a priori* conditions which made possible valuable and, at the same time, critical metaphysical analyses. Metaphysics was to appear as the fundamental science about being while the expression “being” was not always understood in the same way although it was always believed that it formed the basic and all-guaranteeing objectivity of cognition. As it was already mentioned, “being a basic object” of human cognition itself allows various interpretations of the existential character of the “object”. It is true that in the case of different authors we are dealing with various conceptions of the object: beginning with being understood as *Sinn-meaning-contents* up to being understood as *esse*, according to Thomas Aquinas. However, the very existential character of the object of intellectual cognition is not decisive in this interpretation and is this starting point for the nature of metaphysics itself, its realism or non-realism. At this stage, it is precisely the starting point which plays the decisive role.

It so happened in the history of philosophy that both the Aristotelian abstractionist starting point as well as its transcendental counterpart, according to the philosophers presented above are a starting point in a definite situation presented by the “field of being” which itself is determined by a cognitive axis “subject-object”, which appears only in reflective thought. Reflective human thought which gave rise to philosophy, also determined the character of metaphysics itself as well as the character of its history. Historical experience of a continuum of this problem, correctly mentioned by Gilson,¹⁸ revealed the poverty and highlights of the very philosophical thought sown and cultivated on precisely this field of existence.

Upon the basis of this historical experience one can say that on the one hand the philosophical problems are always alive in different eras and that they are grouped around the conception of being and its particularization or “symptoms” correctly noticed already in the antiquity; on the other hand, philosophy is unceasingly “contaminated” by idealism

¹⁸ I have in mind his works *Being and Essence* and *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*.

and appearances or at least by the incorrectness of solutions. It is precisely this “axis” starting point which is the important case for the incorrectness of solutions in various philosophical systems (which attempt to ultimately explain reality) and the unending tendency towards idealism. By this starting point I mean such a point in the conception of philosophy at which we begin with data in our reflective cognition, either objective (classical philosophy and the peripatetic trend) or subjective (as was the case with Descartes, Kant and all those who took over his methods of philosophizing). Of course, reflective cognition itself can be more or less permeated with reflectiveness but at this point we are not so much concerned about the degree of such permeation as with the fact of reflective cognition itself, which always appears together with the duality of the cognizing subject and the object under cognition.

There exist such acts of spontaneous cognition in which the division into the object and the subject has not occurred. Those are the so-called existential judgements which ascertain directly the existence of a certain concrete object given to us in direct empirical knowledge. These existential judgements are our absolutely primary cognitive act if we draw our attention to the fact that there do not exist acts of sensual experience which would be filtered from intellectual cognition. We do not, after all, have the experience of perception of a sound, a colour or a purely material object as such. It is true that our cognition stems from sensual perception but the latter is cognized in a connection and in one cognitive function in which the activity of the intellect appears. As a result of a description and analysis of cognition and the distinguishing of intellectual and sensual cognitive structures, there appeared the conviction or feeling that sensual perception is the first cognitive act followed by intellectual cognition raised upon it. In reality, we are dealing with one indivisible cognitive function of man in which one can later distinguish in the course of an analytical description the most various cognitive structures, depending on the so-called direct sources of cognition which are our senses and intellect.

The first human cognitive act is thus the existential judgement which ascertains the existence of particular objects (or a collection of objects) given to us directly in sensual experience. In an existential judgement

understood in this way we are given directly the fact of the existence of something which we have not yet come to know. The fact of the existence of something “grabs us by the throat” in such a way that there is no possibility of a doubt or a cognitive distance. In an existential judgement there is also no room for the division into the object and the cognitive subject. This problem can arise only in the initial moment of reflection, of which the existential statement is a spontaneous pre-reflective cognition.

It is precisely this existential statement which places before us the being *ens ut primum cognitum*; we are dealing, after all, with the ascertainment of the existence of something which is still cognitively undescribed, something that is in the process of separation, being as being (as existing). It is only the process of distinguishing the object of metaphysics which starts from existential judgments—the so-called separation—which can guarantee: a) the *reality* of metaphysical cognition, b) its *analogous* universality both in extensive (pertaining to each being) and intensive aspects (pertaining to each existential element), c) *neutrality*, which in turn guarantees an objective philosophical interpretation through an unceasing contact with reality; and finally, d) the allowance for *ultimate explanation*.

These problems, however, were presented and discussed in a more detailed manner in monographical studies on the subject e.g. *From the Theory and Methodology of Metaphysics*¹⁹ and *Metaphysics*.²⁰ These works presented both cognitive operations and their results which revealed the concept of being as existence, its transcendental definitions both in the epistemological and real aspects (first statements) as well as fundamental interpretations of reality conducted in the light of the concept of being gained during the process of separation.

*Translated from Polish by Mieczysław A. Krąpiec
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¹⁹ Published in Lublin, TN KUL 1962

²⁰ Published in Poznań, Pallottinum 1966.

