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THE DISCOVERY OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE ABSOLUTE IN EXISTENTIAL METAPHYSICS

One feature of existential metaphysics is that its philosophical thought begins with the investigation of that which really exists. That is, it begins with being. In the history of philosophy being was understood in different ways, beginning with the identification of being with a primordial material element (water, air, fire, the limitless), with a thought, an idea, a law, a formed concrete thing (a substance), a generic concept, or a number. However, metaphysical knowledge as a whole was concentrated on being and was about being.

Metaphysical theism is based on philosophical thought which begins with being and concentrates on being, and so it begins from and concentrates on reality given in experience. Thus the knowledge concerning being is supplied to metaphysical theism by metaphysics. Metaphysics passes on knowledge concerning a being as something that exists, something that is particularized, and something that is given in experience as changing, caused, contingent, and purposeful (or ordered). Thus we have, as it were, the content of our experience of being

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given from the side of metaphysics. It is given from the outside and from the inside. From the outside things are discovered as defined in content, internally free of contradiction, separate, true, good, and beautiful. From the inside, they are discovered as composed of constitutive parts, integrating parts, and perfective parts, of act and potency, matter and form, substance and accidents, and primarily of essence and existence.

So it is not a matter of indifference what type of metaphysics underlies theism. The way of understanding being that is discerned as the object of metaphysics also resolves the question of how God should be understood. Hence a wrong understanding of being entails a wrong understanding of God (the Absolute).

The Search for the Foundations of Metaphysical Questions

In realistic metaphysics, the effort to reach the Absolute using the natural powers of the human reason is treated not only as a scientific “task” or “satisfaction of curiosity,” but it is treated primarily as the actualization of man as a being who cognizes. In this sense we speak of the fulfillment of human knowledge. Just as reality finds its ultimate real decontradictification of the act of existence by connecting the act of existence with the existence of the Absolute, so it is with the existence of the human being, who as a knowing being finds his ultimate decontradictification in the discovery of the deepest mystery of being, and at the same time of himself, in the act of affirmation of the existence of the Absolute.

The question of God’s existence is grounded in reality itself. Reality is composite and plural, and it demands an explanation and response for why it exists, since it does not need to exist. The response to the question is the fulfillment of the obligation to be a rational being, and not merely a satisfaction of curiosity. Therefore we should indicate the objective reasons for the reason why human questions have their

capacity as questions, as opposed to subjective reasons. What then is the reason for the question-capacity of questions, and at the same time for the capacity to be known?

Curiosity as the Source of Questions

In the history of philosophy we can find several proposals for how to describe the source of philosophical questions. As we set those proposals in order, we obviously cannot avoid a certain amount of simplification. It is not a question of how to interpret the answers, but it is question of searching for the foundations of the questions that generate the answers. In response to the question concerning the reason for “our cognition’s capacity for questions,” the ancient philosophers indicated sensory curiosity. So begins Book I of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*:

The desire for knowledge is innate to all human beings. One sign of this is pleasure in sensory impressions. Regardless of the benefits that result from them, they are desired for their own sake. This applies in particular to visual impressions. For indeed it is not only in order to act, but also when we have nothing to do, that we put vision, so to speak, above all other impressions. The reason for this is that of all the senses, vision plays the greatest role in our cognition and it discovers many differences in what is seen.¹

In this case, cognition is identified with experience (we know redness by redness, odor by odor, light by light, etc.). The whole of knowledge is contained in experience or sensory cognition. Just as “how” reality is experienced, so it is known. Hence the generalization

¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 980 a. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1933, 1989) [hereafter cited as *Tredennick*], 980 a: “All men naturally desire knowledge. An indication of this is our esteem for the senses; for apart from their use we esteem them for their own sake, and most of all the sense of sight. Not only with a view to action, but even when no action is contemplated, we prefer sight, generally speaking, to all the other senses. The reason of this is that of all the senses sight best helps us to know things, and reveals many distinctions.”

of sensory cognition that we encounter among the Ionian empiricists was the ultimate fulfillment of cognition. The indication of water, fire, air, the limitless, and the earth as the ἀρχή of being entailed a reduction of cognition to the world of the senses. However, this did not allow for the ultimate actualization of the potentiality of our cognition.

Aristotle stated that “[t]hose who are experienced know only how it is, but not why it is.”² And furthermore, we do not think that sensory cognition constitutes wisdom. While it is the richest cognition of individual things, it does not say why it is such, for example, why fire heats, but only that it heats.³

Human cognition is fulfilled in wisdom-oriented cognition—“wisdom is knowledge concerning causes and principles.”⁴ Knowledge is thus fulfilled in the search for something that exceeds sensory knowledge. It also exceeds the realm of the experience of causes, and so it exceeds the fact of “how” a being exists, and it rises toward the question “why.”

The Aristotelian support for causal knowledge is not a mere declaration but it rises from the very nature of things. Reality does not exist as simple, as the Ionians thought (under the form of sensibly discerned elements), but reality is “problematic,” “composite,” and it is not “self-intelligible.” Hence, in order for human cognition to be fulfilled, in order for its potentialities to be actualized, we must pose the question δὲ τί and search for the ultimate cause. As Aristotle argued:

The wise man has knowledge of everything that can be cognized, and that knowledge of his does not consist in cognizing particular things separately. Next we consider that the wise man is he who

² Id., 981 a 29. Cf. *Tredennick*, 981 a 29: “For the experienced know the fact, but not the wherefore.”

³ Id., 981 b 10–13. Cf. *Tredennick*, 981 b 10–13: “Further, we do not consider any of the senses to be Wisdom. They are indeed our chief sources of knowledge about particulars, but they do not tell us the reason for anything, as for example why fire is hot, but only that it is hot.”

⁴ Id., 982 a 4.

cognizes that which is difficult for men to cognize, and not only that which is easy to cognize. For indeed sensory cognition is common to all and comes easily, but it also has nothing in common with wisdom. Moreover, we think that he is wiser in any realm of knowledge who knows more exactly the causes and is better able to teach about them . . . the sciences concerning what is first provide the most exact knowledge.⁵

This is one of the proposals for showing the reason for the question-capacity of the philosophical question.

*The Will of Gods as the Source of
the Capacity for Questions*

The knowledge of the ultimate truth and the question-capacity of questions are both the domain of the gods. In this way we could reconstruct the reason for the capacity for questions and the capacity for knowledge in Plato's philosophy. Hence that which is divine in man demands to be present in awareness; that which is forgotten demands to be remembered. Hegel had the most radical conception of this when he said that in knowledge, the spirit (the Absolute) becomes conscious of himself.

In his Seventh Letter, Plato showed the path of ascending to truth. This path is an arduous climb for the soul. On the climb we become not so much conscious of ideas, as our soul is liberated, fulfilled, and delivered from that which restrained it.

For every object there are three representations upon which knowledge about that object must unconditionally rest; the fourth

⁵ Id., 982 9–30. Cf. *Tredennick*, 982 9–30: “[T]he wise man knows all things, so far as it is possible, without having knowledge of every one of them individually; next, that the wise man is he who can comprehend difficult things, such as are not easy for human comprehension (for sense-perception, being common to all, is easy, and has nothing to do with Wisdom); and further that in every branch of knowledge a man is wiser in proportion as he is more accurately informed and better able to expound the causes . . . the most exact of the sciences are those which are most concerned with the first principles . . .”

is the knowledge itself, the knowledge concerning the object. That which is the object of knowledge and is truly existent should be taken as the fifth. Now, the first is the name, the second is the definition, the third is the image, and the fourth is knowledge . . . The soul seeks to know the essence, not qualities. Now each of the four manifestations presents before the soul, both by word, and in facts, something to which the soul cannot strive at all, and in this way as it always provides to the senses the ability to refute easily that which is said in any case, or that which is indicated, it fills in every domain each man, if we may say so, with confusion and perplexity . . . After much effort, as if we rub together in friction names and definitions, visual images, and sense experiences, scrutinizing their power with kindly applied attempts, and using the method of questions and answers without ill will, only then will there spring up the light of the proper grasp of each thing, and understanding pushed to the highest limits of human abilities.⁶

According to Plato, the reason for the capacity for questions in human cognition was placed in the soul by the gods, and the release of

⁶ Plato, *Listy [Letters]*, trans. [into Polish] M. Maykowska (Warsaw 1987), VII, 342 A–B, 343 C, 344 B–C. Cf. Plato, “Letter VII,” in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 7, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1966), 342 A–B, 343 C, 344 B–C: “Every existing object has three things which are the necessary means by which knowledge of that object is acquired; and the knowledge itself is a fourth thing; and as a fifth one must postulate the object itself which is cognizable and true. First of these comes the name; secondly the definition; thirdly the image; fourthly the knowledge . . . and the soul seeks to know not the quality but the essence, each of the Four proffers to the soul either in word or in concrete form that which is not sought; and by thus causing each object which is described or exhibited to be always easy of refutation by the senses, it fills practically all men with all manner of perplexity and uncertainty . . . and it is by means of the examination of each of these objects, comparing one with another—names and definitions, visions and sense-perceptions,—proving them by kindly proofs and employing questionings and answers that are void of envy—it is by such means, and hardly so, that there bursts out the light of intelligence and reason regarding each object in the mind of him who uses every effort of which mankind is capable” [<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>, accessed on 15 December 2016].

this divine particle, and the achievement of self-awareness, are the fulfillment of the human soul's life.

*Man's Mental State as the Reason for
the Capacity for Questions*

Another proposal for the reason of the capacity for questions of our cognition is an appeal to man's mental state. The human being is torn between certainty and doubt, between a question and a doubt. This state of being torn, a natural state as it were, is the reason for our cognition's capacity for questions. Krąpiec writes on this:

In Aristotle, *aporia* was the beginning of philosophical inquiries, the typical mental state at the boundary of a question and a doubt, of an incipient vision of the truth flowing from cognitive contact with a being whose necessary structures, appearing in general outlines, were immersed in concrete, changing, individual, and unknown reality. Aporematic cognition stimulated the search for a solution, to find support for the solution in historical and systemic data, or to put it succinctly, it passed through a stage of being mooted, of *diaporesis*, in order to find its way out in *euporia*, that is, a sort of cognitive solution, which in turn would become an *aporia* for further searches. The aporematic character of human scientific cognition really seems to be a constant phenomenon in the history of human thought.⁷

Aristotle in Book III of the *Metaphysics* mentioned the aporematic state of the mind as that which generates cognition. At the beginning of the book he writes:

On account of the knowledge that we concern about here, we must first mention the doubts that should be first discussed . . . Now if one wants to resolve a problem, one should first consider it exactly, because later solution will consist in resolving previ-

⁷ Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, "O rozumienie dróg poznania Boga [On Understanding the Ways to Know God]," in *W kierunku Boga [In the Direction of God]*, ed. B. Bejze (Warsaw 1982), 51–52.

ously perceived difficulties. And this is impossible if one does not know wherein lies the difficulty. The difficulty shows that in a particular question there is a sort of knot to unravel. Thinking that is entangled in doubts is like a bound man: it also cannot move forward.⁸

Another reason is man's mental state caused by the awareness of death, a certain *meditation mortis*. It was typical of the stance of the Stoics, and in the Middle Ages and recent times it was seen in fear and trepidation, which are a constant attitude of the human spirit that certain Christian philosophers in the Middle Ages and some in existential philosophy emphasized. Epicurus of Samos argued as follows:

The youth should not neglect philosophy, and the elder should not feel incapable of studying it further. It is not too early or too late for anyone to begin to concern himself with the health of his soul. Therefore he who says that the time for philosophizing has not yet come for him, or that it has already passed, is like he who states that the time for happiness has not yet come or that it has already passed. Therefore both the young and the old should philosophize; the old so that as they age they may feel young, recalling the goods with which fate endowed them in the past, and the young again so that despite their youth they may feel unshaken in the face of the future, like older people. And so incessantly we should seek what can win happiness for us; for he who has taken possession of happiness has everything that he could have at all, while he whom happiness has passed by does everything to get it

⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 995 a 25–34. Cf. *Tredennick*, 995 a 25–34: “It is necessary, with a view to the science which we are investigating, that we first describe the questions which should first be discussed . . . Now for those who wish to get rid of perplexities it is a good plan to go into them thoroughly; for the subsequent certainty is a release from the previous perplexities, and release is impossible when we do not know the knot. The perplexity of the mind shows that there is a ‘knot’ in the subject; for in its perplexity it is in much the same condition as men who are fettered: in both cases it is impossible to make any progress.”

. . . Indeed all we do is so that we may be free of suffering and disquiet.⁹

So for the Stoics, cognition is fulfilled in the solution of the riddle of fear and suffering, and that is at the moment that one achieves the state of apathy (Gk. ἀπάθεια).

*The Nature of the Intellect as the Reason for
the Capacity for Questions*

The very nature of the human intellect may also be a foundation for the question-capacity of human questions. The intellect by its nature constructs a question in the form of categories. The question is constructed as an instrument for the cognition of material and changing things. Thus man is the author of the question and of the content of the answer to the question.

The controversy over the reason for knowability began in the seventeenth century from—as Eric L. Mascall writes—the distinction between primary and secondary qualities of the object made explicitly for the first time by Galileo, but known better from the writings of John Locke. Secondary qualities such as color or smell are obviously dependent to a certain degree

⁹ Diogenes Laertios, *Żywoty i poglądy słynnych filozofów* [*Lives of Eminent Philosophers*], trans. I. Krońska, K. Leśniak, W. Olszewski (Warsaw 1984), X 122–128. Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, X 122–128, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972): “Let no one be slow to seek wisdom when he is young nor weary in the search thereof when he is grown old. For no age is too early or too late for the health of the soul. And to say that the season for studying philosophy has not yet come, or that it is past and gone, is like saying that the season for happiness is not yet or that it is now no more. Therefore, both old and young ought to seek wisdom, the former in order that, as age comes over him, he may be young in good things because of the grace of what has been, and the latter in order that, while he is young, he may at the same time be old, because he has no fear of the things which are to come. So we must exercise ourselves in the things which bring happiness, since, if that be present, we have everything, and, if that be absent, all our actions are directed toward attaining it . . . For the end of all our actions is to be free from pain and fear” [<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>, accessed on 15 December 2016].

on the sensory equipment of the percipient and indeed did not exist except when perceived; whereas primary qualities, such as shape, solidity and mass, were inherent possessions of the object, so it was held, and they existed whether they were being perceived or not. Thus, for Locke, substances existed with their primary qualities beneath the superficial array of secondary qualities with which we perceive them. Berkeley had little difficulty in showing that Locke's primary qualities were just as subjective as the secondary; indeed, that, in Locke's sense, there were no primary qualities at all. Physical objects thus became entirely subjective: *esse est percipi*, to exist is simply to be perceived. Berkeley tried to preserve their substantiality and continuity by holding that even when no one else perceived them God did; and that to exist in the mind of God was a sufficiently exalted status for any finite object to have. Later thinkers and in particular David Hume, eliminated God and, with him, the last vestiges of physical substantiality. Physical objects were simply concatenations of impressions in the mind, though Hume never managed to give a satisfactory account of the mind in which they were concatenated.

The story continues through Kant and Hegel . . . Kant tried to preserve the objective character of physical objects by holding that although the actual object of perception is a product of the very act in which it is perceived, so that we can never know things as they really are, there is nevertheless at the root of the phenomenal object a being-in-itself, a *Ding an sich* or *noumenon*, which is wholly real and non-subjective. It has always been difficult to see how Kant accounted for his knowledge that there is a *noumenon* at all, in view of his doctrine that all we can know is the *phenomenon* which the mind has constructed in the act of perceiving. Some have indeed thought that for Kant the *noumenon* (and probably God as well) was only a regulative principle for human thought and not a constituent element in reality.¹⁰

¹⁰ Eric L. Mascall, *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971), 64–65.

The reason for the question-capacity of cognition formulated in this way also determines the term of cognition, which is already inscribed in the question. One example here could be Kant's proposal. Man is fulfilled as a cognizing being in making cognitive instruments (or categories), among which is the Absolute, which appears as one of the *a priori* categories of the practical reason. Kant in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals* wrote:

All rational knowledge is either material and considers some sort of object, or formal and is concerned only with the form of the intellect and of the reason, and with the general laws of thought in general without regard for the difference of objects.¹¹

In this way any connection between philosophical (metaphysical) cognition and the object was broken. Cognition was made independent and it exists with its own independent life. Cognition is above beings, above things, and things are subject to it. Without going any further into a description of Kant's proposal, we may note only that the intellect is creative. As such it is fulfilled in its creativity visible in the formulation of *a priori* categories (laws and principles), and that creativity is the deepest reason for the question-capacity of cognition. However, it would be more appropriate here to speak of the creativity of cognition rather than of the question-capacity of cognition.

In this way we have presented various foundations for the question-capacity of our questions (more by way of examples than by an exhaustive list). Those foundations determine for cognition ends that are useful (practical), religious, or psychological. In philosophical cog-

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Uzasadnienie metafizyki moralności* [*Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals*], trans. [into Polish] M. Watenberg (Kręty 2001), 5. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Jonathan Bennett (online version: <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/kant1785.pdf>, accessed on 15 December 2016), "Preface:" "There are two kinds of rational knowledge: material knowledge, which concerns some object, and formal knowledge, which pays no attention to differences between objects, and is concerned only with the form of understanding and of reason, and with the universal rules of thinking."

niton, and especially in metaphysical cognition, which we describe as wisdom-oriented, the purpose is to reach the ultimate reason or cause of existence (in a certain aspect). This cognition is expressed in the art of separating being from non-being, that is, in the art of the decontradiction of a fact that is given to us to explain by indicating the objective reasons for the fact's existence. Hence a metaphysical question is a question of the type (as Heidegger said) in which the one who is asking is also put under a question mark. Therefore in metaphysics we indicate the structure of being as the foundation for the question-capacity of a question. Being is capable of being an object of questions. It is not completely intelligible, and it is mysterious, because it is composite and plural. It is reality which compels us to ask the question about its own existence. The act of providing an exhaustive and final answer is a fulfillment of man as a cognizing being.

*Being as the Reason for the Question-Capacity of
the Question "Why?"*

In metaphysical cognition we indicate the structure of being and the composition of being as the foundation for the question-capacity of questions. As Krapiec writes:

The foundation of all questions, of all "whys," that appear in various domains of life, can be, and ultimately is, the very structure of being. For indeed an existing being is not completely legible to the intellect; it is not self-intelligible, since in itself it is composite. As it is given to us originally in sensory experience, it appears as changing, plural, divisible, and contingent. All this points to an internal structure of being that alone can decontradictify the observed state of things: plurality, divisibility, and contingency. This structure is the internal composition of being, which is unusually difficult to understand since the "parts" of this composition (the factors that compose the really existing being and which constitute the being) do not exist before the composition, and are not capable of existing independently after the being disintegrates. Simply, the concrete being "is composed" of the

factors that “themselves” never become an independent being; for example, a man’s head does not become an independent being after it is cut off from the body, since it ceases to be a head at all and ceases to perform all the functions that it performed when the human being was a being composed of a head, a trunk, and other “parts” that constituted him. The schema for the “artificially” constructed composition from the material parts of an object is not at all a model for the composition of a really existing being, for in a being the “parts” did not exist previously, not are they capable of becoming a being, that is, that which exists. They are real insofar as a being that really exists is “from them.”

The reality of one being alone composed from an unimaginable number of components becomes a “problem” for the cognizing intellect, for indeed every composition (and by the same token, its conditionings and its consequences) causes non-self-intelligibility of a being (given to us in experience), but causes intellectual “perplexity” manifested in the question “why.” Therefore we search for “reasons” for an observed (or supposed) composition, in order to make a being intelligible and to “calm” the intellect. Thus questions of “why” have their ultimate objective foundation in a being, in its composite structure, which connects our understanding of a composite being with the factors that more or less condition this “troublesome” composition.¹²

Among the compositions of being, both integral and perfective compositions, we indicate the compositions without which a being could not be what it is. The composition from essence and existence is the fundamental composition. This composition expresses the deepest mystery and reason for the existence of a being. The apprehension of this composition is the beginning of metaphysical or wisdom-oriented explanation. All other compositions, both integral and perfective, that are manifested in the divisibility of being (matter and form), change or mutability (act and potency), and identity (substance and accidents), have their ultimate ground in a being composed of essence and exis-

¹² Krąpiec, “O rozumienie dróg poznania Boga,” 52–53.

tence. In other words, they have their ground in a being, and they are not suspended in a vacuum, and so, not suspended in non-being.

When we reach the composition of being from essence and existence, and when we become aware of the non-necessary connection of essence with existence in a being, then a vision of reality opens before us as reality composed of contingent beings. In turn, this plurality of non-necessary (contingent) beings stands as the capacity for questions, as the next “why” before the human being who cognizes.

The discovery of the ultimate reason “why” for the existence of contingent beings is the fulfillment of human cognition. It is necessary, since man cannot live in a world of absurdity, and so he cannot allow a question to remain unexplained. It is not a question merely of theoretical explanation, but of drawing a dividing line between being and non-being, that is, it is a question of showing a reason for being such that by that reason the contingent and non-necessary being is realized. Thus in cognition we reach the Absolute.

Krapiec explains:

The affirmation of the necessity of the Absolute’s existence is the only rational way out of the realm of absurdity for the intellect in the field of explanative philosophy. This does not mean that when one accepts that the Absolute must exist, everything right away becomes clear and understandable, but it means only that being ceases to be irrational, or even absurd. Most often we face a mystery, for we cannot connect all the elements of being into one rational range of being that is legible to all and does not raise objections . . . Although we face a mystery, we find ourselves in the sphere of intelligible being, and not in the sphere of absurdity. For indeed a being that is not understandable by itself is completely referred in all that is not understandable by itself to the Being that is understandable by itself, to the Absolute. Its presence makes being itself intelligible, because (a) the only possibility for the being-ness of the reality that we see is its connection with the Pure Existence, that is, with the being *per se*; (b) the internal non-division of things and their separateness can be ex-

plained by the participation of beings that in themselves [each] are one, but are separate from each other in the oneness of the Absolute Being; (c) the whole intelligible order called truth is only the consequence of ordering to the Creative Intellect; (d) the order of the good is connected with the Absolute's creative love. Therefore both the being-ness of being and its transcendental perfections are ultimately explained by the necessary connection of the contingent beings given to us in everyday experience with the First Being, the Absolute. Everything that in reality is an expression of real being apprehended in different aspects is ordered to the necessity of the affirmation of the Absolute's existence, which becomes a real response to the fundamental "why" that emerges from our cognition of the really existing world.¹³

In this way, the end-purpose of man's cognitive life is also realized. That end-purpose is expressed in wisdom-oriented cognition, which found the ultimate decontradictification for the existence of the contingent being, and in this way being was separated from non-being.

The Cognition of the Ultimate Reason for the Existence of Beings: The Absolute

The Absolute appears in realistic metaphysics as the ultimate reason that decontradictifies the explanation of a really existing being. The reason for the existence of a non-necessary being and our cognition of it appears as the Being who is transcendent to the world both in being and in cognition. His existence is not in any way necessitated by the world's existence. We do not affirm His existence directly or immediately, but by explaining being in ultimate and philosophical terms we indirectly affirm God's existence. We discover only the necessity of His existence upon the background of the structure of being; that structure is not intelligible (it is absurd) in its own existence unless it has its ground in the decontradictifying context of God. Hence Thomas said very cautiously:

¹³ Id., 54.

The word “is” has two meanings: the first means real existence, or actualized existence, and the second means a copula that connects a proposition together, when a thought connects a predicate with a subject. If we take “is” in the first meaning, we acknowledge that we cannot know at all what is God’s existence or being, just as we cannot know what His essence is; however, in the second sense we can; for we know that the proposition “God is” is the truth; and we know this from God’s effects, as we said above.¹⁴

In connection with this, the “ways” of arriving at knowledge of God’s existence that Thomas Aquinas formulated in the form of proofs, spring from an analysis of composite being; a composite being which in its existence is contingent, changing, and has a cause. Composite beings differ in their degrees of perfection. A composite being exists as ordered and as having its origin in the reason. Hence the Absolute appears as the ultimate explanation for the existence, action, perfection, and nature of a contingent being.

As Krapiec explains:

For if we turn our attention toward existence in a contingent being, then the becoming of existence in every order of being takes the form of motion, or it can be called in a broad sense “motion” as the actualization of potentiality, and this is the object of considerations in the so-called first “way”—from motion. The realized existence of a being indicates its first efficient cause, the first being from the second “way;” the relation of existence to essence in a contingent being is the foundation of the affirmation of being *per se*, the Necessary Being of the third “way;” the mo-

¹⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I. q. 3, a. 4, ad 2. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros. edition, 1947), I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2: “*To be* can mean either of two things. It may mean the act of essence, or it may mean the composition of a proposition effected by the mind in joining a predicate to a subject. Taking *to be* in the first sense, we cannot understand God’s existence nor His essence; but only in the second sense. We know that this proposition which we form about God when we say *God is*, is true; and this we know from His effects.”

ment of a more or less perfect essence under actual existence takes the form of the fourth “way;” finally, the action of a contingent being (the understanding of which has been outlined in the first four “ways”) constitutes the essential background of the fifth “way;” which indicates the personal character of the first Being. Therefore Thomas’ five “ways” are nothing other than the ultimate philosophical understanding of a contingent being in the perspective of ontic decontradictifications. In order to separate the contingent being from nothingness, from non-being, we must refer it to the reason that is the Being.¹⁵

When we emphasize that in realistic metaphysics the Absolute appears as the ultimate reason that decontradictifies the existence of the contingent being, we should note that this is not a theoretical assumption or a verifying hypothesis, but it is a response that involves the entire human being, since it also contains the resolution of the riddle of human existence.

With the affirmation of the existence of a being, an “image” of the Absolute emerges. For we cannot conceive of the existence of anything except in the manner of a being. Here we encounter a difficulty that is not any less (and may be greater) in determining the nature of the Absolute. First, we must overcome the pictorial and metaphorical descriptions of God’s nature that we have inherited from mythology, religion, and the Bible. Second, we must overcome the anthropomorphic tendencies with which biblical and religious literature are full. Third, and finally, we must overcome *a priori* conceptions of God proposed in various types of definitions, so as far as possible we can take a position where we do not distort the image of God.

In philosophy we often encounter the identification of the nature of God with various things.

1. The nature of the world is that of God—this is seen in the *Book of Twenty-Four Masters* in which we read: “Deus est sphaera

¹⁵ Krąpiec, “O rozumienie dróg poznania Boga,” 55.

infinita, cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia nusquam” (God is the infinite sphere, whose center is everywhere, but whose circumference is nowhere). In descriptions of this kind we find echoes of Orphic beliefs, of Anaximander’s conception of the “apeiron,” and of Anaxagoras’ “Nous” that stretches along the infinite mixture of “Krisis.”

2. Conceiving God as an infinite spirit, in ancient times, quite naturally led, in the Middle Ages, to the identification of God with space, and also with ὄλη. We find the following in Alan de Lille’s *Regulae theologicae*: “Deus est sphaera intelligibilis, cuius centrum ubique, circumferentia nusquam” (God is an intelligible sphere, whose center is everywhere, and whose limits are nowhere). Nicholas de Cusa referred to this: “those who pondered God’s most actual existence, conceived of God as an infinite sphere.”¹⁶

3. Among the German mystics (John Eckhart, John Tauler, and Henry de Suso) we encounter a tendency to identify God with the Soul, which in turn as identified with the “pure self” underlies the image of God as the “Pure Self” or the “Pure I.”

Krąpiec comments on Eckhart’s thought:

Properly speaking, such a state of the “pure self” would be achieved after a man’s death, when the soul, losing its relation to this body . . . is no longer found “before,” “after,” or “beside” anything, but “is in itself” and at the same time by virtue of its structure it retains a transcendental (necessary) relation to matter. Wherever there is matter—through this necessary relation—there is the soul, insofar as it acts there. The action of the soul is reduced to cognition and love. Such a state of the soul’s presence in the world would be a realization of the “pure self” . . . The pure self, present in itself and equally distant from all things and processes of matter, would be the foundation for grounding pure

¹⁶ Nicolaus de Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, ed. E. Hoffman, R. Klibansky (Lipsiae 1932), I 12.

objectivism, since such objectivism can be given in relation to “pure subjectivity.”¹⁷

In this way what puts down its roots in theism is the conception (or image) of God—as the “Pure I,” the “Architect of the World,” “The Self-Thinking Reason,” “Will,” “Pure Subjectivity,” or the “Transcendent Subject”—which is a foundation of knowledge, a postulate of the reason, the reason for consciousness, while the image of God as really connected with the world becomes more distant.

4. Hence in Thomas’ theism we primarily indicate that God is a being. We connect with a being all the properties that we are trying to ascribe to God both by way of positive predication and by way of negative predication. They cannot violate the “principles of the existence of being” (like a square circle, a contradiction in itself, etc.), and therefore when we speak of the properties of God the Absolute, we connect those properties with the conception of the Absolute Being and with the conception of being in general. In this way we guard ourselves from various absurdities and we avoid contradictions.

The problematic of the Absolute’s existence in realistic philosophy is an integral part of metaphysical cognition and grows, as it were, from that cognition. The absolute, the ultimate reason for the world’s existence, appears in metaphysical cognition as the completion and culmination of our understanding of reality, as the “keystone” of a rational and coherent vision of the world. One condition for this is that as we search for the ultimate reasons for the existence and action of beings, we see the necessity for the existence of a being that ultimately provides the explanation for all that. In philosophy we call that being “the Absolute,” and in religion we call that being “God.”

It should be noted that the Absolute is not a direct object of human experience and cognition. This impossibility follows from man’s ontological condition; man is a contingent (finite) being. The Absolute

¹⁷ Krąpiec, “O rozumienie dróg poznania Boga,” 58.

or God is a necessary (infinite) being. Thus man “has existence,” while the Absolute or God “is existence” (*ipsum esse subsistens*). Just as a drop of water cannot engulf the ocean, so a human being in his experience or knowledge cannot engulf God. Moreover, God who is present in the world as the world’s cause, is transcendent to the world with respect to existence and cognition. This means that the world does not exhaust the wealth of God’s existence.

Agnosticism or skepticism does not follow from those limitations. Metaphysical theism teaches that it is possible to cognize God from the world of nature. In this world God is present as the ultimate cause of its existence and action. If in keeping with the actual state of affairs we affirm the pluralism of beings, which will be free of contradiction only if beings are internally composed of non-identical elements that are incapable of existing on their own without their correlates in composition, then a question arises which is fundamental if we are to understand contingent being: why does the pluralistic world exist, rather than not exist? If a new being (composed of a concrete essence and an existence proportional to it) arises, which did not exist previously, and if its essence does not explain the fact that it came into existence, since the essence “would give” to itself what it is not and what it does not possess, then the reason why a contingent being comes into existence (the reason why its concrete essence is internally connected with an existence proportional to that essence) is not the “ontic interior” of the being that arises. The reason is “outside.” If that “reason for being” did not exist, then the being that exists would not differ in any respect from “nothingness,” since as it does not possess “within itself” or “on its inside” the reason why it came into existence, that is, it does not possess the reason for its coming-into-existence in its component factors, at the same time it would not possess that reason “externally” or outside of itself, and thereby it would be “nothing;” the being would not exist. However, since it exists, even though previously it did not exist, and since it has no reason in itself for being, because that would

also be a contradiction, then it possesses that reason for being “outside” itself, outside its compositional factors. This “external” reason for being is not, and ultimately cannot be (in a decontradictifying explanation) a contingent being composed of an essence and an existence that is not identical to the essence, for then that reason of being would be found in the same ontic situation as the contingent being whose existence we are trying to explain.¹⁸

In this way on the basis of an analysis of reality given to us in experience, we show the necessity for the existence of the First Being who is absolutely non-composite, without whom the existence of the contingent world would be an absurdity. In metaphysical analyses we are trying not so much to show the existence of God as to show that without His existence, the existence and action of the contingent world would be unintelligible and absurd.

So we come to know the existence of God indirectly through analyzing the fact that the world exists and is given to us in sensory experience. This is a world that is changing, contingent, caused, ordered, and differentiated in perfections. As we seek the ultimate reason (or cause) to explain the existence of this world, we indicate the Absolute as its ultimate cause.

In turn, as we discern the universal (transcendental) properties of beings (truth, the good, and beauty), we discover the relation of origin of all reality from the Intellect and the Will of the Creator, and we learn that the Absolute is a Person, since the Absolute is a rational and free being.

Metaphysical theism, which is found in the five ways of St. Thomas (the *quinque viae*), which are based on an analysis of motion, causation, contingency, degrees of perfection, and purposefulness, is a classical example of realistic cognition, which is fulfilled in the discov-

¹⁸ Cf. Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, “Metafizyka—ogólna teoria rzeczywistości [Metaphysics: The General Theory of Reality],” in *Wprowadzenie do filozofii [Introduction to Philosophy]*, vol. 1 (Lublin 2000), 165–169.

ery of the First Cause of the existence of the world and of man. This discovery shows to philosophers the way out of absurdity, both existential absurdity (that the world does not make sense), and cognitive absurdity (which resorts to chance or blind necessity to explain the existence of the world).

Moreover, the experience of contingency and non-necessity that each and every man has, direct man's thought naturally toward the Absolute as toward the sole guarantee of his existence and action. Hence we can describe man as a being who by nature is open to God.

The discovery of the Absolute is thus a natural consequence of the ultimate cognition of the truth concerning the real world. Hence metaphysical cognition reaches its ultimate end by rising to discover the existence of the Absolute as the ultimate cause of the existence of this world, which is given to us in experience as contingent, changing, caused, ordered, rational, and purposeful.

The proposed ways to cognize God are not so much proofs, as they are ways to cognize the ultimate truth about the world, its end-purpose, and its existence. It is reality, existing as changing, non-necessary, caused, purposeful, and intelligible, and put up for cognitive analysis, that leads us to discover the ultimate reason for its existence and action, which is the Absolute. The Absolute also indicates the ultimate way of making sense out of the existence of the world and of man (their purpose), and reveals that the world is not some kind of chaos, and that human life is not an absurdity or an accident.

Conclusion

The discovery of the existence of the Absolute is one of the crucial steps on the way to understanding reality. The world in which we live and act is varied in many ways. We cannot succumb to monistic and reductionistic tendencies. Nature and reality have "many names." Someone who wants to show the truth, good, and beauty of reality cannot work with some sort of global and reductionist vision of the world.

Reality, which we call the “natural environment,” is composed of various objects; the end-purposes of their existence are inscribed in those objects, and they are ordered to each other in various ways. Thus we should not lose sight of the natural hierarchy of beings that form the world of nature, at the summit of which stands man.

This existential metaphysics provides us with knowledge about reality. It shows the content of the experience of being, the content given to us in the transcendentals. It also unveils the foundation of the rational order, which is given to us in the discovery of the first principles of the existence of being and of cognition. Metaphysics provides us also with knowledge concerning the structure of being. It shows us being as composite and plural; being which is “insufficient” in its structure and calls for an explanation. That being—that is problematized in existence, given to us in experience, and incompletely intelligible in itself—lifts us toward its ultimate “complement” and understanding, to the Absolute.

Translated from Polish by Hugh McDonald

**THE DISCOVERY OF THE EXISTENCE OF
THE ABSOLUTE IN EXISTENTIAL METAPHYSICS**

SUMMARY

The article shows the way in which the discovery of the existence of the Absolute is made in existential metaphysics. This existential metaphysics provides us with knowledge about reality. It shows the content of the experience of being, the content given to us in the transcendentals. It also unveils the foundation of the rational order, which is given to us in the discovery of the first principles of the existence of being and of cognition. Metaphysics provides us also with knowledge concerning the structure of being. It shows us being as composite and plural; being which is “insufficient” in its structure and calls for an explanation. That being—that is problematized in existence, given to us in experience, and incompletely intelligible in itself—lifts us toward its ultimate “complement” and understanding, to the Absolute.

KEYWORDS: Absolute, existence, reality, being, metaphysics, cognition, why, curiosity, gods, mental state, intellect, reason.