

Tomasz Duma

John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
Poland

**TO KNOW OR TO THINK—THE CONTROVERSY OVER
THE UNDERSTANDING OF PHILOSOPHICAL
KNOWLEDGE IN THE LIGHT OF THE STUDIES OF
MIECZYŚLAW A. KRAPIEC**

There is general agreement among historians of philosophy and philosophers on the beginnings of the appearance of philosophical knowledge in our cultural circle. It is astounding that in general there are no great differences in the interpretation of how the first philosophers understood philosophical knowledge. Serious differences of opinion begin only in regard to the great philosophical systems, beginning with Plato and Aristotle. While we can point to many common elements in interpretations concerning earlier times, such as the identification of philosophy with wisdom, that philosophical knowledge was given a universal character, and that philosophical knowledge was related to some sort of metaphysical dimension of reality, yet in our time all the elements that could be generally recognized as essential properties of philosophical knowledge have been eliminated one after another. For this reason, both philosophical knowledge and philosophy itself become something completely relative, even arbitrary or accidental. One example of this is the postmodernist description of philosophy as “a certain way of writing,” “the art of holding conversation,” or the “most recently read book.”¹ In this light, the terms “philosophy” and “philosophical knowledge” basically mean nothing except a vague description in the framework of ordinary language for some-

This article was originally published in Polish: Ks. Tomasz Duma, “Poznawać czy myśleć – spór o rozumienie poznania filozoficznego w świetle studiów Mieczysława A. Krąpca,” *Studia Elckie* 10 (2008): 41–62.

¹ Cf. M. Kwiek, *Rorty i Lyotard. W labiryntach postmoderny (Rorty and Lyotard. In the postmodern labyrinths)* (Poznań 1994), 42–46.

one's attitude or approach to something. Thereby the enormous domain of knowledge upon which people have worked for millennia loses its place and meaning in culture as culture is broadly understood, and thereby in the intellectual life of the man of our time; the consequences of this appear in the sphere of morality, higher education, primary education, politics, art, and even religion.

It seems that the present loss of confidence in this field of knowledge is caused not so much by the planned questioning of its significance in culture, as it is caused by various aberrations within philosophy itself. To restore to philosophical knowledge its original rank, we should take up once again the problem of the specific character of philosophical knowledge. This cannot be done unless we look in a precise manner to the entire philosophical tradition especially to the most eminent achievements of that tradition. However, not many thinkers in our time have decided to pursue the classical understanding of philosophical knowledge.² Most often, people stop at minimalism, or they develop some sort of subjective vision of the world. However, this does not mean that interest in the classical approach to philosophy has completely died. Evidence of this is found in the achievements of Fr. Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec, the leading representative of the Lublin School of Philosophy, which in this field has distinguished itself not only in Polish philosophical literature, but beyond.³ In his many works, Fr. Krąpiec worked to show the specific character of philosophical knowledge.⁴ He thought that to do this, we should reach to the very foundations of cognitive operations that cause a fact such as philosophical knowledge to come into existence, and which consequently demarcate the

² Cf. A. Bronk, S. Majdański, "Klasyczność filozofii klasycznej" ("The classical character of classical philosophy") *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 39–40 (1991/1992, no. 1): 367–391.

³ M. A. Krąpiec (1921–2008)—philosopher, theologian, humanist, rector for many years of the Catholic University of Lublin. In his philosophical system he worked to explain the whole of reality accessible to human knowledge. He did this in investigations in general metaphysics, the methodology of metaphysics, the metaphysics of knowledge, philosophical anthropology, the philosophy of law, the philosophy of politics, the philosophy of culture, the philosophy of language, moral philosophy, and the philosophy of the nation. Cf. *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii (Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*, vol. 6 (Lublin 2005), 43–48.

⁴ The most important works that deal with this problematic are as follows: *O rozumienie filozofii (On understanding philosophy)* (Lublin 1991); *Odzyskać świat realny (To regain the real world)* (Lublin 1993); *Poznawać czy myśleć. Problemy epistemologii tomistycznej (To know or to think. Problems of Thomistic epistemology)* (Lublin 1994); *O filozofii (On philosophy)* (Lublin 2008).

entire profile of the knowledge that arises by describing the essential moments of that knowledge. If this preliminary stage in investigations on the nature of philosophical knowledge is forgotten, this will always lead to reliance on certain assumptions, with the result that the knowledge gained in this way, despite its general character, will not essentially differ from knowledge in other domains. The imposed framework of assumptions would weigh very heavily on the role of philosophy in the establishment of human knowledge, or in general it would deprive philosophy of that task or role. All the more, philosophy thus understood would not be in a position to provide a realist, and at the same time ultimate explanation of reality, that is, an explanation that looks to the world that exists independently of the human intellect and has such a form that we no longer need to look to anything else to explain this world.

As we keep in view the need to grasp the specific character of philosophical knowledge, we should look at man's original or first cognitive operations. Because, as Fr. Krapiec believed, it is crucial to make a distinction between knowing and thinking for these inquiries, the analysis we are making will focus on this problem.

Thinking Instead of Knowing

Because of the initial close connection between philosophy and religious thought, especially Oriental thought, philosophical knowledge was excessively concentrated on various forms of thinking about reality, and philosophical knowledge was often divorced from the really existing world. The domination of thought followed from the fact that, unlike real knowledge, thinking by itself allowed people rather easily to explain the origin and beginning of the world and of man. The connection between religious thought and philosophical thought appeared most clearly in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and in the Far East.⁵ One particular expression of this was the interpretation of the whole of reality that appeared in ancient India, in light of which the entire world appeared as an emanation of the Absolute-Brahma, understood as pure thought. In this conception, the Absolute was the only real being, and everything else possessed only the appearances of being. A special place was given to the human soul (atman) on account of its ability to think and know; consequently the soul was identified with the Absolute; this followed from the idea that all objectivity

⁵ Krapiec, *O filozofii*, 7.

in knowledge was only the “showing” of something to the subject of thinking, as a result of which that subject remained the only real being.⁶ Whatever appears to the subject is only an emanation of the subject’s thought. According to Krapiec, this philosophical and religious thought of the East left a permanent mark on the history of philosophy. The most important consequence was that human knowledge was divorced from the real object, and an object that was only an emanation of thought took the place of the real object. In this way, operations of thought became the chief way of knowing; the measure of operations of thought was no longer the existing object, but only the laws of logic.⁷

Such an approach to human knowledge found many adherents in ancient Greece. One of the first philosophers who clearly took up this way of philosophizing was Heraclitus. In his conception of reality, he emphasized the fundamental role of the Logos. The Logos was the eternal principle that governed the entire cosmos, and which despite universal mutability gives meaning to everything.⁸ The next great supporter of the priority of thought over knowledge was Parmenides. He concentrated on the universality of the laws of thought so much that he was inclined to call into question all change in the world. This philosopher was the first in the history of the philosophy of the West to identify directly being with thought. This found expression in a popular maxim attributed to him: “for it is the same to think and to be” (*to gar autó noéin te kai éinai*).⁹ On this basis, he formulated a paradigm of philosophical knowledge that assumed that the fea-

⁶ “These two concepts, the objective and the subjective, Brahman and Atman, the cosmic principle and the mental principle, are regarded as identical. Brahman is Atman . . . The transcendent conception of God accepted in the Rig-Veda here has been transformed into an immanent conception. The infinite is not outside the finite but within it. The subjective character of the doctrine of the Upanishads caused this change. The identity between the subject and object was considered in India before Plato’s birth . . . This identity of subject and object is not a hazy hypothesis, but is a conclusion that follows in a necessary way from all thinking, feeling, and wanting” (S. Radhakrishnan, *Filozofia indyjska (Indian philosophy)*, vol. 1, Polish trans. Z. Wrzeszcz (Warszawa 1958), 186–187).

⁷ Krapiec, *O filozofii*, 10.

⁸ Cf. K. Mrówka, *Heraklit. Fragmenty: nowy przekład i komentarz (Heraclitus. Fragments: a new translation and commentary)* (Warsaw 2004), 345: “Heraclitus is convinced that an absolute truth exists: the Logos—Thought, the One, the Wise, the Law . . . he saw that in the world everything happens because of the rational Logos that rules, governs, and unifies the whole cosmos. He also saw that the human soul possesses the ability to know the Logos; that the same rational logos that rules the cosmos dwells in the soul.”

⁹ Cf. *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii (Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*, vol. 8 (Lublin 2007), 28–29.

tures of thought must correspond to the properties of the object of thought. Having stated that generality, necessity, and immutability were features of thought, he thought that the object of knowledge also had such properties. Almost all later Greek philosophy took up this paradigm, and that is why it was so difficult for Greek philosophy to free itself from understanding real being after the manner of thought. According to Krąpiec, the Orphic beliefs, besides Heraclitus and Parmenides, also had a strong influence on that philosophy. The Orphic beliefs emphasized the divine character of the human soul, and held that by nature the soul is perfect and eternal, and the soul's happiness consists in beholding the divine world of truth.¹⁰ When as the result of a fall, the soul loses its happiness and is incarnated in a human body, it can free itself from the world of matter by proper thinking, and can return to the beholding of being itself. In the light of this, man is really only a spirit-thought, which means that knowledge of the material world will not have any greater significance for him.

Plato's philosophy was the culmination of those views. For Plato, noetic knowledge (*nóesis*—intuitive thought) was the highest level of human knowledge. Noetic knowledge consists in the immediate and pure intellectual vision of the world of ideas.¹¹ Dianoetic knowledge (*diánoia*—discursive thought), although concerned this dimension of the world, could be reduced to operations on the ideas of mathematical beings, and in a certain sense, also the weakest form of knowledge, or doxal knowledge (*dóxa*—opinion) concerned this dimension of the world. Although doxal knowledge concerned corporeal beings, it was based on the anamnesis of ideas.¹² According to Plato, as Krąpiec notes, knowledge there consists in

¹⁰ Krąpiec, *O filozofii*, 11; cf. A. Krokiewicz, *Studia orfickie. Moralność Homera i Hezjoda (Orphic studies. The morality of Homer and Hesiod)* (Warsaw 2000), 71–72: “All this (the Orphic mysteries) happened in the name of the divinity of man, or man's soul. Herodotus called the belief described ‘immortalizing’ (*athanatizousi*). He adds that some of them even have lamentation when someone is born, and joy when someone dies . . . It is difficult to suppose that such a strong metaphysical belief arose spontaneously in barbarian Thrace. We would rather say that it have had roots either in Hindu culture (the Upanishads) or in Minoan culture, which perhaps is closer to the truth . . . According to Minoan beliefs, the soul existed in complete independence from the body, which was not the case in other ancient beliefs, for example, in Egyptian beliefs.”

¹¹ “And the soul is like the eye: when resting upon that on which truth and being shine, the soul perceives and understands and is radiant with intelligence” (Plato, *Republic*, trans. Benjamim Jowett, bk. VI).

¹² “[T]hey were speaking of those numbers that could only be realised in thought . . . this knowledge may be truly called necessary, necessitating as it clearly does the use of the pure intelligence in the attainment of the pure truth” (Id., bk 7). “And do you not know also that

the “contemplation in thought of the intellectually seen necessary truth that constitutes the content of an idea.”¹³ An idea that contains a general, necessary, and unchanging content is thereby a source of truth. Since this content is perfect, it can be imparted by participation to sensible things; from those things the content is known by way of anamnesis; according to Krapiec, anamnesis performs the role of special apperception that guarantees that the individual thing can be known. This means that real knowledge is realized only at the level of thought, and it is the work of the spirit-soul, which “brings forth from itself, as from a subject, truth-oriented thought that transcends mutability, time, and individuality.”¹⁴ This is done in acts of conceptual knowing that show the content of being as unchanging, necessary and general. Since this content existed in the soul before it was joined with the body, knowledge in principle may be reduced to the remembrance of that content. On this account, the operation of reminiscence is a special apperception, which is the reason for knowledge and knowability. The content of reality presented in an idea is intelligible in itself. The only element that hinders self-intelligibility is matter. Matter limits the perfection of ideas and becomes the basis for cognitive error.¹⁵ One consequence of the opposition of ideas and matter was a dualistic vision of reality, in the light of which one should look for “real reality” in

although they make use of the visible forms and reason about them, they are thinking not of these, but of the ideals which they resemble . . . the forms which they draw or make, and which have shadows and reflections in water of their own, are converted by them into images, but they are really seeking to behold the things themselves, which can only be seen with the eye of the mind?” (Id., bk. VI).

¹³ Krapiec, *O filozofii*, 12.

¹⁴ Id., 15.

¹⁵ “Has the reality of them ever been perceived by you through the bodily organs? or rather, is not the nearest approach to the knowledge of their several natures made by him who so orders his intellectual vision as to have the most exact conception of the essence of that which he considers?

Certainly.

And he attains to the knowledge of them in their highest purity who goes to each of them with the mind alone, not allowing when in the act of thought the intrusion or introduction of sight or any other sense in the company of reason, but with the very light of the mind in her clearness penetrates into the very fight of truth in each; he has got rid, as far as he can, of eyes and ears and of the whole body, which he conceives of only as a disturbing element, hindering the soul from the acquisition of knowledge when in company with her—is not this the sort of man who, if ever man did, is likely to attain the knowledge of existence?” (Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 65e–66a).

the order of thought, while the order of material things was only a shadow of the real world.

All later philosophies that emphasized the role of the subject in human knowledge were shaped on the basis of Plato's philosophy. Even in Christianity, Platonism was regarded as the doctrine closest to the revealed truth. In large measure, Neo-Platonism contributed to this. Neo-Platonism strongly influenced ancient Christian thinkers. As Krąpiec thought, the philosophical and religious current of Neo-Platonism contributed to a deeper connection between philosophy and the thinking subject, after the model of the systems of the Orient.¹⁶ All being appears only through thought; thought is treated more as a being than as a cognitive operation. The beginning of being is from the One. We can only speak of the One in a negative way, what it is not, e.g., that the One is not something divided, and even that it is not a being, because only what is knowable can be a being. Since the One is beyond the bounds of all thought, no positive predicate can be ascribed to it. Spirit (*nous*) comes forth (or emanates) from the One. Spirit thinks itself and causes a doubling or split into the one who thinks and what is thought. On the one hand, this means a directing toward the One (it is the image of the One). On the other hand, it is directed "downward," encompassing in ideas the plurality of the necessary contents of being. This leads to the third phase of the process of emanation—the emergence of the Soul of the world, which is a thought that contains all multitude. Thus thinking and being are unified in the Spirit that contains all ideas and forms, as well as the forms of individual things. Hence the Spirit is the essence of everything that is, and the being of the Spirit is expressed in thinking. In this way, as J. Disse remarks, the Parmenidean identity of being and thinking is transferred to the plane of the Spirit.¹⁷ As in Platonism, here we find a certain dualism of the world of matter and spirit, which is most clearly seen in the human being, who is *de facto* a spirit accidentally connected with a body.

According to Krąpiec, Arab philosophy was another important moment in the increasing domination of thought in philosophical knowledge. Although a special combination of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy was made in the framework of Arab philosophy, yet the main conclusions were

¹⁶ Krąpiec, *O filozofii*, 28.

¹⁷ *Metafizyka od Platona do Hegla (Metaphysics from Plato to Hegel)* (Kraków 2005), 105.

made in a Platonic and neo-Platonic spirit.¹⁸ On the basis of the Aristotelian conception of substance, the Arab philosophers thought that neither a substance understood as a concrete thing, nor a concept (a “second substance”) could be an object of metaphysical knowledge. Only a substance in the sense of an object of definition knowledge (“what a thing was and is”), which comprehends a group of necessary elements that constitute the essence of a thing (a “third nature”) could be an object of metaphysics. Thus the “third nature” is the object of metaphysical knowledge. The third nature is an arrangement of essential-necessary factors that exists separately from concrete things and knowing minds, which means that its way of being is not determined by individuality or by generality. The intellectual knowability of things is decided only by essential-necessary content, which thereby is the reason for the truth of knowledge.¹⁹ The principle of knowability is the “agent intellect” or “active intellect,” which since it is the manifestation of the first intelligence that knows necessary natures in eternal knowledge is separate from the proper human intellect (passive and acquired intellect). The agent intellect makes necessary things accessible to the human intellect, and thereby it makes it possible to reach the very foundations of reality, to things in themselves.²⁰ In this light, even the existence of things appeared as an additional accident because it only performed the function of one of the predicates of an essence. Thereby the logical order also became confused with the metaphysical order.

According to Krąpiec, the next stage in the increased tendency to base philosophical knowledge on structures of thought was medieval essential ontologism, which was a continuation of the main movements of Arab philosophy (esp. Avicenna). Duns Scotus took over the conception of the “three natures” and ordered it according to generality into a definite hierarchy (being—substance—body—animal—man—John), which was not the result of a cognitive abstraction, but was the necessary foundation of reality. Nature in itself is neither general nor individual, since the individualizing factor (*haecceitas*) is what first makes a nature the nature of the concrete thing, and the knowing mind makes it the nature of a general con-

¹⁸ “[P]rimarily, the conception of the emanation of the intelligences from God; . . . the gradation of the intelligences according to perfection; the recognition of the human intellect as the lowers of the intelligences, and so its transcendence, its independence from individuals, and its unity for all human beings” (S. Swieżawski, *Dzieje europejskiej filozofii klasycznej (History of classical European philosophy)* (Warsaw–Wrocław 2000), 547).

¹⁹ Cf. W. Stróżewski, *Ontologia (Ontology)* (Kraków 2003), 138.

²⁰ Krąpiec, *O filozofii*, 52–53.

cept. What is essential in knowledge is that the mind does not start from a concrete thing, but from a common nature on the basis of which it makes a general concept.²¹ In this concept, we also see a confusion of the real order with the logical order. The truth of knowledge is based on the nature of the mind alone that creates the act of knowledge. The real thing only performed the role of a passive object to which the cognitive activity of the mind referred. William Ockham drew radical conclusions from this position.

Ockham said that general concepts do not have any real foundation in things, and therefore they are nothing other than conventional signs, and the only “place” where they exist is the mind. This is because in things there is nothing that would be general, and so generality cannot be the result of a copying or reproduction of reality, but only of mental processes governed by the rules of logic. For this reason as well, necessity does not have an ontological character, but only a logical character.²² The result of this conclusion was that only a mental status was attributed to all forms of relations, both in things themselves, and between things. The most important effect in its consequences of this was that the principle of causality was called into question.²³

Francis Suarez continued this line of thought. Suarez concentrated his philosophy on the analysis of being’s essence and believed that in the framework of that analysis he could express the whole of being. He apprehended essence in the concept of being, and he attributed to this concept a subjective or an objective form. The subjective form concerns the act of thought through which the intellect apprehends a thing, and in the objective form it is a question of the content of the thing known in a subjective concept. This solution led to the rise of “representationism,” which was the most typical approach to human knowledge in the modern epoch, and consisted in this: in the act of knowledge we do not know the thing itself di-

²¹ M. A. Krąpiec, *Byt i istota (Being and essence)* (Lublin 1994), 182.

²² P. Prechtł, *Wprowadzenie do filozofii języka (An introduction to the philosophy of language)*, Polish trans. J. Brehmer (Kraków 2007), 39.

²³ D. Hume finally questioned the principle of causality. Hume said that the causal connection that our mind chooses is only the result of associations resulting from the habit of transferring the occurrence of certain facts from one object to others. Kant, when he tried to rescue causality, moved causality to the plain of the categories of the mind, which *de facto* robbed causality of any objective foundations. Cf. Krąpiec, *Poznawać czy myśleć*, 284.

rectly, but we know only a cognitive form that mediates between the thing and the mind.²⁴

Descartes radicalized Suarez's position and gave the status of objectivity to the cognitive data of the subjective concept. As a result, the ideas—thoughts of the intellect became the only object of intellectual knowledge. The value of knowledge was dependant upon the clarity and distinctness of those data. In this way, as Krapiec remarks, there was a complete separation of human knowledge and reality because the ideas contained in the mind were the only actual object of knowledge.²⁵ A new type of philosophy, which would dominated modern times, often called the “philosophy of the subject” or the “philosophy of consciousness” arose on the basis of this solution. This is because it was a philosophy completely based on human cognitive acts, or more precisely, it was a philosophy that was the result of reflection on our own cognitive acts.²⁶

Unlike realistic philosophy, which starts from wonder caused by the external world, this type of philosophy most often starts from methodical doubt, which is an operation that is limited to thought alone.²⁷ In it the critique of knowledge, which investigates the conditions of valuable knowledge, plays the dominant role. Reflection (thinking) is the main cognitive operation. Reflection encloses knowledge within consciousness. This approach took away from knowledge the intersubjective controllability that would appeal to real things external to consciousness. The assertion of the truth of a judgement, on account of the lack of any possibility to verify its conformity with a thing, ultimately had to be based on an act of the will that recognizes or did not recognize a particular judgement.

Later modern philosophy as a whole could not deal with the problem of representationism. Leibniz first asserted that an idea was not identi-

²⁴ It should be emphasized that in Suarez's conception, a subjective concept (*species impressa*) is really different from an objective concept (*species expressa*). Representationism occurs through a movement of the mind, the efficient cause of which is the *species impressa*, which causes an intentional representation. Cf. W. N. Neidl, *Die Realitätsbegriff des Franz Suarez nach den Disputationes Metaphysicae* (München 1966), 27–28.

²⁵ Krapiec, *O rozumienie filozofii*, 76.

²⁶ “[T]he starting point for the entire epistemological problematic was the psyche—as the proper psyche of the object. Not only in Descartes' rationalism, but also in Locke's empiricism, the significance of priority was given to one's own psyche . . . The modern theory of knowledge here is the concealed foundation of methodical solipsism” (G. Gottfried, *Teoria poznania od Kartezjusza do Wittgensteina* (*The theory of knowledge from Descartes to Wittgenstein*), Polish trans. T. Kubalica (Kraków 2007), 144).

²⁷ *Id.*, 20.

cal to an act of thought. He regarded the act of thought only as a disposition as such to become aware of what is really innate to the knowing subject, but which is given unclearly. This disposition is found beyond all perception, and so it is found outside of any reception of data “from the outside.” It follows from this that conceptions and principles exist in the mind in the manner of apperception that provides evidence that the mind is an active faculty that enables the human spirit to live independently.²⁸

I. Kant contributed in large measure to the further subjectivization of knowledge. Krąpiec believes that Kant reduced reality to the mental explanation of reality. In this approach, all reality is contained in the act of thinking; the act of thinking is the result of a synthesis of categories and cognitive forms that exist *a priori* in the knowing mind, along with given impressions; thereby the thinking subject gives meaning to reality. Thereby all the rationality of knowledge is reduced to the realm of consciousness. One consequence of this was that the fact of the objectivity of knowledge was identified with reality that is independent of knowledge.²⁹ This provided the foundation for later phenomenological considerations in which thought was regarded as a thing in itself. Since thought has an intentional nature, this proposal was supposed to resolve the problem of opposition between knowledge and reality, since intentional being makes a synthesis of thought and reality. The analysis of thought was supposed to lead to the discovery of the reason of being. As Krąpiec notes, for this reason Heidegger understood being “‘as be-ing’ in the subject of thought, thought that is extracted from the contents of the imagination of what exists.”³⁰ In this light, “be-ing” appears only to *Dasein* (to man), receiving the form of *Seiende*, because only man is a subject capable of thinking about what exists. The imagination is the source of this thought. The imagination determines and defines *Seiende*. In this way, the essence of being is reduced to the constitution of *Dasein*, because the world is only that which appears in the thinking of *Dasein*.

The most destructive consequence of the idea that thought was prior to knowledge was the subjectivization of knowledge. The subjectivization of knowledge, in its most extreme form, is the creation by the knowing subject of an object of knowledge, along with that object’s existence. In

²⁸ Krąpiec, *O filozofii*, 64.

²⁹ Cf. *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii (Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*, vol. 7 (Lublin 2006), 93.

³⁰ Krąpiec, *O filozofii*, 69.

knowledge, thus understood, no intersubjective verifiability of the known being was possible, because each subject creates an object of knowledge in his own way.³¹ Krąpiec remarks that such an approach “destroys the very meaning of knowledge, which precisely is the understanding of reality, and not performing operations on known contents expressed in the images of the imagination and in conceptual signs.”³² This happens because such operations are *de facto* an imposition of a special network of abstract concepts on reality; reality in this way is rationalized on the basis of thinking that is constructed *a priori*. Meanwhile, according to Krąpiec, “abstract-logical and *a priori* constructions can only be myths or a mythical way of knowing.” History knows many such “failed attempts to create a new ideal world given to ‘thinkers’ to rule, attempts that make man happy by methodologically correct ideological thought far from the toil of knowing the world of really existing things and persons.”³³ By basing philosophy on thought, philosophy is made into ontology; ontology sees its object in an abstract concept of being in which real being appears only as one of the modes of existence. For the correctness of philosophical thought, the laws of logic are sufficient by themselves, because the laws of logic guarantee non-contradiction.³⁴ As a result, justifying thought by referring to things is replaced by logical and methodological reasons. It is not important whether thinking is the result of knowledge of the real world, but what is important is what sort of laws rule it and what sort of ways of thinking are possible. In the modern epoch, “thinking about being” supplanted realistic metaphysics and became the foundation of philosophical knowledge. Meanwhile, as Krąpiec states, “true knowledge is born in philosophy as metaphysics, and not as ontology as a cognitive pseudo-philosophical mythology, the mother of ingenious errors that strike at really existing man, when he regards mythology (ontology) as metaphysics and philosophy.”³⁵

³¹ “[T]he world of consciousness and of conscious experiences became an object of ‘philosophical’ analyses, of the construction of theories that were unverifiable by any reference to the reality of really existing beings” (Id., 83).

³² Id., 71.

³³ Id., 83.

³⁴ “However by logic we can never prove the truth of our knowledge of the world. Logic can only stand guard over the truth of our thinking, but it can never prove anything in relation to the real object of our human knowledge” (Krąpiec, *Poznawać czy myśleć*, 244).

³⁵ Krąpiec, *O filozofii*, 86.

Realistic Knowledge

Realism in philosophy relies, among other things, on the fact that operations of thought are regarded as a secondary phase of the process of knowing. An idea and the content of an idea are constructs of the human reason that arise in the process of knowing the really existing; the reason apprehends the wealth of content of really existing things only partially and in some aspects. Thus the concepts that are produced are not an object of knowledge, but are signs of things themselves, and as a result they are a mode of knowing the things.³⁶ Aristotle began this conception of knowledge. In light of this conception, the human intellect is a “blank slate,” while all the contents of knowledge are from really existing things. The conception of the intellect that Aristotle proposed excluded any sort of apriorism with respect to acts of knowledge, since consciousness is made only by acts of knowledge.

The process of knowledge begins from sensory impressions (at first, these are acts of the external senses, then of the internal senses), and on the basis of these impressions, acts of intellectual knowledge arise; these acts apprehend the object “cognitively and by reasoning” in concepts and judgements, and consider the object in reflection and reasoning. Such knowledge is the process of the interiorization of the really existing object; the object is “impressed” into the knowing subject, causing the production of an image-sign (a mental image); on the basis of that image-sign, the intellect formulates a concept, which is a reflection of the content of a real object.³⁷ The content apprehended in this way is not, of course, equal to the content of the thing itself, not only on account of the fragmentary and aspective character of the intellectual apprehension, but also on account of the fact that the thing’s real existence has been left to the side; that exist-

³⁶ “Concepts as produced signs are, as it were, a pair of glasses that increases our aspective vision of the known thing, but they are not the object itself of knowledge in our acts of spontaneous knowledge. The identity of the content of a thing apprehended in a concept and of that content as really existing in a real being is only aspective, and from the side of the concept alone, not from the side of the thing” (Id., 16).

³⁷ “The thing itself is the object of knowledge (understanding), and a ‘generality’ of the thing, which is only a sign-based mode of knowledge. However, in reflected knowledge we can objectify this mode of our knowledge and make it precisely an object of reflected knowledge. This happens because when we know we organize in ourselves out of our acts that know, a ‘transparent intermediary’ as a selective sign (selective with respect to things), through which as through eyeglasses we can know and understand things” (Krapiec, *Poznawać czy myśleć*, 296).

tence is a simple act that is not subject to conceptualization. Thus we can say that from the side of the concept, the content contained in the concept is identical with the content of the real object, while from the side of the content of the thing itself, identity does not occur, since the real thing is infinitely richer than the intellectual apprehension of it. On this account, conceptual knowledge must be completed by judgemental knowledge, since only judgemental knowledge, according to Krapiec, makes it possible to apprehend a thing's act of existence (in existential judgements), and to apprehend the arrangement or system of the thing's properties which make up the created concept (in subject-predicate judgements). Because of this, there is a 'connection' of the cognitive apprehension with the known thing, since "the thing's content represented in the concept indicates what in the thing itself has been perceived and apprehended cognitively."³⁸

This means that the formulated concept cannot be treated as an object of knowledge, but only as an instrument by which the factors that constitute a real being's content are known. The thing's content apprehended in this way can be preserved in the memory, made precise in further acts of knowledge, or subjected to reflection. However, it must be a previously known content. Acts of reasoning or reflection are not spontaneous knowledge of really existing things, but they are operations based on cognitively apprehended contents of a really existing being.³⁹ Operations on contents separated from real things are more "thinking" than they are the actual act of knowing things, hence they should be qualified as belonging to the realm of "art," not to the realm of philosophical knowledge. Although they are rational operations, it is only the rationality of the thinking subject and of the laws of logic, as a result of which the operations mentioned above do not go beyond the sphere of consciousness.⁴⁰ If in their framework, explanations and rational justifications occur, in this it is a question only of rea-

³⁸ Krapiec, *O filozofii*, 80.

³⁹ Id., 81: "Reflected knowledge is not natural knowledge of a thing itself, but it is knowledge of the knowledge of a thing in an apprehended and produced image-sign of a thing, which represents a being's real content . . . reflective knowledge occurs through an idea and analysis apprehended from the content of a thing, which by the very fact that the content is depicted is already separated from the content of the really existing being."

⁴⁰ Id., 85: "[T]he loss of real contact with reality and the cognitive turn, not to really existing being, but to its image-sign, as the intentional representation of a being, is the first separation from the truth of knowledge, truth that is accessible, verifiable, intersubjectively meaningful, and it is a situation of being closed in the trap of reflection in the field of consciousness. The subjectivization of philosophy, which is typical of 'thought' alone, became a chronic illness and deformation of philosophy."

sons concerning the field of thing (*ratio mentis*), and so, it is a question of logical or psychological reasons. However, this does not concern the rationality of being as such that would allow us to understand and explain being.

Basing human knowledge on really existing things guaranteed cognitive realism and intersubjective verifiability. Really existing things, that is, independently existing substances, were the object of philosophical knowledge. The main type of philosophical knowledge—metaphysical knowledge—had the task of investigating the essential properties of substances, the fundamental compositions, and the causes of generation and action. The search in things themselves for necessary factors that would explain the state of affairs such as it found is directed by the question “why?” which thereby becomes the leading scientific question, the question, in other words, that creates scientific knowledge. This question protects philosophical knowledge from becoming separated from real things, and from being limited to a description of the process of knowledge alone, or the logical mode of reasoning, as takes place in the case of the other scientific or science-forming question “how?”. To understand things as profoundly and legibly as possible is the task of real and verifiable knowledge. Metaphysics, which works to discover the ultimate reasons of being for known things, and which explains why things are such and not otherwise, reasons without which knowledge would be exposed to insurmountable errors and would have no purpose, provides such knowledge.⁴¹

St. Thomas Aquinas took over and completed the Aristotelian conception of knowledge. Starting from common-sense knowledge, Thomas arrived at the discovery of the most important principle of his own conception of knowledge. That principle states that we should not seek the fundamental reason for reality in aspects of content, but in their act of existence.⁴² A content of being without an act of existence is not a real content,

⁴¹ *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii (Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*, vol. 7 (Lublin 2006), 92–93.

⁴² Aristotle did not concern himself with the problem of the existence as such of things, and in that he was in conformity with the entire Greek philosophical tradition. Even when he distinguished between the functions of the propositional copular ‘is’ he did not take the existential meaning under consideration. Cf. C. H. Kahn, *Język i ontologia (Language and ontology)*, Polish trans. B. Żukowski (Kęty 2008), 63: “The theory of predication is thus supposed to absorb the idea of existence, and the expression of this idea in language is supposed to occur with the help of joining applications of the verb . . . for both Aristotle and Plato, existence is *einai ti*, to be this or that, to be something definite.”

hence existence is the original condition for all knowledge. On this account, Krąpiec remarks: "The affirmation of existence is the threshold of our cognition process of the world-being, it is the cognitive reason of being for knowledge itself."⁴³ Since existence in real things is unrepeatable (there is no common or shared existence), there is also no real common or shared content. The common elements of content are only the result of the work of the intellect, which "separates" them from things in the process of abstraction and apprehends them in a general concept. The metaphysical knowledge of things themselves can only have an analogical character that allows us to apprehend reality in its most important constitutive factors: essence and existence.⁴⁴

Krąpiec thought that St. Thomas Aquinas was the only thinker who saw in actual and real existence the ultimate reason of being. The recognition of the leading role of existence allowed him to discover the ultimate reason for the existence of the world, that is, the Absolute Being. At the same time, it made it possible for him to describe the nature of this Being; that nature is "Pure Existence." Since the connection of the Absolute with the world "begins" from the most perfect factor of being—existence, it will also permeate the other planes or levels that determine being. In this way, St. Thomas rationally justified the world's rationality and teleology. Things can be known intellectually and truly because the rationality and finality, or teleology, as realizations of the ideas of the Divine Intellect, were contained in things by the act of creation.⁴⁵

Because of the perception of the role of existence in being, it was possible to resolve the problem of the relation of the real object of knowledge to the contents of cognitive apprehensions. This is one of the key moments of human knowledge. The objectification of the concept leads to subjectivization, and to the separation of knowledge from things, and another result is that everything that is knowledge becomes true.⁴⁶ Mean-

⁴³ Krąpiec, *Poznawać czy myśleć*, 261.

⁴⁴ Cf. M. A. Krąpiec, *Struktura bytu (Structure of being)* (Lublin 1995), 286f.

⁴⁵ Krąpiec, *O filozofii*, 41.

⁴⁶ This problem clearly appears already in Plato's *Cratylus* where the question of the correctness of language was raised. Plato presents two extreme positions: one position holds that each thing possesses by nature a true name, while the other position is the belief in the conventional character of language. The weakness of the first position is that it is difficult to show in what way the author of concepts would have acquired the knowledge of reality to make concepts on the basis of reality, since reality is known through concepts. The second position, on the other hand, would lead to the situation that what appeared to someone as true would pass for true. Cf. Precht, *Wprowadzenie do filozofii języka*, 13–14.

while, concepts make it possible to know an object, but they are not the known object in natural human knowledge.⁴⁷ Therefore the cognitive results depend on a cognitive effort, not on something that is prepared and given to an immediate viewing. Only in a concept can contents be subjected to reflection at a further stage of knowledge. The solution of the problem of the relation of concepts to the known object became possible by applying a new method of philosophical knowledge, which is metaphysical separation; by metaphysical separation a discernment (a separation, but not a separation of the sort that occurs in abstraction) is made of the factors of being without which a being could not exist.⁴⁸ Such factors have a necessary and general (transcendental) character and cannot be cognitively “separated” from being. The foundation of our knowledge of them are judgemental apprehensions that directly refer to the existing thing without any intermediary or medium. Thereby metaphysical knowledge concerns real being and cannot be reduced to an analysis of explanation of concepts, as is the case when only the method of abstraction is used, which does not reach real things but halts at intermediaries (concepts).⁴⁹

Since human knowledge is always objectified, so also the thinking that composes human knowledge will have its object. That object can be the content as such of thought or the content of a really existing thing. However, the objectivity as such of knowledge, as Krąpiec remarks, does not constitute the realism of knowledge, because the ultimate reason for knowledge is the really existing being. Thus the objectivity of knowledge is constituted by all the verifiable acts of the knowledge of real being.⁵⁰ The fact that a being is real is not determined by its content alone, but by real existence, since a really existing concrete content is a being. Therefore

⁴⁷ “It should be said that intellectual-cognitive images are to the intellect as that through which the intellect knows” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, I, 76, 2).

⁴⁸ Cf. *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, vol. 7, 111–112. For further information, cf. A. Maryniarczyk, *Metoda metafizyki realistycznej (The method of realistic metaphysics)* (Lublin 2005).

⁴⁹ “Metaphysical knowledge (based on abstraction) really becomes the knowing of the general essences of things (and not of individual things). Moreover, in the process of further particularization, this knowledge will be further and further from the concrete thing, and it will focus on an analysis of concepts and operations on abstractions” (A. Maryniarczyk, “Spór o przedmiot metafizyki realistycznej” (“Controversy over the object of realistic metaphysics”), in *Zadania współczesnej metafizyki. Metafizyka w filozofii (Tasks of contemporary metaphysics. Metaphysics in philosophy)*, ed. A. Maryniarczyk, K. Stępień (Lublin 2004), 75).

⁵⁰ Krąpiec, *O filozofii*, 69f.

the role of existence in knowing things is so important, because it is existence that causes knowledge to refer to real things and not to abstractions that exist in the mind. For this reason, the first phase of knowledge has a transcendental character, because it encompasses the universal properties of being, on the basis of which the transcendental concepts are formulated; the transcendental concepts are the most elementary “eyeglasses” through which man sees reality. Knowledge through the transcendentals is not separated from the concrete thing, but it allows us to see in the concrete thing the universal properties that belong in a necessary but analogical way to each and every being. Thus the reading of the fact that the existence belongs to something is called “being,” and when something existing is at the same time a determined content, it is called “thing;” again, something that exists in itself and is different from anything else is called “separate,” and something that exists in itself as undivided is called “one.” When the fact is read that something that exists is in a necessary relation to a knowing intellect, then the being is the “truth,” and when it is so related to the will, it is a “good;” when it is so related to the intellect and to the will, it is “beauty.” If, however, the transcendental “concepts” of being are expressed in judgements (the assertion of a necessary state of affairs⁵¹), then they take the form of the principles of knowledge—identity, non-contradiction, the excluded middle, the reason for being, finality, and personal fulfillment.⁵²

Knowledge based on the transcendental properties of being and on the first principles of being and knowledge leads to the understanding of reality through the discovery of the ultimate reasons that provide a rational justification for the most essential manifestations of mutable being and the dynamic world. Those reasons are the factors discovered in each and every concrete being, factors without which a given universal manifestation of being would not be intelligible, and moreover, that manifestation of being could not exist at all without them. Thus dynamism is explained by the factors of act and potency; material mutability is explained by the factors of substance and accidents; the coming-into-existence of being is explained

⁵¹ “It is the structure of being (not the accidental structure, but the essential structure) that constitutes the ultimate reason for the necessary character of conceptual knowledge and organized rational knowledge . . . not only language or accepted conventions” (Krapiec, *Poznawać czy myśleć*, 302).

⁵² For more extensive information, cf. A. Maryniarczyk, *Zeszyty z metafizyki IV. Racjonalność i celowość świata osób i rzeczy* (*Notesbooks on Metaphysics IV. Rationality and finality of the world of persons and things*) (Lublin 2000).

by the factors of essence and existence. Transcendental properties, first principles, and compositions within being do not belong to beings in a univocal way, but they are realized analogically in each instance of being.⁵³ Therefore, in order to understand reality, it is necessary to appeal to the analogy of being and the analogy of knowledge whereby in the infinite variety and plurality of beings we can see factors without which being itself and the essential manifestations of being would not be intelligible. This is because reality, as Krapiec remarks, is not known

as in physics by observation and different forms of measurement, but by intersubjective cognitive forms, which are the most primary, 'divide being from non-being in knowledge,' and indicate a factor (or factors) the negation of which is an absurdity or contradiction, or consequently leads to cognitive contradiction.⁵⁴

Only cognitive realism allows us to preserve the objective aim of philosophy, which is the wisdom-oriented understanding of reality. The choice of the way to acquire knowledge of this reality determine what sort of philosophy it will be. Support for the priority of knowledge over thought guarantees that it will be a philosophy open to the wealth of reality, and a philosophy that takes into account the laws that govern this reality. The really existing upon which the truth of knowledge will depend will be the object measure of knowledge. Existing things are the only source and measure of cognitive truth. The objectivity of knowledge follows from the fact that knowledge possesses

a really existing object as knowable and given to many persons in knowledge, as verifiable for many when they compare features apprehended in knowledge with the very content of the really existing being. Really existing and known objects are the same objects before they are known and after they are known, always constituting a reference for the verification of the known thing.⁵⁵

⁵³ "Analogy as the way of the real and individual being of concrete things that are internally composed of real factors and correlates of one and the same structure of being indicates the relations within being and between beings that form the analogy of being. The analogy of being is the foundation for the analogy of knowledge and predication in realistic knowledge" (Krapiec, *O filozofii*, 94).

⁵⁴ Id., 89.

⁵⁵ Id., 77–78.

The Absolute Being in turn will be the ultimate guarantee for the measure contained in things; the Absolute Being imparts existence to every being, and thereby makes being intelligible, that is, capable of being known.⁵⁶

The emphasis on the role of knowledge in philosophy must always preserve its objective character, because otherwise, when the cognitive faculties are made the starting point of the cognitive process, the danger that knowledge will be separated from the real world can appear, and thereby that knowledge will be reduced to mental processes alone.⁵⁷ Meanwhile the task of philosophy is not “to think about the world,” but to know and understand the world within possible and verifiable limits.⁵⁸ Therefore the way of philosophical knowledge is developed in metaphysics; metaphysics as classically understood is the leading type of human rational knowledge, because real being is the object of metaphysics. For this reason, Krąpiec holds that the other domains of philosophy should borrow the metaphysical mode of knowledge, since it alone is verifiable by reality itself. This means that the fundamental cognitive method in the other sections of philosophy must also be the metaphysical method if they are to retain the character of philosophical knowledge that concerns the understanding of being as existing.⁵⁹ This is because all knowledge that claims to be philosophical knowledge must start from the knowledge of really existing being; really existing being in subsequent stages of knowledge is apprehended in more and more detail and with increasing

⁵⁶ “Sic ergo intellectus divinus est ut mensura prima, non mensurata; res autem est mensura secunda, mensurata; intellectus autem noster est mensuratus et non mensurans” (Thomae Aquinatae, *In Libros Sententiarum I*, 19, 5, 2).

⁵⁷ Krąpiec, *Poznawać czy myśleć*, 245: “Knowing reality itself (or being), only secondarily do we know the act itself of intellectual knowledge whereby we know the object (*secundario cognoscitur ipse actus, que cognoscitur ipse intellectus*), and finally through that act of intellectual knowledge we arrive at knowledge of the source of that knowledge, which is the intellect itself (*et per actum cognoscitur ipse intellectus*).” Cf. Tomasz z Akwinu, *Suma teologiczna*, I, 5, 2.

⁵⁸ “The temptation of a purely intellectual cognitive life was always and is strong among many thinkers, since it makes man independent of sensory experiences, from empirical knowledge, and it gives illusions of precision of thought” (Krąpiec, *Poznawać czy myśleć*, 241).

⁵⁹ In the metaphysical method, the focus is mainly brought into a question of decontradictifying explanation, which consist in showing a factor of being such that its negation would mean either the negation of the very fact that is being explained, or the recognition of it as contradictory or inexplicable in itself. Cf. M. A. Krąpiec, *Metafizyka (Metaphysics)* (Lublin 1985), 64f (*Metaphysics. An Outline of the History of Being*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York, 1991), 43f).

precision, beginning from the universal properties and principles, followed by its structure and categorical properties, and then individual features and actions. For this reason it is clear for Krąpiec that “in the process of knowledge, the loss of contact with real reality, and the turn to the image-sign of a thing as the thing’s intentional representation is a manifestation of a separation from the truth of knowledge accessible to the intellect.”⁶⁰

Conclusion

On the basis of the realistic knowledge as outlined above, we can draw out certain features of the kind of philosophy that uses this type of knowledge; Fr. Krąpiec most often called it realistic philosophy. It is first of all a question of a kind of philosophy that takes into account the wealth of the real world and sees the basic factors that affect man who exists in this world. It is a philosophy that has the purpose of knowing really existing, plural, and varied being; being is rational and thereby knowable to the extent that it exists. It is a kind of philosophy that recognizes man’s cognitive ability, especially the power of the natural sight of the reason, which underlies man’s entire conscious life. It is a philosophy that, in order to understand and explain the most essential dimensions of reality strives to discover the principles without which those dimensions would remain either inexplicable or contradictory in themselves. It is a philosophy that aims at ultimate explanations, that is, explanations that are fully sufficient for a complementary understanding of the world, and in its framework, of man, and above which there is no need to appeal to anything else, to any sort of cognitive *a priori* or to irrational factors. It is a philosophy that understands truth universally; it does not stand in opposition to the truth contained in religion, but strives by the power of the natural human reason to investigate even those truths that concern objects that exceed the human reason, up to the Highest Truth—God. Finally, it is a philosophy that has a wisdom-oriented or sapiential character, which means that the knowledge formulated in its framework cannot be reduced to theoretical ends alone, but always has in view practical ends as well.

A philosophy based on “thinking about being” cannot meet such conditions. The interest of that sort of philosophy is not focused on real things, but on the modes, possibilities, or conditions of our knowledge of them. In such a philosophy, the knowing mind and the laws of logic are the

⁶⁰ Id., *O filozofii*, 96.

source and measure of the rationality of such knowledge. Although in that philosophy the natural light of the human reason, which is connected with the active and the passive aspect of the intellect, does not play any greater role, but the active power itself of the reason, a power connected with the imagination, which forms the field of consciousness, in the bounds of which man's entire cognitive life is enclosed, plays a great role. That philosophy does not strive to decontradictify the essential states of affairs already there, but rather it assumes non-contradiction as the necessary and sufficient condition for valuable knowledge. It is not interested in ultimate explanation, because it always starts from defined assumptions that have the purpose of guaranteeing and maximizing the effectiveness of explanations. Hence also the understanding of the truth will not have a classical character, but only a coherent and pragmatic character. The meaning of such a philosophy for human life will be reduced basically to the expansion of man's domination over the world and so, to the generation of progress in technology, but from the subjective side, it will be reduced only to the perfection of the laws of thinking and imagination. Since it is universally known that the spheres mentioned are present in the domain of the particular and formal sciences, philosophy thus understood basically loses its reason for being.

**TO KNOW OR TO THINK—THE CONTROVERSY OVER
THE UNDERSTANDING OF PHILOSOPHICAL KNOWLEDGE
IN THE LIGHT OF THE STUDIES OF MIECZYŚLAW A. KRĄPIEC**

SUMMARY

The article concentrates on the specificity of philosophical cognition. Referring to Mieczysław A. Krąpiec's study, the author proves that the process of thinking is not to be necessarily identified with the process of cognition, as in fact the former is merely a secondary phase of the latter. When identified with thinking, the philosophical cognition would undermine the very sense of cognition, which means the understanding of reality. When based on thinking alone, philosophy does not grasp real things, but operates with abstracts of being and being's representations (concepts). As for the correctness of philosophical thinking the laws of logic, with ensuring non-contradictory operations, are sufficient enough. However, any knowledge that aspires to be philosophical has to start from really existing beings. In the next phases of cognition, such beings are grasped more and more particularly and precisely—starting from their transcendental properties and principles, then their structure and categorial properties, and finally their individual characteristics and actions. The very first act of cognition is directed to real beings, which are immediately grasped in respect of their existence and real

essence. The second act of cognition deals with signs. The precedence of being in human cognition makes the philosophy charged not with a task of thinking about the world, but with the task of knowing and understanding it within possible and verifiable limits. Therefore, according to Krapiec, the very first philosophical discipline is metaphysics, which has real beings as its object. Thus, philosophical cognition should preserve its objective character, as this is the only way to guarantee its realism.

KEYWORDS: thinking, cognition, philosophy, knowledge, reality, abstract, sign, understanding, metaphysics, realism, Mieczysław A. Krapiec.