

Władysław Stróżewski

Existence, Sense and Values.

Essays in Metaphysics and Phenomenology

**Polish Contemporary Philosophy and
Philosophical Humanities**

Edited by Jan Hartman

Volume 4



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Contents

Foreword.....	7
Source Note.....	11

Part I

Foundations and Methods	13
The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics	15
Metaphysics as a Science.....	35
Ontology, Metaphysics, Dialectics	63
Phenomenology and Dialectics.....	87

Part II

Existence and Experience	95
Three Conceptions of Existence	97
What is Existence?.....	115
Experience of Being – Experience of Existence.....	131
Three Notions of Non-Being	143
Experience and Interpretation.....	149

Part III

Towards a Theory of Values	167
On the Concepts of Beauty	169
Aesthetic and Super-aesthetic Values.....	189
On the Truthfulness of the Work of Art	209
Transcendentals and Values.....	229

Part IV

Metaphysics of Human Being	243
Man as <i>Ἀρχή</i>	245
On the Specific Mode of Human Existence.....	247
Axiological Structure of Human Being	257
Freedom and Value	273
Rationalism and Metarationalism	281

Foreword

Władysław Antoni Stróżewski (born 08.06.1933, in Krotoszyn, in west-central Poland) belongs to the most intriguing and fascinating contemporary Polish philosophers. The scope of his interests as well as the depth of his phenomenological insights into crucial philosophical problems make his ideas remarkable and truly worthy of consideration. Moreover, he seems to be successful in merging different methods of doing philosophy, putting together scholastic deductive reasoning with dialectics on the one hand, and descriptive phenomenology with linguistic analysis on the other. This attitude gives him a unique possibility to advance and deepen the main problems of philosophy through his analyses of the fundamental role of the problem of existence.

Władysław Stróżewski is definitely a philosopher of existence, which means that he wishes to know what the “existential dimension” of being consists in. Thus in his writings on existence he tries to elaborate on both its experiential mode (how we experience it) and its conceptual mode (ways of thinking and speaking on existence). He convincingly argues that existence has many facets and all its aspects determine our cognitive and volitional life. In addition, he shows that the problem of existence is both the starting point of philosophical inquiry and its very limit beyond which there is no discursive or positive thinking. In Stróżewski’s understanding the specificity of existence as a metaphysical issue lies in the fact that it combines at once positive and negative dimensions. Negative dimensions emerge from our experience whereas the positive dimensions lead us to the problem of values and, consequently, that of human nature.

Inquiries into values, into their phenomenological and ontological status, take up a lot of space on Stróżewski’s philosophical agenda. It is important to say that he treats values not only as phenomena mutually related to existence, but also as primarily metaphysical objects. It gives him an opportunity to see them as objective and independent from human action on the one hand, and as normative and rule-giving on the other. Stróżewski’s axiology combines aesthetic and ethical values. Beauty, which is one of the main subject of interest of Stróżewski’s investigations, is not only an aesthetic value but also a fundamentally ethical one. This is an echo of the scholastics with their rich and fruitful theory of transcendentals which sketches a picture of the metaphysical unity of being, truth, and goodness, along with beauty.

Values and human nature go hand in hand. That is why Stróżewski is deeply interested in some anthropological issues. He focuses on what he calls the 'axiological structure of a human being' and that is his own, original and very promising idea that allows us to see how it is possible that human beings are profoundly capable of realizing the highest of values and at the same time of doing real evil and thus actualizing that most scandalous dimension of being. In thinking about human nature Stróżewski endeavours to combine the traditional picture of man known from Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy with the phenomenological ideas rooted in the works of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler and Roman Ingarden. This dialectics brings him to a view that humans are meant to be rational, even though sometimes the effects of their actions are far from what we understand as rationality.

It remains to be said that Władysław Stróżewski's philosophy is already well-established in history of philosophy. This is due to his unique but very effective method of exploring issues: he starts with a problem he is interested in, then he puts forward some well-known historical solutions to the aforementioned problem, and only afterward does he clarify it step by step through systematic analyses of mostly phenomenological nature. Another exceptional and distinctive aspect of Stróżewski's approach must be defined in terms of the connections he makes between poetry and philosophy. In the best possible manner, he seeks out philosophical ideas in examples of great poetry. For readers from the Anglo-Saxon part of the world it may come as a surprise, but it must be kept in mind that he does not do philosophy *as* poetry; what he does, above all, is underline that poetry touches the same problems as philosophy, and (what may be controversial) that from time to time it actually gives a much better insight into what really matters.

This volume puts together a few papers representative of Stróżewski's philosophy; they come from different periods of his rich intellectual life, which is still in full swing and will hopefully provide us with new works. The three main sections of the book refer to the three main areas that are distinctive for Stróżewski's thought: his historical, metaphysical, and phenomenological background (Part I: Foundations and Methods), then his elaborative, many-faceted investigations into the nature of existence (Part II: Existence and Experience), next his decent work on the aesthetic values and their sources (Part III: Towards a Theory of Values), and, finally, his inquiries into the intimate relationship between values and human nature (Part IV: Metaphysics of Human Being).

I would like to express my deep gratitude to all the individuals and institutions taking part in this project. First of all I would like to say thank you to Ms. Ewa Klimontowicz and Ms. Klementyna Chrzanowska for their outstanding job in translating and editing the English versions of most papers published in this volume. I would also like to express my gratitude to Ms. Maja Kittel, Mr. Karol Kleczka, Mr. Stanisław Ruczaj, and Mr. Błażej Skrzypulec. All of them helped me in many ways.

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Sebastian Tomasz Kołodziejczyk

Source Note

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2. Metaphysics as a Science, in: *Knowledge and Sciences in Mediaeval Philosophy. Proceedings of the Eight International Congress of Mediaeval Philosophy*, Vol. I, eds. Monika Asztalos, John E. Murdoch, Ilka Niiniluoto, Helsinki: Acta Philosophica Fennica, Vol. 48 (1990), pp. 128-157.
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4. Phenomenology and Dialectics, *Dialectics and Humanism*, Vol. IV, No. 4 (17), pp. 129-135.
5. Three Conceptions of Existence [Trzy koncepcje istnienia], *Przegląd Tomistyczny*, Vol. III, 1987, pp. 4-20.
6. What is Existence? [Czym jest istnienie?], in: *Nauka, religia, dzieje. IX Seminarium w Castel Gandolfo, 5-7 Sierpnia 1997*, ed. Jerzy A. Janik, Kraków 1998, pp. 103-122.
7. Experience of Being – Experience of Existence, *Kwartalnik Filozoficzny*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1, 1996, pp. 19-30.
8. Three Notions of Non-Being, *Reports on Philosophy*, No. 3, 1978, pp. 47-52.
9. Experience and Interpretation, unpublished.
10. On the Concepts of Beauty [O pojęciach piękna], *Znak*, 7/8 (61/62), 1959, pp. 866-887 and 1077-1079.
11. Aesthetic and Super-aesthetic Values [Wartości estetyczne i nadestetyczne], in: *O wartościowaniu w badaniach literackich*, Lublin 1986, pp. 35-56.
12. On the Truthfulness of the Work of Art, *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. XXXV, No. 2, 1981, pp. 251-273.
13. Transcendentals and Values, *The New Scholasticism*, Vol. LVIII, 2, 1984, pp. 187-206.
14. Man as APEE, *Reports on Philosophy*, 8, 1984, pp. 73-75.
15. On the Specific Mode of Existence of Human Being [O swoistości sposobu istnienia człowieka], in: *Roman Ingarden a filozofia naszego czasu*, ed. Adam Węgrzecki, Kraków 1995, pp. 123-132.
16. Axiological Structure of Human Being [Original title: Human Being and Values], *Polish Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. I, No. 2, 2007, pp. 119-134.

17. Freedom and Value, in: *Freedom and Contemporary Culture*, Lublin 1998, pp. 217-224.
18. Rationalism and Metarationalism [Racjonalizm i metaracjonalizm, *Studia Filozoficzne* 5-6 (210-211), 1983, pp. 39-56], English version, in *Dialectics and Humanism*, 2, 1984, pp. 299-317.

Part I

Foundations and Methods

The Fundamental Question of Metaphysics

Various kinds of questions come up in science. Particular types of questions might prevail in particular academic disciplines. We shall not, however, deal with the general theory of questions here.¹ We shall only point out certain issues that may prove important for our investigations.

Scientific methodology distinguishes two basic groups of questions: 1. closed-ended questions or, in Roman Ingarden's terminology, existential questions requiring inversion, and 2. open-ended questions or, in the same terminology, factual questions starting with the worlds like, e.g., "what," "when," etc.² The first type of questions can be answered in two ways only: in the affirmative or in the negative ("yes" or "no"). This type of answers would be nonsensical if given in response to the questions of the second type: the answers to these questions must have the form of a sentence revealing exactly what is unknown in the question itself. In other words – a sentence obtained by way of substituting a constant for the variable in the sentential function corresponding to the interrogative sentence and determining the scheme of the answer.³ There may be numerous answers to this kind of question.

Every question contains some known element which it assumes, and some unknown element which it asks about. A question that would contain unknown elements only would not be possible at all. Obviously, the knowns and the unknowns are different in closed-ended questions and in open-ended ones. However, the so-called known is not always explicated. Sometimes it remains obscure and has to be "worked out" or simply brought out in an expanded version of the question. This hidden known, together with an explicated known, is always found in the question "why?" When we ask, for instance, "Why is this pencil black?" we assume not only that the pencil is black and that there is some reason for this state of affairs – which we are actually asking about – but we also express a supposition grounded in the possibility that it could be a different

1 See R. Ingarden, *Essentiale Fragen. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des Wesens*, Halle 1925; K. Ajdukiewicz, *Zdanie pytalne* [Interrogative Sentences], in: K. Ajdukiewicz, *Język i poznanie. Wybór pism* [Language and Cognition. Selected Works] Vol. 1, Warsaw 1960, pp. 78-286; P. Waszczenko, *Przedmiot pytań egzystencjalnych* [The Object of Existential Questions], in: *Szkice filozoficzne. Romanowi Ingardenowi w darze* [Philosophical Sketches. In Tribute to Roman Ingarden], Warsaw 1964, pp. 105-119.

2 R. Ingarden, *Essentiale Fragen... op. cit.*, Chapter 1, §2.

3 See K. Ajdukiewicz, *Zdanie pytalne, op. cit.*, p. 279.

colour. If it turned out that the pencil of necessity had to be black and only black, then the question “Why is it black?” would, in fact, be senseless. This non-explicated known of the question “Why...?” may be involved in formulations of various types. For instance: “Why is this car moving if it could remain still?,” “Why has the soldier left his sentry duty (i.e., he is not standing guard) if, being assigned there, he must perform it?,” “Why hasn’t the train arrived yet, if it is already due?” – etc.

These examples show that:

1. The sentences explicating the hidden known of a question may be of different modalities.
2. When the explicated known of a question is in the form of an affirmative sentence, while unexplicated it is expressed in a negative sentence – and *vice versa*.

To this we may add:

1. If the second factor of the known cannot occur – the “why” question is not possible at all.

We shall illustrate the last statement with the following example: “Why is a dog a dog?” If we wanted to develop it – as we did with the questions cited above – we would have to ask: “Why is a dog a dog if it cannot be (or even is not) a dog?” The self-contradiction of this sentence is obvious.⁴ A sentence expressing the identity of something with itself is self-explanatory. And therefore the state of things it determines does not give grounds for questions about the reason for it.

Thus, it follows that:

1. the reason which we are trying to find to explain something is, of necessity, transcendent, and
2. if in the course of asking the “why” questions we finally reach a kind of object which, being in some respect the reason for others, will make it impossible to ask about the reason for this object itself, then we shall have reached the necessary end of questioning, equal to the answer.

4 It is not possible to ask “Why is a dog a dog?,” but we should not confuse it either with the question about the origin of the dog or with an essential question like “What decides that a dog is a dog (and not merely, e.g. a mammal, a four-legged animal, etc.)?” If this last question could assume the form of a “why” question, then within this type of question we must introduce a clear distinction between essential questions and existential ones. In the former case the interrogative ends when we get to the discovery of the features due to which a given object is this very object, that is, those which decide that a given dog is a dog, and this very dog at that.

Therefore, ultimately we can state that when asking the “why” question we have a disjunction of at least two options, only one of which is actually realized. It is only thanks to the fact that this kind of disjunction occurs that it is possible to ask the question of why, from among the various potentialities, this particular one was actualized. That is: if it was possible that either A or B or C or D could be realized, why was it A that actually came into being? Why does A exist?

However, concluding the necessity of the above mentioned disjunction is not sufficient to justify the “why” question. We have to additionally assume that there exists a rational way of explaining the fact that only one of the possibilities determined by this disjunction was in fact realized. This, in turn, consists in proving either that it was purely random, or that there occurred the necessary and sufficient reasons for this realization. If we agree to the former solution, our investigation is completed.⁵ If we choose the latter solution, which itself is the result of a conviction about a certain determinism, regularity or at least some minimum of order ruling reality, we assume:

1. that those reasons exist,⁶
2. that when “attached” to the realized situation that is being studied, they actually explain it, i.e., that in some particular case there exist specific relations between two states of affairs such that one of them evokes, “supports,” or – most generally – “justifies” the other,⁷
3. that it is possible to reach the ultimately necessary reason, about which it will be impossible to ask a “why” question.⁸

Thus, eventually, apart from the directly given state A, which is the explicated known of the question, and apart from the possibilities mutually exclusive with this state – *non-A* (so, for instance, B, C, D, E), which are usually the non-explicated known of the question, we have to assume the necessary occurrence

5 Assuming a totally random character of what is happening in the world, we cannot explain anything. Although the mere posing of the question “why...?” is possible then, but the only answer to it is agnostic: we do not know.

6 Speaking of reasons we have in mind objective (ontic) reasons and not logical ones.

7 All the time we have in mind here relations of objective and not of logical nature, so when we speak of justification, it should not be understood in the sense of logical justification of, e.g., a corollary through reasoning in a sequence of sentences, but in the sense of actual relations taking place between the states of things determined by those sentences. This interpretation of the word “justification” does not, in my opinion, contradict its etymology.

8 It might seem paradoxical that for an accurate (i.e., making an answer possible) formulation of a “why” question it is necessary to assume the existence of “something” about which this question cannot be asked. Otherwise, we will not avoid infinite regression or a vicious circle that will make an effective answer impossible.

of a state Y that would justify, by entering into a definite relation R with state A, the fact of realization of state A. Moreover, if state Y is not ultimately necessary, it remains in some indirect or direct relation R' with the ultimate, necessary state Z. The character of the relations R, R' as well as of the states Y and Z are the unknown elements of the question "why?"

Each of the factors distinguished here is necessary, but it is only their conjunction that constitutes the sufficient condition for the possibility of asking a "why" question. In accordance with what we have stated before, since A as a whole, or at least in the aspect about whose justification we are asking, does not explain itself, Y and Z have to be, in this particular aspect, transcendent to A.

In turn we must consider what the formal character of the justifying factor should be, as set out by the very question word "why." At first glance it seems that what must be determined is some cause – in particular the efficient or the final cause, as it is literally pointed out in the French *pour-quoi?* or the Polish *dla-czego?* In this sense, we could call our question causative or causal. But let us return to the unbiased intuitions and analyse one more of our previous examples.

Let us ask again "Why is this car moving?" and look through some possible answers to this question. It will turn out that these answers are diverse in character and do not always indicate the cause in the proper sense of this word. For although we can answer: It is moving because certain physico-chemical processes are taking place and bringing about the movement of particular engine parts" or "It is moving because it was sent to bring the guests here," indicating different causes of the car's movement, but we can also state: "It is moving because movement belongs to the essence of the car," thus drawing attention to the essence of the car and its proper functions issuing from this essence.

Therefore, instead of speaking about the cause, it would probably be better to speak of the sufficient reason assumed by the "why" question, which should be expressed in the answer to that question. Obviously, the reason might be identified with one of the causes of the questioned state of affairs, but it may also be a conjunction of several causes, or something that cannot be classified as a cause *sensu stricto*.⁹ However, in order to perform its task it must be sufficient, that is, satisfactory for a complete, adequate explanation of what we are asking about. This means that ultimately it must be such that all further

9 It would require a separate analysis to find whether such a case could be possible if we took into account all four traditional causes listed by Aristotle, namely: material, formal, efficient and final (and also the prior one), but we have no basis to exclude it in advance. For example: we could also ask about the "meaning" of some event, which probably could not be classified as one of the above causes.

questioning about it should become if not impossible, then at least completely useless.

When we transfer the question “why...?” to the area of metaphysics, existence becomes its sole object. But a metaphysical analysis of reality must first of all justify that a question of this kind makes sense at all. This means that it will be necessary to show that the known of the question may include existence. More precisely, at the full expansion of this known, that it may include existence and possible non-existence, i.e., being and non-being. What is at stake here is the essential question regarding the reason for existence. It reads simply: “Why does something exist?” And in one of its expanded forms: “Why is there something rather than nothing?” The first time this question appeared in the form quoted above was most likely in the works of Leibniz, for whom it was an immediate consequence of adopting the principle of sufficient reason. It was then repeated a number of times, most recently by Bergson and Heidegger; in its shortened form we also find it in Roman Ingarden’s *Controversy over the Existence of the World*, where it is mentioned as one of the most typical questions of metaphysics.¹⁰ We shall adopt it in Leibniz’s formulation, though it will later turn out that, as a result of ontological investigations, we will have to adjust it slightly for the field of metaphysics, especially by limiting the possible range of “something.” That assuming our ontological analyses to be correct.

If, however, we want to find out whether this question really is the essential question of metaphysics, we have to take a closer look and make an attempt to analyse those of its elements which determine both its known and unknown. Consequently, we will also show that posing this question is itself justified. However, before we place this question on its proper – as we believe – metaphysical plane, let us ask which of its elements could be justified on a pre-metaphysical plane, i.e., through phenomenology and ontology. We will be able to refer to the results of the investigations carried out within these two disciplines when we enter the domain of metaphysics. The particularly important solutions will be the ontological ones, as they will exclude all the impossibilities in advance and also limit the possible solutions to the problem.

10 G.W. Leibniz, *Teodicy*, I, 44; G.W. Leibniz, *Monadology*, 32; H. Bergson, *L'Évolution Créatrice* in: H. Bergson, *Oeuvres*, Paris 1959, p. 728; M. Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik* in M. Heidegger, *Wegmarken* Frankfurt am Main 1967; R. Ingarden, *Spór o istnienie świata [Controversy over the Existence of the World]* Vol. I, Warsaw 1962, pp. 62-63.

1

Phenomenology asks, first of all, about what is given to us and what it is like.¹¹ The world which we will try to describe as precisely as possible by answering questions such as “What is it like?,” “What is the thing we are experiencing now like?,” etc., will always be conceived as given, and, moreover, given to us in particular, that is, to cognizing subjects with a definite structure and a definite way of experiencing. Obviously, this approach imposes certain limitations. If we want to remain consistently on phenomenological ground, we cannot go beyond what is given, and thus we cannot say anything definite about “the thing as such” – the thing as absolutely free of the fact that it is given to us (in particular, “the thing in itself,” if it indeed turned out that this “thing in itself” does exist). Similarly, we will not know whether reality as it is given to us “truly” exists in the very same way in which we experience it (in particular, as “real”), and not in some other way. It follows from the very nature of “being given” that we must refrain from all speculations and decisions concerning the actual nature and mode of existence of what is given to us, and therefore we have to limit ourselves to reporting about what is “presented” or “revealed” to us, and then to taking it into consideration as such. This aspect of “being given,” as it were, permeates our entire “reality.” To be detached from it is impossible here: everything that we experience, even if it manifests itself as autonomous, real, and “in itself” – is given to us as such. Obviously, in a faithful phenomenological description we must necessarily take into account also this very way of manifesting of the currently studied things, processes, or events, and so we have to say that they manifest themselves as – or simply “are” – real, autonomous, etc. Yet we always have to remember that it is us who are giving this description, which means that it is us who perceive and experience them in this way, that they “are” like this for us.

This, however, does not mean that they depend on us – either in their existence or in their essential or contingent qualifications. For it may turn out that our recognition of them is basically true even if inadequate, and that they really are as we get to know them. Anyway, this is our everyday, common attitude towards them. Since, however, we must not neglect the very moment of “being given,” our every faithful reporting proposition must be “coloured” with

11 As phenomenology I understand here not the philosophical current that arose at the beginning of the 20th century and was started by Husserl, but the separate philosophical discipline discovered by this current, which uses its own method of investigation. For more information on this subject see R. Ingarden, *Dążenia fenomenologów [Phenomenologists' Aspirations]* in: *Z badań nad filozofią współczesną [Studies in Contemporary Philosophy]*, Warsaw 1963.

this moment: “This chair is given to me as an actually existing object, absolutely independently of me,” but, e.g., “The castles in the air I am just imagining are given to me as something fictional that I can annihilate at any moment when I stop imagining it.” If I abstract from this mode of being given, if I state that it is truly so – I shall transgress the limits of a phenomenological description. Therefore, the conviction that things really are as they are given must be, as it were, “suspended.” This does not mean that we are to reject it. It only means that it should be neutralized, so that we are claiming only what we have the right to claim. The phenomenological *ἐποχή* is not an arbitrary limitation imposed in advance to achieve some specific goals, but a postulate coming from the very essence of our experience of reality.

However, since phenomenology “suspends,” as it were, the judgement about the existence of the world, it becomes clear that one cannot pose the fundamental metaphysical question within its framework.¹² Nevertheless, phenomenology does not remain insignificant for this question.

The world, as it is given to us, manifests itself as a whole composed of various kinds of objects, processes, and events that occur within it. All this is given to us as more or less changeable, marked by temporality. Some of the most fundamental data of how we experience what is present to us is the transience, disappearance, and annihilation of particular fragments of the whole, a part of which we feel we are. Everything that surrounds us reveals itself as particularly “fragile”: not only prone to destruction, but “actually: being destroyed or, at the very least, undergoing a change in some respect. The phenomenon of death is particularly expressive here, not only imposing itself in all its brutality on our cognitive faculties, but also experienced in all its tension of helplessness, surprise, responsibility and awe... by us, humans, in the fullness of our being. Within humans, like nowhere else, the awareness and experience of the end, of that definitive and irrevocable end of something that used to be but will never again appear in the same shape as before, occurs in the most acute form. The “transience” of what appears to us as existing, the experience of time within which everything around us changes together with ourselves: this is undoubtedly one of the most essential moments of the “reality” given to us. The

12 And this even if it turned out that in light of the existence of a specific religious phenomenon, phenomenology speaks about God as well. The phenomenological judgement about God is also a “neutralized” judgement. This claim does not exclude, however, the possibility of a religious experience which, marked with the absolute certainty of the existence or even presence of the object of this experience, of its essence does not allow for the reduction, that is, for “neutralizing” the categorically-imperative character of the existence revealing itself here. Whether religious experience possesses this very character or not obviously requires investigation.

discovery of this very trait of this “reality” will prove to be one of those precious achievements that we shall take into account while posing the fundamental metaphysical question. If it turned out, for instance, that reality is in fact truly as it is given to us, or that at least it is such (perhaps analogically) in this one aspect of transience revealed to us in experience, then from this we could gather the data confirming the hidden known of the question, which states that what we are asking about may be different than it is, or may even not be at all. But even if we don’t make this assumption, we nevertheless benefit in that we now know what it means for something to be at some definite time, but cease to be at another time (“in general” or in some aspect), meaning that it is and it is not.

Another achievement of phenomenology of particular importance for us is the discovery of a domain to which *ἐποχή* cannot be applied, because it excludes the very possibility of doubting its existence. This is the domain of what has been termed pure consciousness. We have the right to conclude about it directly that it exists – that is, to issue a true and indubitable existential judgement, even without saying anything about its characteristic mode of existence. Thus we acquire the basis for a positive answer to the first question of metaphysics: whether there is anything at all. However, only more detailed research into the mode of existence of consciousness may lead us to solve the issue of whether we are entitled to ask the question “why does it exist?” about it.¹³

Finally, the third benefit. Phenomenological investigations may be performed in various kinds of attitude. These depend on the types of objects which are given and which, of themselves, demand the right kind of experience: that in which they can manifest themselves most fully (so, for instance, a material object will be given to us in one kind of experience, the value of a piece of art in another, an internal experience of the cognizing object in still another, etc.). But they also depend on the various mindsets of the cognizing subject, that is, e.g., passiveness or activeness, indifference or intense attention, etc. The detection of the most appropriate ways to cognitively approach the object that is given is one of the most important tasks of phenomenology. One of the possible attitudes towards the object of a phenomenological study is the so-called eidetic attitude, which is focused on capturing that which is most important for the

13 With a certain solution it is possible to recognize consciousness as existentially autonomous and original, due to which the question “why...?” becomes meaningless. If we assumed a strict ontic relation between the consciousness and the soul, this would be the situation found in Plato’s philosophy, which as we know accepts the absolute eternity of the human soul. Cf. *Phaedo*, and *Phaedrus*, *passim*. This, of course, is based on the assumption that the concept of eternity mentioned here remains in a necessary relation with the concept of impossibility of inexistence. But this solution already belongs to metaphysics!

object as this very object, i.e., focused on capturing its proper essence. This is how we pass on to the domain of ontology.

2

The task of ontology is to analyse the object in the aspect of its essence and to examine the possibilities determined by the necessary connections occurring between the constitutive moments of the essence of objects and between the objects themselves.¹⁴ Its primary questions are the so-called essential questions of the “what is this?” type (whose task is to discover the essence of the object), and questions regarding pure possibilities, through which we try to learn what is possible at all. Therefore, ontology has to study, e.g., the necessary relations between the “elements” of what is given in order to reject those connections which are not possible, but at the same time it must consider all the connections, arrangements and structures which are possible and which could be realized in the actually existing world. Moreover, these investigations regard not only the structure or the material (qualitative) endowment of objects (states of affairs, processes, etc.), but also their potential and possible modes of existence, which can be recognized by way of analysis of their “existential moments” and relations that may or must occur among them. In effect, ontology is able to present a number of theoretical, purely potential solutions, both in response to particular questions and to the most broadly formulated issues regarding, for instance, the structure or the modes of existence of the world in general.

But this is where its role ends. Remaining within its own limits, ontology cannot in any way decide which of the possibilities determined by it will be (or are) actually realized. Thus, ontology will determine with utmost precision that the so-called “actually existing object” must have a definite structure and a definite mode of existence, but it cannot claim that this possible “really existing object” actually *is*, that its possibility is actualized in at least one copy in the “real” world.

Similarly, ontology determines what the meaning of the notion of a necessarily existing being consists in, but it cannot determine whether such a necessarily existing being actually exists. The so-called ontological proof by St. Anselm, which has fascinated so many of the brightest minds, is ontological

14 For a complete characterisation of ontology it is necessary to introduce the concepts of an idea and of necessary connections between the contents of ideas. I refrain from doing it here in order to avoid overcomplicating this analysis or adopting assumptions the necessity of which I am not able to explain here. A complete characterisation of ontology can be found in Roman Ingarden's *Controversy over the Existence of the World*, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 44-60.

exactly in that it is impossible within it to pass from what is *thought* as necessarily existing to what is simply *existing* of necessity. The necessarily existing being is obviously possible, but it does not follow that it really exists. I may, as St. Anselm wants it, think of something so perfect that, of its essence, it excluded the possibility of non-existence – but all in all it will be merely a thought, and so merely possible in its perfection. *Nam potest cogitari esse aliquid, quod non possit cogitari non esse...*¹⁵

Ontology does not (and does not aspire to) decide about the issue of factuality of existence. Not only does it not pose the question “Why is there something?,” but it even shows that this question simply cannot be asked within its scope. Analyses of possibility do not lead to any existential conclusion *sensu stricto*. No studies concerning the essence make it possible to infer its existence. Ontology is needed and important, and in the theoretical considerations concerning reality it plays a major role. Yet it cannot replace metaphysics. Aware of its tasks, it does not even try to do so – and this is why accusing it of not dealing with “real” existence is a misunderstanding. Ontology does not want to be metaphysics. The real danger arises when metaphysics strives to be ontology. And when it actually turns into ontology.¹⁶

The role of ontology, as we see it here, is limited to providing metaphysics with certain possibilities which it must (or at least may) take into account in its own investigations aimed at determining what actually exists.

Three statements are of particular importance here:

1. that the actual existence of anything cannot be inferred from the pure possibility of the existence of something (including the possibility of a necessarily existing being),
2. that within the boundaries of what is possible there are beings which, if they exist, do not need to exist, and finally,
3. that within the boundaries of what is possible there is a being which, if it exists, has to exist of its essence.

The first statement justifies in a sense the necessity of metaphysics itself, which, first of all, is to deal with the answer to the question whether there actually is something apart from possibilities.¹⁷ The remaining two statements present

15 St. Anselm, *Proslogion*, cap. III, cit. after S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi, *Opera Omnia*, Vol. 1, Seccovi 1938, p. 102 (Emphasis mine – W.S.).

16 This situation took place several times in the history of philosophy. Gilson shows this in a convincing way in his book *L'être et l'essence*, Vrin, 1948.

17 Identifying the *existence* of possibilities (as possibilities) is also, in a sense, the task for metaphysics! But the mode of existence of possibilities is obviously different than the mode of existence of what is already an actualization of a possibility. Metaphysics

possibilities which metaphysics will confirm – or reject. Nevertheless, as regards the third statement, it is also known in advance that for the necessarily existing being it will be impossible to ask the question “Why does it exist?” – if it turns out that it actually does exist. This is because the concept of necessary existence excludes the possibility of non-existence, and therefore it excludes also the possibility of “filling in” the negative known (content) of the question. If we expand it into the form “Why does the necessarily existing being exist if it is possible for it not to exist?,” we shall obtain a clearly self-contradictory sentence. This is why the possible range of the “anything” toward which we direct the question about the reason for its existence is limited in advance.

3

If metaphysics is to perform its task, it has to have an appropriate method, which will allow it decide both whether the (real) “world” exists and what it is actually like. In the latter case, most important for metaphysics, the task will be extremely difficult: to discover and develop a method of reaching reality and capturing it in what it really (actually) is. While – with the right understanding of the “world” – a positive answer to the first question seems beyond doubt (we shall try to show it again soon), the second question may have several different answers, starting with extremely idealistic ones (the existence of the world equals *esse = percipi*), and ending with realistic ones. Each of them may be justified in a different way (in the realistic solution we might, e.g., simply rely on common sense in accepting unquestioningly the objective character of the existence of the world, or adopt as our starting point the methodical realism proclaimed by Gilson), and some of these justifications will refer also to the necessity of applying methods specific to metaphysics, just to mention Bergson’s intuition.

We cannot conduct here an analysis of the particular methods offered by metaphysics in the course of its history. Neither can we decide at this moment whether any of them is the most appropriate. However, in order to carry on our argumentation we have to assume that we have positive answers to the question (1) whether the world exists, as well as to that (2) if it exists actually.

The thing is that our essential question of metaphysics is not original at all. With a negative answer to the first question it would make no sense at all, and with the negative answer to the second question, although it could be asked, it

in its narrower – and proper – sense deals only with those real actualizations, as if completing (in the existential as well as essential aspect) what ontology has only outlined.

would neither have the same force nor be as dramatic as when the actual reality of the world is assumed. Yet, in order to avoid our assumption being completely groundless, let us conduct one more reasoning. At the same time we shall determine the starting point – and the point of support – for the question “Why does it exist?”

When we remain within the frames of our everyday, pre-scientific behavior (which also constitutes the starting point for phenomenological analyses), we find it absolutely obvious that we live and dwell in a world which exists and whose specific but also existing elements we are ourselves. Does this world have to exist, however?

At least since the days of Descartes the sphere of objects, states of affairs, events, etc., whose existence could not somehow be doubted has been shrinking.¹⁸ If we admit the possibility of an idealistic solution, we will be left with only one existing element, namely the conscious subject whose *esse=percipere* (as in Berkeley), or even only the consciousness itself, as the source of acts constituting what we call “reality.” If we ask “Why does this table exist?” we can answer: “Because there exists a consciousness which has constituted it” and accept its fictitious mode of existence, that is, its not being something “real” – but at the same time we have to accept the existence of such a thing as consciousness, which exists at least in a different way than the table it constitutes. The fact of its existence is for us immediately obvious and irrefutable. The ultimate fact given to me directly in experience is the fact of my own existence. And even if we made our skepticism stronger than that of Descartes, we would still have to accept the existence of challenging, doubting and thinking itself. If *cogito-sum* is not certain, *cogito-ergo est cogitation* is certain. Thus, ultimately there exists some sort of “something,” however minimal. Following this path we can probably at least accept the fact that the word “exists” present in our question is not objectless.

Can, however, the fact of existence of this something be self-explanatory? That is, though these questions are not equivalent, why does this something exist? But let us not try and make our task easier. A moment ago we were ready to accept an extremely idealistic assumption in order to make the “existing” something weaker, and therefore reveal the sense of the metaphysical question at

18 But, as Ingarden aptly remarks: “The existence of the real world is »dubitable« not because there might exist definite positive motives (arguments) that would testify against the acceptance of this existence, but which, at the same time, would not be sufficient to reject it, but only in the sense that the non-existence of the real world cannot be basically excluded while preserving the existence of all those courses of pure consciousness that actually occur.” R. Ingarden, *Controversy over the Existence of the World*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 23.

its most radically limited range. Let us now accept –here at the starting point – the possibly strongest assumption to make the application of “why?” more difficult. Let us not ask why there exists some minimal “something” which is almost asking for a clarification of the fact that it exists at all, but let us assume that the world truly and really exists in all its actuality, diversity, and richness, in all its existential “force.” Do we have the right to ask the question “Why does it exist?” about such a world?

Metaphysics states – and without this statement it would not be itself – that the object of its study *exists*. But at the same time, in accord with phenomenological data and the results of ontology, it experiences being, given to it directly, as existing, but not having to exist. That which is due to its “what,” i.e., due to its content its essence, its nature of this very individual, definite object, does not have to be at all. And still it is true that it is – it exists. Thus, the face of what exists is, in a way, double: for both the fact of real existence and the equally real fact of the possibility of non-existence are contained within it. Contrary to the ontological view, the metaphysical possibility of non-existence is a real possibility because it is grounded in a real being, i.e., a being which at present actually *is*, but which really may *cease* to exist. *Quod possibile est non esse, quandoque non est.*¹⁹ The specific character of metaphysical cognition includes the fact that it conceives, as if in one act, both faces of one specific being. When taking into consideration some unity, one being, such as it presents itself within proper metaphysical cognition (experience), we are grasping at the same time two threads of theoretical analyses: the thread of existence and the thread of the possibility of non-existence, that is, of nothingness. But it is only with this perception of being that we can acquire the data needed for the appropriate completion and interpretation of all the “known” elements in the question “Why does it exist?” which thus gains its clearest form. Let us add at once that although the conception of existence (*esse*) connected with the concept of being (*ens*) of St. Thomas is radically different from the existing (*Seiende*) of Heidegger,²⁰ it is not by chance that they are both able to pose the same question with which Heidegger concluded his lecture entitled: *Was ist Metaphysik?*²¹

19 This statement is taken from the so-called “Third Way” of proving the existence of God, presented by St. Thomas Aquinas, see *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 3c.

20 We must not forget about this difference if we do not want to lose the specificity of the so-called existential conception of being, which we find in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas. See also: Gilson, *L'être et l'essence*, especially the additional chapter *Answers to a Few Questions* (in the Polish edition, Warsaw 1964, pp. 306-330).

21 There are two Polish translations of this text: one by S. Grygiel and W. Stróżewski, “Znak” 1965 Vol. 127, and the other by T. Pomian in: M. Heidegger, *Budować*,

Although in radically different ways, they both noticed also the possibility of the negation of existence – either in the form of a real possibility of nothingness – like Thomas, or in the form of nothingness actually “manifesting itself” in being and simultaneously with it – like Heidegger.²²

Let us then pose once again the question that finds here its proper place and the possibility of a solution: why is it that something exists – rather than not nothing? Or: why is it that this which is, actually *is* – if it is also possible for it not to be?²³ With this underlined *is* of the second question we want to emphasize the very factuality, reality of existence. It no longer occurs as possible existence, but as existence fully actual and realized. But as a result, the possibility of its non-existence also looks different. The non-existence that opposes it, the nothingness that would “occur” if this existence “finished,” ceased to be, would no longer be a mere impossibility, forever relative to what is possible, but an absolute non-being, a nothing “occurring” as a specific result of the erasure of this real being. The difference between being and non-being on the ground of metaphysics is dramatically more radical than the difference between possibility and impossibility on the ground of ontology. Practically, we should not even speak of a difference here because, as a matter of fact, there is absolutely no content that could be juxtaposes with being as the second part of the comparison. When we ask why this exists if, in fact, it could not-exist, we are not thinking that it could not-exist in some aspect, i.e., that it could be, e.g., something else, but that it is possible for it not to exist in the sense of absolute nothing – the result of radical erasure (annihilation) of that which is.

We can already see that for metaphysical investigations focused on answering the fundamental question of “Why does it exist?” both threads are equally essential: the precise analyses of existence itself, (the ways of its actualization in a definite being, its character, etc.) as well as the realization of what it means that something might not exist, not be. One of them leads us to the Absolute Being. The other one – to nothingness. But they are both equally proper “objects” of metaphysical investigations. Limiting ourselves to the first one for fear of being accused of having an “unreal” or “unscientific” object of study would in fact mean stopping half-way, making a premature capitulation to

mieszkać, myśleć. Eseje wybrane [Building, Dwelling, Thinking. Selected Essays] selected and edited by K. Michalski, Warsaw 1977.

22 As regards St. Thomas, cf, especially *Summa theologiae* 1, Q. 104, a. 3, ad. 1. See also: W. Stróżewski, *Na marginesie “O naturze dobra” Św. Augustyna [On the margin of “On the Nature of the Good” by St. Augustine]* in: W. Stróżewski, *Istnienie i wartość [Existence and Value]*. Cracow 1982.

23 I think that in this form this question is equivalent to the formula “Why is there something *rather* than nothing?”

the mystery that should not be touched in light of superstitions coupled with a certain arbitrarily determined ideal of science. Just as no discipline of science other than metaphysics asks about the actual, real existence or deals with the problems connected with it, likewise no other discipline can take up the issue of the real possibility of nothingness, and its analysis.

Let us briefly direct our attention the issues connected with the two threads of thought mentioned above.

The existence which we encounter in the world and in which we are ourselves “submerged” is hardly homogeneous or identical in all cases. The existence of an individual stone or a tree is different than the existence of a so-called “fiction A human exists in a different way than his or her “being present” in the here and now. In the first example we are dealing with the difference between the existence of an individual, autonomous object and an intentional existence, while in the second – between substantial existence and qualitative existence. Existence – as we actually experience it – is always the existence of something. Thus, if we ask “Why is there something?” we are always asking about an existing whole. We can ask this question, “Why is there X?” about any of the objects in the above mentioned examples. If we start with the existentially “weaker” ones – that is, with intentional objects – they will almost immediately show us their ontic “sufficient reason,” which in any case is given to us directly in cognition. An intentional object will point at the act of intention, decisive for its “content” and its mode of existence, and the act of intention – at the consciousness which brings it about. A quality is always a quality of something; it is, in fact, *non ens sed entis* (according to medieval scholastic terminology), and therefore it always points to the substantial subject in which it is anchored.

The difficulties of the fundamental metaphysical question start with the autonomous being which finds the foundation of its own existence in itself, but which, despite this, does not constitute a sufficient reason for the fact that it *exists*. And this is, first and foremost, where true metaphysics begins. Aristotle was aware of this when he was writing in Book IV (Γ) of *Metaphysics*: “But everywhere science deals chiefly with that which is primary, and on which the other things depend, and in virtue of which they get their names. If, then, this is substance, it will be of substances that the philosopher must grasp the principles and the causes.”²⁴ This programme has remained valid till today: the analysis of substantial being is still the leading problem of metaphysics. The results of its

24 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book IV, 2, Translated by W.D.Ross. For more on this subject see A. M. Krapiec, *Zagadnienie przedmiotu Metafizyki Arystotelesa [The Question of the Object of Aristotle's Metaphysics]* “Roczniki Filozoficzne” [Philosophical Yearly] 1964, Issue 1, pp. 17-26.

investigations in this area will also determine all the possible answers to its fundamental question.

It would not be easy to report on all the solutions concerning the actual nature of what properly exists that have appeared in the history of philosophy. However, let us point out a few of them in order to show the direction which the attempts to answer the fundamental question of metaphysics will follow.

First of all, an entire group of solutions concerning the relation between existence and essence will belong here. As we know, there have existed theories claiming that existence is a kind of qualitative addition to essence. Or that essence and existence are two “things” that complement each other, entering an accidental relation. Or, finally, that existence is an act of essence, that is, that the relation between essence and existence is analogical to that between potentiality and act. This is the solution offered by Thomism.²⁵

As regards the very structure of what exists, we can discern two basic types of solutions: pluralism and monism. According to the former, there exists in the world a multiplicity of beings of diverse formal structures: objects persisting in time, processes, events, etc. The multitude of various substances which the world (reality) as a whole consists in cannot be reduced to a common denominator in the form of some “principle,” ἀρχή, which would be identical for all of them. These “substances” (objects) themselves may be treated as “subjects of properties” or “sets of properties.” There also exist various solutions as regards the relations that occur between objects within the world as a whole – starting with negating these relations (e.g. Leibniz’s *Monadology*) and ending with distinguishing continuously closer relations which constitute more or less compact objective domains.

25 Works by A. M. Krapiec are of fundamental importance for the studies on this issue, in particular his *Teoria analogii bytu* [*Theory of Analogy of Being*] (Lublin 1959) and *Struktura bytu. Charakterystyczne elementy systemu Arystotelesa i Tomasza z Akwinu* [*The Structure of Being. Characteristic Elements of the Systems of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas*] (Lublin 1963). In these books, apart from systematic considerations, we can also find extensive, critical discussions of the history of particular issues connected with the problems of being. Moreover, the literature regarding these issues is vast. Among the books available in Polish we should list the already mentioned work by E. Gilson *L'être et l'essence* and two works by E.L.Mascall: *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism*, Longmans, Green&Co 1943 and *Existence and Analogy*, London, Archon Books 1967.

As regards non-Thomistic literature, the most important work is the already mentioned *Controversy over the Existence of the World* by R. Ingarden. Its first two volumes contain detailed analyses of the possible modes of existence and the formal structure of various objects, carried out on the ground of ontology.