

Transcendentalising Reduction

The Heuristic Role of the Phenomenological *Epoché* in the Metaphysics of Existential Thomism

Piotr Duchliński, Piotr Stanisław Mazur

ABSTRACT The aim of this article is to outline the concept of transcendentalising reduction and demonstrate its role in Thomistic metaphysics. The proposed analysis puts forward an adaptive interpretation involving the application of phenomenological thinking, based on a reduction to Thomistic metaphysics via the notion of epoché. This is used to present the structure of the transcendentalising reduction, in which the epoché takes several different forms. Consistently applied, such a reduction can be expected to lead to a neutralised concept of being as the subject of metaphysics, expressed in the formula “being as being.” In conclusion, we note that the proposed interpretation opens the door to further research, in which phenomenology could be applied in the context of metaphysical studies to a greater extent than has been the case to date.

KEYWORDS analogy; epoché; existential Thomism; phenomenological Thomism; Polish philosophy; transcendental reduction

✉ Piotr Duchliński, Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, ul. Kopernika 26, 31-501 Kraków, Poland

✉ piotr.duchlinski@ignatianum.edu.pl ☎ 0000-0001-9480-2730

✉ Piotr Stanisław Mazur, Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, ul. Kopernika 26, 31-501 Kraków, Poland

✉ piotr.mazur@ignatianum.edu.pl ☎ 0000-0002-6399-8133

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The tradition of referring to phenomenological ideas in Thomism, and especially in existential Thomism, dates back to the 1950s. Indeed, in speaking of Thomism here, we shall specifically have in mind the latter form, which was developed in Poland, especially by the Lublin School. Phenomenological solutions were assimilated into Polish Thomism in a number of distinct ways. The first attempts were made within ethics and axiology (see Wojtyła 1979; Styczeń 1972), then within epistemology and metaphysics (Stępień 1964, 1966; Krokos 2011, 2012, 2013a; Wojtysiak 2020; Stróżewski 1981, 1994),¹ and subsequently within anthropology (Kowalczyk 2002; Mazur 2018), the theory of conscience and ethics (see Stachewicz 2001; Krokos 2013b), and in the philosophy of God and of religion (see Jaworski 2003).² However, after a period of vigorous attempts at developing a phenomenologising version of Thomism, the popularity of this approach to analysing and solving metaphysical problems among Thomists in Poland has waned in recent years. Some of them practise pure Thomism, meaning Thomism without any additions (Maryniarczyk 1991), while others, albeit informed by a construal of existential Thomism as open to phenomenology (e.g. Judycki, Wojtysiak, Piwowarczyk), seem inclined to favour various concepts drawn from contemporary analytical philosophy, seeing potential in these for a creative development of traditional currents of philosophical thought.

In this article, we wish to renew the process of reflection on what phenomenology, broadly construed in both its transcendental and its realist variants, can offer contemporary Thomists seeking to practise a realistically oriented approach to the philosophy of being.³ To what extent could the assimilation of phenomenological thinking help them refresh and modernise certain theses of Thomism? A Thomist can not only make use of

1. As far as applications of Ingardenian phenomenology to Thomistic metaphysics are concerned, the most significant contribution to the field within Polish Thomistic philosophy has been that of A.B. Stępień. In the 1960s, he published his famous work *Z teorii i metodologii metafizyki*, in which he described his project of Thomistic metaphysics—one which may be viewed as rivalling that proposed by Krąpiec and Kamiński. The analyses of W. Stróżewski, meanwhile, were conducted from a different angle: his application of Ingardenian phenomenology and Hegelian dialectics to metaphysics has resulted in the development of an original project of dialectical phenomenology.

2. Some elements of the transcendental method developed by transcendental Thomists have been applied to the metaphysics of existential Thomism by J. Herbut (2008). This issue has also been analysed by Herbut's student, Rev. K. Wolsza. The method applied by these Thomists is not that used in our study.

3. Non-Polish authors who merit recommendation on this score include D. Wagner, who in his latest works demonstrates the complementary nature of Thomism and phenomenology (see Wagner 2018, 2021). This topic is also investigated by Richard Colledge (see Colledge, 2021).

particular conceptual categories present in phenomenology, but also—and in ways that differ from those recommended in certain textbooks (e.g. Stępień 1964; Maryniarczyk 1991) (e.g. Stępień 1964; Krąpiec 1994; Maryniarczyk 1991)—can employ phenomenology to arrive at a perspicuous determination of the proper starting point of metaphysics: namely, the experience of the existence of the world. Inspired by the findings of phenomenologists, what we want to propose here is not a fully-fledged theory, but rather a certain adaptive interpretation of what we shall refer to as *transcendentalising reduction* (see Nowak 1975; Duchliński 2016). This reduction would be part of a larger whole: namely, the theory of the experience of existing being. It would be part of a realistic method for the pursuit of metaphysical understanding, conceived as a set of methodically ordered steps leading to the elaboration of the subject of the theory of being. Using the conceptual apparatus of phenomenology, we want to show how a Thomist arrives at the adoption of this type of reduction, known as *epoché*, and what heuristic role it plays in the adoption of the metaphysical—or, in other words, transcendentalising—attitude, within which the construction of the subject of the theory of being takes place. Following Dennett (1995, 2013), it can be said that this *epoché* is a kind of “intuition pump” or scaffolding which one may climb in order to arrive at knowledge concerning what is most important in reality. We understand “reality” here as the really existing natural world, whose complementary description was provided by Husserl (1982, 2009) and Krąpiec (1991, 1995). On our interpretation, transcendentalising reduction is structurally composed of different types of reduction, and these can be thought of as four distinct steps of *epoché* needing to be taken if one is to obtain the real *residuum* for metaphysical explanation summarised in the formula “being as being”—i.e. the neutralised subject of metaphysics.

When we use the term *epoché*, we have in mind a certain procedure or form of cognitive activity resulting in a suspension that takes in certain attitudes and beliefs accepted by the subject. In a nutshell, this reduction can be expected to lead to the crystallisation of a transcendentalising attitude: i.e. one oriented towards real existence. Such an attitude is something that each and every one of us needs to work out for themselves. Now, it is true that existential Thomists do not use the term “transcendentalising reduction” at all.⁴ We realise that some philosophers (especially Thomists) may find

4. Viewing this from a point of view closer to Thomism, we could say that the reduction we are describing could be called “metaphysical reduction,” or “existential reduction,” or “reduction to existence.” By calling it “transcendentalising reduction” we are drawing attention both to metaphysics and to the problem of existence to which this reduction should lead. We have decided to use the term “transcendentalising reduction” even though it is marked by controversy.

this unexpected and surprising, and that it may even prompt accusations to the effect that we are seeking to introduce a strain of transcendentalism into what is supposed to be a realist approach to metaphysics. Some Thomists, for example Maritain, believe that reduction via the *epoché* is not suited to a defence of realism (Maritain 1946). Hence, at this point we should make clear that the kind of transcendentalising reduction we are proposing has nothing to do with Husserlian transcendental reduction of the sort that, on some interpretations, led its author to idealism.⁵ Moreover, the analyses proposed here will be more systematic than polemical. Rather than embarking on a debate with potential opponents of our interpretation, we aim to focus on presenting our own position in as clear and comprehensive a way as we can.

STEP 1. THE *EPOCHÉ* OF THE NATURAL ATTITUDE

Where reduction is concerned, the first step on the way to achieving a transcendentalising attitude that the Thomist who thinks in a radically objectivist way can take is that of the *epoché* applied to doubt in the context of the natural attitude. The idea of this reduction comes from the well-known phenomenologist Alfred Schutz, the founder of phenomenological

5. The issue of Husserlian idealism is a controversial one, and has also been debated in Poland. Ingarden claimed that Husserl was an idealist, and provided various justifications in favour of this thesis. His interpretation was supported by his student A. Póltawski, but opposed by, for example, Tischner. Meanwhile, Judycki, a contemporary analyst of phenomenology, also thinks that interpreting Husserl's phenomenology exclusively through the prism of idealism is unfounded. D. Wagner is of a similar opinion, and argues that Husserl's phenomenology is not idealistic—rather, it openly presupposes the existence of its subject matter. While criticizing Maritain for an idealistic interpretation of phenomenology, he shows its compatibility with the thought of Aristotle and St. Thomas (see Wagner 2021). As Wagner writes: “Husserl's phenomenological method does not succumb to the *πρῶτον ψεῦδος* that Maritain and some phenomenologists hear whispered in its inception. Husserl does not intend the *ἐποχή* to universally negate the existence of all objects of experience. The bulk of work here was to show that Husserl's formulation of phenomenology as an Aristotelian science requires that it openly take for granted the existence of its subject matter—conscious knowing. Moreover, this subject matter includes as part of it essential structure the noematic, i.e., the known. This approach to phenomenology does not commit Husserl to idealism. Indeed, its discovery of intentionality provides a strong foundation for showing the absurdity of idealism, which started in modernity with the *cogito*—an unreasonable severing of consciousness from what is known. Moreover, the *ἐποχή* leaves Husserl open to a full-blown realism, wherein known objects may also be known to have existence which transcends the knower” (Wagner 2021, 604). In our opinion, a non-idealistic interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology is possible, and we believe that Husserl's methods of cognition can be helpful to Thomism, especially with reference to the issue of experiencing existence. However, the reflections pursued by us in this article do not require us to decide whether Husserl ultimately was or was not an idealist. A realist interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology is also defended by Ameriks (1977).

sociology (see Schutz 1967, 1962, 1973).⁶ The world which is the correlate of the natural attitude is the world of things, processes and events that surround us. It is the world in which we live on an everyday basis, and which occupies time and space. It is described by the natural sciences and the humanities, and knowledge of the world of the natural attitude is not static but dynamic. As the knowledge gained by means of these sciences is constantly growing, the scope of the natural world is ever-expanding. Schutz reinterprets Husserl's concept of the "epoché of the natural attitude, explaining it as follows:

Phenomenology has taught us the concept of phenomenological epoché, the suspension of our belief in the reality of the world as a device to overcome the natural attitude by radicalizing the Cartesian method of philosophical doubt. The suggestion may be ventured that man within the natural attitude also uses a specific epoché, of course quite another one than the phenomenologist. He does not suspend belief in the outer world and its objects, but on the contrary, he suspends doubt in its existence. What he puts in brackets is the doubt that the world and its objects might be otherwise than it appears to him. We propose to call this epoché the epoché of the natural attitude. (Schutz 1962, 229)

It is a form of reduction which covers any doubts relating to the existence of the real world and its point is to overcome scepticism. While, in Husserl's reflections, *epoché* is related to the thesis of the natural attitude, in Schutz's thinking we encounter its complete reversal. We simply cannot doubt the existence of the natural world. In Schutz's theory this is linked to the view that practice defines our primary reference to the world. For him, cognition and action are tightly bound up together. As long as our thoughts and actions are compatible with each other in relation to the world, there is no reason to doubt its reality. From the point of view of everyday experience, the question of the reality of the world is of little interest. If our experiences are consistent, there is no need to problematise the object of those experiences in the manner of scepticism. Even if we encounter illusions or hallucinations that undermine the consistency of our experiences, these still do not lead us to question the existence of the natural world—unless,

6. We are aware of the differences between Husserl and Schutz as regards both methodological matters and subject matter. In this paragraph, applying an adaptative interpretative approach, we use Schutz's concept of reduction to explore the starting points of Thomistic metaphysics. Our aim is not to discuss them in detail.

of course, we are talking about illnesses linked to psychopathological disorders (Mudyń 2007, 2001). Colloquially speaking, we primarily consider as real that which is independent of our minds. This is strongly connected with the objectivist attitude that we adopt in our everyday lives.

For Thomists, the *epoché* of the natural attitude primarily serves to consolidate a realist stance that is directed towards a thing rather than an idea or a conceptual representation. This intuition pump allows the first level of scaffolding to be erected that will root our thinking in genuine reality. The aim of this *epoché* is to carry out a reduction of all sceptical theses such as proceed from various thought experiments seeking to question the obviousness of our experience of the existence of the natural world. By means of this reduction, the Thomist not only temporarily, but also ultimately, suspends all sceptical claims that might undermine that obviousness. He or she makes no use of these claims, and considers them nonsensical and heuristically fruitless. Their suspension is irrevocable, and this is tantamount to adopting the attitude of the realist: i.e. choosing to believe that the world exists independently of our minds. The Thomist is perfectly aware that the knobs of the intuition pump furnished by the *epoché* can be turned in different directions. *Epoché* can be useful to proponents of both idealism and realism. In the radical investigation to which his phenomenology aspired, Husserl suggested temporarily suspending the thesis of the natural attitude: in other words, disregarding the claim that the natural world exists as an entity independent of consciousness. But if we begin to turn the knobs of this intuition pump, as Schutz does, then we find that suspending the thesis of the existence of the real world becomes highly risky, and can lead to very negative consequences for cognition and practical action.

Thus, we have already taken the first step towards knowing the subject of metaphysics. *Epoché* clears the foreground for metaphysical analyses by jettisoning sceptical beliefs. It binds our cognition to the really existing natural world, the world of concrete persons and objects, the pluralistic and diverse world (Krapiec 1995). It allows us to reject scepticism by showing that turning the knob of the intuition pump in the opposite direction leads to cognitive and practical contradictions and paradoxes. Simply put, *epoché* serves to bracket unsubstantiated theses of a kind that threaten to undermine the existence and cognition of the real world in which we live our everyday lives. We cannot doubt that the world is. We can, of course, entertain doubts about what this natural world is like, in the sense of what the qualities of particular beings are, but we cannot doubt that in general it exists and that we enter into certain causal interactions with it. After all, could one really consistently believe that the existence of the real world

is irrelevant to our cognition and action? In theoretical terms, to be sure, anything that does not go against the law of non-contradiction is allowed, and the mere suspension of the thesis of the existence of the natural world is not internally contradictory. But is non-contradiction the ultimate criterion that decides the truthfulness and adequacy of our cognition? In real life, which is closely related to practice and action, an *epoché* pertaining to the real existence of the world would, consistently applied, condemn us to gradual annihilation. Thomists believe that philosophy should concern itself with the real world that we encounter in direct experience: this world itself calls for explanations, and answers to the question of why it exists at all. *Epoché* makes it possible to inquire into the reasons that serve to ground our experience of being (see Olech 2000). That is why we must take the existence of the world of the natural attitude for granted, and treat it as a certainty of kind immune to Cartesian doubt. The fundamentals cannot be doubted. Thus, Wittgenstein was right when he wrote that “If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty” (Wittgenstein 1969, § 115). One might add that we are characterised by a fundamental belief in the existence of the world of the natural attitude: “The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes after belief” (Wittgenstein 1969, § 160).⁷

STEP 2. THE *EPOCHÉ* OF COMMON-SENSE CONVICTIONS

Many Thomists might consider it an aberration to attempt to impose any *epoché* whatsoever upon our common-sense convictions. Let us therefore try to clarify what we have in mind. After all, common sense is treated by Thomists as a set of self-evident assertions that we arrive at through spontaneous cognition. It is nothing other than natural and spontaneous cognition of the world conditioned by cultural and social factors (Krapiec 1995). It is also understood as a reservoir of human rationality: the claims furnished by common sense are obvious, and so unquestionable, and what guarantees this is the reality of the world. For Thomists, the order of common sense is important because it presupposes the existence of the real world. From the point of view of common sense, the existence of the world is something self-evident, something that cannot be problematised. In general, it does not really pay attention to such a thing as existence. The latter is, rather, presumed or assumed in acts of cognition and action. In common-sense cognition, the existence of the world around us is evident. Husserl reflected

7. “Sure evidence is what we accept as sure, it is evidence that we go by in acting surely, acting without any doubt” (Wittgenstein 1969, § 196).

this intuition in his thesis of the natural attitude. The natural attitude is connected with the subject's existential experience directed towards the world (see Sokolowski 2000). The world is treated as real, independent of my consciousness. It is given in acts of external and internal perception. In each perception there is a moment of specific assertion of the existence of an object. Ingarden, following Husserl, calls this moment the thetic moment: "If the whole world exists for me as this piece of paper, I would have to say," Ingarden writes,

there is in me a certain general thesis which refers to the whole world, and this thesis is not like that act of grasping a piece of paper which began, lasted for a certain period, sigma and disappeared, but this general thesis lasts intermittently. (Ingarden 1974, 156)

But if that is so, then why would we want to apply the *epoché* to our common-sense convictions?

The thesis of the natural attitude is something permanently present in our conscious life. As a reservoir of what is, in one way or another, obvious to us, common sense includes the thesis of the natural attitude. Living our everyday lives, we are not aware of its hidden yet constant influence: we simply perform all our acts of cognition and action guided by this thesis. It is not based on some articulated existential judgment. Existence itself is not something we are explicitly aware of in common-sense cognition, because this cognition is entangled with various practical contexts, which do not focus on the existence of the object but on how this object can be practically used. Therefore, in our opinion, common-sense convictions can be treated in a similar way as phenomenologists treat the natural attitude—only that the knobs of the intuition pump should be turned in a different direction. Husserl said that the thesis of the natural attitude can be re-evaluated: i.e. it can be omitted (not taken into account) in phenomenological investigations (see Husserl 1982). Phenomenological reduction is a structurally complex procedure. It boils down to the suspension of all kinds of existential judgments which have their validity in the natural attitude:

In this way, we obtain a kind of 'cognitive reserve' by refraining from stating, or better, by neutralizing the conviction that something exists, similarly, I can also neutralize the convictions that I constantly hold and that are characteristic of my natural attitude to the world. (Ingarden 1963, 361)

We simply do not make any epistemic use of this thesis.

At the same time, it is worth mentioning here that Husserl did not mean to question the existence of the real world. He wanted us to realise that this thesis of the natural attitude is rooted in constitutive acts of consciousness, that there is no world without consciousness, even if we commonly think that there is. The idea was to extract this thesis from the anonymity of experiencing which shrouds life in the natural attitude (see Łaciak 2010). A metaphysician who aims to consciously affirm the existence of an object must extract that existence from those contexts of common-sense cognition that obscure existence. Therefore, they must apply *epoché*: that is, they must bracket all kinds of practical and utilitarian contexts, as well as theoretical contexts coming from different domains of knowledge—contexts that draw attention only to the content side of the object, because it is easier to operationalize it. In this way, metaphysics purifies common-sense convictions and extracts from them the thesis of the natural attitude that initially resides anonymously in our consciousness. It is a matter of extracting the existential judgment from the realm of anonymity—one in which a conscious articulation (affirmation) of the existence of being takes place. In everyday life, both the general existential judgement concerning existence as a totality of being, and the specific judgements concerning individual concrete facts, are present in our consciousness in an anonymous way, as suppositions of various acts of cognition and action. Only by bracketing the contexts of everyday theory and practice does it become possible to fully verbalise the existential judgement in which we not only become aware of the existence of a particular being, but also take subjective responsibility for formulating this judgement. In this sense, the second *epoché* allows us to extract the act of existence from its entanglement in the theoretical and practical contexts of common-sense cognition, which is primarily oriented towards acquiring the kind of information that allows us to fit effectively into an environment that imposes certain pressures on us. Thus, in the context of our common-sense attitudes, we are simply not interested in the existence of the world. It is something anonymous for us—that is, unconscious, but in an intentional way. The simple presumption that the real world exists is something we constantly entertain, but it must be filled out by concrete experience that then culminates in the conscious articulation of an existential judgment. The bracketing of the objective and subjective contexts of everyday cognition enables the thesis of the objective validity of the act of existence that constitutes real being to emerge from the darkness of such an anonymous functioning.

The *epoché* of our common-sense convictions allows us to discern intellectually the existence of being, which in everyday life is covered over by

our practical use of the objects we have at our disposal. Common sense is interested in whether the objects that help us in adaptation and survival are at hand, and whether we can use them quickly and efficiently. Hence, the metaphysician re-evaluates common-sense convictions; he or she does not abandon common sense, but extracts from it the pearl that determines that the reality which surrounds us is constituted in this way and not some other. In this way, *epoché* makes it possible to discover the metaphysical *residuum* in common-sense convictions, which is the act of the existence. It can be said that it shows the way to achieving the real foundation of cognition, thinking and action. Whereas Husserl's *epoché* revealed pure consciousness as the *residuum* of phenomenological investigation,⁸ *epoché* applied to common sense reveals the metaphysical *residuum*, which we obviously do become aware of in subjective existential judgments of moment. The very realisation of these structures, however, is something epistemically secondary. The primary theses of the natural attitude "live"—as dormant within the background of our consciousness. They appear in our mind in the course of normal, spontaneous cognitive development, which is a response to constantly experienced reality. Our first contact with the world—the moment in which a new-born baby opens their eyes—already initiates the development of the thesis of the natural attitude. It is created as our first reaction to stimuli coming from reality. The natural attitude is not learned: it appears in our minds spontaneously, at the moment when we use our bodily functions to explore our surroundings by reacting to stimuli, and at the same time immediately falls into anonymity, because it is hidden by the practical and utilitarian contexts enforced on us by that reality.

STEP 3. THE *EPOCHÉ* OF THE THEORIES AND MODELS OF THE EXACT SCIENCES

According to Husserl, phenomenological reduction is first applied to all of our existential convictions based on transcendental insights. Next, transcendental reduction neutralises all of the kinds of data provided by the exact sciences. These, and especially the natural sciences, explain the natural world with the help of empirical and mathematical methods. The knowledge provided by the exact sciences led Husserl to a naturalistic reduction

8. Of course, assuming that consciousness is the fundamental subject of phenomenological investigation does not necessarily lead to idealism. At this point, we shall not seek to determine whether Husserl was ultimately a realist or an idealist. We are familiar with Wagner's work, in which he argues that Husserl was not an idealist and made a number of realist assumptions that bring him closer to the Thomistic tradition; however, a thorough analysis of Wagner's claims regarding Husserlian idealism would require a separate article.

of mankind (Moran 2008). Also, the concept of objectivity promoted by naturalistically understood science was too narrow to reflect the richness of the complex phenomenon of human cognition. Therefore, phenomenological reduction turned out to be an effective methodological procedure, whose aim was to defend mankind against naturalistic reductionism. When Husserl embarked on his phenomenological investigation, he knew what the final result would be: he knew what steps he had to take to achieve the phenomenological *residuum*. However, fulfilling this aim required a bracketing of the current findings of the exact sciences. The application of the reduction called for a radical distancing from those concepts that seek to naturalise and psychologise human beings (Husserl 1965).

Thomists, just like Husserl, proceed on the assumption that

there is some basic understanding of the reality as reality. And it is this basic understanding of reality that philosophy is supposed to provide, because it is this reality that is the field and the subject of philosophical inquiry. (Krapiec 1995, 31)

Just as pure transcendental consciousness was the field of phenomenological inquiry for Husserl, so reality, in the sense of really existing entities, is such a field for Thomists. But how can this reality qua reality be arrived at? This is to be accomplished by philosophy: that is, by metaphysics. In order to do that, however, it is necessary right at the outset to bracket (*epoché*) all theoretical models and theories constructed in the exact sciences, and especially the natural sciences, whose proponents are constantly tempted to formulate definitive claims regarding the nature of the world.⁹ Scientists look at reality through the lens of the theories and models they construct; they take into account the content of being, which easily lends

9. As the following quotation from Wallace illustrates, philosophers of science have taken note of the fact that scientific models are based on realist metaphysical assumptions. "Both of these types of modeling, but particularly analogue modeling, provide powerful tools for dialectical inquiry and for scientific investigation. It would take us too far afield to canvass such possibilities here, though we have already considered some of them elsewhere. For the present, suffice it to state that epistemological realism, coupling causal analysis with analogical reasoning, can contribute much to an understanding of the cumulative growth of scientific knowledge, along lines to be developed in the final two chapters. The basic thesis is that science is concerned with a study of the real, not with the logical as such, and that real entities can be the subject of true existential predication. That they have natures that can be understood, and that there can be progress in this understanding. Much of this progress comes about through the continued application of modeling techniques, which make new existential claims possible and enable scientists to preserve their generalizations, while modifying them and interpreting them in ways that achieve an ever-deepening understanding" (Wallace 1996, 312).

itself to quantitative operationalization and empirical falsification. This is why mathematics plays such an important role—especially in the natural sciences, whose theories and models are expressed using advanced mathematical language. Mathematics makes it possible to discover certain areas of being, but only in terms of its content, not its existence (see Heller 2010).¹⁰ The sciences impose various models on reality in order to describe and explain it. This profiles our cognition of the world in a specific way, causing us to lose the existential aspect (crucial for understanding reality) as a consequence of concentrating on its content-related aspects. For Thomists, these idealised scientific models and theories do not provide the basic understanding of reality (Krapiec 1995). To put it simply, the sciences do not reveal the existence of being. Therefore, the Thomist, in attempting to unveil this primary understanding of reality that will furnish the *residuum* for philosophical analysis, must apply the reduction (in the sense of *epoché*) to all of the theories and models functioning in the naturalistically conceived natural sciences. Simply put, he or she will disregard these data and make no epistemic use of them—without, of course, denying their existence or questioning the validity of their claim or aspiration to knowledge and intersubjective validity. Such a reduction does not target the development of science. It does not undermine the many great achievements that have contributed to the civilisational development of humanity. In fact, this reduction aims to expose the roots from which scientific knowledge grows. Its basis is a fundamental understanding of reality. Scientific models and theories profile our cognition of reality in a specific way by focusing on the content-related aspect of being, which can be cognised in terms of many different aspects. By contrast, the metaphysician strives to

10. Heller uses the following words to explain the essence of things from the perspective of natural sciences such as engage in mathematical modelling of the world: “The notion of the ‘essence of things’ was not eliminated from philosophical thought by the development of mathematized natural sciences, as it was predicted by, for example, neopositivists. But the essences of things are not hypostases, hidden qualities lying beneath the surface of all that can be reached by sensory cognition. Nature is a formal structure, and the essence of a formal structure—and especially of the structure as complex as nature—is that it consists of a hierarchy of essential and non-essential relationships. However, essential relationships are not the basis for non-essential relationships—entelechy for accidents: they are equal partners in the structure. Essentiality is relative. If some formal relations are essential, it is only in view of some other formal relations; but the same relations may not be essential in view of some other relations. ‘In view of...’ is essential in the formal structure” (Heller 2006, 136). For Thomists, the essence of things, thus construed, is not something that really exists. What does not really exist is studied within the ontology of science, which is not yet metaphysics, where the latter is concerned with what really exists. Moreover, metaphysics does not speak of any existence as being postulated within a theory.

uncover the most fundamental core of the reality that is constitutive of this. Reduction, applied to the data of the exact sciences, makes us realise that there is a reality of the sort that can provide an ontic foundation for scientifically constructed theories and models. In their scientific research, meanwhile, scientists do not treat the problem of existence as central. If they adopt some form of realism, it will just be because they are prepared to assume that the models and theories under development somehow relate to a kind of reality. The question is how this reality is then to be understood. It is certainly not the primary reality of the metaphysician who advocates applying *epoché* to scientific theories themselves.

STEP 4. THE EPOCHÉ OF THE UNAMBIGUITY OF ABSTRACT CONCEPTS

The next step is the reduction of the unambiguity of concepts. If a Thomist wants to unveil reality qua reality, he or she must bracket unambiguous concepts, which are connected with the human way of knowing the world. Unambiguous cognition is related to the process of abstraction—or, to be more precise, unambiguity is related to the products of abstraction, namely concepts: “When man cognises things conceptually (generally, circumstantially and invariably), he can make use of his conceptual cognition insofar as he first theoretically adjudicates general, fixed and necessary concepts about individual things. This adjudication is unambiguous, because it assigns single, determined, general, necessary and unchangeable content contained in a concept to individual subjects” (Krapiec 1995, 203). The qualities grasped in conceptual cognition can be used to make unambiguous judgements about various objects. But unambiguous concepts take into account the content of being, which consists of various elements—both constitutive and consecutive. This type of cognition is dominant in the common-sense attitude and in science. Scientists prefer unambiguous concepts, because they are more intersubjectively accessible and verifiable. Moreover, the unambiguity of cognitive concepts is connected in a special way with the practical use of objects (see Krapiec 1995). It leads to the instrumentalisation and operationalisation of various aspectualised contents of being: “By cognising a thing in the aspect of its instrumentalisation, we grasp only some of its real features enabling us to create an appropriate tool from this thing. In this aspect a human being is extremely creative, i.e. capable of discovering and recognising several relations-features from which he then creates a proper “concept,” i.e. a way of understanding things in a given aspect” (Krapiec 1995, 202).

Our attitude towards unambiguous concepts is primarily directed at the content involved: the essence of being. Adopting such a stance, what we

focus on is achieving a conceptual grasp of various features of the object which, “compressed” into some concept, can then be adjudicated upon in an unambiguous way in terms of how it relates to individual objects. The Thomist is required to apply the *epoché* to this attitude, as otherwise he or she risks falling into the trap of essentialism, which comes into play when we prioritise concepts that are abstract and unambiguous over transcendental-analogical ones. The unambiguous attitude, so dominant in science and in some branches of essentialist metaphysics, can lead to a distortion of the image of a really existing being where the latter radically eludes such unambiguous approaches. But can the natural process of spontaneous cognition be subjected to *epoché*? After all, abstraction is so natural for us that it is difficult even to imagine a cognitive state in which the subject could not make use of it. We are constantly creating unambiguous concepts that are the consequences of the process of abstraction. The concepts created via the process of abstraction represent selected properties of individual objects grouped into types and genres. Even the use of a particular *epoché* is linked to a greater or lesser role being played by abstraction—especially if an exercising of cognitive reserve with respect to certain data is involved. The *epoché* of the unambiguous attitude does not undermine the momentous role of abstraction and its results: it is simply that the Thomist makes no use of this type of cognition at the outset. He or she does not allow unambiguous concepts, even though they are so natural and spontaneous as to be present even in our primary intuitions concerning existence. This suppression of unambiguous concepts is perhaps the most difficult step to take on the road leading to a full experience of reality in its most fundamental existential dimension. Here *epoché* corresponds to an intentional movement of thought whose aim is to re-evaluate this attitude; it is a movement that results from our total freedom, reflecting as it does our conscious decision to be ready and willing to re-evaluate the attitude to which we have naturally become accustomed over the general course of our cognitive development. This re-evaluation consists in the fact that we do not make use of the attitude in question: we recognise that if we adhere to it, we will not be able to consciously grasp the existence of the object. Therefore, we hold back what is most spontaneous and natural in us. By exerting willpower, we overcome our natural tendency to concentrate on the abstractly graspable content of being. Where the metaphysician (who wishes to gain insight into the very core of reality) is concerned, what this step calls for is epistemic control of the cognitive activities performed. However, it is only thanks to this move that the Thomist engaged in such an inquiry can intellectually grasp reality as reality, and thus avoid entering

upon a dangerous cul-de-sac of the sort taken by those who have chosen to maintain an abstract attitude. Being stuck in such an attitude entails a gradual separation of our concept of a given object from the real object itself. Moreover, we may conclude this section by observing that the *epoché* applied to unambiguous concepts reveals the analogy internal to reality itself: that is, the analogy of being.

EPOCHÉ VERSUS THE NEUTRALITY OF THE SUBJECT OF METAPHYSICS

Thomists are inclined to assume that the proper object of investigation should be neutral in its implications: i.e. it should not solve problems in advance, or direct thoughts into an *a priori* cul-de-sac of rational inquiry, but rather allow one to remain in constant contact with the thing while pursuing an objective philosophical interpretation (Krapiec and Kamiński 1961, 612–3).¹¹ The application of the above-mentioned kinds of *epoché* ought to lead to a neutralised conception of the subject of metaphysics (in the sense of being purged of constructivistic and/or a priori elements). At the same time, Thomists are aware of a certain difficulty in achieving such a neutralised subject of study: its achievement is not simple, and history is full of mistakes and false moves in this regard:

The condition that is most difficult to fulfil demands objectivity through a “neutralised” conception of the subject proper to philosophy, that is being. Unfortunately, the history of philosophy does not know—one might say except in one case—of the construction of a neutralized subject of philosophy. And we do not know if this single case, which appeared in the history of philosophy in St. Thomas Aquinas’ considerations, was fully realised by him, although we do know that it has never been fully accepted even by those who considered themselves to be interpreters or continuators of Thomas’s thought. (Krapiec and Kamiński 1961, 614)

Many metaphysicians, even those who declare themselves to be engaged in pursuing further the legacy of St. Thomas, have been unable to arrive at this neutralized subject, because they have not had the appropriate cognitive tools at their disposal. Hence, they have often committed the errors of constructivism and apriorism, which have led in turn to the wilderness of essentialism:

11. The phrase “neutral subject matter of metaphysics” was coined by the Lublin School, and first used in the works of M. A. Krapiec. In the textbooks on Thomistic metaphysics written in Western Europe and the USA it is not listed as an important cognitive category.

All constructions of the subject proper of philosophical inquiry known in the history of philosophy within the proposed neutralized conception of the object are the result of too rapid inductive generalization, naturally with the philosopher's realistic attitude. Very often these were a priori constructions dictated either by the preponderance of the school or by the extra-philosophical aims of doing philosophy. And such constructions of subjects proper to philosophy lived only thanks to abstraction and logic, and sometimes the school authorities' edict. (Krapiec and Kamiński 1961, 615)

A small mistake at the beginning in the end turned out to be of major significance. What can help us avoid this error is transcendentalising reduction, which in our interpretation means reduction to existence and to reality; providing it is methodically applied, this will lead us to a grasp of the neutralised subject of the theory of being:

The neutralized conception of the proper subject of philosophy is again given as the traditional formula of "being as being," but understood in the form of "being as something existing." For only real, actual existence constitutes the reality. That what really exists now is real, actual. Even "potential" existence, although it belongs to the real world, is evident to the extent to which it is conditioned by the real present existence of the subject enriched with the most varied dispositions. And probably there is no need to prove that the real world as real is constituted by existence; for no proof is more convincing than the simplest perception of the existence of the real being. (Krapiec and Kamiński 1961, 614)

The particular *epoché* leads us in the direction of a subject free from all practical and theoretical impositions. Thanks to the purifying removal of theoretical, practical and utilitarian elements from our common-sense convictions, the bracketing of the natural activity of abstraction, and the suspension of all theoretical constructs and scientific models, it becomes possible to intellectually perceive and consciously affirm the act of existence. Proceeding a step at a time, each *epoché* neutralises objective and subjective obstacles that otherwise could prevent our intellectual apprehension of real existence, and in this way we arrive at a radical objectivity of cognition. Indeed, one can speak here of a "pure objectivity," free of any interpretation:

The existence of real being does not yet determine the nature, content and action of being. Existence, as it later turns out, does not realistically equate

itself with the content of beings we perceive. Thus, the realization that the reality is constituted by existence is not yet linked in our thought with any philosophical preconception and does not direct our thought towards some disastrous tracks of logical consequences in which reason is left with nothing else but to “reason” logically in isolation from the stimuli of the really existing world. Contrary to this, if it is existence that does not constitute reality, then existence is commensurate with every being, it is modified in every being. (Krapiec and Kamiński 1961, 615)

Noticing existence, as Krapiec and Kamiński write, is not conditioned by any preconceived notions. If we consistently carry out these particular reductive steps, we can obtain just such a neutralized cognitive “construct”: one which is, of course, not freely constructed, but rather “un-known” and read off from reality itself. Each particular *epoché* binds our cognitive concepts to reality, and this ultimately leads to a direct “pincer movement” in respect of our conceptions of reality itself as the proper domain of philosophising.

Existence is a natural fact—one so obvious that one cannot doubt it. One can doubt the content presented in perception, but not the existence given in structures of judgement. As a natural and self-evident fact, existence does not ultimately determine anything about the nature of an object. It is simply existence, and that is it—no more and nor less. By revealing the act of existence, the particular *epoché* guarantees the objectivity and realism of metaphysical cognition. The experience of existence is theoretically and linguistically undetermined: it is not fixed by any proof or previously accepted philosophical or scientific theory. Whatever would determine the experience of existence a priori must be bracketed, reduced and left temporarily unaccounted for in the metaphysician’s investigation, so as to allow it to be experienced and verbalised in an existential judgment. In order to experience existence as an act that constructs all of reality, one must develop a radical attitude of cognitive reserve with respect to various objective and subjective data (Krapiec and Kamiński 1961).

TRANSCENDENTALISING REDUCTION: CONCLUSIONS

If the interpretation taken up and developed in this article is correct, then phenomenology can indeed provide heuristic tools that will help Thomists arrive at a neutralised conception of the subject of metaphysics. We have not sought to address the question of whether these individual steps suspending various sorts of data actually lead to such a subject, as that is a topic that calls for a broader debate. Moreover, we have deliberately omitted

any description of the mediating role of language in the particular stages of reduction, as this would also require a separate investigation. Summing up our analysis, the first and basic condition which makes it possible to embark on any kind of pursuit of a realist metaphysics is an opening up to the reality of existence. That is, one must adopt the proper cognitive attitude—one linked to a specific cognitive reserve with respect to certain data.

The founder of phenomenology employed reduction in order to discover what is, indubitably, the proper realm of phenomenological study (Husserl 1982): namely, pure transcendental consciousness as the source of all objective sense and of the constitution of objects (Beyer 2013; Bossert 1974; Butler 2016; Łaciak 2010, 2013). Nevertheless, as the Thomists would concur, Husserl's procedure for reduction detaches us from the natural experience in which the existence of the world is given. Even if he wanted this reduction to disclose the basis of the constitution of our world in consciousness and overcome the anonymity of the natural attitude, there can be no doubt that he ceased to be interested in the real world as such and focused instead on the study of its noemata, which were constituted in the stream of pure transcendental consciousness (see Moran 1999; Taminiaux 2004; Zahavi 2003). With such transcendental solutions, the experience of objective existence becomes difficult to obtain. After all, intellectually registering (and experiencing) existence is only possible so long as there is a real object of that experience, i.e. being, and not just the sense (*noema*) of being. Yet this is not a matter of questioning the notion of sense and radically opposing it to being. Being and sense are closely correlated in the structure of the integral experience of the world, but being, as that which is, constitutes the basis of the potentially objective senses that can be revealed through the various structures of conscious intentional life. In Husserl's reduction there are positive moments that can be used when describing the experience of being, as we have tried to show by discussing the various steps of *epoché*. Through it, he not only wished to suspend the existential thesis, entertained by every subject, concerning the existence of the world, but also wanted to neutralise any scientific and philosophical convictions not somehow legitimized from within the unfolding stream of a pure constitutive consciousness.

In order to make it possible to envision the world in respect of its transcendental existence, we have proposed a new form of transcendentalising reduction. The term "transcendentalising reduction" derives from the analogical and transcendentalising form of cognition that is considered valid in metaphysics, while opposing the unambiguous and universalising reduction constitutive of the stance of essentialism. We could even

say that it makes this cognition possible. On the construal proposed here, reduction enables the cognising of existence: it acts as if in the foreground, clears the ground, and constitutes an attitude directed at real existence. Unlike Husserl's reduction, it maintains the existential thesis regarding the existence of the world, and shares with it the necessity of suspending (neutralising) those philosophical convictions—especially idealistic and scientific ones—which in some way deny the cognitive subject's epistemic access to understanding the being of the real world.

What transcendentalising reduction primarily does is open our consciousness up to the experience of being understood analogically and transcendently. It realises, to a great extent, Husserl's postulate of going "back to things themselves." The latter can be formulated as going "back to real existence," "back to the direct experience of what exists" (Duchliński 2016; Olech 2000). Such reduction draws attention to the fact that in our normal cognitive processes we do not lock ourselves up in subjectivity, but go out towards the really existing world in which we are, in which we exist, into whose factuality we are thrown, whether we want this or not. The particular steps or stages involved are nothing more than procedures serving to cleanse the foreground of our experience of real being in respect of the various dimensions of its transcendental *modi entis*. Reduction redirects our cognition to the world around us, which is constituted by the *actus esse*. However, its purifying function does not establish any antecedently theoretical, philosophical *a priori* in relation to the experience of existence. Each time, before cognising the world, one has to be properly prepared, somehow "tuned in"—one must adopt a certain attitude of cognitive reserve, leaving one open to the possibility of new experiences, so as not to lose anything essential from the richness of what is given to us. Cognising existence requires preparation, technique, attentiveness and perhaps contemplation. Reduction occurs primarily in the area of the mind. It is an intentional movement of thought that descends towards the most basic, underlying cognitive acts in which the subject comes into contact with the existence of the world. Its aim is to prepare our cognition for contact with the fundamental dimension of reality that is the act of existence. It allows existence to "cut us with its blade," to "grab us by the throat" (Krapiec 1991). Reduction insulates this experience from the diverse subjective influences that could otherwise prevent it from occurring, and transcendentalising reduction protects us against the transcendentalism of *a priori* consciousness, in which the experience of the world is something derivative in relation to the experience of pure consciousness, mostly dressed up in various *a priori* categories and concepts.

On our proposed account, the Thomist, in his or her cognition and thinking, applies the particular steps of *epoché* to a greater extent than would tend to be advocated by other authors, while also making creative use of the potential of phenomenology to come up with new interpretations within the context of realist metaphysics. Our interpretation in no way undermines the realism and objectivism of cognition, but does involve our pointing out that Thomists and phenomenologists think about certain problems in a similar way. Sometimes the thick lines with which we separate these traditions do not allow us to see the cognitive perspectives they share. Using particular intuition pumps, whose knobs can be turned one way or the other, we obtain arguments either for idealism, as Husserl did, or for realism, as Thomists do. Transcendentalising reduction is an interesting intuition pump, in that it helps us to rethink how far we might be capable of achieving the goal we have set ourselves: i.e. to what extent we can achieve a neutral vision of the metaphysical *residuum*, what we can bracket out in order to reach to the very core of reality, and how far we are able to apply this or that particular *epoché*.

In our adaptative interpretation, we have turned the knobs of the intuition pump so as to obtain arguments for the realism of human cognition, whose objective foundation is the existence of a real natural world. As we mentioned above, our application of a particular *epoché* has not been intended to convince anyone that it is possible to obtain such a thing as a neutralised conception of the subject of philosophical considerations. Yet we do believe that our proposal opens the door to further studies, in which phenomenology could be used in metaphysical research to a greater extent than before.

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