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The Connection between M. A. Krapiec's Existential Thomism and P. F. Strawson's Analytic Philosophy

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Christian humanism in the III millennium from the perspective of Thomas Aquinas's philosophy can be developed by finding the common area between Thomism and other current philosophy trends, for example analytic philosophy. I have made an attempt to show what is common and what is different in both metaphysics: Krapiec's metaphysics and Strawson's metaphysics. Krapiec's metaphysics and Strawson's metaphysics had the same material subject matter of metaphysics: everything that really exists. Nevertheless they have different formal subject matters: existence (Krapiec) and the general aspect, the scheme of concepts (Strawson). According to Krapiec, the method of metaphysics should be causal explanation. According to Strawson, the method of metaphysics should be analysis. I am going to show that elements of both methods are present in both metaphysics.

Christian humanism in the III millennium from the perspective of Thomas Aquinas's philosophy can be developed by finding the common area between Thomism and other current philosophy trends, for example analytic philosophy. The common area for both: Thomism and analytic philosophy is not a new idea¹. According to John Haldane (from St. Andrews University)² now there is analytical Thomism, which connects the analytic traditions with Aquinas' thought and his followers. It tries to use the tools of analytic philosophy to investigate the philosophical problems of Aquinas's philosophy.

My paper presents an attempt to show what is common and what is

¹ One issue of "The Monist" presents the analytical Thomism ("The Monist. An International Quarterly Journal of General Philosophical Inquiry", 1997, vol. 80, no. 4), the number of "New Blackfriars", edited by English Dominicans, is named: *Thomism and the Future of Catholic Philosophy* ("New Blackfriars. A Monthly Review" 80 (1999), no. 938) and a lot of papers of J. Haldane's. Among the analytical philosophers Elisabeth Anscombe and Peter Geach also sympathised with the philosophy of Thomas.

² J. Haldane, *Analytical Thomism: A Brief Introduction*, "The Monist", vol. 80 (1997), no. 4, p. 485 – 486.

different in both metaphysics: Mieczyslaw Albert Krapiec's³ metaphysics and Peter Frederic Strawson's⁴ metaphysics.

Krapiec and Strawson have never discussed directly, but indirectly through books and articles, where there were analyses of the subject matters and methods of metaphysics from other trends of philosophy.

In the first part of my article I want to describe the methodological tools which are used to present the metaphysics. In the second part I describe the philosophy of Krapiec and the philosophy of Strawson. The third part presents the possible discussion between Krapiec and Strawson about the subject matter of metaphysics and the method of metaphysics. Finally it includes connections between the two metaphysics.

Part One

It is possible to present all philosophy by describing the following topics: subject matter, method and aim.

The subject matter of metaphysics is the one which deals with metaphysics. In the Thomistic tradition material subject matter and formal subject matter are distinguished. The material subject matter is understood as what is being studied. The formal subject matter is understood as a study aspect.

Both metaphysics used some different methods. The most important are: analysis and causal explanation.

The analysis concerns concepts or language. It consists in taking down (decomposing) concepts (or sentences) to simple parts and showing how the concepts (sentences) are connected. The aim of an analysis is to clarify the content of concepts (sentences) by identification of their simpler components.

An explanation concerns the state of affairs (described in a sentence) and shows its causes. Therefore, it is named causal explanation, after Aristotle used by Aquinas. The causal explanation is described in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Supplement* as follows:

³ Mieczyslaw Albert Krapiec was born in 1921. He is a Dominican and a retired professor of metaphysics at the Catholic University of Lublin, Poland. The philosopher is the author of existential Thomism. He has written many books, from which a lot of students in Poland have learned philosophy

⁴ Peter Frederic Strawson was born in 1919. He is a retired professor of metaphysics at Oxford University. He belongs to the analytic philosophers who are interested not only in language but also in metaphysics problems.

“For Aristotle [...] a causal explanation is one that cites one or more of four causes or determining factors that exist in nature and correspond to the meanings of the question Why?: the material cause (the matter or constituents of which something is composed); the formal cause (the form or structure); the efficient cause (an external source of motion or change); and the final cause (the end, purpose, or function of something)”⁵.

It is a different explanation from that used in natural sciences.

Part Two

Krapiec is one of the most outstanding and significant figures in contemporary Polish philosophy. He names his philosophy existential Thomism and refers to classical philosophy, mainly to the philosophy of Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas and the following contemporary philosophers: J. Maritain, E. Gilson.

According to Krapiec contact with the real world which people first know through sensual perceptions (and then in mind) is always first. He cites Aristotle:

“All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight”⁶.

The real world exists not connected with a human being. The most important element of being is its existence, which decides whether the being real exists or not. He starts his philosophy with the ordinary knowledge about the world. Next is the thesis about pluralism in the world: the singular real existing beings are different. Then come the questions: “Why is something such and not other” namely the question about reason. As a result Krapiec defines philosophy as “an attempt to understand ‘why’ something is and is such, not other” and indicates a real factor which cannot be negated.

The first philosophical domain is metaphysics, the next are: metaphysics of God, metaphysics of man, metaphysics of knowledge, metaphysics of morals and metaphysics of culture. According to Krapiec, metaphysics is knowledge of the basic principle of the real existing world, which is explained by causes. The goal of metaphysicists is to investigate:

- 1) the first principles of being: principle of identity, principle of inconsistency, principle of sufficient reason;

⁵ P. Achinstein, *Explanation*, in: *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Supplement*, ed. M. D. Borchert, New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan 1996, p. 168.

⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, tr. D. Ross, 980a (b. 1, ch.1) in: <http://classics.mit.edu/aristotle/metaphysics.html>

- 2) transcendental property of being, such as: being as a thing, being as unity, being as individuality, being as truth, being as good, being as beauty;
- 3) the structure of being; there are the following elements of being: *essentia* and *existentia*, matter and form, accidents and substance; there all are in the way of act and possibility.

Peter Frederic Strawson is a widely known and influential postwar British philosopher. He is usually associated with the Oxford Ordinary Language Philosophy. He is the author of “descriptive metaphysics” which is “an attempt to reveal and elucidate the most general features of the conceptual structure in terms of which we do as a matter of fact think about the world and ourselves.”⁷

The goal of Strawson's metaphysics is only to describe (not revise) the fundamental and most general features of our conceptual scheme and indicate the basic and most pervasive concepts that we need to think about the world.

He uses the method of connective analysis. He starts his philosophy with an idea that a hearer can know of which object a speaker is speaking. He wrote about the hearer identifying the particular and the speaker making an identifying reference.

In Strawson's opinion, in the ordinary non-philosophical thinking about the world and ourselves it is possible to distinguish a certain number of fundamental, general, pervasive concepts: space, time, object, event, mind, body, knowledge, truth, meaning, existence, identity, action, intention, causation, explanation. The philosophical aim is to make them clear or elucidating, with the stress on interconnection⁸

In Strawson's opinion, Aquinas was a great philosopher⁹.

Krapiec would probably accuse Strawson's philosophy of being concerned only with the scheme of concepts (it means genespect of reality) and does not take into consideration the most important aspect of reality: its existence.

Strawson would almost certainly accuse Krapiec's philosophy of making the revisionary metaphysics, which is going to form a better structure of thinking

⁷ P. F. Strawson, *My Philosophy*, in: *The Philosophy of P. F. Strawson*, ed. P. K. Sen, R. R. Verma, New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research 1995, p.5.

⁸ P. F. Strawson, *My Philosophy*, p. 13-14.

⁹ P. F. Strawson, *What Have We learned from Philosophy in the Twentieth Century?*, “Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy”, vol. 8: Contemporary Philosophy, Bowling Green: Philosophy Documentation Center, Bowling Green State University 2000, s. 270.

about the world and ourselves than we currently have. Besides, he wants to explain through pointing at causes. But Strawson said that it was an impossible task.

According to Krapiec, the subject matter of metaphysics are singular beings (in other words particular substance or Aristotle's first substance). The singular beings he understood as what is singular, real existing. The beings can be material or not material.

According to Strawson, the subject matter of metaphysics is the conceptual scheme, namely the general beings (in other words general substance or Aristotle's second substance). It is not the singular beings, which Strawson names particulars. The particular he understood as what is spatio-temporal, individual, defined. But in Strawson's opinion, metaphysics investigates our conceptual scheme, which means the structure of our thought about the world and search it for high and basic features¹⁰. It is general, not singular as particulars or beings.

Krapiec does not write about conceptual scheme. But in his philosophy there are parts about what is general.

It is important that neither of them investigated ideas or pure possibility like Edmund Husserl nor the third nature like Duns Scott.

Strawson supposes that the method of metaphysics should be the connective analysis, which traces "...connections in a system without hope of being able to dismantle or reduce the concepts we examine to other and simpler concept."¹¹ We must "...give up the notions of what is fundamental from the conceptual point of view"¹².

But unlike other analytic philosophers, he did not suppose that all general features of the ordinary conceptual scheme in terms of which we think about the world are easily available for the method of linguistic analysis. They are not fully displayed by the structure of ordinary language, but rather presupposed by it.

According to Krapiec, the method of metaphysics should be causal explanation. According to Strawson, the method of metaphysics should be analysis.

¹⁰ P. F. Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics. An Introduction to Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992, p. 24, 33.

¹¹ P. F. Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics*, p. 21.

¹² Ibidem.

Both of them assume metaphysical and epistemological realism. Strawson argues for direct realism in perception but concedes that scepticism concerning the external world is not conclusively refutable.

Part Three

I think, it is too easy to say that both these metaphysics have two different subject matters and methods.

I suppose that Krapiec's metaphysics and Strawson's metaphysics had the same material subject matter of metaphysics: everything that really exists.

However they have different formal subjects matter. Existential Thomism investigated everything that really exists in the aspect of existence and asked what metaphysical elements of being finally explained it. These were: existence and essence. Strawson investigated everything that really exists in the general aspect of the scheme of concepts.

According to Krapiec the method of metaphysics was supposed to be an explanation. However (I think) he used the conceptual analysis to clarify the concept of being.

A central task of Strawson's metaphysics is not only to describe but, in the best way we can, explain the fundamentals of human thought. Although according to Strawson the method of metaphysics was supposed to be conceptual analysis, finally he explained the possibility of the cognition of the world through the conceptual scheme.

According to Krapiec, Kant's philosophy (particularly his metaphysics) is a big mistake and he rejects Kant's conclusions. However, Strawson said that he (as Kant) sought the answer to questions about the most general, structured property of our conceptual scheme. Strawson defends claims about the necessary structure of our experience, which resemble those advanced by Kant. What is more, he (like Kant) used the method of transcendental arguments.

Part Fourth

I think the difference between Krapiec's metaphysics and Strawson's metaphysics has its source in different answers to the following questions:

- 1) What is the role of the conceptual scheme in knowing of singular beings?
- 2) Must philosophy talk about reality through investigation of language and conceptual scheme?

But the difference is not extremely big. Both metaphysics investigates the

reality to say what the most general principles it has. Although such an easy definition is correct in both metaphysics, they are different. There is a common area and a separate area. I am going to suggest ten theses about a common area for both metaphysics:

- 1) The existential aspect of reality is not totally absent from Strawson's metaphysics. It is an interesting idea for analytical philosophy: the existential aspect of being and the reasons why Krapiec makes it the most important aspect of reality.
- 2) The general aspect of reality is not absent from Krapiec's metaphysics. The Thomistic tradition can reconsider the reasons for studying the general aspect of reality;
- 3) They do not speak of two different subject matters.
- 4) It is impossible to investigate the world without a language and a conceptual scheme. And in Aquinas's philosophy there is lots of studying of the concepts and language. For example the category of "conceptiones universales"¹³ – the most general concepts which you must use to think or speak about the world. But Krapiec did not speak about this category of Aquinas's. And in *De Anima (On the Soul)* of Aristotle (which Krapiec often quoted) there is the following sentence: "that mind is in a sense potentially whatever is thinkable, though actually it is nothing until it has thought? What it thinks must be in it just as characters may be said to be on a writing tablet on which as yet nothing actually stands written: this is exactly what happens with mind"¹⁴.
- 5) The study of the conceptual scheme is better presented in the metaphysics of Strawson. Maybe it can be used in the metaphysics of Krapiec to make the process of clarifying of being as being more clear.
- 6) Causal explanation and analysis are two different methods. There is a question whether these metaphysics have something in common when we use two other methods I think that is, because the both philosophers did not use the only method they claim they use. The elements of analysis are in Krapiec metaphysics and the elements of explanations are in Strawsons metaphysics¹⁵. I argue that the process of clarifying of being (which is the important part of Krapiec's metaphysics) is not metaphysical, causal explanation, but analysis. In the process of clarifying of being Krapiec researches the transcendental property of being. I think the elements of causal explanation are in Strawson metaphysics too. He seeks the deeper, unified structure of our thinking about the world and then he cannot be only on the describing and analysing level.

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Questiones disputate de veritate*, q.10 a. 6 co, q.11 a. 1 ad 5, in: <http://www.unav.es/filosofia/alarcon.amicis/qdv10.html>

¹⁴ Aristotle, *De Anima (On the Soul)*, 429b-430a (b.III, Ch. 4), tr. J. A. Smith, in: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/soul.html>

¹⁵ See for example P. F. Strawson, *My Philosophy*, p. 9

His last aim of metaphysics is the explanation of the possibility of knowing about the real world through the conceptual scheme. And it is not only analysis, but also explanation. The analysis cannot say how it is possible. It means that both metaphysics use both methods: analysis and causal explanations and it is the common level in both metaphysics.

- 7) In Krapiec's metaphysics the method of causal explanation is described more accurately. I think Strawson's philosophy can discover the theory of four causes and use it in to philosophical explanations.
- 8) It is important to say that Strawson rejects Kant's transcendental idealism.
- 9) In Aristotle's philosophy and in Aquinas's philosophy (which Krapiec accepts) there are theses about activity of human mind¹⁶.
- 10) In the postmodern area for both metaphysics the following problems are common: truth, rationality, objectivity.

Conclusions

I have tried to show possible connections between Krapiec's metaphysics and Strawson's metaphysics. I aimed to show common areas for further study. It is only an introduction to use the results of analytic philosophy to investigate the thought of Aquinas. Although Krapiec and Strawson describe what metaphysics should be differently, it is possible to use the results of one of these metaphysics as a tool for doing another.

Aquinas thought highly of the wisdom of Aristotle and at the end I want to quote Aristotle: "...it is not probable that either of these should be entirely mistaken, but rather that they should be right in at least some one respect or even in most respects."¹⁷

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¹⁶ Aristotle, *De Anima (On the Soul)*, 429b-430a; Thomas Aquinas, *Questiones disputate de veritate*, q.10.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098b, b. 1, ch. 8, tr. D. Ross, in: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nikomachean1.html>

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