

Mieczysław A. KRAPIEC*

KNOWLEDGE AND REALITY

We notice that a technical culture is very much present in today's society. At the same time we observe a decline of humanistic culture. To decrease the humanistic culture in our society was one of the major tasks of the occupants of Poland that came from the East and from the West and wanted to deprive the Poles of their national and human consciousness. But it is philosophy that reminds the man about his condition in the world, that reminds him that he has to know the world. In his most important book, *The Metaphysics*, Aristotle wrote: Πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει [Pantes antropoi tu eidenai oregontai fysei; *Met*, A 1, 980^a 22] – all men, by nature (for the very fact that they are men) want to know. Know what? They want to know the world itself and know themselves in this world. This knowledge is present in the whole of human history, on different levels; at each stage of the history of mankind some thought about the world is present, some thought about man is present.

In the ancient times the men who lived in the basin of the Mediterranean Sea – in Egypt, in Lydia (the Ionians), in Mesopotamia – were surprised by the world. During their wandering people saw water, they breathed air, they saw lightning and they even encountered snow. And because of all those things they asked themselves what the world was like? What was the most important constituent in this world? Why is the world what it is? In the beginning the answers to these questions were very ingenuous: some material element was indicated, such as air, fire, water, earth. They claimed that the whole world is just an organized system of water, of air, etc. On the other hand all this encouraged people to know oneself: γνῶθι σεαυτόν [gnothi seauton] – know yourself was engraved in the architrave of the temple of Delphi. The human being knew himself by knowing the world. It wasn't

* Prof. Mieczysław A. Krapiec OP – Catholic University of Lublin

just a reflection of man on himself, but knowing the world he knew himself as one who lives in this world and transforms it.

In our European culture therefore the first meeting with the world and the first essential consciousness were characterized by this ingenuous type of knowledge: an ingenuous materialism according to which the world is an organized system of water, air, fire, etc. But at the same time in the very beginning it was noticed (e.g. Heraclitus) that all this is insufficient, that there is a truth, a *logos*, a thought that pervades the whole world. Beyond these elements of the world a reason was looked for, a cosmic thought that makes things real. The world is real not because it is material but because of a thought, some kind of *logos*, an identity in itself. Plato held that the ideas – the inner necessity, a structural necessity of a thing called idea – is the essence of every thing. Aristotle called it a form because while looking at the thing from outside we see that the dog's form is different from the bull's form; different is the form of a human being: of man and of woman. There is therefore a form that constitutes a thing, that necessarily puts in order the inner structure of the thing, and it was called an idea or a form. From Aristotle onwards it was observed that all of reality can be ordered in strata of forms: starting with the individual form (Xanthippe or Socrates), through a wider form (man) and yet wider forms (an animal, a mammal, a substance) until something that constitutes the essential form.

So the first approaches to understanding the reality emerged: reality is rational and rationality can be expressed in concepts, and the concepts can be expressed in locutions such as „man”, „horse”, „dog” that become in some way a guide for understanding things. In ancient Athens it was noticed that we deal with things, with reality and with the signs of this reality. The signs of this reality are: our thought, our concepts and statements. So reality presented itself to man as a thing in itself and as understood by man in concepts, statements and expressible, communicable through further language signs, therefore as signs of the things. This brought to a cognitive slide: instead of exploring the thing, instead of knowing the horse more and more (what, in fact, scientists did quite late on, in the XIX century), the sign of the thing was given precedence instead of the thing in itself. The various philosophies followed: starting with the Plato's philosophy, then Aristotle's, Arab philosophy, Jewish philosophy, Medieval philosophy, in which different „forms” were analyzed as the factors that constitute the necessary contents and therefore the rational contents. They thought that the analysis of the signs concerns only the things in themselves, while the signs facilitate the knowledge of the thing and make communication possible but do not substitute the things. So it is hardly possible to state that the reality is accessible to the man only through the elements that can be expressible by the signs. The reality is more and more deeply accessible be-

cause it IS, it EXISTS, and the existence can't be expressed in a concept. The existence is experienced directly: even if I know the same concepts, the concepts denote the thing that already exists. We can use an example: if I walk on the street and I shout: „a dog”, the people react, they look around for the dog. So *the structure* of things is something different from the fact that they *exist*. This is the next huge step in philosophy. Thomas Aquinas understood that reality is reality not because it is knowable. On the contrary, it is knowable because it exists, because it is a reality. So the right way of knowing is not from the analysis of the facts to things. All our concepts only partially describe the thing in just one of its aspects and don't equal the thing in itself. From the creation of the concept it cannot be deduced that the thing exists.

The first thing that was pointed out by Thomas Aquinas is that the thing exists and that the fact that determines reality is its concrete existence. Every thing is real because it exists. There are so many existences as many individual things are but the existence has always one concrete function – it makes real. Under existence the thing organizes itself. Firstly a man has to come to existence as the first cell and then everything organizes itself.

In the first phrase of Revelation it is expressed concisely: In the beginning God created (and is creating) heaven and earth. Only God, and nobody else, can create, give existence, transmit existence. All the others in the world can only „re-do” things that already exist.

So we see the first turning point – the passage from the genuine myths to philosophy, to the analysis through concepts and statements about the thing – was done by Aristotle, the Arabs philosophers, especially Avicenna and others. It was also done by the Scholastic, but the emphasis on the act of existence (the second turning point) as a factor that constitutes reality is up to Thomas Aquinas. In any case, the very fact of existence cannot be enclosed in a concept – it can only be experienced, known, it is a reason for knowledge. The concept instead describes not the existence but the contents, for example it describes the existing horse, the existing dog, the existing man, the existing Xanthippe, the existing Plato but it cannot describe existence itself. Existence, however, is the factor that „creates” reality, it constitute reality and Thomas used this for stating that only what exists is real, only what exists and exists as substance – being in itself; it exists as animal, as man, as John, as Mary, as tree. *But existence qua existence* is something that is of God alone. God is „He who exists”, he is Pure Existence. So all the reality is a corollary of the act of existence that takes its hierarchy from the Pure Existence that is the reason of everything that can be being (existences are always concrete).

The act of existence could not be got hold of by philosophy for a long time and because of this Thomas Aquinas is the only philosopher that stress-

es the fact that the reality is due to existence. It was very difficult of course. Why? All the tradition of knowledge was not going in this direction because it was difficult to transmit the fact-act of existence. I can only transmit the fact of existence: look!, touch!, smell!, taste!; but I cannot transmit in a concept what existence really is. I always communicate with men through contents and therefore, after Thomas Aquinas, philosophers tried to stress that existence somehow belongs to the contents and it was understood as a modality of the thing's concepts so that the existence could be enclosed in a concept and transmitted in statements. Because of this the philosophers tried to argue – especially the Spanish philosopher Francisco Suárez – that the concepts have double reality: objective – the concepts concern the thing that exists outside of me – and subjective – the concepts concern my way of knowing; so there are objective and subjective concepts. And all this constituted the transmission of Scholastic thought through the ages.

Descartes knew the achievements of Scholastic philosophy. He asked himself if there was anything new in the objective concept that wasn't in the subjective concept or if there was anything in the subjective concept that wasn't in the objective concept? He answered to this question that the objective concept coincided with the subjective concept, that they were the same thing. So why was it necessary to double the concepts? After Descartes philosophy analysed the ideas (concepts) that automatically, in some way, had to denote the reality. But – if we can create concepts about things that don't exist – do these concepts reveal the existence of the thing?

Cartesianism was a big turning point after Scholasticism. The Cartesian concept claimed to represent the reality because ideas come from God. But how it is possible to arrive from the world of ideas to reality in human knowledge? Some „cognitive bridges” have to be created. Therefore after Descartes a series of cognitive bridges were put forward so that it could be possible to pass from the analysis of knowledge to the existence of the thing. But human thought does not create reality, human thought is only a sign of this reality – the signs don't create reality.

The next turn in the history of philosophy is the thought of Kant. What kind of philosophy did Kant begin? According to him it can be said: the reality in itself is not important. It is the subject that decides about everything, there is only the subject and its inner experiences decide everything. Therefore the subject organizes all our knowledge; the knowledge doesn't come from the world – all the knowledge comes „from me”. I don't know the world, I know my perception of the world, but my perceptions are in disorder. I have to order them, to put them into categories of time and space; if they are rational I have to put them in the categories of causality or of substantiality, etc. So „I-subject” is the source of the rationality of the

world. There is as much rationality in the world as I put in . Again: philosophy passed to the pure subjective sphere.

As a consequence to Kant's subjectivism there took place a change towards psychology. The philosophy has been „psychologized”. Psychology became the general form of knowing reality and apart from psychology there was nothing else. And so humanity wavered in its knowledge. The humanity wanted to know the world, reality, humanity wanted to know itself but it knew signs that it produced and took as reality. These signs are our thoughts, concepts, statements, stories, myths. But reality cannot be produced by ordering our signs about reality as the pieces of a puzzle. Kant and Descartes with their theories are examples of how one can escape the reality and speak not about it but about one's own thoughts as though they were the world.

The next sphere in which the problem of „signs or reality” was reflected is the sphere of the law. The law – *ius* (from the Latin *iustari*, meaning something what is equal to reality) – concerns a very rich interpersonal and international reality. The human being is always in contact with another person that he cannot kill, kick or humiliate. There are many relationships between persons. We spontaneously know these relationships in someone's behaviour as proper or improper. The very expression „I am sorry” is already a recognition of someone's right to treatment different from the one that took place. There are real interpersonal relations such as the conjugal relationship between Adam and Eve. It is a reality that can't be crossed out in order not to hurt other person. Interpersonal relationships are characterized by knowledge and duty of acting or stopping an action against a person. The relationships characterized by this duty of acting or stopping an action because of my or your good are right. We observe in this fact the purposefulness of our acting; one cannot act without a purpose and precisely in the law this purposefulness of acting is revealed: the good should be done. The good can't be destroyed; one has to act for the good because the good is a reason and a goal of acting.

There are really many interpersonal relationships. They sometimes have to be ordered in social life. Some of them have to be chosen (in Latin *eligere*), formulated or written down so that they can be read (in Latin *legere*). These relationships are firmly binding (in Latin *ligare*). The Latin name for the law – *lex* – comes from *eligere*, *legere* and *ligare*. We find, read and choose in the law different real relations and we use them to render somebody responsible. *Ius* (law-relation) and *lex* (law-norm) are in the same relationship to each other as a reality and the signs of this reality. People forgot about all this and they now understand law taking only signs into consideration, they chose the signs and they state that there is nothing more outside the signs. They think that the law is made by *lex*-signs. Unfortunately it

is not so. I can sometimes choose wrongly, I can produce the signs arbitrarily and I can use them for establishing wrong legislations in the country, e.g. that children can be killed before they are born or that the abortive pills can be financed from the nation's budget. These are actions based on badly chosen signs. This cannot bind the human being and when the man thinks that this binds him in the acting he commits evil for which he is personally responsible, as is the member of the Parliament that makes this law. So again we can see that there is reality on one side and the signs of the reality on the other side and that these signs of reality cannot be confused with reality itself. The signs are helpful to understand reality. Through the signs we can understand reality better, we can order it in groups, we can justify them. It is difficult to justify reality itself because it is reality that justifies existence.

It is extremely important to know what reality is, what the signs of reality are and why not all „so called” philosophies are philosophies (when they are not directed to reality). We note that nowadays science communicates through computers but in the past it used the writing that expresses our concepts, our statements; the analysis of writing, of statements, of concepts, of language, has absorbed humanity and we erroneously thought that it was philosophy. Our knowledge is twofold: there is spontaneous cognition that concerns things and there is reflexive cognition that concerns „my” cognition of the things.

If normal human knowledge is set in order – e.g. I see a dog, this dog is brown and has four legs, it barks, it has a color, it frisks – I can see reality, I can make the concept of the dog and afterwards I do not speak about the concept any longer but about the sign. And if in the act of knowledge I don't start with the description of reality but with a reflection on my own concepts, on my understanding of reality, then I create for myself a fable, I create a myth.

Philosophical knowledge that doesn't start with reality but with the reflection on this reality is entangled in myth. This is the reason why today philosophy has passed on to mythology (Kołakowski). In philosophy one has to know reality and at the same time one has to think about his way of knowing and to use logic. But neither logic nor all the methodological rules can substitute knowledge, they can't substitute the contact with reality, with existence. If I quit existence I will quit the real world, I will enter the world of fairy tales. And because of this there is only a fable in phenomenology. Husserl stated that it is necessary to go „back to the things in themselves” (*zurück zu den Sachen selbst*); but realism was not taken in consideration. What do „the things in themselves” mean? For Husserl they are intentional entities and not „to come back to the things” because in intentional entities the object/subject opposition is suppressed – here we have

only a return to the subject. But subjectivity does not decide about existence and objectivity of knowledge it does not mean that man creates reality. One can summarize everything here, even the tale called „fable” by Aristotle and Plato – the tale is the fable-myth that starts when „I” don’t analyze the thing itself but only „my cognition” of the thing, my concept of it.

The fable is necessary in philosophy but only when reality checks it. The fifth volume of the *General Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* shows the most important things for understanding reality. There are some „concepts of philosophy” that are a point of reference. First of all: philosophy has to have a real subject; secondly: philosophical thought has to be expressed firstly by the spontaneous act of knowing and then by a reflected act of knowing, verifiable by reality and directed by logic. Thirdly: it has to be expressed with a human integrated language and not with a separated syntax or language pragmatics. And precisely this happens today in our culture in which the different levels of language – pragmatics, syntax and semantics – are torn apart; for instance, the television, the radio and the press show that one can use language to bemuse the other. And at the end: philosophical knowing requires a correctly put question: a question about reality. This question was once formulated as „why?”, „what-for?” (from Greek: διὰ τί [dia ti]).

The biggest mistakes come from different ways of philosophical knowledge and there is therefore need to return to truth, to verifiability, to the intersubjective character of knowing, and above all to analyze the reality that exists and not reality separated from existence. In order to save Polish culture we have to know and make philosophy as something not separated from reality and we should not substitute reality with signs, any signs: real signs or language signs.