

FR. KINGSLEY CHIDIEBERE EKEOCHA

*On the Methodology of Metaphysics /  
Z metodologii metafizyki*  
by Ks. Stanisław Kamiński\*

This book is a collection of five articles, written in English and Polish. The author's aim in these articles is to formulate or construct a new system of philosophy—classical philosophy—capable of standing the test of time. A careful reading of this book shows a reaction against positivist movements and anti-metaphysical trends which denigrate the scientific status of metaphysics, impose methods which are incompatible with classical metaphysics or absolutely obviate classical metaphysics by reducing it to some other philosophical discipline. The author makes it obvious that metaphysics is under an attack. The title of the work seems very *ad rem* because it shows the way the author undertakes his task of rediscovering and reconstructing classical philosophy. The author is convinced that the reconstruction of classical philosophy demands an autonomous methodology, untainted by positivist tools. The autonomy of methodology guarantees the autonomy and scientificity of philosophy. This philosophy, which can be called a metaphysical philosophy, is what the author refers to as “the theory of being.”

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FR. KINGSLEY CHIDIEBERE EKEOCHA — John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland  
e-mail: frkingsleyekeocha@gmail.com • ORCID ID: no data

\* Ks. Stanisław Kamiński, *On the Methodology of Metaphysics / Z metodologii metafizyki* (Lublin-Roma: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu & Società Internazionale Tommaso d'Aquino, 2018), 275 pages, ISBN 978-83-65792-02-0.

The author's understanding of metaphysics is deeply connected with that of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, yet it retains some unique features. Metaphysics for him is a conception of philosophy which is realistic, that is, a philosophy which has real being as its object. And it is in this narrow sense that it is called classical philosophy.

In the first chapter, "The Theory of Being and Other Philosophical Disciplines," Kamiński seeks answers to questions like: is it possible to formulate an identical methodology for explanation in all philosophical disciplines? Is it possible to reduce all philosophical disciplines to the theory of being? Can the "theory of being alone be the basis of the disciplines of classical philosophy or even exhaust them all?"<sup>1</sup> The author's answer to these questions is affirmative. He argues that

if we assume that classical philosophy explains any object given in experience in its ultimate and necessary ontic aspect, each particular type of reality is ultimately explained also in the same way as being in general, that is, by the structure of being.<sup>2</sup>

The author shows the cradle of classical thought through Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and the importance of the theory of being as a base for the explanation of all beings from the angle of their causes, even those specialized in other disciplines. Thus the unity of the disciplines in Aristotle was solidified in Thomas Aquinas. Thanks to "first philosophy" which is the bearer of the principle of justification for all existing things. The decline of this importance was inevitable in subsequent philosophers, from the Hellenistic to the Modern period, who adopted different methods and systems, championing the cause for the autonomy and disintegration of some philosophical disciplines from metaphysics like the theory of cognition, theory of values, philosophy of

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<sup>1</sup> Kamiński, *On the Methodology of Metaphysics*, 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 39–40.

nature and practical philosophy, natural theology or theory of the Absolute. Meanwhile, metaphysics metamorphosed through these times into logic and a philosophy of possible beings.

In the reconstruction of classical philosophy, Kamiński insists that “one has to restore the greatest possible faithfulness to the conceptions that were historically first (Aristotelian-Thomistic), and were not deformed by later modifications.”<sup>3</sup> Secondly, there is a need to unify the disciplines within classical philosophy by restricting the range of issues it covers. Hence, Kamiński brings together the philosophy of culture and philosophy of action on the grounds that “both are determined by the ontic nature of the acting subject.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Kamiński maintains that in the reconstructed version of classical philosophy the theory of cognition (epistemology) cannot be separated from the theory of being (metaphysics). He accepts the fact that the study of epistemology and metaphysics is widely practiced, however, he claims that such division has no place in classical philosophy.

The second chapter, “The Theory of Being and Its Domains,” seeks to identify all the separate disciplines which form part of classical philosophy, in order to establish methodological links between them and specify the nature of the relationship between these disciplines. Kamiński achieves this task by first stating the views of different philosophers within classical thought under the following headings: (i) “The Basis of the Scope of the Theory of Being,” (ii) “The Character of the Domains of the Theory of Being,” and (iii) “The Methodological Relationships between the Domains of the Theory of Being.” Under these different questions Kamiński submits that (i) “the theory of being constitutes the supreme and principal manifestation of philosophy,”

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

hence there is an identity of philosophy and the theory of being,<sup>5</sup> (ii) “the theory of being constitutes a science that is one and indivisible with regard to its formal object and its method of explanation; it is possible however to distinguish its disciplines that are partially autonomous, and this is due to their particular starting points,”<sup>6</sup> (iii) theory of being proceeds from general metaphysics to particular metaphysics. These points secure the uniformity of philosophical cognition and keep philosophy in check.

Furthermore, Kamiński painstakingly demonstrates why classical philosophy can be identified with metaphysics. He emphasizes that in every science there are two possible objects for investigation: “the object of experience” and “the object of theoretical clauses.”<sup>7</sup> Metaphysics, and indeed all philosophical disciplines have existing beings as the object of experience. Theories simply serve as a generalized formula for explaining what is given in experience and are often times cut off from reality. In this sense, Kamiński defines the “theory” in the “theory of being” as a realistic model wherein the “theoretician of being endeavors to explain reality in the most general (transcendental and analogous) scale.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the determination of the object of metaphysics as being precedes any theory which aims at an explanation of reality. The particular metaphysics, hence, are bound up and linked with general metaphysics on the basis of their formal object and explanation. One important point in this chapter is that only a partial autonomy exists between the theory of being and its domains because of the unity in their formal object and the structure of justification.

The third and fourth chapters are entitled, respectively, “On the Language of the Theory of Being” and “Explanation in Metaphysics.”

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

It is clear that all cognitive actions are communicable only through language. Hence, this forms a vital part of the theory of being. Kamiński states that language is indispensable for doing metaphysics, and argues that appropriate kind of language should accompany metaphysical investigations since all products and fruits of philosophical investigations must be communicated adequately. He holds that the essence of language is not simply to define terms and concepts in metaphysics. Rather, language should help the cognizer to see the object of demonstration. It helps one to see the content of being.

The neo-positivists, then, and others who lay emphasis on the “analysis of the pragmatic functions of language”<sup>9</sup> are defective in its usage. Language in metaphysics cannot be deductive as in logic. The language of the theory of being should be structured in such a way that in the determination of the formal object of the theory of being, the language arrives at the concept of being. The making explicit of this concept in a general sense leads to the discovery of transcendental concepts of thing, unity, something, truth and good. These properties correspond to the fundamental principles of being and thought: the principle of identity, non-contradiction, sufficient reason and finality. There should be “a mutual conditioning of the ontic, cognitive and linguistic aspects”<sup>10</sup> in the theory of being wherein the ontic aspect enjoys primacy. This means that language is objectival. The metaphysical language is also transcendental and analogous in character.

The fifth chapter, “The Methodological Peculiarity of the Theory of Being,” highlights the distinctive nature of the theory of being. First, identifying the theory of being with classical philosophy does not imply that its authority is based on that of Thomas Aquinas or Aristotle. Rather, it is based on what is given in experience. Secondly, in the classi-

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

fication of the sciences, the theory of being stands on its own away from theology or the natural-mathematical sciences. Thirdly, between minimalism and maximalism, the theory of being is committed to fulfilling maximalist goals which other disciplines cannot engage in. Maximalism means that philosophy is able to ask and proffer solutions to fundamental questions concerning the meaning, purpose, and end of existence. Fourthly, the theory of being sees our world as rational and, hence, begins its investigation from common sense experience. In this way, it rejects all idealist and subjectivist trends and focuses constantly on the sensitive-intellectual operations at the moment of contact with objective reality. Hence, intellectualism and reductiveness of thinking are basic features of the theory of being.

In evaluation, the arguments which the author employs are sound and well-founded. The author shows deep experience of philosophy, metaphysics, methodology, history of philosophy, etc. He successfully demonstrates the specificity and peculiarity of metaphysical cognition. His work is a metaphysical masterpiece with a methodological foundation. It demonstrates that being is the point of unity for all philosophical disciplines. Therefore, philosophy is not simply a set of unconnected disciplines which investigate “everything.” Instead, to be philosophical is to be inclusively metaphysical, realistic and methodic. The methods of the contemporary sciences are not proper to realistic metaphysics.

The main difficulty I encountered in the book is the author’s use of “theory of being” which seems ambiguous. Sometimes he employs it as metaphysics (general metaphysics precisely) distinguishable from other disciplines (particular metaphysics) within classical philosophy, and at other times he treats “theory of being” as a model of classical philosophy distinguishable from other models. Also, a reader may be tempted to think that the author simply reduces all philosophical disciplines into metaphysics (general and particular). Such criticism of reductionism may be too harsh since the author emphasizes the unity of phil-

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osophical disciplines, on the one hand, and a partial autonomy of the particular disciplines, on the other. I agree with the author on a need for unity of the philosophical disciplines because when philosophy concerns itself with everything and uses different methods from the sciences, it falls into an identity crisis.

Most interesting for me, however, is the place of the “philosophy of God” in the divisions of the philosophical disciplines. It seems the author would reject any idea of “Christian philosophy.”<sup>11</sup> Philosophy has to be autonomous in relation to faith since God is not given in immediate experience. Therefore we can only employ the Absolute as reason for the existence of contingent things. Such philosophical position may not be totally in agreement with the claims of philosophers like Joseph Owens, whose book title, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*,<sup>12</sup> already suggest the contrary.

There is no doubt that this book covers a wide range of issues for philosophers, metaphysicians, methodologists and even students in the natural sciences who seek to understand the relation between philosophy and other disciplines. I am certain that these persons, as well as all lovers of wisdom, will find the book compelling.



#### REFERENCES

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1963).

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