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THE DISPUTE BETWEEN REALISM AND IDEALISM: BASIC ISSUES

Abstract: The topic of idealism and realism has been the subject of extensive literature. This article presents an overview of the most important aspects of the debate, which dates back to ancient times. Plato and Aristotle established the framework for this dispute, which has continued into modern times. In light of existential Thomism, the dispute between idealism and realism begins at the starting point of cognition. There is no bridge between thought and reality, but there is a walkway that is sometimes crossed by mathematics and experiments.

Keywords: idealism, realism, mathematics, universals, Thomism.

Realism and idealism are constantly present in science. It is known today that without *a priori* assumptions there would be no most important theories, but they would not be recognized as such if they did not work in reality. While in science you can repeat experiments and improve theories, outside science, imposing *a priori* assumptions on reality can end tragically. Idealism and apriorism are not the same, but they have common roots, just like realism and aposteriorism. This work will show their sources and characteristic features on the example of the most famous philosophers. It is an introductory text and has the characteristics of the most basic overview of positions.

The dispute between realism and idealism is almost as old as philosophy, and it certainly begins with the emergence of cognitive theory issues. The question about the precursor of the theory of knowledge poses some difficulties. As a truly

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separate branch of philosophy, epistemology arose with the publication of the work *Theorie des Menschlichen Erkenntnisvermögens und Metaphysik* by E. Reinhold in 1832¹. Until then, cognitive-theoretic issues were, as it were, “adjacent” to philosophical considerations on topics such as the creation of the world, man, the existence of universals, etc. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish philosophers whose research constituted the heritage of epistemology even before its formal separation. Such thinkers include the Pre-Socratics (e.g. Heraclitus), and then Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Ockham, Descartes, Berkeley, Hume, Kant. No one will deny that Kant’s most important work, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, was from the theory of knowledge, although it was written (first edition) in 1781. However, after the formal separation of epistemology as a separate field of philosophy, the history of this discipline is associated with the emergence of new philosophical directions. Since 1879, with the publication of the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* by Leo XIII, we have been dealing with the development of neo-Thomism, and since 1900 with the development of phenomenology². In the 20th century, the development of the theory of knowledge was also influenced by analytical philosophy and the philosophy of language, psychology, neuroscience, etc. Let’s now move on to the issue of the sources of views classified as realism or idealism.

1. REALISM AND IDEALISM AND THE SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

It seems that the first philosopher who asked directly about the sources of our knowledge was Socrates. He was guided to this question by natural philosophy, based on which he concluded that we cannot learn anything from nature. So Socrates started from the limits of knowledge: it seemed to him that we can know what is beyond us – nature. However, he quickly changed his mind, because many philosophers studying nature did not agree with each other, and yet they dealt with the same entity³. Nevertheless, man has knowledge, because even if they know nothing, they already know one thing: “I know that I know nothing”⁴. But we also know other things that nature has not taught us. So where did this knowledge come from? By asking this question, Socrates moved from the limits to the sources of knowledge. And these sources are in man.

The real dispute between realism and idealism began with Plato and Aristotle. Socrates did not know where the knowledge in him came from, so he appealed to

¹ Cf. M.A. KRĄPIEC. *Epistemologia*. In: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*. Vol. 3. Ed. A. Maryniarczyk [et al.]. Lublin 2002 p. 193.

² Cf. H. KIEREŚ. *Fenomenologia*. In: *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii* p. 397.

³ Cf. XENOPHON. *Memories of Socrates: Memorabilia and Apology*. Oxford 2023 IV, 2, 26.

⁴ *Ibidem* IV, 2, 24.

the daimonion, the inner voice. Plato, on the other hand, answered this question: the soul acquired knowledge in the ideal world, and now it only needs to be recalled. For Plato, remembering and learning are one and the same:

The soul, then, as being immortal, and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or in the world below, has knowledge of them all; and it is no wonder that she should be able to call to remembrance all that she ever knew about virtue, and about everything; for as all nature is akin, and the soul has learned all things; there is no difficulty in her eliciting or as men say learning, out of a single recollection – all the rest, if a man is strenuous and does not faint; for all enquiry and all learning is but recollection⁵.

The theory of anamnesis, of which Plato was the author, assumes the immortality of the soul, and treats the body as a factor that impairs the soul (dualism of soul and body), because when connected with the body, the soul somehow loses access to ideas and must recall them. But there are further consequences of the theory of anamnesis. Plato's philosophy somehow forced the introduction of the following concepts into science: nativism, *a priori* and *a posteriori*. The founder of the Academy was certainly a nativist. Nativism claims that we have innate concepts⁶. Is this view realism or idealism? There is no clear answer.

We can often hear that Plato was an idealist because he believed that our knowledge comes from the view of ideas that the soul had in another world. After the incarnation – punishment for sins, the soul must remember what it knew. It is concluded that Plato was an idealist, because experience, which is the basis of realism, is missing. The problem, however, is in the reference point. For Plato, the real world was the ideal world. True knowledge concerns the world of ideas, not the material world, which is only a shadow compared to the world of ideas. Moreover, before incarnation, the soul learned ideas through experience. Therefore, if we take these two remarks into account, it turns out that Platonic idealism begins to appear as empiricism, but not in the sense of experiencing the material world. The assumption here would be that the world of ideas exists at all, even though Plato appealed to the experience of things to support his thesis⁷. Moreover, we could distinguish at least three types of nativism: extreme, moderate and weak.

Extreme nativism claims that all knowledge is innate, and experience only makes us aware of it. This position can be associated with idealism. Extreme nativism claims that all knowledge is innate, and experience only makes us aware

⁵ PLATO. *Meno* 81 c-d. <<https://classics.mit.edu/Plato/meno.html>> [available: 12.03.2024].

⁶ Cf. K. AJDUKIEWICZ. *Zagadnienia i kierunki filozofii. Teoria poznania, metafizyka*. Keęty – Warszawa 2004 p. 30.

⁷ What we learn are not individual objects, but their concepts, the scope of which includes all referents that meet the definition. Therefore, Plato justified the existence of ideas with sensory experience: although we see individual things, we know general things.

of it. This position can be associated with idealism. If we exclude the world of ideas from our considerations, the question remains where this knowledge would come from. And here we would have idealism in the literal sense, because the only answer would be extreme apriorism, which states that only reason is the proper source of knowledge about reality⁸. The problem, however, is that extreme apriorism occurred only in antiquity⁹ and was associated with idealism in the sense of Plato, i.e. that all reality was reduced to ideas¹⁰. In this way, extreme nativism and extreme apriorism lead directly to Platonic idealism and there is no escape from it.

The opposite side of the dispute between realism and idealism, i.e. the representative of ancient realism, was Aristotle, who assigned a superior role to the experience of the world perceived through the senses. It can also be said that the dispute about universals begins with Aristotle. Let us quote a fragment from the Stagirite's writings, which shows a departure from Plato's philosophy:

We had perhaps better consider the universal good and discuss thoroughly what is meant by it, although such an inquiry is made an uphill one by the fact that the Forms have been introduced by friends of our own. Yet it would perhaps be thought to be better, indeed to be our duty, for the sake of maintaining the truth even to destroy what touches us closely, especially as we are philosophers or lovers of wisdom; for, while both are dear, piety requires us to honour truth above our friends¹¹.

This famous quote points us to at least three important "things." Firstly, since Aristotle disagrees with "his friends", he automatically sides with the opposite side, i.e. realism. One can even venture to say that the Stagirite's opposition to the Academy was the birth of realism in philosophy, i.e. the so-called critical realism, which can be considered a scientific justification for naive realism, also called universal realism, i.e. a position recognized by every sane person who is not a philosopher, which states that if we see something, it really exists in a literal sense¹².

The second "thing" that follows from the above quote is Aristotle's encouragement to engage in the study of "the good in general". Plato also considered ideas, which are nothing more than generalizations of individual objects. And this is where the argument about universals begins. Why? Because Aristotle does not give up on general concepts, "things in themselves", but he does not identify them with ideas in Plato's sense. That is why Diogenes Laertius calls Aristotle "Plato's

⁸ Cf. K. AJDUKIEWICZ. *Zagadnienia i kierunki filozofii* p. 33.

⁹ Cf. *ibidem*.

¹⁰ Cf. G. REALE. *Historia filozofii starożytnej. Słownik, indeksy i bibliografia*. Vol. V. Trans. E.I. Zieliński. Lublin 2002 p. 96.

¹¹ ARISTOTLE. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Kitchener 1999 I, 6, 1096 a.

¹² Cf. K. AJDUKIEWICZ. *Zagadnienia i kierunki filozofii* p. 91.

most genuine disciple”¹³. He was genuine because he did not abandon the subject of the investigations initiated by Plato, but looked for their solution elsewhere. The issue of universals continues to this day and will probably never be fully resolved, because when one issue is solved, another puzzle immediately appears. The philosophy of mathematics today can be proof of this: is it possible to build pure mathematics such that it would never have any connection with reality, and on the other hand, applied mathematics should still be considered mathematics and not theoretical physics? Is it possible that in one field of science one part of it perfectly “fits” reality, and another part seems to be completely inconsistent with it? This problem is still an unresolved issue of universals, between realism and idealism.

The third “thing” worth paying attention to is Aristotelian anthropology. Aristotle appreciated the human body. For him, it is not a prison of the soul, but an instrument of the soul through which (the senses) the soul learns about reality. However, I think that the Stagirite overvalued the body. While in Plato we were dealing with extreme nativism and extreme *a priori*, in Aristotle there is almost no nativism left, and we can forget about *a priori*. And this is a paradox: Plato’s most original disciple did exactly the same thing as his master, but the result is completely different. Aristotle claimed that the mind is a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate¹⁴. This can be interpreted in two ways: in a negative and positive sense. In a negative sense, *tabula rasa* means that the mind is not adapted to knowledge, and experience hardly leaves its traces on it. However, *tabula rasa* in the positive sense means that reason is oriented towards knowledge¹⁵. If we were to accept *tabula rasa* in a positive sense, such a position could be called weak nativism. This is what I call the position according to which the mind’s abilities to know reality are innate. In addition, we can distinguish moderate nativism, which says that general concepts are innate, and experience fills them with content. In the case of peripatetic philosophy, what remains is weak nativism, otherwise it would be difficult to say why man needs reason, since the soul thanks to which we have it would be completely unadopted to the experience of reality, but could not obtain knowledge in any other way than experience.

Aristotle was also not an apriorist for understandable reasons. Today we distinguish two types of *a priori* knowledge: extreme apriorism (only in ancient times) and moderate *a priori*. The moderate form of apriorism developed later, in fact only after Kant. Therefore, Aristotle had no choice: since he did not agree with Plato, who was an extreme apriorist, he had to take an *a posteriori* position.

¹³ DIOGENES LAERTIUS. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* V, 1. <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0258%3Abook%3D5%3Achapter%3D1>> [available: 15.03.2024].

¹⁴ Cf. ARISTOTLE. *On the Soul* Γ 4, 429 a 30-430 a 2. <<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/soul.2.ii.html>> [available: 15.03.2024].

¹⁵ Cf. G. REALE. *Historia filozofii starożytnej* p. 152.

The result was the adoption of a distinction between passive and active intellect. Aristotle had to somehow solve the question of universals. After the rejection of Plato's ideas, the existence of universals had to be proven empirically. We therefore have two faculties of intellect: active and passive. They correspond to the division into form and matter in metaphysics. Why such a distinction? Well, since there are no general ideas, only individual material beings that do not have the opportunity to participate in their ideal counterparts, which for Plato was the basis of their intelligibility, Aristotle must have introduced something to this matter of being that makes it perceptible to our mind. Thus, the individuating feature is matter, and the generalizing factor is form. Therefore, there is a reason in the soul that corresponds to matter and a reason that corresponds to form – the efficient cause¹⁶.

The philosopher who perfected Aristotelian realism was Thomas Aquinas. An important novelty he introduced was the distinction between essence and existence. Apart from the fact that he took over the distinction between passive and active intellect from Aristotle, he also introduced a division between essence and existence, which was not important for Aristotle, therefore Aristotelism cannot be identified with Thomism¹⁷. This distinction between essence and existence is extremely important for the concept of cognitive realism. Existence actually determines realism in cognition. If we begin to consider cognition in isolation from metaphysics, from the object of cognition, we will inevitably reach idealism. So what is the role of existence and what are the limits of knowledge? Let's answer these questions.

2. REALISM AND IDEALISM AND THE LIMITS OF COGNITION

The limit of knowledge is what a person can know due to the object of knowledge. In other words, what a person really knows, what point they can reach. It is not about the possibilities of science, that, for example, we can know the limits of the visible Universe and it is impossible to go any further, or that we can study the smallest elementary particles, almost reaching the limits of knowledge when it comes to the structure of matter. The limits of knowledge in the philosophical sense concern a slightly different issue. Just as we previously divided the issue of the sources of knowledge into *a priori* and *a posteriori*, because we found that ultimately all intermediate solutions boil down to these two, so now we will make a similar division: the limits of knowledge can only be realistic, i.e. stating that things they exist independently of the knowing subject, or only idealistic, i.e. those

¹⁶ Cf. ARISTOTLE. *On the Soul* I 5, 430 a 10-23.

¹⁷ Cf. M. GOGACZ. *Istnieć i poznawać. Notatnik błędów filozoficznych i trudności z kręgu klasycznie ujętej filozofii*. Warszawa 1969 p. 101.

that state that the knowing subject is himself the source of the existence of the things he knows. And indeed there is no other division.

We can refer to basic principles here, especially the principle of (non)contradiction, which forces us to choose: either something exists or it does not, and there is no transition, no intermediate state¹⁸, between the existence and non-existence of an object. If so, then when we get to know an object we have two possibilities: either it exists in reality or it does not exist in reality. The decisive moment for realism or idealism is the first cognitive contact with existence. It comes first in the epistemological order¹⁹. This is what Thomistic epistemology says. For her, existence is decisive because it

[...] determines whether we can know something or not, it fertilizes the intellect. And this is the difference between Aristotle and Thomism: in the Stagirite it was the form that determined the existence of things²⁰,

in Thomism – existence. First we learn that being exists at all, and only later – what it is.

And what about idealism? The problem with idealism is that it asks about the value of knowledge: does what we know have any value? Can we trust our senses? However, there is an error in this question: we are asking about the value of knowledge, but through the knowledge whose value we are asking about²¹. It's like knowing that a given object exists and asking whether this existence is real without having any tools to check it. Realism avoids such consequences. Realistic philosophy only asks about the "how" of existence, not the "if" of existence. Where does this desire to check the reality of existence come from? Krąpiec replies that this is first the result of the intelligibility of the world, i.e. that we can discover in it laws that govern many beings (entitarian pluralism), and then our existential construction. Man is a monistic being in the sense that although he consists of a soul and a body (dualism), these two factors create one being, thanks to which we do not feel any internal existential split, but we are a unity of soul and body. Hence, since ancient times²², philosophers have transferred their thoughts about themselves as monistic beings to the reality existing beyond them²³. This is how thinking and cognition became identified²⁴. Reality, which is pluralistic, began to appear as monistic.

¹⁸ Cf. M.A. KRĄPIEC. *Metafizyka. Zarys podstawowych zagadnień*. Poznań 1966 p. 123.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibidem* p. 101.

²⁰ *Ibidem* p. 86.

²¹ Cf. M.A. KRĄPIEC. *Realizm ludzkiego poznania*. Lublin 1991 p. 592.

²² An example is Heraclitus, who, by saying that everything flows (*pantha rei*), transferred his internal world to the extra-subjective world. Cf. G. REALE. *Historia filozofii starożytnej* p. 98-102.

²³ Cf. M.A. KRĄPIEC. *Realizm ludzkiego poznania* p. 576.

²⁴ Cf. *ibidem* p. 577.

In philosophy there was a problem of the so-called gnoseological bridge. Its origins date back to Descartes. This is a problem that arises from idealism. The question here is: Can I somehow move from my own thoughts to the world beyond me? As we can see, this problem arises when we do not take existence into account. Existence is simply possessed by the intellect and it is impossible to free oneself from existence – Thomism says so. When we try to examine our cognition “critically” not only by asking how we know, but also what we know, we have a problem with moving from thoughts to reality.

For Descartes, the problem of existence comes from disbelief in the evidence of the senses, because, as he says,

[...] everything that I have previously considered most true, I received from or through the senses; However, I have found that sometimes they fail me, and prudence dictates that we should never fully trust those who have failed us even once²⁵.

Therefore, since Descartes rejects the evidence of the senses, he is left with doubt. However, one cannot doubt everything, and what Descartes does not doubt is thinking, hence the famous “Cogito, ergo sum”²⁶. However, if a person asks themselves whether he can know the world, but does not refer to it, they have no possibility of going beyond their own thinking, because there is no “bridge” enabling the transition from thinking to reality. Thus, the problem of the “bridge” appears only in the context of idealistic philosophy, while in realistic philosophy such a problem does not arise at all, because the key concept is existence and only on this basis the reflection on cognition is built.

The second philosopher worth considering, if only because he continues to exert a huge influence on philosophy to this day, is Kant. His philosophy is also not realistic from the point of view of Thomism. Although he does not claim that the really existing world is not possible, his knowledge depends on the mind. Sometimes one might even think that Kant is a supporter of Aristotle and Thomas. Here is a passage that may suggest this:

That all our knowledge begins with experience, there is no doubt about it. For what else could arouse the power of cognition into action if it were not brought about by objects that move our senses and partly by themselves evoke representations, partly by setting in motion the activity of our intellect [consisting of]

²⁵ R. DESCARTES. *Medytacje o pierwszej filozofii wraz z zarzutami uczonych mężów i odpowiedziami autora oraz Rozmowa z Burmanem*. Vol. 1. Trans. M. i K. Ajdukiewiczowie. Warszawa 1958 p. 21.

²⁶ It is worth emphasizing that this is also proof of the existence of God. How can a man who holds only their own thinking indubitable be certain of the existence of the world outside themselves? And here Descartes refers to God who makes our thoughts true. If it were not for God, we could not know anything.

comparing representations with each other, combining them or separating and processing in this way the raw material of sense impressions into knowledge of objects called experience²⁷.

We can see here that Kant does not deny sensory cognition and in this case he is a realist. However, he comes to different conclusions than realistic philosophy:

Whoever was the first to conclusively demonstrate [the properties of] an isosceles triangle [...], a light shone as if they understood that they should not investigate what they see in the figure, or investigate its very concept and hence it is as if they were learning its properties, but that they must create a figure from what they themselves, applying the concept, thought, put into it *a priori* and presented (with the help of construction), and that – in order to know something with certainty *a priori* – they cannot attribute nothing to a thing except what necessarily results from what they themselves have put into it according to their conception²⁸.

This is where Kant's idealism is revealed. Cognition is possible thanks to the existence of things, but its result does not depend on existence, but it is on the side of the knower.

Realistic philosophy claims that the existence of a thing is necessary for it to be known, while the knowledge itself is somehow mediated by the so-called cognitive form of the subject. This is a very specific element that mediates cognition, namely, the cognitive form, without ceasing to be an object, becomes a subject at the same time. The cognitive form becomes a substitute for the object²⁹. Thanks to this, Thomism, as a realistic philosophy, preserves Aristotle's distinction between form and matter, adds the distinction between essence and existence and, avoiding idealism, says how a person directly knows what a given object is, thanks to the introduction of the term "cognitive form". Thanks to this, the subject learns about a really existing object directly and can create its concept on this basis, which is done by active reason, while passive intellect takes a cognitive form.

It is also worth paying attention to Berkeley's idealism. His philosophy is interesting because it is a continuation of Descartes' philosophy. While Descartes claimed that the world he perceives is real because God gives him such an impression, and God cannot lie, Berkeley specifies what exactly a person perceives. The Anglican bishop is the most outstanding representative of subjective idealism in its immanent version. His famous *esse = percipi* thesis means that for Berkeley bodies do not exist in the literal sense, but begin to exist when someone perceives

²⁷ I. KANT. *Krytyka czystego rozumu. Przedmowa do drugiego wydania*. Trans. R. Ingarden. Warszawa 1957 B 1.

²⁸ *Ibidem* p. B XI-B XII.

²⁹ Cf. E. GILSON. *Tomizm*. Warszawa 1998 p. 265-266.

them³⁰. By stating this, Berkeley almost reached absurdity, because one would have to assume that the world exists only when it is observed, and disappears when no one looks at it, and if, for example, a house is observed by many observers, then there are in fact so many houses, how many observers. To avoid such absurd conclusions, Berkeley claims that God constantly observes the world and therefore reality constantly exists, regardless of humans³¹. The solution to the difficulty of the existence of the world independent of the human observer was to refer to the Eternal Observer. Interpreting *esse = percipi* today, one could say that Berkeley was the precursor of one of the interpretations of quantum mechanics. Niels Bohr's Copenhagen Interpretation indicates the existence of a superposition of the wave function state, the reduction of which depends on observation (measurement). This is reminiscent of Berkeley's statement that perception is existence. However, quantum mechanics is not idealistic, but shows that what already exists can take on various states (forms) of existence depending on observation. Thanks to Berkeley, the idea that reality could be shaped by observation was not new in the 1920s and 1930s, when new physics was being shaped.

From the point of view of the realism of existential Thomism, transcendental idealism, of which Kant is the most outstanding representative, is also a trend that raises many doubts and untenable conclusions. First, Kant claims that things are only phenomena about which nothing can actually be said. Therefore, he considered traditional metaphysics as foam floating on the surface³² and from here it is only a step to agnosticism, because since nothing can be said about the so-called "things in themselves", even more so about God. The next difficulty in Kant's philosophy is the recognition of time and space as *a priori* structures of the mind. Kant's reasoning was as follows: since we cannot experience time and space like things, and since we know the phenomena of things always located in time and space, then these time and space are a construction of our mind. Kant failed to notice that time is simply the totality of features and relations defining matter, and space determines its features and relations, with time in the aspect of duration and succession, and space in the aspect of extension. So time and space are properties of things, not of mind. Kant's failure to notice this is a result of idealism.

Idealism is also present in contemporary philosophy. Let us mention one more philosophical trend that has a great influence on contemporary philosophy. This is Husserl's phenomenology. The German philosopher created a new direction in philosophy because he could not come to terms with the fact that philosophy is not one thing, but that philosophers constantly argue with each other, Kantians

³⁰ Cf. G. BERKELEY. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. Dublin 2002 part 1, III.

³¹ Cf. *ibidem* part 1, LXX.

³² Cf. I. KANT. *Prolegomena do wszelkiej przyszłej metafizyki, która będzie mogła wystąpić jako nauka*. Trans. B. Bornstein. Warszawa 1993 p. 24-26.

with positivists, etc., but these disputes moved philosophy away from its proper object – the things themselves³³. One might assume that phenomenology would be a realistic philosophy, but it is closer to the post-Cartesian tradition. This return to the things themselves, according to Husserl, consisted in taking into brackets all the features of things that are not constitutional features. It's as if, seeing red tissue paper and wanting to see what red is, we tried to abstract the red tissue paper from it³⁴. What we are left with will be red itself. For Husserl, everything that is not red, but appears “alongside” red, are transcendent features (accidents). That is why Husserl says that only

[...] thanks to reduction, which we can also call phenomenological reduction, I obtain an absolute presentation that no longer offers anything transcendent³⁵.

So did Husserl mean to return to things themselves? Yes, but “things themselves” actually come down to Platonic ideas. Phenomenological reduction refers a specific thing to its idea, so phenomenology is actually a method teaching how to look at the ideas of things through these specific objects. And again we have a return to idealism, and even to Platonism, to which Husserl came closer later in his life. Husserl, like Kant, began with realism, but the end was idealistic.

CONCLUSIONS

Let us conclude with this review of the positions involved in the dispute between realism and idealism. Certainly, other directions and other philosophers can be added, but the aim of this work was not the history of this dispute, but its essence. Hence, we referred only to some philosophical trends and their representatives, examples of which served to illustrate the essence of this dispute. The one between realism and idealism is a problem that has existed in philosophy for over two and a half thousand years. In the whole galaxy of philosophical directions and schools, two directions stand out, which are realistic from beginning to end, i.e. starting from the sources of knowledge and ending with its limits. These are Aristotelianism and Thomism. It can be safely said that realistic philosophers are in the minority compared to idealists. It is also characteristic that realism is particularly close to Christianity, because it best fits Revelation and best answers the fundamental question: who is man, but at the same time it allows us to maintain the truth about the world as a really existing reality, which man must get to know, and not create on the basis of only for personal use, regardless of the truth.

³³ Cf. R. INGARDEN. *Wstęp do fenomenologii Husserla*. Trans. A. Półtawski. Warszawa 1974 p. 21-22.

³⁴ Cf. E. HUSSERL. *Idea fenomenologii: pięć wykładów*. Trans. J. Sidorek. Warszawa 1990 p. 68.

³⁵ *Ibidem* p. 54.

It should be emphasized that the *a priori* approach to scientific research is now common and, contrary to the fears of existential Thomists, it results in discoveries that would not be possible in a purely *a posteriori* approach. The gnoseological bridge between the human mind and reality does exist, but it is not perfect in itself, i.e. it is possible to cross it from time to time. It is possible to move from mind to reality if the starting point in cognition is pure thought. This is made possible by mathematics, and the confirmation that you have reached the other side of the bridge is an experiment. It seems that the dispute over whether idealists or realists are right should be reduced to an agreement on mutual relations. To perceive something with the senses, you first need to have an assumption to know what to look for. To know whether an assumption is true, it must be verified by reality.

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SPÓR MIĘDZY IDEALIZMEM A REALIZMEM:
KWESTIE PODSTAWOWE

Streszczenie: Temat idealizmu i realizmu jest przedmiotem obszernej literatury. Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia przegląd najważniejszych aspektów debaty sięgającej czasów starożytnych. Platon i Arystoteles ustanowili ramy dla tego sporu, który trwa do czasów współczesnych. W świetle egzystencjalnego tomizmu spór między idealizmem a realizmem rozpoczyna się w punkcie wyjścia poznania. Nie ma pomostu między myślą a rzeczywistością, ale jest kładka, która czasami jest przekraczana przez matematykę i eksperymenty.

Słowa kluczowe: idealizm, realizm, matematyka, uniwersalia, tomizm.