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NATURAL SCIENCE – AN ENEMY OR AN ALLY OF THEODICY? SOME METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS INSPIRED BY ST. THOMAS AQUINAS' NATURAL THEOLOGY

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/TiCz.2023.015>

Abstract. Since the emergence of modern scientific revolution two opposing trends have appeared which attempted to use the hypotheses formulated on the basis of the dynamically developing natural science. The first of them focuses not only on questioning the truths of revealed faith relying on the results of natural science but also on demonstrating the groundlessness of the conclusions reached before by purely rational reflection which indicated the existence of the Absolute Being within the framework of theodicy. In the case of the second trend, there are attempts to interpret selected scientific discoveries as a confirmation of the truths contained in supernatural Revelation, or to use them as premises on the basis of arguments proposed by theodicy. St. Thomas Aquinas who was able to combine revealed knowledge with the scientific knowledge of his time, creating their integral synthesis is frequently mentioned in this respect to justify the rightness of this aspiration. The article addresses several methodological questions which provide a more ordered approach to the aforementioned issues relying on the model proposed by the Angelic Doctor.

Keywords: theodicy, natural science, methodology, metaphysics.

Streszczenie. Przyrodoznawstwo – wróg czy sprzymierzeniec teodycei? Kilka metodologicznych uwag na marginesie teologii naturalnej św. Tomasza z Akwinu. Na przestrzeni stuleci, jakie minęły od czasu nowożytnej rewolucji naukowej, zaobserwo-

wać można próby wykorzystywania formułowanych na gruncie rozwijającego się dynamicznie przyrodoznawstwa hipotez, zmierzające w dwóch przeciwstawnych kierunkach. W przypadku pierwszego z nich, mamy do czynienia z dążeniem, by w oparciu o wyniki badań przyrodniczych nie tylko zakwestionować prawdy wiary objawionej, ale również wykazać niezasadność wniosków, do jakich prowadziła wcześniej czysto racjonalna refleksja, wskazująca na fakt istnienia Bytu Absolutnego, prowadzona w ramach teodycei. W przypadku drugiego, spotykamy dążenie, by interpretować wybrane odkrycia naukowe jako swego rodzaju potwierdzenie prawd zawartych w nadprzyrodzonym Objawieniu, bądź też wykorzystywać je w charakterze przesłanek na gruncie teodycealnej argumentacji. Celem uzasadnienia słuszności tego dążenia, nierzadko przywoływany zostaje autorytet św. Tomasza z Akwinu jako tego, który potrafił łączyć wiedzę objawioną z wiedzą naukową swoich czasów, tworząc ich integralną syntezę. W ramach artykułu podjętych zostaje kilka kwestii o charakterze metodologicznym, pozwalających – jak się wydaje – uniknąć błędów, jakie pociągać może za sobą realizacja tego dążenia.

Słowa kluczowe: teodycea, przyrodoznawstwo, metodologia, metafizyka.

INTRODUCTION

The worldview debate has a long history. Since the modern scientific revolution the discoveries in the field natural sciences and the hypotheses formulated on their basis have been used for questioning not only the truths of revealed faith, but also those truths resulting from philosophical reflection. An extreme response to such efforts has been an attempt, in the spirit of concordism, to prove that it is these discoveries that confirm the truth about God the Creator of all things. To justify the rightness of these aspirations, the authority of St. Thomas Aquinas has been frequently invoked, as his works skillfully combine faith with the scientific knowledge of his time.

However, the implementation of this aspiration entails, in practice, the risk of errors which may be avoided by drawing attention to certain methodological questions that arise in this context. They will concern, in particular, the temptation of quoting the worldview reflections expressed by representatives of natural sciences instead of referring to factual and philosophical argumentation; preserving the unity of truth while guaranteeing the autonomy of the ways leading to it; the manner in which Aquinas understood the so-called scientific knowledge he creatively used in his works; and the methodological distinctiveness of theodicy and natural

science. The consideration of the aforementioned issues will lead to the formulation of the conclusion to answer the question posed in the title of the paper whether natural science is an enemy or an ally of theodicy.

1. 'SCIENTIFIC WORLDVIEW' – A WORLDVIEW WITHOUT GOD? WHAT SO-CALLED 'SCIENTISTS' THINK ABOUT IT?

The monumental works of the scientific revolution which took place in modern times are certainly *De revolutionibus orbium caelestium* (1543) of Nicholas Copernicus and *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica* (1687) by Isaac Newton. In particular, the latter has become a model example of mathematical natural science, aiming to present the results of experiments in the form of a coherent theory expressed in the language of mathematics. Although the authors of these works were deeply religious, it was natural science that was to be used as a tool of ideological struggle against religion further in the future.¹

The particular intensity of this approach fell on the second half of the nineteenth century – an era in which positivism and scientism dominated. According to the concept formulated by the precursor of positivism, Auguste Comte, the intellectual development of humanity was to include three stages: religious, metaphysical and positive. Religion was thus identified with the manifestation of intellectual immaturity, overcome in time by philosophy, which was finally to be replaced by science, understood in the spirit of scientism as mathematical natural science. Inspired by the scientism of the second half of the nineteenth century, scientists,

¹ It is widely known to those interested in the history of science that Copernicus dedicated his monumental work *De revolutionibus* (1543) to Pope Paul III. However, few readers had a chance to come across the information that Isaac Newton, one of the greatest scientists who ever lived, spent less time on science than on theology. The reason his religious writings remained unknown was because none of them were published during his lifetime. It was only after his death in 1727 that the executor of Newton's will, John Conduitt, published some of his theological manuscripts. They reached a wider audience after 1936 when the manuscripts were auctioned, Steve E. Jones, „A Brief Summary of Sir Isaac Newton's Religious Views,” in *Converging Paths to Truth. The Summerhays Lectures on Science and Religion*, ed. by Michael Rhodes and J. Ward Moody (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2011), 59–60.

spreading a materialistic view of the world, directly postulated the replacement of religion with science. A peculiar expression of this trend were the paraliturgical speeches of the Nobel Prize winner, Wilhelm Ostwald, who every Sunday preached his “scientific sermons” in front of a group of enthusiasts of the new, enlightened “religion”.²

The positivist spirit of the struggle against religion in the name of science exerted an institutional influence on the twentieth century due to Marxism, which gaining real political power at its service, shaped for many decades the face of a part of the world. Materialist ideology was imposed by force as a result of the victory of the Bolshevik revolution, and later Soviet conquests. Its characteristic expression was, in particular, the promotion of the so-called “scientific worldview,” which excluded the recognition of the existence of any non-material reality.

Unlike much of the “Soviet world,” in Poland the love of liberty and courageous opposition to the Marxist-inspired worldview revolution allowed the Catholic Church to retain considerable freedom of action. For many decades, the struggle with the materialistic and atheistic “orthodoxy” propagated by state institutions was going on in the space of broadly understood culture. This struggle was visible in both the strictly philosophical space, and its protagonists were Catholic thinkers who took up polemics with Marxism in a way appropriate for philosophy, as well as the catechetical and propaganda space, in which arguments were addressed to a wider audience.

An example of the struggle taking place in the latter space may be an unpublished collection of essays by well-known representatives of science entitled *Scholars about God*. They were exhibited in display cases for parish advertisements, replicated in parish newspapers, so that the faithful reading them could realize that contrary to official propaganda religious faith was not a manifestation of ignorance and backwardness, since it was shared by so many eminent minds.

This type of action, although effective in individual cases and in the practical and pastoral sense, seems imperfect from the methodological point of view. “Citing eminent scholars as authority instead of factual ar-

² Andrzej Bronk „Religia i nauka,” in *Zrozumieć świat współczesny*, by Andrzej Bronk (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1998), 217.

guments” – as Stanisław Kamiński, an outstanding methodologist/representative of the Lublin School, observed at that time – “is always not only risky, although temporarily helpful and effective, but also fundamentally wrong.” Kamiński also postulated to be more far-sighted and “give the faithful a thorough foundation, which may have to be worked out with greater difficulty, but will be definitely more permanent”.³

The question of referring to authority to justify the truth of proven statements is taken up by St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* in the context of demonstrating the validity of the appeal to supernatural Revelation as a source of truths that theologians can legitimately use to argue their theses. “Although the argument from authority based on human reason is the weakest, yet the argument from authority based on divine revelation is the strongest” (*locus ab auctoritate quae fundatur super ratione humana, sit infirmissimus; locus tamen ab auctoritate quae fundatur super revelatione divina, est efficacissimus*) seems to be the key to Aquinas’ argument.⁴ St. Thomas thus responds to the *videtur quod* part of the article on the question of justification of theological claims, the opinion expressed by Boethius that “the proof from authority is the weakest form of proof” (*locus ab auctoritate est infirmissimus*).

In the light of Aquinas’ solution, it appears obvious that while on the basis of theology, understood as a science referring to supernatural sources, the authority of God who reveals Himself guarantees certainty and it is appropriate to accept particular truths on the basis of this authority, however, on the basis of theodicy, this would be an obvious methodological abuse. Therefore, we should agree with the postulate mentioned earlier that when arguing the fact of God’s existence in the worldview debate, it does not seem appropriate to refer to scientific authority, but look for factual, philosophical arguments.⁵

³ Stanisław Kamiński, „O sposobie poznania Boga,” in *Światopogląd – religia – teologia*, by Stanisław Kamiński (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1998), 203.

⁴ *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1. a. 8 ad 2.

⁵ Arguments from authority are currently discussed in more detail in the works of M. Kotowski among others, Mateusz Kotowski, „Argumenty z autorytetu a krytyczne myślenie. W nawiązaniu do *Logiki i argumentacji* Andrzeja Kisielewicz,” *Studia Philosophica Wratislaviensia* 13, no. 3 (2018): 77–93.

2. THE THOUGHT OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS AS A MODEL OF A SKILLFUL SYNTHESIS OF FAITH AND REASON

Throughout the ages the Catholic Church has repeatedly presented St. Thomas Aquinas as a creator of skillful synthesis of knowledge through faith and rational knowledge. A particularly important confirmation of this fact are the encyclicals *Aeterni Patris* by Leo XIII and *Fides et ratio* by John Paul II entirely devoted to philosophy.⁶ This “accomplished combination” was expressed, on the one hand, in the preservation of the methodological separateness of orders of cognition which could not be brought to each other, and on the other hand, in the creation of their original synthesis which opposed the tendency that these orders contradict each other. “Although St. Thomas,” as Leo XIII states, “clearly distinguished reason from faith, while happily associating the one with the other, he both preserved the right and had regard for the dignity of each; so much so, indeed, that reason, borne on the wings of Thomas to its human height, can scarcely rise higher, while faith could scarcely expect more or stronger aid from reason.”⁷

Distinguishing and separating the path of rational reaching the truth from the path of faith is, as A. Maryniarczyk notes, one of the most characteristic features of St. Thomas’ scientific activity. It was also an effective remedy for the threat to Latin civilization from Gnostic influences adopted uncritically by some Christian theologians and philosophers.⁸

In his *Summa Contra Gentiles* (lib. 1 cap. 3–7), Aquinas devotes a number of questions to reflection on the ways of knowing God. He focuses on the fact that there are truths which human reason can arrive at by its own efforts, but which are supernaturally revealed, so that they also become accessible to human being gaining knowledge through faith (*rev-*

⁶ Leo XIII, „Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* on the Restoration of Christian Philosophy. 4 August 1879,” Vatican, accessed 25 August 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.html. And John Paul II, „Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio* on the Relationship Between Faith and Reason. 14 September 1998,” Vatican, accessed 25 August 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html.

⁷ Leo XIII, „Encyclical *Aeterni Patris*,” n. 18.

⁸ Andrzej Maryniarczyk, *Zeszyty z metafizyki*, vol. 3 (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 1998-1999), 19–21.

elabilia). A separate group is formed by revealed truths, the knowledge of which surpasses all efforts of reason (*revelata*). However, as Thomas emphasizes, “the truth of Christian faith ... surpasses the capacity of the reason, nevertheless that truth that the human reason is naturally endowed to know cannot be opposed to the truth of Christian faith” (*Quamvis autem praedicta veritas fidei Christianae humanae rationis capacitatem excedat, haec tamen quae ratio naturaliter indita habet, huic veritati contraria esse non possunt*).⁹

The main methodological principle formulated by Aquinas on the interrelationship between philosophical knowledge and knowledge derived from supernatural Revelation thus opened up the ways to overcome two dangerous tendencies: Platonic-Plotinian philosophy, expressed in the conviction of the possibility of natural, ecstatic knowledge of God; and Averroism, revealed in the recognition of the existence of two mutually contradictory “truths,” discovered through rational cognition and faith.¹⁰

The crisis of realistic metaphysics that appeared at the end of the Middle Ages led to, as John Paul II put it in *Fides et Ratio*, “the legitimate distinction between the two forms of learning became more and more a fateful separation”.¹¹ It was the aftermath of this division that was to become, as the Pope indicates, the aforementioned “positivistic mentality”, breaking all links with the Christian vision of the world. As a consequence, as John Paul II notes, some scholars, aware of the possibilities created by the dynamic development of technology, seem to succumb not only to the “market-based logic”, but also to the acquisition of “demiurgic” domination not only over nature, but also over the human being.¹²

⁹ Aquinas, ScG, Lib. 1 cap. 7. These questions are extensively discussed by, among others, Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism. Aquinas’s Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Aquinas devotes more space to this question in the *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, (q. 2, a. 3) where he states that “it is impossible that those things which God has manifested to us by faith should be contrary to those which are evident to us by natural knowledge. In this case one would necessarily be false: and since both kinds of truth are from God, God would be the autor of terror, a thing which is impossible [...] If, however, anything is found in the teaching of philosophers contrary to faith, this error does not properly belong to philosophy, but is due to an abuse of philosophy (*non est philosophia, sed magis philosophiae abusus*).”

¹¹ John Paul II, „*Fides et ratio*,” n. 45.

¹² John Paul II, „*Fides et ratio*,” n. 46.

It seems that after twenty-five years since the publication of the encyclical on the relationship between faith and reason, the diagnosis presented by John Paul II has gained even greater clarity, given the unprecedented acceleration of technological progress. This progress creates difficult to predict possibilities of transforming the human world, raising justified concerns, such as the widely discussed transhumanism which reduces the essence of humanity to a computer code generated by brain neurons communicating with each other. The desire to gain quasi-divine power over man, analyzed in *Fides et ratio*, finds its disturbing expression in the postulate of creating a new variety of human beings, free from unreliable biological structures, which could ensure their technological immortality.¹³

3. WHAT TYPE OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE DID AQUINAS SUCCESSFULLY APPLY IN HIS NATURAL THEOLOGY?

The reconciliation between reason and faith should be welcome considering the context of the current crisis in which these two spheres are viewed as opposites. However, a legitimate doubt appears as to whether such reconciliation is possible without overcoming the positivist manner of understanding science and without reviving the truly metaphysical dimension of rational reflection, lost at the threshold of the modern era.

It is worth noting that St. Thomas Aquinas, cited by some enthusiasts who view the achievements of modern natural science as the source of means to demonstrate the coherence of scientific knowledge and religious faith, understood science primarily as the realistic metaphysics created by Aristotle. Just as the Bishop of Hippo was for Aquinas an exponent of theological wisdom and an authority in the field of revealed knowledge, so Aristotle, called plainly “the Philosopher” by Thomas, remains the supreme authority when it comes to natural knowledge.¹⁴

¹³ In this context, the words of John Paul II about the man who lives increasingly in fear seem to acquire a prophetic character: “He is afraid of what he produces ... precisely that part that contains a special share of his genius and initiative – can radically turn against himself,” John Paul II, „*Fides et ratio*,” n. 47.

¹⁴ Following Aristotle Aquinas understands physics as a field of speculative knowledge, which is visible in *Super Boetium De Trinitate* (q. 5, a. 1). He observes that

When considering the possibility of gaining natural knowledge of God, it is worth emphasizing that the very term “metaphysics” applied to describe the basic philosophical discipline, focused on the problem of being, appeared only many generations after Aristotle. This happened in the first century B.C. thanks to the editorial work of Andronicus of Rhodes, who placed Stagirite’s treatises devoted to this problem after a set of treatises on the questions concerning nature, hence their name: *ta meta ta physica* – “after physics”.¹⁵ Previously, terms such as “first philosophy” (*prote philosophia*) and, especially in the context of our considerations, “theology” (*theologia*) were used to designate the field of philosophy aimed at explaining the causal aspect of the world and the changes taking place in it, since the final explanation of the phenomenon observed in the world of movement was for Aristotle God as the Immovable Mover.¹⁶

In the Christian epoch, theology started to be understood as the science of God and His creatures, whose principal source became supernatural Revelation. As it was necessary to distinguish this form of a philosophical reflection leading to knowledge of God from the study which does not refer to this Revelation, but is based on human innate cognitive abilities, the latter was described as “natural”. In order to present the individuality and at the same time the unity of the truth discovered, the metaphor of the “two books”: the book of nature and the book of Holy Scripture in which the Creator revealed himself was applied.¹⁷

The first of these books illustrates what is commonly called “natural,” “primary,” and sometimes “cosmic” revelation.¹⁸ This revelation took place in the creative act of God, who can henceforth be known through his works, as is also directly confirmed by the biblical texts on which the

”physics in itself and in all its parts is speculative (*phisica secundum se et secundum omnes partes suas est speculativa*)”.

¹⁵ Władysław Stróżewski, *Ontologia* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Aureus; Wydawnictwo Znak, 2003), 21.

¹⁶ Aristotle himself describes metaphysics as “divine science” because it investigates ultimate causes, the highest of which is God who “is thought to be among the causes of all things and to be a first principle, and such a science either God alone can have, or God above all others”, Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion Press, 2002), 983a 5–15.

¹⁷ Olaf Pedersen, *Dwie księgi. Z dziejów relacji między nauką a teologią* (Kraków: Copernicus Center Press, 2016).

¹⁸ Piotr Moskal, *Religia i prawda* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2008), 158.

First Vatican Council, defending the rationality of the Catholic faith in the age of positivism, based the dogma of the natural knowledge of God (Wis 13:5; Rom 1:20). In *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II refers to the second text when he states that “this important Pauline text affirms the human capacity for metaphysical enquiry.”¹⁹ (n. 22)

It is this metaphysical reflection that provides human reason with the proper means to know, by reading the “book of the world”, both the truth about the existence of its Creator and, as the aforementioned texts of Sacred Scripture indicate, “through likeness”, a series of truths which refer to its nature. St. Thomas Aquinas evokes this philosophical reflection when he begins his monumental *Summa Theologiae*, posing the question, whether, besides philosophy, any further doctrine is required.²⁰

Unquestionably, the most well-known element of St. Thomas’ natural theology is the famous “five ways” that Aquinas included in both of his works, The *Summa Theologiae* and The *Summa Contra Gentiles*.²¹ These ways have their physical frame,²² which, however, as W. Granat, the author of the most popular textbook study of theodicy in Poland, notes, can be successfully separated from the essential, metaphysical structure of arguments.²³ This fact has turned out to be extremely important from the point of view of preserving their timeless value, although the validity of the concepts evoked by Thomas, or the principles formulated by him, were later questioned in their physical understanding, as some of the examples given by Aquinas, have been derived from the outdated natural knowledge of his time, which may seem naive to the modern reader.²⁴

¹⁹ John Paul II, „*Fides et ratio*,” n. 22.

²⁰ *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 1, a. 1.

²¹ I refer here to the most well-known element of St. Thomas’ natural theology, since the metaphysical argument emphasizing the necessity of the existence of the absolute being as the first and final cause of reality known through the senses also appears in other texts of Aquinas, f.e. in *De Ente et Essentia* (77–80).

²² Wayne J. Hankey, „The Place of the Proof for God’s Existence in the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 46, no. 3 (1982): 370–393; Matthew Levering, *Proofs of God: Classical Arguments from Tertulian to Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016).

²³ Wincenty Granat, *Teodycea. Istnienie Boga i Jego natura* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1968), 91.

²⁴ These include, in particular, the example of fire, provided in the text of the fourth way (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3), which, as Aquinas states, “is the maximum

An essential condition for recognizing the relevance of Thomas' natural theology is to interpret it in the spirit in which it was created, that is, in the spirit of natural wisdom and knowledge, which in the eyes of Aquinas was above all the realistic metaphysics adopted by him from Aristotle and creatively developed and perfected.²⁵ Natural theology, as Gilson observes, is not based on methods proper to exact sciences, but on the method of existential metaphysics, and only within this framework can it correctly pose and solve its questions.²⁶

4. THE METHODOLOGICAL GAP BETWEEN METAPHYSICS AND CONTEMPORARY NATURAL SCIENCE

The statement of Gilson quoted above seems to be particularly significant. It is worth emphasizing that the criticism that the natural theology of St. Thomas Aquinas was to face in modern times arose precisely on the basis of a denial of the value of metaphysical reflection. Concepts fundamental to metaphysics, such as motion, conceived as any change consisting in passing from potentiality to act, or the concept of causality, understood broadly, in its both causative and teleological aspect, reduced to their purely physical understanding, became an easy object of attack.²⁷ It appears that, in order to avoid a conflict between natural theology based on metaphysical research and the natural sciences, it would be necessary to bear in mind the essential differences between these two branches of human cognition and knowledge. The awareness of it would make it possible to notice the existence of a methodological gap that opens between theodicy, which is an integral part of metaphysics, and natural science, understood in a positivist spirit.

The first difference is closely related to the contrast between the fundamental questions which have underlie metaphysics and natural sci-

heat, is the cause of all hot things" (*ignis, qui est maxime calidus, est causa omnium calidorum*).

²⁵ Andy Mullins, „Rationality and Human Fulfilment Clarified by a Thomistic Metaphysics of Participation,” *Scientia et Fides* 10, no. 1 (2022): 184.

²⁶ Etienne Gilson, *Bóg i ateizm* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1996), 93.

²⁷ Michael Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action. Contemporary Science and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

ence, and which, as such, have determined the methodological character of the types of knowledge characteristic of these fields.

The fundamental question that gave rise to philosophical reflection was metaphysical and was the enquiry concerning the search for the cause – the famous Greek *dia ti* – “why?” John Paul II recalled this fact in *Fides et Ratio* when he stated that philosophy was “born and nurtured when the human being first asked questions about the reason for things and their purpose” (n. 3). The explanation of the reality in direct sense experience by pointing out its first and final causes was the task that Aristotle assigned to his “first philosophy,” which became for him the model of scientific knowledge.²⁸

The positivist-scientist concept significantly differs from the concept of science formulated by Stagirite and programmatically distances itself from Aristotelian casual investigations. According to its creator, A. Comte, the aim of science is not to explain reality in the causal aspect, but to describe, hence the leading question accompanying scientific research frequently posed by positivists is “how?” The causalism of the Aristotelian conception is thus rejected in favor of legalism: the aim assigned to science is to establish laws (e.g. regarding the coexistence of features, the temporal sequence of events, etc.). Science itself linked with the idea of progress, is endowed with a form of messianic mission to serve not so much the search for the truth as the improvement the world. It is clear that the concept of science conceived in this manner no longer includes philosophy, which as a “love of wisdom” loses its autonomy and its proper object of study, being reduced to the relatively modest task of generalizing the results of the research of empirical sciences.²⁹

The second methodological difference, which exists between natural theology as the culmination of metaphysical reflection and contemporary natural science, refers to the status of the statements formulated in these fields. Traditionally, the essential features of metaphysical cognition are its “truthfulness and ultimate character”, expressed by the correct indication of the necessary and final causes of being which have a definite and undisputed nature As A. Maryniarczyk notes, only knowledge of con-

²⁸ Zygmunt Hajduk, *Ogólna metodologia nauk* (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 2000), 185.

²⁹ Hajduk, *Ogólna metodologia nauk*, 187.

tent about the structure of individual things or the entire universe can be subject to evolution.³⁰

On the other hand, the value of answers obtained in the field of natural science has a hypothetical character, resulting from their very nature, which K.R. Popper expressed in his concept of fallibilism emphasizing the denial of reliability of any statement.³¹ According to this concept, the development of science takes place precisely through the formulation of bold hypotheses, which are an intuitive creation of the mind and constitute only one of the possible interpretations of the observed events. Characteristically, these hypotheses are in no way under the scrutiny of the criterion of truth, and if they are treated as currently valid, it is only because they have managed to resist reliable and severe attempts to refute them on the basis of provisionally accepted data.³²

Although such a radical emphasis on the temporary nature of the explanations provided by research in the field of natural science seems to be a relatively new phenomenon and deviating from the metascientific consciousness that accompanied researchers in previous epochs in which they set themselves more ambitious aims; the very fact of the difference between the permanence of metaphysical solutions and explanations appearing in the context of natural research could have been observed many centuries ago. Its perfect illustration might be the collapse of Aristotelian physics at the threshold of modern times, and later mechanistic physics, which occurred at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. “If the philosophy of St. Thomas,” as S. Swieżawski notes, “was dependent on the natural theories of the time, as it was frequently unjustly presented, it would have to be rejected along with other outdated theories.”³³ Such was the case, for example, with his observations relying on contemporary physics, or those in which he referred to the concepts in the field of physiology of his time.³⁴

³⁰ Maryniarczyk, *Zeszyty z metafizyki*, vol. 1, 26.

³¹ Henry Perkinson, „Popper’s Fallibilism,” *ETC. A Review of General Semantics* vol. 35, no. 1 (1978): 5–19.

³² Hajduk, *Ogólna metodologia nauk*, 193.

³³ Stefan Swieżawski, *Święty Tomasz na nowo odczytany* (Poznań: W drodze, 2002), 18.

³⁴ Swieżawski, *Święty Tomasz*.

5. TOWARDS THE FINAL CONCLUSION

The question posed in the title: “Natural science – an enemy or an ally of theodicy?” was formulated in a somewhat provocative manner as the so-called close-ended question. However, the reflection presented in this paper inspired by the natural theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, while decidedly rejecting the former alternative contained in this question finds it difficult to express a strong confirmation to the latter. This is the result of the methodological conditions characteristic of the exact sciences, on the basis of which it is impossible to resolve the problem of God.³⁵ The application of the results of the study of these sciences in order to repudiate either the content of revealed faith or the conclusions formulated on the basis of theodicy is always linked with methodological abuse and is usually dictated by reasons of a non-rational nature, resulting either from the need of a publicly disseminated ideology or a more individual desire to confirm the rightness of attitudes adopted in life.

The fact that the arguments against faith, quoted as supposedly “scientific”, are essentially a philosophical over-interpretation was pointed out by Pope Benedict XVI in his spiritual testament:

What I said earlier of my compatriots, I now say to all who were entrusted to my service in the Church: Stand firm in the faith! Do not be confused! Often it seems as if science [...] has irrefutable insights to offer that are contrary to the Catholic faith. I have witnessed from times long past the changes in natural science and have seen how apparent certainties against the faith vanished, proving themselves not to be science but philosophical interpretations only apparently belonging to science – just as, moreover, it is in dialogue with the natural sciences that faith has learned to understand the limits of the scope of its affirmations and thus its own specificity.³⁶

Just as none of the hypotheses of exact sciences can independently provide an argument capable of questioning either the truths of faith or the findings of natural theology, so none of them can be regarded as an

³⁵ Kamiński, „O sposobie poznania Boga,” 203.

³⁶ Benedict XVI, „The Spiritual Testament. 31 December 2022,” Vatican, accessed 25 August 2023, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2022-12/the-spiritual-testament-of-pope-emeritus-benedict-xvi.html>.

argument capable of determining their truth.³⁷ If one wishes to recognize natural science as an ally of theodicy, this can only be done through the better knowledge of the rationality of the structures of animate and inanimate matter, as provided by the research carried out within its framework. The scholastic adagium, which indicates that nature is the work of a rational Being (*opus naturae est opus intelligentiae*) may be conducive to the recognition of the validity of this claim, however, it refers to St. Thomas' teleological argument, and thus to his metaphysics. If a man, relying on knowledge of the internal structure of being and the laws concerning the elements constituting being as being, does not independently accept the existence of the Absolute Being, which is *Ipsum Esse*, and at the same time the source of all existence, then the existence of the world remains inexplicable to him.³⁸

SUMMARY

In the light of the aforementioned reflection the following remarks may serve as a conclusion to this text:

1. It must be ruled out unequivocally that natural science is essentially the enemy of theodicy as human reason can arrive at the unity of truth in different ways.
2. Such hostility to metaphysical knowledge may be the result of unjustified claims that only the manner of formulating and justifying statements, characteristic of the natural sciences, should be considered legitimate and valuable. Consequently, it leads to

³⁷ In both cases, as A. Maryniarczyk observes, there is a confusion of radically different methodological fields, the separateness of which was already indicated by St. Thomas. Maryniarczyk emphasizes that authors such as Hawking, Whitehead, Weizsäcker or Heisenberg apply physical theses to reach physical statements about the existence and nature of God, the creation or eternity of the world, or its randomness, which is a grave misunderstanding, Andrzej Maryniarczyk, *Tomizm. Dla-czego?* (Lublin: Lubelska Szkoła Filozofii Chrześcijańskiej, 1994), 11–12.

³⁸ Kamiński, „O sposobie poznania Boga,” 203. The same observes S. Swieżawski: “natural knowledge, no matter how magnificent, is insufficient to learn about God [...] the right way which leads to the natural knowledge of God is only metaphysics.” Swieżawski, *Święty Tomasz*, 46.

- a denial of the value of metaphysical cognition, from which theodicy reflection derives, or to philosophical overinterpretation of the results of exact sciences research.
3. The natural sciences can be an ally of theodicy only in an auxiliary and secondary sense, because of the essential methodological difference between metaphysical cognition, which is the source of natural theology, and the knowledge obtained through exact sciences.
 4. The value of theodicy arguments, which take as their starting point hypotheses developed in the field of natural science, is strictly conditioned by the degree of certainty of these hypotheses, hence it does not match the value of arguments formulated on the basis of autonomous philosophy.
 5. It is necessary to refrain from quoting, in the context of theodicy, the worldview opinions expressed by eminent representatives of natural sciences who are believers, bearing in mind that the argument from authority remains the weakest of arguments on the level of natural knowledge.

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