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Aristotle's Πρώτη Φιλοσοφία: Metaphysics, Ontology, Theology or Methodology?

ABSTRACT: The term “first philosophy” became popular, because of Aristotelian *Metaphysics*, where it is associated particularly with the knowledge of the first principles and causes. In relation to other kinds of knowledge, it would play a regulative role as *archikotera* and even *archikotate ton epistemon*.

In the sixth book (E) of *Metaphysics*, the aporetic question is raised, and it concerns the honor of being „the first” – whether it is to be attributed to the knowledge of some particular and specific kind of subject matter, because of its exceptional ontic status, or whether it is to be attributed to the most general ability that has universal value. In the first case, *to ariston en te physei pase* would be regarded as most noble for its gravity deserves, which would have to exceed everything in the nature. In the second, one could call it the „first” ability due to its range of application.

From the Book Epsilon it does not follow that the *timiotaton genos* (=to *theon*) should dethrone *to on he on* as the only legitimate subject of the first philosophy. The major problem of the Epsilon is the primacy of philosophy understood as the very first of the abilities (explaining the beings/things/facts distributively), and not due to its being some „supra-philosophy”, but rather due to the universality of its method, i.e., due to the fact that it can (albeit does not have to) deal with the most dignified Being. Aristotle understood the priority of the (first) philosophy as the proper, first wisdom (*sophia*), as a special ability of dealing with any subject matter of knowledge. In Aristotle, the role of the unifying factor is played by the formal approach, identical in each case, providing exhaustive, ultimate explanations, namely, asking the same questions about the essential, final, material and efficient causality. Pointing to the causes of anything is tantamount to its explanation and justification, “an explanation in all the possible meaning in which something can be explained” (Th. Kuhn). Thus, philosophy is the first one, because the principles and causes ontologically precede being, as logically, within the order of knowledge, the explanatory reasons are first; the situation is exactly the same as in logic where *explanans* logically precedes *explanandum*.

In brief, being familiar with the cause-and-effect nexus (aitiology) is discovering of the truth, namely, the wisdom and knowledge, including the art of definition of essences of things (ousiology), because in the structure of being *ousia* is also that which is the first.

KEY WORDS: Aristotle • first philosophy • wisdom • first principles and causes • ontology • metaphysics • theology • methodology

Men of experience know the result (τὸ ὄτι),
but they don't know the reason (τὸ διότι), and
theorists know both the cause and the reason.

Aristotle, *Met.* 981a 28–29.

It is generally agreed that the name “metaphysics” is one of the most hazy and ambiguous terms. This is partially true. On the one hand, this situation is because of the asserted generality and ambiguity of “being” – the subject matter of metaphysics. Yet on the other hand, in the course of the long history of metaphysics, there have been a few turning points, the most important of which is associated with the modern transformation of metaphysics into ontology; and this transformation has involved a significant change in understanding of the subject matter and in the conception of its method. And this very unconscious version of the purely conceptual theory of the being (arbitrarily referring to Aristotelianism), casts a long shadow on the original understanding of the Aristotelian “first philosophy”, which centuries later was called “metaphysics”, because it was, not very appropriately, assumed to be the synonym of the former. When, due to Aristotle’s commentators (Alexander of Aphrodisias, Asclepius, medieval thinkers), the term “metaphysics” became a technical term to designate the general theory of being and principles of demonstration, the term “first philosophy” was applied in order to emphasise the priority of metaphysics and, later, of ontology.

The term “first philosophy” became popular, because of Aristotelian *Metaphysics*, where it appears *explicite* only once (Book E)¹ and furthermore in the very problematic context. To understand this term better (not a technical term in Aristotle), we must take into consideration Aristotle’s investigations concerning the priority of *sophia/philosophia* in Book A, which priority is associated particularly with the acquaintance of the first principles and causes (περὶ τῶν πρώτων ἀρχῶν καὶ αἰτίων) in a very broad sense of the word². The aforementioned term is also implied in one more

¹ In fact, we find this term already in A 10, 993a 15–17: ψελλιζομένη γὰρ ἔοικεν ἡ πρώτη φιλοσοφία περὶ πάντων, ἅτε νέα τε κατ’ ἀρχὰς οὖσα καὶ τὸ πρῶτον (In Tredennick’s transl.: „For the earliest philosophy speaks falteringly, as it were, on all subject; being new and in its infancy”. In R. Hope’s transl.: „For the very first philosophy seems like unintelligible speech on everything, since it is young and still in its beginnings”). Aristotle speaks of the immaturity of (first?) philosophy as still incapable of explaining things in the light of ultimate principles, causes and what is first. For predecessors the material principle, whereby constituents were sought, predominated – they had not made comprehensive use of essential causes nor of all four causes in an integrated manner.

² Cf. E. König, *Aristoteles’ erste Philosophie als universale Wissenschaft von den ἀρχαί*, „Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie“ 1970, H. 3, pp.225–246. also: A. Lumpe, *Der*

place (Book Γ), where Aristotle presents an analogy between philosophy and mathematics, which is divided into first mathematics, second mathematics and so on. However, though the terms “first” here are used, this idea is left undeveloped at this point. In other words, we are dealing with an initial attempt to classify domains of philosophy analogically to mathematics and its parts.

In Book Γ (1003b 16–17) the most important claim is that philosophy is one and primary, because it deals with what is primary, namely being (substance as the first category) and its first principles and causes. More generally, the research into all that is first, belongs to this one science.

Yet we should bear in mind that *Metaphysics* does not constitute science in the strict sense, understood as a rigid, inflexible edifice of knowledge; it is rather used to evaluate knowledge and establish a hierarchy of various kinds of knowledge or better – abilities (ἐπιστήμα).

Note that Aristotle uses some other “evaluative” terms to increase the value of that ability, which should take first place in epistemic rank. Thus he uses the following superlatives in this regard: τιμιωτάτη, κρατίστη, θειοτάτη³. In relation to other kinds of knowledge, it would play a regulative role as ἀρχικώτερα and even ἀρχικωτάτη τῶν ἐπιστημῶν⁴. The ranking sense has also the term σοφία (wisdom)⁵ and the one associated with it, and actually derived from it, i.e. φιλοσοφία (the love of wisdom), both used interchangeably for the postulated, yet to be specified supreme knowledge, to be developed in the future.

In the sixth Book (E) of the *Metaphysics*, the aporetic question is raised and it concerns the honour of being “the first” – whether it is to be attributed to the most general ability that has a universal value, or whether it is attributed to the knowledge of some particular and specific kind of subject matter, because of its exceptional ontic status⁶. In the second case, τὸ ἄριστον

Terminus >Prinzip< (ἀρχή) von den Vorsokratikern bis auf Aristoteles, „Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte“, Bd. 1, 1955, pp.111–116.

³ Aristotle, *Met*, A 2, 983a 4–11: “None is more noble than it is. It is the most divine and respectable. The skill can be so only for two reasons: That God in particular possesses it and that it concerns the divinity. This one is so for both reasons. God turns out to be the one of the principles of all things, and God exclusively, or to utmost degree, can master this kind of knowledge. Let all other be most useful, it will remain the best” (A 9, 993a 2).

⁴ *Ibidem*, A 2, 982a 16, b 4.

⁵ Aristotle uses also synonymously φρόνησις, A 2, 982b 24: ἡ τοιαύτη φρόνησις ἤρξατο ζητεῖσθαι (in Ross’ translation: „such knowledge began to be sought”; in Hope’s transl.: „this sort of intelligence began to be sought”).

⁶ *Ibidem*, E 1, 1026 a 24–31: Ἀπορήσειε γὰρ ἂν τις πότερον πῶθ’ ἢ πρώτη φιλοσοφία καθόλου ἐστίν, ἢ περὶ τι γένος καὶ φύσιν τινὰ μίαν [...] εἰ δ’ ἔστι τις οὐσία ἀκίνητος, αὐτὴ πρῶτερα καὶ φιλοσοφία πρώτη, καὶ καθόλου οὕτως ὅτι πρώτη. In Ross’ translation: “For one might raise

ἐν τῇ φύσει πάση would be regarded as most noble for its gravity deserves, which would have to be above everything that exists in nature⁷.

In Book Λ Aristotle even tries to specify such a subject matter, proposing it to be the first Act (*sc.* Prime Mover) – the element (factor) moving all beings, i.e. present in all the acts of begetting.

In the first sense, one could call it the “first” ability due to its range of application. Such a possibility is provided, in Aristotle’s opinion, by the universality (καθόλου) of its references⁸, not to be understood merely as a concept whose reference is the most “general object”, e.g. as *ens commune* (*omnibus*) of scholasticism, or *ens in genere*, or *omne quod cogitari potest* of modern ontology (Clausen, Wolff), but rather in a formal sense. This guarantees that judgments, formulated with the aid of it, are universal.

Within this formal classification, Aristotle assigns the highest value to the laws of thinking and justifying, demonstrative principles (αἱ ἀποδεικτικαὶ ἀρχαί), among which he situates, as the first axiom, the logical principle of non-contradiction, ἀρχὴ τῶν ἄλλων ἀξιωματῶν πάντων, turning it into a kind of “principle of principles”⁹.

Strictly speaking, the name “the first”, together with the traditional name “metaphysics” would be justified only for the second of the two versions of philosophizing, and only the second one deserved to be assigned primacy. The subject matter of metaphysics would be understood – in accordance with some interpretation of the name “metaphysics” – in the sense of transcendence (μετά = ἐπέκεινα, ὑπέρ), something surpassing the physically existing world, including among other things its theological sense¹⁰. A link between “first philosophy” and “metaphysics” may be found

the question whether first philosophy is universal, or deals with one genus, i. e. some one kind of being [...]; but if there is an immovable substance, the science of this must be prior and must be first philosophy, and universal in this way, because it is first”.

⁷ *Ibidem*, A 2, 982b 7.

⁸ The Greek word καθόλου means: 1. general, universal and broadest in terms of range; 2. universal (in application).

⁹ *Ibidem*, Γ 3, 1005b 33–34. In Book Beta (996b 26–27), Aristotle considers whether the so-called “demonstrative principles” are to be treated together with the knowledge of causes; however, he leaves this question unanswered.

¹⁰ Cf. J. Domański, *Metafizyka Arystotelesa i fizyka pierwszych filozofów*, “Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej” 1991, p.8: “In accordance with this connotation, μετά/ would have the same meaning [...] as ὑπέρ, namely above”. In the case of supreme knowledge in the first sense, we should stick to the term “first philosophy” for the name “metaphysics”, because of its historical ambiguity, could be confusing. It is also unjustified to treat both terms as synonyms, because the name “metaphysics”, if its introduction is at all justified due to its editorial not substantial sense (*Idem*, pp. 5–8), should be regarded as subordinate to the name “first philosophy”.

in the words *πρῶτος* and *μετά*, which both express the relation of a major above a minor.

From the Book Epsilon, however, it does not follow that the most honourable genus (*τὸ τιμιώτατον γένος* = *τὸ θεῖον*, the divine) should “dethrone” *τὸ ὄν ἢ ὄν* as the only legitimate subject of the “first philosophy” (1026a 20–21). The major problem of Epsilon is the problem of the primacy of philosophy understood as the very first *episteme* of the abilities (explaining the beings/things/facts distributively), and not some distinctive object that would determine its primacy. Its primacy is not due to its being a “supra-philosophy”, but rather to the universality of its method, i.e., due to the fact that it can (but does not have to) deal with the most dignified Being. To this formula *τὸ ὄν ἢ ὄν* (exchangeable in Aristotle with *τὰ ὄντα ἢ ὄντα*) belongs the *τί ἐστι* question, namely, that a given being (natural compound substance) has inalienable properties, of which a simple supranatural divine entity is simply devoid¹¹.

The content of chapter 1 of Book E requires a new commentary. The author of book E distinguishes three theoretical (speculative) sciences, characterised by the type of objects they are each concerned with.

It is obvious, then, from these considerations, that physics is a form of speculative science. And mathematics is also speculative; but it is not clear, however, that some branches of mathematics study their objects *qua* immutable and *qua* separable from matter. Obviously it is province of a speculative science to discover whether a thing is eternal and immutable and separate from matter; not, however, of physics (since physics deals with mutable objects) nor of mathematics, but of science prior to both. For physics deals with things which exist separately but are not immutable; and some branches of mathematics deal with things which are immutable, but presumably not separable, but present in matter; but the primary science treats of things which are both separable and immutable. Now all causes must be eternal, but these especially; since they are the causes of what is visible of things divine. Hence there will be three speculative philosophies: mathematics, physics, and theology – since it is obvious that if the divine is present anywhere, it is present in this kind of entity; and also the most honourable science must deal with the most honourable class of subject. The speculative sciences, then, are to be preferred to the other sciences, and ‘theology’ (θεολογική) to the other speculative sciences (Tredennick’s translation).

¹¹ E 1, 1026a 30–32: καὶ φιλοσοφία πρώτη, καὶ καθόλου οὕτως ὅτι πρώτη, καὶ περὶ τοῦ ὄντος ἢ ὄν, ταύτης ἂν εἶη θεωρῆσαι, καὶ τί ἐστι καὶ τὰ ὑπάρχοντα ἢ ὄν (in Ross’ translation: “and must be first philosophy, and universal (in this way), because it is first. And it will belong to this to consider being *qua* being – both what it is and the attributes which belong to it *qua* being”).

These are, however, particular branches of knowledge which require a superior methodology which would demonstrate how to study any object in a most fundamental way. Aristotle saw such a discipline in philosophy and for this reason called the first of abilities.

One might indeed raise the question whether the primary philosophy is universal or deals with some one genus or entity; because even the mathematical sciences differ in this respect – geometry and astronomy deal with a particular kind of entity, whereas universal mathematics (i.e. arithmetic – Bonitz) applies to all kinds alike. Then if there is not some other substance besides those which are naturally composed, physics will be the primary science; but if there is a substance which is immutable, the science which studies this will be prior to physics, and will be primary philosophy, and universal in this sense, that it is primary. And it will be the province of this science to study Being *qua* Being; what it is, and what attributes are which belong to it *qua* Being. (Tredennick's translation).

Let us take note of the whole closing passage: “And if there is an immutable essence, it is first, and philosophy is first, i.e. universal in the sense of being first”. The author has coupled this idea with the words that follow immediately, to the effect that it is philosophy's task to study any being in the aspect of its essential being, i.e. what properties can be ascribed to this entity. It seems that Epsilon's author tried to encompass in one definition of (first?) philosophy both Plato's and Aristotle's concept of being: both transcendent and concrete.

The above fragment (1026a 23–33) provides the source and the understanding of the genesis of metaphysics, ontology, onto-theology, and the ostensibly Aristotelian concept of the so-called first philosophy. This quasi-term generated a plethora of interpretations and misunderstandings. Are we in fact dealing here with a term coined by Aristotle?

The crux of this passage is 1026a 23–25. Not only is this question-alternative aporetic but so is the very notion of “first philosophy”.

Bearing in mind that Aristotle in Book A assigns to philosophy the highest rank among abilities and sciences, which is also, let us note, confirmed in Book E, that “philosophy is first and universal” (1026a 30–31), one should follow this path and correct the passage (1026a 23–24) as follows: “whether the first (of all, *sc.* abilities) philosophy is universal”, or even replace the article ἡ with the particle ἥ, which offers the following sense: “One might indeed raise the aporetic question whether a s (or: b e i n g) the first (of all) philosophy is universal, or whether [...]”. The correction to the translation and changes in punctuation is also required in the final passage of the first chapter of Book E:

if there is an immutable essence, then it (this essence) precedes (*sc.* objects of physics and mathematics). And philosophy is first and universal. Thus, if it is first then it is to study being as being, i.e. what it is and what is ascribable to it as being something.

The meaning of the closing sentence of Book E, 1 in translations and commentaries becomes distorted in consequence of taking it, erroneously, in conjunction with the previous words: “but if there is an immutable essence, it is first.” For it is assumed the φιλοσοφία πρώτη, mentioned a moment later, concerns this essence and the latter being routinely identified with the πρώτη φιλοσοφία from the previously formulated aporia, without regard for the key difference in the order of the terms in the expression: in the aporia, we were dealing with the “first” from among the disciplines of philosophy, whereas now with philosophy as the “first” from among abilities.

This thought is, however, widely understood in the following way: if there is a being, which we take to be first, then it shall be the subject of first philosophy. However, then the explanation which follows becomes unintelligible: that philosophy, conceived in this way as dealing with “immutable essence” – and for this reason “first” – should at the same time, also in virtue of its priority, be general (καθόλου) and address itself to being-*qua*-being something (understood distributively) and being’s essential properties.

In the light of the aforementioned, there appears the concept of the first philosophy affected by contradiction: its subject turns out to be both particular and general. The source of this contradiction is the fact that we deal with assertions not with questions as we do in the case of the aporia. We may preserve the aporetic character and avoid contradiction if we place some punctuation before καὶ φιλοσοφία πρώτη, understanding καὶ as “on the other hand”. Then we have two independent statements; first that immovable essence is first when compared with others (and here we can surmise that knowledge of it would be first against other kinds of knowledge); second, that philosophy is the first of the abilities because it is universal. As the two kinds of knowledge are not one, the contradiction is eliminated. What remains to be solved the possible aporia which of the two is prior to the other.

This provided the impetus to initiate the discussion as to the proper subject of metaphysics, respectively: first philosophy. There appeared the widely discussed dilemma of *metaphysica specialis* and *generalis*. This problem is inventively “solved” by Emmerich Coreth as follows:

Already assumed here is the duality, which since Aristotle defines the essence of metaphysics: it is the science on the most general determi-

nations of being (*Seinsbestimmungen*), which necessarily belongs to all 'being as being', and at the same time it is the science of the ultimate, unconditional foundation of being (*Seinsgrund*), common to all beings; [...]. Regardless of whether, historically, the 'ontological' aspect gains prominence (metaphysics as a general science of being) or the 'theological' aspect (metaphysics as a philosophical science of God), or whether after Aristotle the essence of metaphysics lies in the unity of the tension between them, it always puts forward a claim to transcending the domain of immediate objective experience and to probing the entire reality. Thus metaphysics is the science of Being in general¹².

The notion of primacy can be understood in various ways. It may denote something most fundamental or basic, and at this point it is consistent with the notion of ἀρχή (the origin, the basis). In this sense, the "first" will be the knowledge of preliminary principles, namely, the ability to provide e.g. exhaustive explanations. We can see at this point that Plato and Aristotle totally agree, as far as the tasks facing the philosopher are concerned: they both define his most important purpose as comprehending that which is most fundamental, i.e. chief explanatory principles.

The term "first" can also denote something simple or elementary; in this sense it will be close to the term στοιχειόν (the simplest, most primary element), the final result of an analysis). Philosophy as the first one will, therefore, be aimed at reducing the multiplicity to oneness. The term "first" can also enclose factors conditioning anything derivative and having its cause (αἰτιατόν), whether in the explanatory or causative sense, which was reflected in Greek expressions αἴτιον ἀνδ αἰτία (the cause, the explanation). Also, as regards the concept of οὐσία: according to *ordo essendi* "substance" is the first (τὸ πρῶτως ὄν: Z 1, 1028a 30–31) and according to *ordo cognoscendi* the first is "essence". Finally, the word "first" can have, most generally, an axiological sense expressing dignity and honour, and within the relative approach – the governing, or leading role.

All these ways of understanding converge in the notion of the priority of philosophy as first σοφία and as ἡ ἐπιστήμη τοῦ πρῶτου (1003b 16–17). Its leading function in relation to other specific kinds of sciences, arts and abilities is not to unify the whole of knowledge, or to develop a theory of theory (meta-theory), which, for example, contemporary methodology expects of philosophy, and which is wrongly imputed to ancient Greek philosophy. Nowadays, some scholars would like to assign this task to the philosophizing

¹² E. Coreth, *Zum Begründungsproblem der Metaphysik*, „Akten des XIV Internationalen Kongresses für Philosophie, 2–9 September 1968. Bd. III Logik. Erkenntnis- und Wissenschaftstheorie. Sprachphilosophie. Ontologie und Metaphysik“, Wien 1969, p. 596.

physics of C. F. von Weizsäcker's style, to which the word "meta-physics" could be applied, but not in the sense of the "methodological reflection upon physics", where the word "metaphysics" is understood analogically to the following terms common in sciences: "metascience", "metalanguage", "metalogic", "metaethics", and so on¹³. "Metaphysics" is rather understood in the more literal sense μετά as "beyond", as a knowledge of something exceeding what physics normally deals with¹⁴. It is not the methodology of physics, but reflection upon the physical world, departing from the assumptions of physics, yet practiced with the use of the results of all natural sciences, but exceeding them in all respects. Such a reflection is to provide a general picture of the world, which would be then relevant and valid for all those sciences.

However, Aristotle understood the superiority of philosophy differently – as the proper, first wisdom. In his opinion, it was to be a special ability of dealing with any subject matter of inquiry. The subordination of all particular disciplines to this "first philosophy" resulted from general guidelines which first philosophy was to give them, showing how any given subject matter should be examined, i.e. in the most thorough and most comprehensively explanatory manner.

First philosophy would confine itself to developing methods, doing so with particular objects to begin with, but in order to ultimately apply them to the whole of reality. Because of their universality, its solutions will be valid for all the specific fields.

In Aristotle, the role of the unifying factor is played by the formal approach, identical in each case, which provides exhaustive, ultimate explanations, asking the same questions about the essential causality (*sc.* formal/paradigmatic), material causality, efficient and final causality (*Met.* 983a 24–b 6; *Phys.* 194b–195b; 198a 14–198b 9). Thus philosophy is the first because the principles and causes (ontologically) precede being, as within the order of knowledge, explanatory reasons (*resp.* of explanations) are first; the situation is exactly the same as in logic where the *explanans* logically precedes the *explanandum*. Note that the Aristotelian model of scientific, *sc.* essential explanation (ousiology), culminating in the art of definition, is analogical here as in his organon. According to this model οὐσία is the *definiendum*, and τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι is nothing but the *definiens*. In brief, being familiar with the cause-and-effect nexus is discovering the truth, i.e. wis-

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Cf. W. Stróżewski, *Metafizyka jako meta-fizyka*, [in:] *Istnienie i Sens*, Kraków 1994, p. 268.

dom and knowledge, including the art of defining the essences of things (ousiology), because in the structure of being *ousia* is also that which is the first.

Philosophy the first one makes it possible to finally grasp the starting point for all the relationships, both in the explicative and ontic aspect. Postulating the reliability of its considerations, i.e. providing the ultimate and irrefutable explanations, it satisfies the inborn desire of a human nature (φύσει), i.e. the desire to understand, which manifests itself in both curiosity and surprise¹⁵. Those spontaneous, natural inclinations, however, have to be appropriately directed so that they can sort of turn into the ἐπιστήμη understood as an ability, namely into the ability of explaining everything in the light of ultimate principles, i.e. the exhaustive causes conditioning everything else. These causes are understood in a way without reification. They are understood in the sense of the explanations provided.

Pointing to the causes of anything is tantamount to its explanation and justification. Properly understood, wisdom doesn't involve acquiring the widest range of the specific knowledge possible, which would make it similar to the phantom called "absolute knowledge"; moreover, it doesn't involve "solving the puzzle of being as being" – grasped as a totality, as "the truth of being" or revealing – in a single cast of thought – "the truth of (its) being" in the shape of some supreme maxim. Its advantage of universality is not of this nature; it rather involves the development of the ability to explain which can be applied to all fields. This ability is most fully realized, in Aristotle's opinion, in the analysis of the formal structure of utterances expressing all human knowledge¹⁶. The development of such analytical attitude, which can be realized on each detail, on each event, situation, or fact, namely on the most generally comprehended "object", conditions the transition to understanding that which is the totality. Socrates and Plato used the method of dialectic consideration of specific cases, so that this method can be applied in a comprehensive explanation of reality, in some eventualities¹⁷.

This "explanatory maximalism", characteristic of philosophy, understood as "the first", and expressed in the universality of its method (the questions about the cause are universal) and not in the universality (general-

¹⁵ Cf. *Met.* A 1, 980a; A 2, 982b.

¹⁶ J. Bigaj in his article entitled *The Characteristics of the Philosophical Knowledge in Aristotelian 'Metaphysics'*, stresses this aspect of Aristotelian methodology of philosophical knowledge, "Zagadnienia Naukoznawstwa" 2002, 3 (153), pp. 415–432).

¹⁷ Plato recommends this method e.g. in the *Letter VII*: "Adjust it to one example in order to understand what was said here, and this very reasoning transfer to all other things".

ity) of “Being”, as is the case with the so-called modern ontology and thus metaphysics, (“Being” as the most general name and concept)¹⁸, involves (1) questions asked from the causative perspective; *διὰ τί, διότι*), i.e. in the light of the four causes about anything (*οὐσία ἐκάστου, ἕκαστον*), that is about any object (*τὸδε τί*), which we deal with, i.e. which we attempt to explain in an exhaustive and ultimate way, and then (2) we try to apply the type of the cognitive procedure developed on the basis of the factual material (*τὰ ὅτι*) in which we are cognitively engaged, to the whole reality, comprehending the same causes as those of the superior rank, which also don't have to (and at the very moment of asking questions about the explanation even can't) be understood in an objective way. Enrico Berti emphasizes:

When talking about causes, we can attribute the broader meaning to this term, which the epistemologist and the historian of science – Thomas Kuhn referred to and assumed in Aristotle. The cause is understood here as explanation in all the possible meanings in which something can be explained¹⁹.

The generality applied here, and so important for philosophy itself, as comprehended by both Plato and Aristotle, doesn't mean that the explicative operations should be confined only to the reality grasped generally, in the whole of its objective range; rather they should be applied to the reality in the sense of formal generality which can be applied to each, even the smallest element of that reality. Each cognitive operation, carried out by a truly wise man, and aimed at finding the truth, must involve this strictness and thoroughness, resulting from the honesty and reliability, from the ethos of thought which he should practice throughout his life.

This is the main theme of Aristotle's works, known unfortunately only in fragments, like the *Protreptic* (in many aspect very close to Plato's 7th Letter) or the dialogue *Περὶ φιλοσοφίας*. Those works emphasize the perfecting value of the cognitive process. In those works, we can find the moral conditions of practicing knowledge, which is the essential element of the first philosophy. What is meant here is the most noble and respectable abil-

¹⁸ In Book Γ (1003a 4-5) Aristotle says that there is only one science which, when applied, is universally (*καθόλου*) concerned with being as being *sc.* essentially something (*ἐπισκοπεῖ καθόλου περὶ τοῦ ὄντος ἢ ὄν*); cf. Book B 996b 14: *ἡ σοφία τῆς οὐσίας*; 996b 17: *καὶ μάλιστα τὸν τί ἐστίν*). Let us emphasize that in the inauthentic Book K (1061b 32) the adverb *καθόλου* is misattributed to being as adjective (*ὄν καθόλου*; in Alexander's commentary on Book Γ we find *τὸ ὄν καθόλου*: p. 238, 5; 244, 6 Hayduck). Thus we obtain a most general concept of Being *qua* Being, which has dominated the modern translations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

¹⁹ E. Berti, *Introduzione alla metafisica*, Torino 1993, p. 93.

ity, because it provides understanding by neutralizing the state of surprise, resulting from ignorance of truth. By doing so it perfects and enriches the human spirit. So no wonder that in both Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum, philosophy became a way of life.

This kind of knowledge-wisdom, as Plato and Aristotle agree, brings the human being closer to the divine being, and it also has the most perfecting and enriching effect on the human spirit.

Aristotle's aim is to develop and then present a basic methodology – something closer to know-how rather than the descriptive-oriented know-that – a set of tools in the service of the science of his day. His methodological attitude seems to be result of growing up in a long lineage of physicians, so he rather attempts to formulate a *diagnosis* as if transposing distributively the methodology of medicine onto the entire body of reality. On the one hand philosophy is first in some sense but as a methodology serving other sciences. These methodological considerations in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* should, in my opinion, be counted as part of his organon. The term “first philosophy” serves to emphasize that it is philosophy which is first among *epistemai* (according to Plato's definition τέχνη τεχνῶν καὶ ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστημῶν). Hence, we should preserve the term “first (or primary) philosophy” – not in the modern sense of *ontologia generalis* and so-called onto-theology, but as a universal method of explaining (aitiology) and defining (ousiology), which precedes both descriptive metaphysics of natural substance and metaphysics of divinity. So, the question what is the first philosophy reduces to the question what is philosophy as first wisdom or first ability. The practical aspect (*habitus*) of theoretical philosophy – In the Aristotelian conception – comes to the fore precisely with *episteme* as ability and competence, wisdom as an intrinsically human feature.

Medieval followers of first philosophy, who practiced first philosophy under the name of metaphysics, also paid attention to this aspect. As Stróżewski points out, when he summarizes Aquinas' standpoint expressed in his comment on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*,

His methodological arguments are based on the philosophy of man in the broad sense. [...] This close connection of wisdom and happiness – resembling Socrates' thought – [...] allows for treating knowledge as a factor of human knowledge, so it is inherent in the very essence of the human being (We should bear in mind that knowledge is first of all *habitus!*)²⁰.

²⁰ W. Stróżewski, *Metafizyka jako nauka*, „Studia Mediewistyczne” 1990, vol. 27, no. 2, p. 25.

In this parenthetical remark, Stróżewski refers to the opinions of the medieval thinkers on metaphysics, enumerated above, who acknowledged “metaphysics as science (*scientia*)” they understood as follows: “it belongs to the category of *habitus* – the intellectual dispositions”²¹.

In Place of a Summary

It has struck me once that the Greek ideal of the search for causes has been realised, surprisingly enough, by Hercule Poirot, the hero of Agatha Christie's detective stories. In each novel we encounter a fact, usually a crime, and then along comes our inspector – a skilled professional. He is able to reconstruct the course of events: to unmask the culprit (the efficient cause); to uncover the formal cause, i.e. the criminal's plan; to find out the final cause – the purpose and motive for the crime; and to present the material cause, which is to say the weapon or other means. Finding the means is no simple matter and plays a key role in throwing light on the entire explanation of the facts. (The victim is found with a knife in his heart, but in fact the cause of death was previously administered poison). The majority of “arm-chair experts” or “presupposers” (Plato's φιλόδοξοι and δοξόσοφοι) the various onlookers in the detective novel are satisfied with ad hoc explanations, with whatever comes to mind, emotionally based presumptions. But we know and learn how misleading our subjective suspicions regarding the culprit may turn out to be; there are ever new assumptions as to who the guilty party may be. For the most part, people do not pursue their line of thought or investigation to the very end. And it is in this sense that Poirot remains the ideal Aristotelian – one who realises the goal we have postulated above: the ultimate explanation, the exhaustive explanation. 

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²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

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