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APPROACHING THE DEBATE
ON THE SUBJECT OF METAPHYSICS
FROM THE LATER MIDDLE AGES
TO THE EARLY MODERN AGE:
THE ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL ANTECEDENTS*

Est [...] sciendum, quod nunc non quaeritur de subiecto in quo est scientia. Sic enim omnium scientiarum est unum subiectum scilicet intellectus. Sed intendimus de subiecto scientiae, de quo est scientia.
Durandus a Sancto Porciano¹

1. THE ARISTOTELIAN ROOTS OF THE MEDIEVAL DEBATE ON
THE OBJECT OF METAPHYSICS

1.1. *Some Aristotelian texts on science and metaphysics*

The remote origin of the debate on the nature of metaphysics and of its subject/object lies in some texts Aristotle devotes

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1. I set this quotation at the beginning of my essay to suggest that historians of philosophy should either abandon the distinction between ‘subject in a medieval sense’ and ‘subject in a modern sense’ or be more precise when they avail themselves of it. As shown by the passage I quote (Durandus a Sancto Porciano, *In Petri Lombardi sententias theologicas commentaria*, Prologus, q. 5, n. 6), the medievals availed themselves of a notion of subject in a “modern” sense too, and Durandus is neither the only one nor the first one to use it. Cfr. for example Henricus de Gandavo, *Quodlibet XII*, q. 1: *Utrum Deus sub ratione infinita ex parte sui sit subiectum sive obiectum alicuius scientiae creatae*, ad 1 (cfr. *infra*): «quaelibet scientia respicit duo: et obiectum sciibile a quo formatur in sciente et ad quod terminatur, et subiectum in quo formatur; et ab utroque determinatur, sed diversimode, quia secundum rationem obiecti determinatur ad formam et speciem, secundum rationem autem subiecti determinatur ad intensionem et remissionem». Petrus de Alvernia, *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam*, I, q. 1: *Utrum substantiae separatae sint subiectum in ista scientia*, intelligendum est (cfr. *infra*): «Intelligendum est quod

to the nature of scientific knowledge and to the characterizations of the first philosophy.²

subjectum dicitur dupliciter: Uno modo quod est ens aliquod actu, in potentia tamen ad illud quod habet esse per ipsum [...]. Sic autem non quaeritur hic de subjecto. Hoc tamen modo loquendo de subjecto anima potest dici esse subjectum huius scientiae. Alio modo dicitur subjectum idem quod obiectum, et sic quaerimus hic de subjecto». Aegidius Romanus, *In libros Sententiarum*, Prologus, pars 1, q. principalis 1: *De causa materiali <theologie>*, q. 1: *Utrum idem sit aliquid esse subiectum in scientiam et esse de consideratione scientie*, respondeo (cfr. *infra*): «subiectum in scientia non est illud in quo est scientia, sed illud de quo; nam si illud in quo est scientia esset subiectum, cum omnis scientia sit in intellectu, omnium scientiarum esset unum subiectum, et tunc scientie non distinguerentur per subiecta sua [...]. Igitur subiectum in scientia est obiectum». Ioannes de Neapoli, *Quaestiones variae Parisiis disputatae*, q. 20: *Utrum Deus sit subiectum theologiae, sub ratione absoluta, qua Deus, vel sub ratione aliqua speciali, utpote sub ratione, qua restaurator, vel glorificator, etc.*, punctum 1: *Quid proprie sit subiectum alicuius scientiae* (cfr. *infra*): «hic non loquimur de subiecto, in quo est habitus scientiae, quia hoc est intellectus possibilis, nec de hoc aliquis dubitat. Sed loquimur de subiecto de quo, seu circa quod est scientia, quod aliquo nomine dicitur obiectum scientiae». Robert Orford's perspective looks partly different; cfr. Robertus de Orford, *Reprobationes dictionum a fratre Egidio in primum sententiarum*, <reprobatio> 1: <*In Prologum, q. 1*> (cfr. *infra*): «subiectum <scientie> habet materiam “in qua” et “circa quam”: materia “in qua” est anima rationalis vel intellectus angelicus; materia “circa quam” est id circa quod negotiatur».

2. In the following paragraphs I do not wish to present thoroughly Aristotle's doctrines on the nature of scientific knowledge or on the unity and the object of metaphysics. I merely wish to emphasize the aspects of the Stagirite's thought relating to those themes that aroused interpretative and speculative efforts on the part of medieval and renaissance authors. For a reconstruction of Aristotle's theses on this topic, cfr. for example I. Bell, *Metaphysics as an Aristotelian Science*, Academia, Sankt Augustin 2004 (*International Aristotle Studies*, 2); M. Wilson, *Aristotle's Theory of the Unity of Science*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto-Buffalo-London 2000 (*Phoenix Supplementary Volumes*, 38), in part. 14-52 and 134-174; R.D. McKirahan, *Principles and Proofs. Aristotle's Theory of Demonstrative Sciences*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1992. For other reconstructions of the difficulties concerning the nature of metaphysics that Aristotle's writings presented to thinkers from Late Antiquity to the sixteenth century, cfr. A. Bertolacci, *Avicenna and Averroes on the Proof of God's Existence and the Subject-Matter of Metaphysics*, «Medioevo», 32 (2007), 61-97; M. Pickavé, *Heinrich von Gent über Metaphysik als erste Wissenschaft. Studien zu einem Metaphysikentwurf aus dem letzten Viertel des 13. Jahrhunderts*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2007 (*Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters*, 91), *passim*, in part. 81-86; A. Ghisalberti, *Percorsi significativi della “Metafisica” di Aristotele nel Medioevo*, in A. Bausola - G. Reale (ed.), *Aristotele. Perché la metafisica. Studi su alcuni concetti-chiave della «filosofia prima» aristotelica e sulla storia dei loro influssi*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1994 (*Pubblicazioni del Centro di ricerche di metafisica. Temi metafisici e problemi del pensiero antico*, 29), 451-470; A.M. Martins, *Lógica e ontologia em Pedro de Fonseca*, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian - Junta Nacional de Investigação Científica e Tecnológica, Lisboa 1994 (*Textos universitários de Ciências sociais e humanas*), *passim*, in part. 61-75.

In the *Posterior Analytics* the Stagirite firstly provides a definition of scientific knowledge as well as an incorporation of knowledge through demonstration into the latter. We have scientific knowledge of a thing, writes Aristotle, whenever we know both the causes of this thing as being its causes, and we know that this thing cannot be other than it is.³ Knowing a thing through demonstration, he continues, is the same as having scientific knowledge of that thing.⁴

Further, he lays down some theses about the features of scientific knowledge itself that will be the focus of attention and debate among authors from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century.

In the first book of the *Posterior Analytics* one reads that all teaching, and, in general, all intellectual learning requires pre-existing knowledge; in particular, of some things it is necessary to know already that they are, of some others it is necessary to know already what the thing said is, and of others it is necessary to know already both that they are and what the thing said is.⁵ Now, scientific demonstrative knowledge must depend on things (in the sense of ‘things said’ as well, hence of ‘propositions’) that are true, primitive, immediate, better known than the conclusions, and prior to and explanatory of the latter.⁶ Here it should be noted, specifies Aristotle, that things may be prior and better known in two senses: either in the sense of prior by nature or in the sense of prior in relation to us. Prior and better known in relation to us is what is nearer to perception; prior and better known without qualification is what is farther. The things that are farthest from perception are most universal, the things that are nearest are the particulars, and these two types of things are opposed to each other.⁷

There are three “things” in demonstrations: what is demonstrated, i.e. the conclusion, consisting in the fact that an attribute belongs *per se* to a genus; the axioms; the subject genus (*ghénos ypokeímenon*), whose *per se* attributes are revealed by the demonstration. Now, the extremes and the middle terms of the demonstrations of a science must be, if taken as predicates, *per*

3. Arist., *APo.* 1, 2, 71b.

4. Arist., *APo.* 1, 2, 71b.

5. Arist., *APo.* 1, 1, 71a.

6. Arist., *APo.* 1, 2, 71b.

7. Arist., *APo.* 1, 2, 71b-72a.

se predicates; but this occurs only if the extremes and the middle terms belong to one and the same genus; hence each science, with respect to its own demonstrations, possesses the genus proper to it. The axioms can be common to more than one science. By contrast, supposing that the genera of two sciences are different, the demonstration of the one cannot be applied to the attributes studied by the other, unless these sciences are such that one is subordinate to the other.⁸ The subject genus, pursues Aristotle, has attributes belonging *per se* to it;⁹ all the terms of a demonstration must derive from one and the same genus;¹⁰ a science develops proofs with respect to a certain genus;¹¹ the principles and conclusions of the demonstrations of a certain science belong to one and the same genus.¹²

Assuming that the premises of a syllogism are universal, the conclusion of this syllogism must be eternal. Therefore it is not possible to demonstrate or to know in a properly scientific sense that an attribute belongs to something perishable. Such a demonstration might be only accidental, since the connection of the attribute with a perishable thing is not universal but occurs at a time and in a way.¹³

Every demonstrative science has to do with three classes of things: those it assumes to exist, i.e. the genus whose attributes belonging to it *per se* are investigated by the science, as well as the attributes themselves; the common principles (called axioms), from which the science forms its demonstrations; the attributes, about which the science assumes what each signifies. In other words, the things a science has to do with are: those about which it forms its demonstrations; what it demonstrates; that from which it forms its demonstrations. Here, clarifies Aristotle, two points should be noted. First, some of the “things” used in demonstrative sciences are proper to a certain science, whereas others are common – by analogy, he explains – to more than one science. Second, as regards the principles, the elementary things, and genus, it is necessary to assume both what they signify and that they are, since the science cannot

8. Arist., *APo.* I, 7, 75a-b.

9. Arist., *APo.* I, 7, 75a-b and *ibi*, 10, 76b.

10. Arist., *APo.* I, 7, 75b.

11. Arist., *APo.* I, 11, 77a.

12. Arist., *APo.* I, 28, 87b.

13. Arist., *APo.* I, 8, 75b.

demonstrate that they are; by contrast, what dependent things signify is assumed, but the fact that they are is not assumed, since it is necessary to prove of them precisely the fact that they are.¹⁴

At the beginning of the second book of the *Posterior Analytics* Aristotle writes that four things are object of study and scientific knowledge: the fact that a certain attribute belongs to a certain thing; the reason why; if this thing is; what this thing is.¹⁵

This passage is relevant for two reasons. First, it enumerates the questions in the light of which a science develops its research. Second, it introduces a difference between the first and the third of the enumerated questions. Indeed, pursues the Stagirite, we can seek the fact that a thing has a certain attribute or not; or we can seek if a thing is or is not, without any qualification.¹⁶ Namely, if it exists or does not exist. As it clearly appears, our author presents the two problems as distinct; nonetheless, he himself finds out connections among them. According to Aristotle, we do not know what a non-existent thing is, but we just know what its name signifies; hence, in order to know what a thing is, we also need to know that it exists.¹⁷

A second reference point for medieval academic authors was the group of Aristotelian texts known under the collective name '*Metaphysics*'. According to Aristotle, metaphysics is certainly a science, and yet this group of texts provides at least four different descriptions of what this science is concerned with. In the first book of the *Metaphysics* we read that everybody supposes what is called 'wisdom' to deal with the search for the first causes and the principles of things.¹⁸ In the fourth book we read that there is a science that considers being as being and the attributes belonging to this by virtue of its own nature.¹⁹ In the sixth book our author develops the following argument: if there is something which is eternal and immovable and separate, then the knowledge of it belongs to a science distinct

14. Arist., *APo.* I, 10, 76a-b.
15. Arist., *APo.* II, 1, 89b.
16. Arist., *APo.* II, 1, 89b.
17. Arist., *APo.* II, 7, 92b.
18. Arist., *Metaph.* I, 1, 981b.
19. Arist., *Metaph.* IV, 1, 1003a.

from physics and from mathematics; but if the divine exists, it exists in this kind of entity; hence, the science that deals with it is called theology.²⁰ Lastly, in the seventh book he writes that the question concerning ‘what being is’ is equivalent to the question concerning ‘what substance is’.²¹

Besides the mentioned passages, several other parts of the *Metaphysics* were to leave their traces in the doctrines about the nature of science in general, and of metaphysics in particular, formulated by medieval, renaissance, and early modern academic authors. Below I point out three of them.

In the first book we read that the wise man is he who knows all things. Aristotle immediately specifies that this does not mean that the wise man has knowledge of each of them considered in detail, and yet, some lines below, he reiterates that he who has in the highest degree universal knowledge must know all things.²² Now, assuming that, according to Aristotle, science deals with universals, we may ask whether metaphysics deals with all universals or just with some of them. It is further to be noted that on the same page our author moves from the theme of universals to that of the causes.²³ Therefore, we may ask whether, in such a context, by the word ‘universal’ Aristotle means ‘that which is the cause of more than one thing’ instead of ‘that which is common’.

In the fourth book he theorizes the unity of first philosophy and he concludes that it belongs to this one science to investigate being as being and its attributes, substances and their attributes, the contraries, what ‘prior’ and ‘posterior’ are, what ‘genus’ and ‘species’, what ‘whole’ and ‘part’.²⁴ Therefore, the science of being as being appears to be the science of many other things as well, that are not just being as being. Now, we may ask what enables this science to deal with these other things as well and how far its competence extends.

In the first chapter of the sixth book, Aristotle writes that physics deals with non-separate and non-immovable realities; mathematics, or at least some parts of mathematics, with immovable but non-separate realities; first philosophy with reali-

20. Arist., *Metaph.* VI, 1, 1026a.

21. Arist., *Metaph.* VII, 1, 1028b.

22. Arist., *Metaph.* I, 2, 982a.

23. Arist., *Metaph.* I, 2, 982a-b.

24. Arist., *Metaph.* IV, 2, 1004a-1005a.

ties that are both separate and immovable.²⁵ Further he declares that if there is no substance other than those that are natural – i.e. other than movable substances – then physics will be the first science; but if there exists an immovable substance, then the science of this substance will be prior to the sciences of the other substances, and will be first philosophy; and, because it is first, will be universal.²⁶ The notion of ‘universal science’ raises again the question we have just proposed: what are the limits of this science? What distinguishes it from the other sciences? Moreover, this passage puts forward again the question of the role of existence in the occurrence of scientific knowledge: for in this case too, the existence or non-existence of a thing determines the possibility or impossibility of a specific science. Finally, one may ask whether Aristotle really thinks that if there were no immovable substances, then physics would be able to study the totality of the attributes of actually existent essences, and one may also ask which consequences this thesis may have on the possible conceptions of metaphysics.

1.2. *Some deriving problems*

These texts confronted Scholastic authors and all commentators on Aristotle, and still confront present-day scholars of his thought, with three classes of problems.

First of all, one might meditate on the meaning, unity, and value of the doctrine contained in the *Posterior Analytics*. We saw, for example, that the notion of subject genus is a fundamental element of the Aristotelian conception of science. Nonetheless, if we examine the *Posterior Analytics* looking for elucidations about the nature of this genus, we come across several answers. At times the Stagirite appears to conceive of the subject genus as the whole of the individuals belonging to a single genus;²⁷ on other occasions he puts it as a single ge-

25. Arist., *Metaph.* VI, 1, 1026a. The correct reading of this passage from the *Metaphysics* is the object of a widely known philological controversy; yet, medieval and post-medieval readers mostly adopted the version I have just summarized. See also – primarily as a general introduction to the question concerning the problem of the subject/object of metaphysics in medieval thought – P. Porro, *Introduzione. Dalla “Metafisica” alla metafisica, e ritorno: una storia medievale*, «Quaestio», 5 (2005), IX-LI, in part. XIX-XX.

26. Arist., *Metaph.* VI, 1, 1026a.

27. Arist., *APo.* I, 7, 75b and *ibi*, 10, 76a-b.

neric nature;²⁸ elsewhere he writes that a science is a science of one genus in the sense that it is science of all the things that are composed of the elementary things and of all the things that are parts of all the attributes belonging *per se* to the former things, i.e. by virtue of what these things are.²⁹

Moreover, on the one hand Aristotle states that a particular science deals with a particular subject genus; on the other hand, he does not reduce to the mere subject genus that which a science (i.e. each single science) is concerned with. Confronting with this statement, one may ask what kind of relationship exists – according to the Stagirite – between the subject genus and that which a science is concerned with. We have also seen that, according to Aristotle, there cannot be a science of the non-existent. Nowadays scholars agree that the existence here at issue is the historical existence, though not necessarily existence at the present time. Now, one may ask if this interpretation manifestly appears from the Aristotelian text itself and what meaning this text might acquire if one reads it on the basis of a notion of existence different from the historical one.

Similarly, also the doctrines contained in the *Metaphysics* raise questions about their meaning, unity, and value. Still today, scholars of Aristotle hold diverging positions concerning the unity of this work. Ancient readers did not get to deny the coherence of the Stagirite's doctrine, and yet it is not surprising that they disagreed concerning the nature of the subject genus of metaphysics.

Finally, one may ask what is the coherence of the Aristotelian thought as a whole. In other words, one may ask whether the doctrine on the nature of science as expressed in the *Posterior Analytics* accords with the doctrine on the nature of metaphysics as expressed in the *Metaphysics*, and whether the former can be applied to the latter. Should we understand the first causes, or being as being, or the immovable substance, or substance in general as the subject genus of metaphysics? Let us point out that Aristotle hardly uses this particular notion in the *Metaphysics*;³⁰ however, ancient and scholastic readers of his

28. Arist., *APo.* I, 10, 76b.

29. Arist., *APo.* I, 28, 87a.

30. Actually, in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle sometimes uses 'genus' to refer to 'what a science is concerned with', but he neither says that being is a genus, nor explains what the 'subject genus' possibly studied by metaphysics is.

texts judged they could, or even should, understand the contents of this work using this conceptual tool too. No wonder that they came across interpretative as well as theoretical difficulties.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF THE QUESTION FROM LATE ANTIQUITY TO THE LATIN FOURTEENTH CENTURY

2.1. *The evolution of the notions of 'subject' and 'object' of a science*

Between Late Antiquity and the later Latin Middle Ages, the notion of 'subject of a science' undergoes significant transformations, which deeply influence the manner in which the question about the nature of the subject of metaphysics is set.³¹

The works of Alexander of Aphrodisias represent a crucial moment in this evolution. First of all, he introduces some distinction between the subject genus and the scope of a science. Moreover, on at least one occasion he uses the term '*ypokeímenon*' – when referring precisely to the "subject" of metaphysics – not as an adjective associated with the noun '*ghénos*' but as a noun. He thus attributes the form of a search for the subject of a science to the problem of the search for the foundation of the unity of a science.³² Ammonius, in his *Meta-*

One can see that in *Metaph.* VI, 1, 1026a he writes that the highest science must deal with the highest genus, but it has to be noticed that: *i*) this genus is the genus of the things that exist separately and are immovable; *ii*) Aristotle does not clearly state that this genus is the subject genus of the highest science.

31. On this aspect of the question, it remains helpful the study by P.P. Ruffinengo, *Da "ghenos ypokeímenon" a "obiectum scientiae"*, «Annali chieresi», 13 (1997), 51-84. Let us observe, however, that Ruffinengo erroneously ascribes to Alexander of Aphrodisias also the commentary by Pseudo-Alexander (namely Michael of Ephesus) on book Lambda of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

32. Properly speaking, Alexander provides at least three historically significant contributions. First, he applies the notion of 'subject genus of a science' to the case of metaphysics. Second, he identifies this subject genus with being as being and formulates the following question: assuming that being is not a genus, how is it possible to affirm that it is the "genus" (i.e. the subject) of a science? (Alex. Aphr., *In Metaph.*, comm. a IV, 2, 1003a33, ed. M. Hayduck, Reimer, Berolini 1891 [Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, 1], 240³⁵-241⁹). Third, he solves the question by operating on two different sides. On the one hand, at least on one occurrence he drops 'genus'

physics commentary – written down by his pupil Asclepius – retains the innovation introduced by Alexander about the use of ‘*ypokeímenon*’ and distinguishes between the scope (*scopós*) of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and the subject (*ypokeímenon*) of *meta-physics*.³³

Boethius does not use the term ‘*subiectum*’ when he distinguishes between the different parts of speculative philosophy, and yet he plays an important role in the history of the question. First of all, he offers medieval readers a translation of the term ‘*ypokeímenon*’. In his translation of Aristotle’s *Categories*, he renders the noun ‘*ypokeímenon*’ as ‘*subiectum*’ and the adjective ‘*ypokeímenos*’ as ‘*subiectus*’; this is the case of the phrase ‘*materia subiecta*’.³⁴ Secondly, in the fifth book of the *Consolatio* he uses the adjectives ‘*obiectus*’ and ‘*subiectus*’ in very similar contexts that are considerably important in the history of the question of the “subject/object” of a science. In the fifth Prose we find both ‘*subiectus*’ (with the meaning of ‘subjected’) and ‘*obiectus*’ (with the meaning of ‘opposite a cognitive faculty’). And in the subsequent Prose we may read: «omne iudicium secundum sui naturam quae sibi subiecta sunt comprehendit». Certainly here ‘*subiectus*’ has the meaning ‘subjected’, but suggesting ‘that

and uses only the term ‘subject’ (*ibi*, comm. a IV, 1, 1003a21, 239²²⁻²⁵); on the other, he examines the notion of ‘genus’ here at issue and does not identify either a logical or a psychological sense of it, but rather an epistemological one (*ibi*, comm. a IV, 2, 1003b19, 245³⁻⁴). Actually, he thus offers to later authors the possibility to designate the “genus” taken in an epistemological sense simply as ‘subject’. Cfr. also P. Donini, *Unità e oggetto della metafisica secondo Alessandro di Afrodisia*, in G. Movia (ed.), *Alessandro di Afrodisia e la Metafisica di Aristotele*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2003 (Temi metafisici e problemi del pensiero antico. Studi e testi, 94), 15-51; M. Bonelli, *Alessandro di Afrodisia e la metafisica come scienza dimostrativa*, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2002 (Collana di testi e studi sul pensiero antico, 35), 88-99. It could also be noted that in the proem to his commentary on Arist., *Metaph.* XII he makes use of the notion of ‘purpose of metaphysics’ too, but one has to be aware that this text is preserved only in the form of quotations inside Averroes’s *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*.

33. Cfr. A. Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle’s “Metaphysics” in Avicenna’s “Kitāb al-Sifā”*. *A Milestone of Western Metaphysical Thought*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2006 (Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies, 63), 79-88 and 136-142.

34. Arist., *Categoriae vel praedicamenta. Translatio Boethii*, cap. 2-3, 1a-b, in *Aristoteles Latinus*, vol. I/1-5: *Categoriae vel praedicamenta. Translatio Boethii, editio composita, translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeka, lemmata e Simplicii commentario decerpta, pseudo-Augustini paraphrasis themistianiana*, ed. L. Minio-Paluello, Desclée De Brouwer, Bruges-Paris 1961, 5-6.

which is seized' as a possible translation: the things "subjected" to judgment are those grasped by it.³⁵

In the Arabic area, al-Fārābī (followed by Avicenna) adopts the distinction, already used by Ammonius, between the purpose of the book of *Metaphysics* – as well as of each single book of it – and the subject of metaphysics, and yet he speaks both of subjects (in plural) of this science and of its first subject. This approach to the question presents two characteristics. First, the reference to 'genus' drops out again; second, metaphysics is presented as a discipline composed of parts and such as to consider more than one "subject", among which, however, only one – i.e. the first subject – determines its unity and nature.³⁶

'*Ghénos ypokeímenon*' is rendered as '*genus subiectum*' both in the translation of the *Posterior Analytics* carried out before 1150 by James of Venice³⁷ and in the so-called translation *Anonymi sive Ioannis* that appeared a few years later.³⁸ In the translation of the *Posterior Analytics* carried out before the mid 1180s by Gerard of Cremona, '*ghénos ypokeímenon*' is rendered as '*natura subiecta*',³⁹ however it should be noted that this translation renders an Arabic translation of Aristotle's work into Latin. The revised version made by William Moerbeke keeps the syntagma '*genus subiectum*'.⁴⁰ The translation of Avicenna's so-called *Metaphysics* (*Liber de philosophia prima sive Scientia divina*), made around 1150 by Dominic Gundisalvi, poses the question concerning the subject of metaphysics in terms of the problem of the *subiectum primae philosophiae* and more precisely – at least at one point in the text – of the *primum subiectum* of this science.

35. Boeth., *Cons.*, V, proses 5–6. When a work is available in several forms and editions, I quote from it by just referring to its interior partitions.

36. Ruffinengo, *Da "ghenos ypokeimenon"*, 64–71. For the translation and analysis of the *Treatise on the Scope of Aristotle in the Book of "Metaphysics"* by al-Fārābī, cfr. Bertolacci, *The Reception*, 65–103.

37. Arist., *Analytica posteriora. Translatio Iacobi*, I, cap. 7, 75a, in *Aristoteles Latinus*, vol. IV/1–4: *Analytica posteriora. Translationes Iacobi, Anonymi sive "Ioannis"*, *Gerardi et recensio Guillelmi de Moerbeka*, ed. L. Minio-Paluello – B.G. Dod, Desclée De Brouwer, Bruges-Paris 1968, 19.

38. Aristoteles, *Analytica posteriora. Translatio Anonymi sive "Ioannis"*, I, cap. 7, 75a, in *Aristoteles Latinus*, vol. IV/1–4, 122.

39. Aristoteles, *Analytica posteriora. Translatio Gerardi*, I, cap. 7, 75a, in *Aristoteles Latinus*, vol. IV/1–4, 202.

40. Aristoteles, *Analytica posteriora. Recensio Guillelmi de Moerbeka*, I, cap. 7, 75a, in *Aristoteles Latinus*, vol. IV/1–4, 293.

Hence, the reference to ‘genus’ is lost and the attention is focused on the syntagma ‘*primum subiectum*’.⁴¹

From at least the middle of the thirteenth century the theme of the nature of the subject of a science, and more precisely of the nature of the subject of metaphysics, becomes a regular object for reflection in the Latin milieu.

In a chapter of the first book of his *Metaphysics* (a paraphrase of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*) Albert the Great presents four different positions concerning the issue. The first is held by those for whom the subject of first philosophy is the cause; the second by those for whom the subject of first philosophy are *deus et divina*; the third by those for whom the subject of first philosophy is being as being;⁴² the fourth position is discussed in a sort of addendum to the chapter in question. Here Albert writes that, according to certain Latins (*quidam Latinorum*), we can speak of the subject of a science in three senses: in the sense of the most common support, i.e. that which in the science underlies everything as the most common; in the sense of that which in the science is the most certain; in the sense of that which in the science is the worthiest (*dignus*). Well, the supporters of this thesis appear to maintain that the subject of metaphysics taken in the first sense is being, taken in the sec-

41. Avicenna, *Liber de philosophia prima sive Scientia divina*, tract. 1, cap. 1–2, in *Avicenna Latinus, Liber de philosophia prima sive Scientia divina*, ed. S. Van Riet, vol. I, Peeters – Brill, Louvain–Leiden 1977, 1–18. Also the Renaissance translation of the *Epitome of Metaphysics* ascribed to Averroes uses ‘*subiectum* of metaphysics’ rather than ‘*genus subiectum*’, but the syntagma ‘*primum subiectum*’ does not appear in this work. It seems to me that this is due to the fact that in the lexicon of the Latin translations of Averroes’s writings the latter expression usually designates the basic support, i.e. the material principle, of something. Nevertheless, the phrase ‘*prima intentio* of metaphysics’ does appear: it consists in knowing about the ultimate causes of sensible things what about them has not been studied by physics. Cfr. Averroes Cordubensis, *Epitome in librum Metaphysicæ Aristotelis*, transl. by Iacobus Mantinus Hebraeus, tract. 1, in Aristoteles – Averroes, *Aristotelis opera cum Averrois commentariis*, Apud Iunctas, Venetiis 1562 (repr. Minerva, Frankfurt a.M. 1962), vol. VIII, f. 356^{va-b}. But note that this text was unknown to medieval authors.

42. Albertus Magnus, *Metaphysica*, I: *De stabilimento huius scientiæ et stabilimento principiorum quæ sunt causæ*, tract. 1: *De stabilitione huius scientiæ et nobilitate*, cap. 2: *Digressio declarans quid sit huius scientiæ proprium subiectum; et est in eo disputatio de tribus opinionibus philosophorum quæ sunt de subiecto*, in Id., *Opera omnia*, vol. XVI: *Metaphysica*, ed. B. Geyer, Aschendorff, Monasterii Westfalorum 1960, 3^a–5^a.

ond is the cause, taken in the third is God.⁴³ Albert the Great, who rejects this position, does not mention the identity of its inventors, and yet he explicitly states that it is held by some *Latini* authors.⁴⁴ Now, the German master writes his *Metaphysics* between 1260 and 1265. Therefore, the just mentioned passage proves that from the middle of the thirteenth century in the Latin milieu there are attempts to link the doctrine contained in the *Posterior Analytics* with the various statements on the “topic” of first philosophy contained in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

Albert’s own position concerning the subject/object of metaphysics appears to contain an ambiguous element.⁴⁵ In his *Physics*, the German Dominican writes that being is the subject (*subiectum*) of first philosophy, that this science deals with the divisions and attributes of being, and that among these latter there is the pair ‘*separatum/non-separatum*’.⁴⁶ In the first pages of his *Metaphysics* he writes that being as being is the subject

43. Albertus Magnus, *Metaphysica*, I, tract. 1, cap. 2, 5^{a-b}.

44. Geyer supposes it is Kilwardby, but this attribution seems problematic to me. In Robertus Kilwardby, *De ortu scientiarum*, cap. 26–29, nn. 211–245, ed. A.G. Judy, The British Academy – The Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Oxford 1976 (Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi, 4), 82–92, the English Dominican openly writes that the subject (*subiectum*) of metaphysics is being as being taken as an analogical notion that is shared by God and creatures and that is based on the fact that the former (to which ‘being’ is attributed essentially, priorly, and in a primary manner) is cause of the latter (to which ‘being’ is appropriate by participation, posteriorly, and in a secondary manner).

45. This ambiguity has been recently pointed out by T. B. Noone, *Albert the Great’s Conception of Metaphysical Knowledge*, in L. Honnefelder – R. Wood – M. Dreyer – M.-A. Aris (ed.), *Albertus Magnus und die Anfänge der Aristoteles-Rezeption im lateinischen Mittelalter. Von Richardus Rufus bis zu Franciscus de Mayronis*, Aschendorff Verlag, Münster 2005 (Subsidia Albertina, 1), 685–704, in part. 691–703. It seems to me, however, that the ambiguity pointed out by Noone cannot be understood, as he maintains, as the effect of a tension between an Avicennian and an Aristotelian perspective.

46. Albertus Magnus, *Physica*, I, tract. 3: *De principiis secundum sententiam veram*, cap. 18: *De hoc quod materia est ingenita et incorruptibilis et privatio corruptibilis, et de fine primi libri*, in Id., *Opera omnia*, vol. IV: *Physica*, ed. P. Hossfeld, Aschendorff, Monasterii Westfolorum 1987–1993, 76^b. See also *ibi*, I, tract. 1: *De praelibandis ante scientiam*, cap. 1: *Digressio declarans, quae sit intentio in hoc opere et quae pars essentialis philosophiae sit scientia naturalis et cuius ordinis inter partes*, 1^b, where he writes that «Si quis [...] diffinire velit substantiam in eo quod substantia et esse eius considerare voluerit, nihil sensibilem vel mobilium ingreditur in esse et rationem suam, quia si talia in esse substantiae et rationem ingrederentur, oporteret, quod essent de esse et ratione omnis substantiae, et hoc patet non esse verum, cum nihil horum conveniat substantiis separatis».

(*subiectum*) of metaphysics and that the things proceeding from it (*quae sequuntur ens*), if it is taken precisely as being, are its attributes (*passiones*).⁴⁷ It follows that, in these places, the subject of a science is understood by Albert as something “common” to all that is considered by that science and, in the case of metaphysics, it is identified as being.

And yet in the first book of his *Metaphysics*, Albert also writes that the being (*esse*) considered by this science corresponds to the first emanation proceeding from God (*effluxio Dei*) and to that which is created first (*creatum primum*);⁴⁸ that metaphysics deals with *speculationes* which do not concern *continuum* and time;⁴⁹ that metaphysics is one unitary science by virtue of the fact that it deals with all that it deals with insofar as it is «non conceptum cum continuo et tempore».⁵⁰ Further, in the sixth book, he explains that metaphysics deals with God and divine things as they are principles of the totality of being (*universi esse*), and that precisely for this reason this science is a universal one.⁵¹

Facing these statements one may ask what exactly is Albert’s conception of the subject of a science. One may also ask whether being is that which is created first or is something common to God and creature, and whether it actually is what

47. Albertus Magnus, *Metaphysica*, I, tract. 1, cap. 2, 4^b-5^a.

48. Albertus Magnus, *Metaphysica*, I, tract. 1, cap. 1: *Digressio declarans, quod tres sunt scientiae theoriae et ista est principalis inter tres et stabiliens alias duas*, 3^a.

49. Albertus Magnus, *Metaphysica*, I, tract. 1, cap. 1, 3^a.

50. Albertus Magnus, *Metaphysica*, I, tract. 2: *De proprietatibus sapientiae istius secundum se*, cap. 11: *Digressio declarans quattuor, de quibus est haec sapientia et in quo convenit cum topico et sophista in his et in quo differt ab ipsis*, 28^b.

51. Albertus Magnus, *Metaphysica*, VI: *De accidente*, tract. 1: *De inquisitione propria primae philosophiae et de modo diffinitionis qua utitur*, cap. 3: *Quod haec scientia sit divina et honorabilissima et prima et universalis*, 305^b-306^b. The interpretation Albert gives here of the corresponding passage from Arist., *Metaph.* VI, 1 is surprising if compared with the above quoted passage from Id., *Physica*, I, tract. 3, cap. 18, 1^b. L. Honnefelder, *Wisdom on the Way of Science: Christian Theology and the Universe of Sciences According to St. Albert the Great*, in L. Honnefelder - H. Möhle - S. Bullido del Barrio (ed.), *Via Alberti. Texte - Quellen - Interpretationen*, Aschendorff, Münster 2009 (Subsidia Albertina, 2), 13-36, writes that Albert replaced «The ontological criterion according to which Boethius introduced Metaphysics, namely separateness from matter and motion,» with «the epistemological procedure of transcending our Categories to the presupposed most general concepts» (*ibi*, 25). However Honnefelder skips to prove that, according to Albert, the procedure in question conflicts with the aforementioned criterion. Thus, one might still think that – in Albert’s view – the first entails the second.

is shared by the *speculationes* that do not concern *continuum* and time.

Thomas Aquinas's position appears to be an attempt to follow his master's doctrine and make it more rigorous. According to what the Italian Dominican writes in his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate* and in the proem to his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, the *subiectum* of a science is that whose attributes are demonstrated and whose principles are studied in that science; furthermore, what a science deals with is broader than its *subiectum*, and yet it can be referred to that *subiectum*; finally, the *obiectum* (note: the *obiectum*, not the *subiectum*) of a science is that *ratio* in which all the things considered in that science take part (*communicant*). If applied to metaphysics, this scheme has the following results. The *subiectum* of metaphysics is common being. What this science deals with (*considerat*) is being, its attributes, and its principles (among which there are separate substances). The *obiectum* of metaphysics is that which is speculatively knowable (*speculabile*)⁵² and does not depend upon matter according to reason (*secundum rationem*) nor according to its being (*secundum esse*).⁵³

Although its systematic appearance, Aquinas's doctrine is difficult to interpret. First of all, it is difficult to comprehend his conception of *ens commune* and of its relationship with separate substances. In the proem to his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Aquinas, within a few lines, states that the subject of metaphysics is «*ipsum solum ens commune*»; that separate substances are the «*communes et universales causae*» of *ens commune*; that *ens commune* is included among the things «*quae possunt sine materia esse*»; and that the fact that these things, among which there is being, may exist without matter shows that they do not depend «*a materia secundum esse*». Well, if we interpret *ens commune* as a product of separate substances, we are induced to think that it is the same as material created being. But if that is the case, then we do not see why Aquinas says that *ens commune* is included among the things that can exist without matter and

52. Note that already Aristotle uses the term '*epistētós*' to denote what is object of science (but equally note that this term definitely does not designate "the object" of a science) and that Alexander of Aphrodisias even speaks of '*ghénos to epistētón*'. Cfr. Alex. Aphr., *In Metaph.*, comm. a IV, 2, 1003b16, 245²⁰⁻²⁸.

53. THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Boet. De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 1, c. and ID., *In Met.*, Prol.

do not depend upon matter according to being. We might then think that *ens commune*, although somehow depending upon spiritual substances, is common to the latter as well as to material substances. But if that is the case, then we do not see the reason why Aquinas does not simply say that spiritual substances are included in the subject of metaphysics.

A possible solution of the conundrum consists of the two following points. *i*) *Ens commune*, taken as it is in reality, is identical with transcendental being; hence, on the one hand, it is common both to material substances and to spiritual substances and, on the other, it is in a way posterior to the latter substances, since it depends upon them.⁵⁴ *ii*) Taken as beings, spiritual substances are included in transcendental being (i.e.: they are instances of being, “inferiors” of being), hence they form part of the subject of metaphysics; yet, if taken in this way, they form part of the subject of metaphysics just as material substances too form part of this subject. However, since spiritual substances are also principles of transcendental being – and therefore of the subject of metaphysics –, metaphysics deals with them “more” than it deals with material beings: it deals with material beings only insofar as these beings are included in the common *rationes*; it deals with spiritual substances both insofar as these substances are included in the common *rationes* and as these substances are principles of transcendental being. In other words, according to Thomas, metaphysics – in relation to

54. Actually, Thomas is not generous with explanations. In THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Met.*, XI, lect. 7, n. 21 the thesis according to which the science that studies separate substances is the same as the «universalem scientiam entis, in quantum est ens» is laconically justified as follows: «Eadem enim est scientia quae est de primis entibus, et quae est universalis. Nam prima entia sunt principia aliorum». Moreover, our author uses the syntagma '*ens commune*' in problematic ways. On several occasions it means '*ens universale*', thus embracing both created and uncreated beings; but in some other passages it means 'created being': cfr. for example ID., *S. th.*, I-II^o, q. 66, a. 5, ad 4 and ID., *De Div. nom.*, cap. 5, lect. 2. A passage in ID., *De ver.*, q. 10, a. 11, ad 10 even foreshadows a well-known passage by Scotus and its developments by Francis of Marchia and Nicolas Bonet: «ens quod est primum per communitatem, cum sit idem per essentiam cui libet rei, nullius proportionem excedit; et ideo in cognitione cuiuslibet rei ipsum cognoscitur. Sed ens quod primum est causalitate, excedit impropotionaliter omnes alias res: unde per nullius alterius cognitionem sufficienter cognosci potest. Et ideo in statu viae, in quo per species a rebus abstractas intelligimus, cognoscimus ens commune sufficienter, non autem ens increatum».

the range of the existing substances and beings – is an asymmetrical science, at least as to its purposes.

A second problematic aspect of Aquinas's doctrine concerns the distinction and the relation that he draws between *subiectum* and *obiectum* of a science. In Aquinas's writings there are passages where he seems to equate them.⁵⁵ Yet, in his commentaries on Boethius's *De Trinitate* and, at least implicitly, on the *Metaphysics*, Aquinas actually distinguishes between them. Moreover, one may observe that when Aquinas, in his commentary on the *De Trinitate*, asks what is that by virtue of which metaphysics is distinct from the other speculative sciences, he answers: by virtue of the object.⁵⁶ And when, in his *Summa theologiae* and in his commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*, he asks what lends unity to a cognitive faculty and to a science, he answers: the object, and more precisely its *ratio formalis*.⁵⁷

In addition, one may observe that *ens commune*, which for Aquinas is subject of metaphysics, is not conceptually identical with transcendental being. First of all, transcendental being includes all its inferiors; by contrast, common being includes some inferiors of being (general *rationes*; *rationes* of immaterial substances as far as the latter are taken as principles of being), but not all of them (particular *rationes* of material beings; *rationes* of immaterial substances different from those which characterize these substances when the latter are taken as principles of being). In other words, in Aquinas's view, transcendental being is an ontological/metaphysical notion; common being is an epistemological notion (I use the word 'epistemology' in the sense of 'doctrine of *scientific* knowledge'). In reality they are identical, but before the mind they are not completely identical. Furthermore, one may observe that common being is not conceptually identical even with the *speculabile* that does not depend upon matter according to reason nor according to its being: common being – taken precisely according to its epis-

55. Cfr. for example THOMAS AQUINAS, *S. th.*, I^a, q. 1, a. 7, c., where he writes that «Sic enim se habet subiectum ad scientiam, sicut obiectum ad potentiam vel habitum. Proprie autem illud assignatur obiectum alicuius potentiae vel habitus, sub cuius ratione omnia referuntur ad potentiam vel habitum [...]».

56. THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Boet. De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 1, c.

57. THOMAS AQUINAS, *S. th.*, I^a, q. 1, a. 3, c. and *ibi*, a. 7, c.; cfr. also *ibi*, q. 59, a. 4, c. and ID., *In Post. Anal.*, I, lect. 41.

temological role – embraces separate substances only insofar as they are principles of it; by contrast, the aforementioned *speculabile* embraces them, so to speak, *simpliciter*.

These data might be explained as follows. In Aquinas's view, what determines the "intension" of a science is the object of that science. It is the object of a science which "makes explicit" and "exhibits" the epistemological role of the subject of that science. In the case of metaphysics, the fact that this science deals with what is abstract according to reason and according to being is precisely what accounts for the fact that this science does not study every *ratio* of every real being, but only some *rationes*, and at the same time it accounts for the fact that this science deals more with separate substances than with material substances. We may thus conclude that the *obiectum* is at the center of Aquinas's epistemology at least as much as the *subiectum* is. We may also conclude that, on the one hand, Thomas Aquinas develops the perspective contained in Aristotle's *Metaph.* IV: for he focuses the attention on establishing the subject of science and identifies the subject of metaphysics with being; but, on the other, he develops the perspective contained in Aristotle's *Metaph.* VI and goes beyond it: for he identifies the discriminating and conclusive determining element of any science with the object of it.⁵⁸

58. Moreover, let us consider that, for Aquinas, the degree of abstraction that characterizes metaphysics does not result from an act of abstraction but from an act of separation, i.e. from a judgment. In *In Boet. De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3, c. he writes: «intellectus distinguit unum ab altero aliter et aliter secundum diversas operationes; quia secundum operationem, qua componit et dividit, distinguit unum ab alio per hoc quod intelligit unum alii non inesse. In operatione vero qua intelligit, quid est unumquodque, distinguit unum ab alio, dum intelligit, quid est hoc, nihil intelligendo de alio, neque quod sit cum eo, neque quod sit ab eo separatum. Unde ista distinctio non proprie habet nomen separationis, sed prima tantum. Haec autem distinctio recte dicitur abstractio, sed tunc tantum quando ea, quorum unum sine altero intelligitur, sunt simul secundum rem. Non enim dicitur animal a lapide abstrahi, si animal absque intellectu lapidis intelligatur. Unde cum abstractio non possit esse, proprie loquendo, nisi coniuictorum in esse, secundum duos modos coniunctionis praedictos, scilicet qua pars et totum ununtur vel forma et materia, duplex est abstractio, una, qua forma abstrahitur a materia, alia, qua totum abstrahitur a partibus. [...] Sic ergo in operatione intellectus triplex distinctio invenitur. Una secundum operationem intellectus componentis et dividit, quae separatio dicitur proprie; et haec competit scientiae divinae sive metaphysicae. Alia secundum operationem, qua formantur quidditates rerum, quae est abstractio formae a materia sensibili; et haec competit mathematicae. Tertia secundum eandem operationem quae est abstractio

universalis a particulari; et haec competit etiam physicae et est communis omnibus scientiis, quia in scientia praetermittitur quod per accidens est et accipitur quod per se est». Now, the fact that separation only pertains to metaphysics is substantiated by the following argument: «cum dicimus formam abstrahi a materia, non intelligitur de forma substantiali, quia forma substantialis et materia sibi correspondens dependent ad invicem, ut unum sine alio non possit intelligi, eo quod proprius actus in propria materia fit. Sed intelligitur de forma accidentali, quae est quantitas et figura [...]. Substantia autem, quae est materia intelligibilis quantitatis, potest esse sine quantitate; unde considerare substantiam sine quantitate magis pertinet ad genus separationis quam abstractionis» (*ibidem*). It seems to me that this argument holds only supposing that spiritual substances do exist. This suggests that, according to Thomas, in order to distinguish metaphysics from physics it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of immaterial substances. However, the medieval master neither affirms this point without ambiguity (indeed, in the passage from *De veritate* quoted above he moves in the opposite direction), nor explains whether this acknowledgement should be achieved before developing metaphysics (that is to say, it must be achieved either through an intuition preliminary to metaphysics or at the “end” of physics) or within metaphysics itself. The historiographical issue is extensively debated. As opposite examples, cfr. R. MCINERNEY, *The Science We Are Seeking*, «Rev. Meta.», 47 (1993-94), 3-18, who focuses on the theological conclusion of Aquinas’s physics; M.S. PUGH, *Maritain, the Intuition of Being, and the Proper Starting Point for Thomistic Metaphysics*, «Thomist», 61 (1997), 405-424, who maintains the Maritainian “eidetic intuition of being”; J.F.X. KNASAS, *The Preface to Thomistic Metaphysics. A Contribution to the Neo-Thomist Debate on the Start of Metaphysics*, Lang, New York-Bern-Frankfurt a.M.-Paris 1990 (American University Studies. Series V: *Philosophy*, 106), in part. 95-113, who holds that one can demonstrate the existence of separate substance while developing metaphysics and only then – i.e. within metaphysics – discover the being that is common to material and spiritual beings. J.F. WIPPEL, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas. From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington (D.C.) 2000 (Monographs of the Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy, 1), 58-59, footnote 110, argues that Knasas’s approach «fails to do justice to Thomas’s understanding of the subject of a science, knowledge of which is required for one to begin the science. It also contradicts a principle Thomas accepts from Aristotle to the effect that no science can establish the existence of its own subject». However, I wonder whether Thomas interprets that requirement and that principle in the sense of a purely *secundum se* or of a *quod nos* too; in the former case, Knasas would be right. Most likely, Thomas’s thinking is just confused. Departing from these positions, P. PORRO, *Astrazione e separazione: Tommaso d’Aquino e la tradizione greco-araba*, in *Lecture e interpretazioni di Tommaso d’Aquino oggi: cantieri aperti. Atti del convegno internazionale di studio (Milano 12-13 settembre 2005)*, Istituto di Filosofia San Tommaso d’Aquino, Torino [2006?] (Quaderni di *Annali chieresi*), 121-161, depreciates the role of the distinction between *abstractio* and *separatio* in Aquinas’s determination of the nature of the subject of metaphysics. I do not entirely agree with him; it seems to me that Porro develops this view partly because he undervalues the asymmetry – an intended one, in my opinion – of Thomas’s metaphysics.

Peter of Auvergne and Henry of Ghent carry out a more strong and direct unification of the notions of ‘*subiectum*’ and ‘*obiectum*’. Like Thomas Aquinas, Peter writes that the subject of a science relates to the science in the same way as the object of a *habitus* or faculty relates to that *habitus* or faculty. The statements formulated by the two authors are quite similar;⁵⁹ nevertheless, as far as metaphysics is concerned, their doctrines differ on an interesting point. The *obiectum* Thomas speaks of clearly and plainly embraces both material and separate substances, whereas the *subiectum* he speaks of is epistemologically related to separate substances inasmuch as it follows them ontologically. By contrast, the *obiectum* and the *subiectum* Peter speaks of are totally interchangeable: both of them are simply being as being, which for Peter embraces both the most universal things and the “first” things (i.e. separate substances).⁶⁰

Henry of Ghent first of all distinguishes between subject and matter of a science. The matter of a science is all that the science deals with, besides the subject.⁶¹ As concerns the subject of a science, for our author it possesses three fundamental distinguishing features. *i*) It is what first moves the intellect to an act of intellectual knowledge (within the science having that subject as its subject, obviously)⁶² and is the object of a certain science on its own basis.⁶³ *ii*) It is that the knowledge of which

59. PETRUS DE ALVERNIA, *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam*, I, q. 1: *Utrum substantiae separatae sint subiectum in ista scientia*, considerandum ergo primo, in A.P. MONAHAN, *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam Petri de Alvernia*, in J.R. O'DONNELL (ed.), *Nine Mediaeval Thinkers. A Collection of Hitherto Unedited Texts*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1955 (Studies and Texts, 1), 145-181, quotation from 153: «Subjectum se habet ad scientiam sicut obiectum ad habitum vel potentiam. Obiectum autem alicuius potentiae est sub cuius ratione cadunt omnia alia quae movent potentiam illam [...]». Compare THOMAS AQUINAS, *S. th.*, I^o, q. 1, a. 7, c., quoted in footnote 55.

60. Cfr. A.P. MONAHAN, *The Subject of Metaphysics for Peter of Auvergne*, «Med. Stud.», 16 (1954), 118-130. Nonetheless, Peter asserts a strong division, within metaphysics, between metaphysics as a science of the most universal things and metaphysics as a science of separate substances.

61. Henricus de Gandavo, *Summa. Quaestiones ord.*, a. 19, q. 2, c., *Opera et impensis Iodoci Badii Ascensii, Apud Parrhisios 1520* (repr. The Franciscan Institute - Nauwelaerts - Schönningh, St. Bonaventure [N.Y.]-Louvain-Paderborn 1953), vol. I, ff. 116^v-117^r.

62. Henricus de Gandavo, *Summa. Quaestiones ord.*, a. 19, q. 1, c., vol. I, f. 115^r.

63. Henricus de Gandavo, *Summa. Quaestiones ord.*, a. 19, q. 2, c., vol. I, ff. 116^v-117^r.

represents the purpose of that science.⁶⁴ *iii*) It is such that the science having it as its subject deals also – and solely – with all the things that can be referred to it.⁶⁵

The subject performs all these functions insofar as it is in front of the faculty or the science, i.e. as object: «subiectum est illud quod primo cadit in notitia scientiae tamquam per se obiectum; et cuius notitia principaliter intenditur».⁶⁶ Henry relates therefore the meanings of ‘*subiectum*’ and ‘*obiectum*’ in a more direct way than Aquinas did. Moreover, he identifies the epistemologically determining subject with the one falling *primo* within the cognitive activity proper to a science; hence, his words announce the introduction of the syntagma ‘*obiectum primum*’. Finally, the subject of a science is such that the science having it as its subject does not exceed (*non excedit*) the sphere of the things that can be referred to it; which announces the introduction of the notion of ‘adequate subject of a science’.⁶⁷

Giles of Rome’s doctrine concerning the subject/object of a science accepts and develops a central aspect of Henry’s position and thus enables us to grasp the cruxes of the strategy proposed by the master from Ghent.

Giles writes that there are four modalities according to which something can be considered by a science. *i*) *Per se*, principally, and in every way; this is the subject of the science in a proper sense. *ii*) *Per se*, principally, but not in every way. This is

64. Henricus de Gandavo, *Summa. Quaestiones ord.*, a. 19, q. 1, ad 1, vol. I, f. 115^r. Strictly speaking, here Henry distinguishes between subject and aim of a science: something is «subiectum huius scientiae quo ad imperfectam cognitionem quam scientiam de ipso supponit; et est finis eius quo ad perfectam cognitionem quam de ipso quaerit».

65. Henricus de Gandavo, *Summa. Quaestiones ord.*, a. 19, q. 1, ad 7, vol. I, f. 116^r.

66. Henricus de Gandavo, *Summa. Quaestiones ord.*, a. 19, q. 2, vol. I, f. 116^v. Cfr. also *ibi*, q. 1, ad 2, vol. I, f. 115^v: «circa subjectum [...] veluti circa proprium obiectum scientiae vertitur principalis scientiae consideratio».

67. See also the interchangeability of ‘*subiectum*’ and ‘*obiectum*’ in Henricus de Gandavo, *Quodlibet XII*, q. 1: *Utrum Deus sub ratione infinita ex parte sui sit subiectum sive obiectum alicuius scientiae creatae*, in Id., *Quodlibet XII. Quaestiones 1-30*, ed. J. Decorte, Leuven University Press, Leuven 1987 (Henrici de Gandavo opera omnia, 16), 4-13. However, the expression ‘*res subiecta [...] rationi sit obiectum scientiae*’, used by Henry in the *solutio*, suggests that he understands ‘*subiectum*’ and ‘*obiectum*’ as denoting the (studied) “thing” as it is provided with properties and the (studied) “thing” as it is laid before the mind, respectively. For a somehow different and more accurate investigation into Henry’s doctrine, cfr. Pickavé, *Heinrich von Gent*, 102-109.

the case of that where the *ratio* of the subject, taken in a proper sense, is fulfilled in the highest degree. This thing or these things are subject of the science, but just in a certain respect. *iii*) *Per se*, but not principally. This is the case of that which bears some reference to the subject in a proper sense: its species and attributes. *iv*) Accidentally. This is the case of the examples that are given with a didactic purpose.

The scheme is clear. If applied to metaphysics, it has the following result: the subject of metaphysics in a proper sense is being as being; the subjects of metaphysics that are such just in a certain respect are substance and God; finally, within that which metaphysics considers *per se* but not principally there is, for example, the accident.⁶⁸

Moreover, this scheme enables Giles to distinguish the theology included in metaphysics from the theology offered by the *sacra pagina*. Metaphysics determines what it determines about God in a *commune* way, i.e. since God is being and is the universal cause of beings; hence, metaphysics does not deal with God in a totally principal way (*principaliter secundum omnem modum*), and for this reason God is not subject *simpliciter* in it. By contrast, theology determines what it determines about God in a particular way, i.e. since God restores the fallen human nature (*restaurator*) and carries out the human glorification (*consumator glorificationis, glorificator*); it therefore deals with God

68. Aegidius Romanus, *In libros Sententiarum*, Prologus, pars 1, q. principalis 1: *De causa materiali <theologie>*, q. 1: *Utrum idem sit aliquid esse subiectum in scientiam et esse de consideratione scientie*, respondeo, in Id., *Primus Sententiarum*, Sumptibus et expensis heredum quondam Octaviani Scoti, Venetiis 1521 (repr. Minerva, Frankfurt a.M. 1968), f. 2^b. Likewise, in the previous *Questiones methaphisicales*, I, q. 5: *Utrum deus sit subiectum methaphisice*, Per Simonem de Luere mandato domini Andree Torresani de Asula, Venetiis 1501 (repr. Minerva, Frankfurt a.M. 1966), f. 3^m, Giles distinguishes between two ways of being “principal subject” of a science: there is a principal subject that is such because it is that *de quo primo et per se intenditur in illa scientia*; and there is a principal subject that is such *ex continenti*, i.e. by virtue of the fact that the subject that is principal *primo et per se* contains – as its most perfect “expression” – precisely that thing. Further, in *ibi*, I, q. 6, f. 3^{m-b}, he distinguishes between subject of a science and that which is considered by a science: the latter comprises the former and is connected to it, since all what is determined in a science is determined by virtue of the fact that it is characterized by a reference (*attributio*) to the subject; by contrast, the latter is not identified with the former.

in a totally principal way, and for this reason God is subject *simpliciter* in it, although *sub speciali ratione*.⁶⁹

Giles considers the components of this representation (more precisely, those ones that fall within the consideration of a science according to the first three of the four modalities listed above) as objects too. In the *Questiones metaphisicales* he explicitly maintains that, speaking about the subject and object of a science, the two terms are interchangeable.⁷⁰

In the *lectura* reported by Godfrey of Fontaines and in the commentary on the first book of the *Sentences*, our author clarifies his thought as follows. Science has a primary object and a secondary object (*obiectum primum*, *obiectum secundarium*). The secondary object is such because it is a knowable object (*in potentia ut sit scibile*) investigated by a certain science just on the basis of a reference (*ordo*) to the primary object.⁷¹ The secondary object is considered by the science only on the basis of the primary object, just as in nature matter only exists in the subject. Consequently, the primary object and the secondary object are called *subiectum* and *materia*, respectively. This is due to the fact – explains Giles – that they relate to each other and to the *lumen* of the agent intellect just as in nature the subject and matter relate to each other and to accidental forms.⁷²

69. Aegidius Romanus, *In libros Sententiarum*, Prologus, pars 1, q. principalis 1, q. 3: *Quid sit subiectum in sacra pagina*, respondeo, f. 3^{va-b}.

70. Aegidius Romanus, *Questiones*, I, q. 5, f. 3^{rb}. The interchangeability of subject and object – in the same sense it has in the text by Henry mentioned in footnote 64 – is also present in the first two passages that (presumably) Godfrey of Fontaines draws from a *reportatio* of Giles's commentary on the first book of the *Sentences*: cfr. Aegidius Romanus, *Lectura super libro Sententiarum. Excerpta Godefridi de Fontibus*, I, exc. 1–2, in Id., *Reportatio lecturae super Libros I–IV Sententiarum. Reportatio Monacensis. Excerpta Godefridi de Fontibus*, ed. C. Luna, SISMEL – Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 2003 (Testi e studi per il *Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi*, 17 – Aegidii Romani opera omnia, III/2), 491–492.

71. Aegidius Romanus, *Lectura*, I, exc. 2, 492. In Id., *In libros Sententiarum*, Prologus, pars 1, q. principalis 1, q. 1, respondeo, f. 2^{ra}, the terminology is partly different but the thesis seems identical. In this text Giles writes that the subject here at issue is the object of a science; yet, the object of a science which is the subject of that science is not any object of it but its principal and formal object; hence, the subject of a science is included within what that science considers, but not all it considers is subject of that science.

72. Aegidius Romanus, *In libros Sententiarum*, Prologus, pars 1, q. principalis 1, q. 3, respondeo, f. 3^{rb-va}. At the point in the *Lectura* mentioned in the previous footnote, Giles presents the object *tout court* and matter as equiva-

Our author's thought is made more complex by at least two further theses. As already seen, in the prologue to the commentary on the *Sentences* he writes that the subject of a science in a proper sense is what the science considers *per se*, principally, and in every way. However, in the same passage he adds that this subject is that *sub cuius ratione* the science determines all that it determines. Giles does not elucidate the meaning of this expression. If I see right, it denotes the fact that when something is considered by a science, this thing is always considered together with the subject, i.e. in its referring to the latter. This implies that, according to Giles, the mind is always aware of the subject of a science whereas it develops that science; actually, it is the principal *obiectum* of that science, i.e. something present – as a reference term – in all that the science considers.⁷³

These reflections may be associated with those Giles develops concerning the role of abstraction in the unity of a science. If I rightly understand what he writes in two passages of the *Questiones methaphisicales*, the abstraction degree is the way in which a speculative science considers all that it considers, including its own subject.⁷⁴ In the prologue to the commentary on the *Sentences* he states that the universality and abstraction degrees proper to a science result from the universality and abstraction degrees proper to its subject.⁷⁵ In this case too Giles does not clarify his own statements. I advance the hypothesis that, in our author's mind, the presence of the subject/object of a science to the mind that develops the science involves that what that mind is considering possesses the same degree of abstraction (and the same degree of universality)⁷⁶ as that subject/object.

Between the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century, the range of doctrines pertaining to the

lent; however, it has to be noticed that there he understands the former as comprising any kind of object a science deals with.

73. Aegidius Romanus, *In libros Sententiarum*, Prologus, pars 1, q. principalis 1, q. 1, respondeo, f. 2^{ib}.

74. Aegidius Romanus, *Questiones*, I, q. 6, f. 3^{vb}, and *ibi*, q. 7, f. 4^{ra}.

75. Aegidius Romanus, *In libros Sententiarum*, Prologus, pars 1, q. principalis 1, q. 2: *Utrum theologia sit scientia communis vel specialis*, respondeo, primum, f. 2^{va}.

76. It is to be noted that, according to Giles, the fact that a science is more universal than another does not imply that the former is more abstract than the latter. Cfr. Aegidius Romanus, *In libros Sententiarum*, Prologus, pars 1, q. principalis 1, q. 2, respondeo, secundum, f. 2^{vb}.

unifying principle of a science rapidly develops and becomes more complex. Among the Dominicans, for example, some adhere to Henry's and Giles's positions, while some others criticize them; and yet all of them – while keeping in mind the Aristotelian word saying that *scientiae secantur quemadmodum res* – interpret the subject of a science as a conceptual content or as a *res* taken as the term of a cognitive act.

John Quidort avails himself of a conception of the subject and object of a science close to that of Aquinas, but his concept of 'matter of a science' is close to that of Henry of Ghent.⁷⁷ By contrast, Robert of Orford and Remigio de' Girolami, although defending the synonymy of subject and object when these terms are said about a science, do maintain the synonymy of subject and matter too.⁷⁸

Also Hervaeus Natalis, in his commentary on the *Sentences*, criticizes the ways in which Giles of Rome presents the relation between the matter and the subject of a science and accounts for the use of these terms. According to the Breton Dominican too, the relation between a science and its subject is the same as that existing between a faculty and its object. For this reason, in order to designate the subject of a science he actually prefers the term '*obiectum*', specifying that the object of a

77. Ioannes Parisiensis, *Commentarium in libros Sententiarum*, I, q. 1: *Utrum in theologia Deus sit subiectum*, in Jean de Paris (Quidort), *Commentaire sur les Sentences. Reportatio*, I, ed. J.-P. Muller, Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi – Herder, Romae 1961 (Studia Anselmiana, 47), 3–8.

78. Robertus de Orford, *Reprobationes dictionum a fratre Egidio in primum sententiarum*, <reprobatio> 1: <In Prologum, q. 1>, in A.P.Vella, *Les premières polémiques thomistes: Robert d'Orford. Reprobationes dictionum a fratre Egidio in primum Sententiarum*, Vrin, Paris 1968 (Bibliothèque thomiste, 38), 31–38. Robert's criticism of Giles is somewhat mitigated by the fact that he specifies that the subject of a science can be considered *materialiter* and *formaliter*. Moreover, according to the English Dominican, the subject can be taken *formaliter* in two ways because «vel est subiectum principale ad quod quidquid est in scientia est ordinabile [...], vel est subiectum commune et predicabile» (*ibi*, 36). Remigius Girolami, *Questio de subiecto theologie*, in E. Panella, *Il "De subiecto theologie" (1297-1299) di Remigio dei Girolami O.P.*, Massimo, Milano 1982 (Studia Universitatis S. Thomae in Urbe, 14), 37–71. Also Remigio's – implicit – criticism of Henry and Giles is somewhat softened by the observation that the subject/object/matter of a science can be considered both *materialiter* and *formaliter*. The former is «quicquid materialiter continetur in scientia, sicut etiam lignum et lapis potest dici obiectum visus»; the latter is «illum solum sub cuius ratione omnia alia tractantur in scientia» (*ibi*, 55). Moreover, Remigio holds that the fact of being subject of a science can occur in a number of ways (*ibi*, 46–51).

science is said ‘subject’ due to the fact that it is the subject of the conclusions composing the science.⁷⁹

But it is Hervaeus’s *Liber de intentionibus* that most offers a systematic though synthetic theory about the *subiectum scientiae*; a theory that already contains expressions such as ‘*continentia virtualis*’ and ‘*obiectum adaequatum*’.

The subject/object of a science, writes Hervaeus, must satisfy three conditions. The first is that the object of a certain science must be that which in the science becomes known first. Here, clarifies Hervaeus (revolutionarily, it seems to me), ‘first’ does not mean a temporal priority, since it is false that among all the knowable “things” (*intelligibilia*) belonging to a certain science the object of the science (*illud quod est primum et per se obiectum*) is known before all the others. Rather, it means a priority in finality, i.e. as to intention, since any science tends to the knowledge of its own object more than to the knowledge of any other thing.

The second condition is that all the things considered in a science must have some reference to (*attributio*) that object. This, writes Hervaeus, is due to the fact that if this reference did not exist, then the science would deal with things beyond (*excederet*) those virtually contained (*continet virtualiter*) in its subject/object (*subiectum sive obiectum*); which would imply that this object would not be the adequate object (*obiectum adaequatum*) of this science; which again would imply that it would not be its first and *per se* object.

Finally, the third condition is that the course of the science has to resolve itself (*resolvi*) in the formal *ratio* of its object and has to remain (*stare*) in it. Moreover, specifies Hervaeus, this course and the relations it is based on must be somehow rooted in the very nature of things, although insofar as they are taken not absolutely, but as capable of being grasped by the intellect.⁸⁰

79. Hervaeus [Natalis] Brito, *In quattuor Petri Lombardi sententiarum volumina scripta subtilissima*, Super primum, Prologus, q. 7: *Utrum deus sit subiectum theologie*, respondeo, quantum ad primum, Per Lazarum de Soardis, Venetiis 1505, f. 8^{rb-vr}.

80. Hervaeus Brito, *Liber de intentionibus*, <q. 5:> *Utrum <de secundis intentionibus> sit scientia et que scientia est de eis*, <a. 1:> *Utrum aliqua scientia sit de secundis intentionibus ut per se subiecto*, respondeo, primum videndum. I have consulted both the edition entitled *Tractatus de secundis intentionibus*, Per Georgium Mitelhus, Parisii 1489 (whose transcription has been kindly

John of Naples embraces the arguments Hervaeus had employed in his commentary on the *Sentences*, nonetheless he introduces some significant expansions too, at least one of which seems to be aimed at Durandus's position (on the latter see *infra*).⁸¹

In short, John of Naples maintains that the *subiectum* of a science – that he identifies with the object – is such because it includes a formal *ratio* by virtue of which it is subject (i.e. subjected) to the consideration of that science; whereas the *materia* of a science – that John distinguishes from the subject – is such because it can be considered by the science only insofar as it is grasped in the light of (*sub*) that formal *ratio*.⁸²

made available to me by Judith Dys), where the debated passage is on pp. 77^a-82^b, and the edition entitled *Liber de intentionibus*, s.e., s.l. [but Venetiis] s.d. (the name of the printer and the date of print that are proposed – the former explicitly, the latter implicitly – by BMC, vol.V, 515 and that are accepted by all subsequent catalogues are mere conjectures; compare them with the information given by R. Proctor, *An Index to the Early Printed Books in the British Museum. From the Invention of Printing to the Year 1500. With Notes of Those in the Bodleian Library*, Kegan Paul, London 1898, vol. I, 379, n. 5711), where the debated passage is on ff. (unnumbered; I identify them through the signatures on the fascicles) g8^r-h3^v. Both editions offer a corrupted text, although in different manners. Therefore I read that passage with the help of the partly literal quotations from it contained in Franciscus de Prato, *Logica*, pars I, tract. 4, a. 12, in F. Amerini, *La logica di Francesco da Prato, con l'edizione critica della "Loyca" e del "Tractatus de voce univoca"*, SISMELE - Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 2005 (Testi e studi per il *Corpus Philosophorum Medii Aevi*, 19), 363-368, and in Franciscus de Prato, *Logica*, ed. Chr. Rode, Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden 2002 (Philosophia), 112-115 (these two editions propose different readings of some points from the only codex containing the *Logica* by Francis of Prato). In the early 1340s, Francis of Prato in his *Logica* repeated and summarized with anti-Ockhamistic intentions the very same doctrine by Hervaeus I have just mentioned. Cfr. also Chr. Rode, *Franciscus de Prato. Facetten seiner Philosophie im Blick auf Hervaeus Natalis und Wilhelm von Ockham*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2004 (Philosophia), 212-217.

81. If this is true, John actually introduces a novelty in the debate, since Hervaeus's doctrine is the basis of Durandus's position too.

82. Ioannes de Neapoli, *Quaestiones variae Parisiis disputatae*, q. 20: *Utrum Deus sit subiectum theologiae, sub ratione absoluta, qua Deus, vel sub ratione aliqua speciali, utpote sub ratione, qua restaurator, vel glorificator, etc.*, punctum 1: *Quid proprie sit subiectum alicuius scientiae*, In aedibus regalibus S. Dominici typis Constantinii Vitalis per Secundinum Roncaliolum, Neapoli 1618 (repr. Gregg Press, Ridgewood [N.J.] 1966), pp. 173^b-176^a. In my view, the *quaestio* formulated by John of Naples is directed against the first *reprobatio* by Robert Orford against Giles. Let me add, however, that on the one hand John defends Giles's thesis concerning the relation between subject, object, and matter of a science, but on the other he rejects the considerations used by the Augustinian friar to explain this relation.

John Duns Scotus's lexicon undergoes an evolution. In his *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum*, he writes that in order to designate what a science deals with (i.e. its *materia circa quam*) the term '*obiectum*' is preferable to the term '*subiectum*', just as it is preferable to speak about the object rather than the subject of virtues.⁸³ Nevertheless, in this work he generally uses the noun '*obiectum*' in relation to the terms '*potentia*' and '*habitus*',⁸⁴ whereas in order to designate what a science deals with he uses the noun '*subiectum*'. In the *Ordinatio*, however, some variation appears. Here the term '*obiectum*' (taken precisely in the sense of 'subject/object of a science') replaces the term '*subiectum*', whereas the latter is often given the special task of designating the subject of the attributes and predicates considered in a science.⁸⁵

The relationship between subject and attributes as well as the question of the knowability of the latter are described in the same way in the *Quaestiones* and in the *Ordinatio*: the subject is structured in a certain manner; hence it includes attributes, i.e. predicates, and includes them either essentially or virtually⁸⁶ or – as we shall see in a while – potentially. As a result, three kinds of intellectual *habitus* are possible. The first kind formally refers to a single state of affairs that is undergoing consideration (*complexum speculandum*). The second kind refers to this state of affairs just virtually, since it is formally oriented not to consider

83. Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Quaest. super Met.*, Prol., §[10], n. 32.

84. Cfr. for example Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Quaest. super Met.*, VI, q. 1, §[12], nn. 55 and 59.

85. Cfr., for example, Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §[15], n. 174; *ibi*, §[15], n. 176; *ibi*, §[18], n. 189. In his essay *Jean Duns Scot. Introduction a ses positions fondamentales*, (Études de philosophie médiévale, 42), Vrin, Paris 1952, in part. 45-46, Étienne Gilson appears to think that – according to Scotus – the subject and the object of a science are distinct insofar as the latter is nothing but the former as it is known. In my opinion this can occasionally be true, nevertheless Scotus usually regards the terms '*subiectum*' and '*obiectum*' as interchangeable; cfr. for instance Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Ord.*, I, dist. 3, pars 1, q. 1, §[20], n. 174.

86. Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Quaest. super Met.*, VI, q. 1, §[8], n. 39; *Id.*, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §[19], n. 185. As concerns Scotus's doctrine on truth and judgment – thus also his doctrine on the virtual inclusion of the predicates in the subject/object of a science – cfr. D. Demange, «Objet premier d'inclusion virtuelle». *Introduction à la théorie de la science de Jean Duns Scot*, in O. Boulnois – E. Karger – J.-L. Solère – G. Sondag (ed.), *Duns Scot à Paris, 1302-2002. Actes du colloque de Paris, 2-4 septembre 2002*, Brepols, Turnhout 2004 (Textes et études du Moyen Âge, 26), 89-116.

this state of affairs but rather to consider something virtually contained in it. Each *habitus* of the first kind refers to a single knowable; by contrast, the *habitus* of the second kind may concern a multiplicity of states of affairs (*complexa*).

Taken as a *habitus*,⁸⁷ a theoretical science cannot properly be a *habitus* of the first kind; rather, it can be a *habitus* of the second kind. In this case, its subject/object (and the *notitia* of the latter) is precisely that which virtually contains all the predicates considered by that science and all the principles and conclusions composing it.⁸⁸

Besides these two kinds, a third one is possible: a *habitus* referring to a multiplicity of states of affairs that are contained in a subject not virtually but potentially or generically (*in univ[er]sali*). This is the case of a science that considers what is proper to the inferiors of its subject/object. What is proper to the inferiors of something can just be known by virtue of the *rationes* proper to those inferiors; hence, a science that considers only what is common to those inferiors will deal with what is proper to them just in a generic way.⁸⁹

Furthermore, if considered as conceptual representations (*notitiae*), the theoretical sciences of a multiplicity of states of affairs can have three degrees of unity. Taken as noncomplex knowledge of something noncomplex, they are sciences just virtually and have the unity of a species. Taken as knowledge of all the conclusions contained in their own subjects/objects, they are sciences in a formal way and can have different kinds of unity. Those sciences that are knowledge of all the conclusions virtually contained in their own subjects/objects have the unity of a proximate genus; those sciences that are knowledge of all the conclusions potentially contained in their own subjects/objects have the unity of a remote genus.⁹⁰ If applied to theoretical sciences, this scheme has the following result: metaphysics possesses the unity of a proximate genus, whereas mathematics and physics possess the unity of a remote genus.⁹¹

87. For Scotus a theoretical science can also be considered as a conceptual representation (*notitia*), as I shall explain in a while.

88. Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Quaest. super Met.*, VI, q. 1, §[8], n. 40.

89. Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Quaest. super Met.*, VI, q. 1, §[9], n. 42.

90. Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Quaest. super Met.*, VI, q. 1, §[9], nn. 41–42.

91. Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Quaest. super Met.*, VI, q. 1, §[12], n. 58.

The subject/object virtually containing all the predicates considered by the science of which it is subject/object is the first subject/object of that science. The “primacy” (*primitas*) here at issue has two meanings: it expresses both the fact that this subject/object embraces and matches (*adaequat*) the entire field of what is considered by that science⁹² and the fact that it virtually contains this field just by virtue of itself.⁹³ Actually, in order to designate the subject/object of a science, in the *Ordinatio* Scotus uses ‘*primum obiectum*’ as well as ‘*primum subiectum*’ and ‘*obiectum adaequatum*’ as well as ‘*subiectum adaequatum*’.

As I already remarked, this is the doctrine presented in the *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum* and in the *Ordinatio*. It should be noted, however, that in the *De cognitione Dei* Scotus develops a partly different thesis. In this text too he presents the subject/object of a science as that which virtually includes the “things” considered by that science and the propositions composing it; and yet he adds that, in case such a subject/object does not exist, one may use a subject/object common by predication to what that science considers. Further, concerning metaphysics he makes clear that being, which is the subject of this science, is such a subject in two senses: as regards that part of metaphysics dealing with the transcendentals, being is subject «*secundum perfectam rationem illius primi subjecti, scilicet secundum rationem virtualis continentiae*»; as regards metaphysics as a whole, being is subject «*imperfecte, quia non nisi secundum adaequationem communitatis ad subjecta continentia virtualiter veritates quas ipsum non continet*».⁹⁴

The thesis of the virtual inclusion maintained by Hervaeus Natalis and Scotus is rejected by the Dominican Durandus of Saint-Pourçain and the Franciscan Peter Auriol. Nevertheless, the solutions proposed by these two authors diverge.

Durandus maintains a conception of the subject of a science as a focus where relationships and references converge. Accord-

92. Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Quaest. super Met.*, VI, q. 4, §[3], n. 11. See also Id., *Quaest. super Met.*, IX, q. 5, §[7], n. 28; Id., *Quodl.*, q. 5, a. 2, §§10-11; Id., *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §[4], n. 143; Id., *Ord.*, I, dist. 3, pars 1, qq. 1-2, §[21], nn. 69-70.

93. Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Ord.*, Prol., pars 3, qq. 1-3, §[4], n. 144.

94. Ioannes Duns Scotus, *De cognitione Dei*, a. 2, [f. 152^v], ed. C.R.S. Harris - E.G. Parker, in C.R.S. Harris, *Duns Scotus*, vol. II: *The Philosophical Doctrines of Duns Scotus*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1927 (repr. Thoemmes Press, Bristol 1994), 379-398, in part. 392-393.

ing to him, one of the conditions that something necessarily has to satisfy in order to be the subject of a science is precisely the following: the subject of a science is what the science considers first and primarily (*primo et principaliter*) and is that in relation to which (*per comparationem; attributio*) the science considers all the other things it considers. He also and explicitly draws a distinction – as well as a connection – between subject and object of a science. The subject of a science is something noncomplex about which attributes, i.e. predicates, are proved; whereas the object of a science is something complex, i.e. a proposition. Now, that which is first and primarily known scientifically (*illud quod scitur*) is the proved conclusion, i.e. the object; by contrast, the subject is not that which is known first and directly but merely that about which (*illud de quo scitur aliquid*) attributes are proved.⁹⁵

Durandus's position enjoyed considerable historical success. William of Ockham adopts the conception of the distinction between *subiectum* and *obiectum* of a science proposed by Durandus.⁹⁶ Peter de la Palu – although appropriating Hervaeus's and John of Naples's criticisms of Giles – defends the Duran-

95. Durandus a Sancto Porciano, *In Petri Lombardi sententias theologicas commentariorum libri IIII*, Prologus, q. 5: *De subiecto theologiae*, nn. 6–8, Ex officina Gasparis Bindoni, Venetiis 1586, ff. 8^{vb}–9^{ra}; *ibi*, III, dist. 24, q. 1: *Utrum Deus sit obiectum fidei*, n. 6, f. 256^{vb}. Strictly speaking, in the second passage I have just mentioned, Durandus writes that one can speak of 'obiectum' both with the meaning 'conclusio demonstrata' and with the meaning 'subiectum', i.e. the subject of that *conclusio*. A possible answer to Durandus's position are the words written a few years later by the Dominican John of Naples: «nomen scientiae aliquando significat habitum, unius conclusionis demonstratae, et de subiecto tali scientiae procedit argumentum [i.e.: the possible objection to the identification – as supported by John – of subject and object of a science], nec de hoc loquitur ad praesens; aliquando significat totalem aliquam notitiam alicuius subiecti, quantum ad omnes partes suas, et passiones, quae sub se comprehendit per consequens multas demonstrationes [...]» (Ioannes de Neapoli, *Quaestiones*, q. 20, punctum 1, pp. 175^b–176^a).

96. Guillelmus de Ockham, *Scriptum in librum primum Sententiarum. Ordinatio*, I, Prologus, q. 9, ed. G.I. Etzkorn – Fr.E. Kelley, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure 1967 (Guillelmi de Ockham opera philosophica et theologica, Opera theologica, 1), 226–276, in part. 266. This does not mean that Ockham's position is identical with that of Durandus. The *Venerabilis Inceptor* thinks that, strictly speaking, a total science – that is a science composed of several partial sciences, i.e. several single conclusions – does not have a unique subject. Conversely, even when several conclusions have the same subject, the fact that they refer to different properties of this subject is a sufficient condition to make these sciences different from one another. Cf. *ibi*, 255–262.

dian distinction.⁹⁷ Durandus is also followed by Jean Cabrol (who, however, does not mention the medieval author),⁹⁸ Francisco Suárez (who does recognize being indebted to Durandus),⁹⁹ and John Punch (who does not mention the source of this doctrine too).¹⁰⁰

Peter Auriol dissociates himself too from the doctrine of the virtual inclusion. He explicitly ascribes it to Scotus and summarizes it as follows: the first subject/object of a science is that which first and virtually contains all the truths of the science (which is understood by Auriol as the cognitive *habitus* of all the conclusions of the science itself).¹⁰¹

His several objections to this thesis mainly rest on two considerations. The *ratio* of any subject/object is the reason why its immediate parts and immediate attributes (*passiones*) inhere in this subject/object; on the contrary, it is not the reason why the

97. Petrus a Palude, *In I Sent.*, Prol., q. 5: *De subiecto theologiae*, <a.> 1: *Quid sit subiectum et unde dicatur*, in G. Groppo, *La teologia e il suo "subiectum" secondo il Prologo del "Commento alle Sentenze" di Pietro da Palude, O.P. (†1342)* (*In I Sent.*, Prol., q. III; q. V, a. I), «Salesianum», 23 (1961), 265-270 (Groppo's essay is on pp. 219-316 of the journal; the edition of Peter de la Palu's texts is on pp. 254-294).

98. Ioannes Capreolus, *Defensiones theologiae divi Thomae Aquinatis*, In primo Sententiarum, Prologus, q. 4: *Utrum Deus sit subiectum theologiae*, a. 1, concl. 2, ed. C. Paban - Th. Pègues, *Sumptibus Alfred Cattier, Turonibus 1900-1904*, vol. I, 46^b. But see also *ibi*, a. 2, contra primam conclusionem, contra aliam partem, and ad argumenta contra primam conclusionem, <ad argumenta> contra secundam partem, 50^a-51^b and 55^a-57^b, where he criticizes Gregory of Rimini's position by denying that a *complexum significabile* exists also *a parte rei*.

99. Franciscus Suarez, *Commentaria in Summam divi Thomae*, In secundam secundae, De fide theologica, disp. 2: *De objecto, seu subiecto materiali fidei*, in Id., *Opera omnia*, ed. M. André - Ch. Berton, *Apud Ludovicum Vivès, Parisiis 1856-1878*, vol. XII, 14^{a-b}.

100. Ioannes Poncius, *Philosophiae ad mentem Scoti cursus integer*, Logica, disp. 22: *De scientia*, q. 2: *De obiecto scientiae*, n. 10, *Sumptibus Ioannis Antonii Huguetan et Marci Antonii Ravaud, Lugduni 1659* (reprint of the text's second edition; the second edition, published in 1649, must be considered archetypal), p. 291^a.

101. For Auriol's conception of science cfr. Petrus Aureolus, *Scriptum super primum Sententiarum*, Prooemium, q. 4: *Utrum habitus ex theologico studio acquisitus sit unus vel plures*, aa. 1-2, ed. E.M. Buytaert, *The Franciscan Institute - E. Nauwelaerts - F. Schöning, St. Bonaventure (N.Y.)-Louvain-Paderborn*, vol. I, 1953, nn. 2-57. Let me point out that in this and the following questions Auriol treats the syntagmas 'genus subiectum' and 'obiectum formale' of a science as equivalent. On the other hand, in these two questions I cannot find the phrase 'obiectum adaequatum', but on at least three occasions there are forms of the verb 'adaequare' that are used to express the relation between science and subject/object.

properties of its parts and of its attributes inhere in this subject. Hence, a subject/object virtually contains just the truths concerning its immediate parts and immediate attributes, whereas the truths concerning the immediate parts and the immediate attributes of the latter are virtually contained just in the latter. Assuming this premise, only two alternatives follow. Either one holds that it belongs to one and the same science to deal both with its own subject/object and with the species and parts of the latter; but in this case it is not possible to affirm that this subject/object virtually contains all the truths of the science. Or one holds that the subject/object of a science is that which first and virtually contains all the attributes of the science; but in this case one has to admit that there are as many sciences as the subjects/objects, their parts, and their immediate attributes.¹⁰² Hence Auriol concludes that the thesis of the virtual inclusion is true just in the case of a *propter quid* science concerning a subject not divisible by species and regarding only the immediate attributes of this subject.¹⁰³

Both Durandus and Auriol reject the theory of the virtual inclusion, nonetheless they diverge in the *pars construens* of their doctrine. According to the Occitan Franciscan, the distinction of sciences is based on the difference between the modes of knowledge (*modus cognitionis*), the difference between the modes of knowledge is based on the difference between the modes of abstraction (*modus abstractionis*), the difference between the modes of abstraction is based on the difference between the knowable genera (*genus cognoscibile*). A knowable genus is a genus that includes all the knowables that – if taken precisely as knowables – are characterized by one and the same mode of abstraction. Now, according to Auriol, Aristotle designated as ‘the only subject genus’ (*unum genus subiectum*) of a sci-

102. Aureolus, *Scriptum super primum Sententiarum*, Prooemium, q. 5: *Ut- rum habitus theologicus habeat pro subiecto Deum ratione deitatis*, responsio, a. 1, §b: *Quod illa non est ratio subiecti scientifici, contra Scotum*, nn. 37–42.

103. Cfr. Aureolus, *Scriptum super primum Sententiarum*, Prooemium, q. 5, responsio, a. 1, §b, n. 43, where he adds: «Et si aliqua talis inveniatur, subiec- tum illius haberet rationem quam iste Doctor [i.e. Scotus] assignavit; et for- sitan hoc aspexit et ita intellexit». Cfr. also *ibi*, n. 39. My opinion is that Sco- tus would deny that it is possible to speak of virtual inclusion only in the case of the subject/object of a *propter quid* science, and yet – as we saw – he maintains that this type of inclusion is only valid for the truths concerning the immediate parts and immediate attributes of the subject/object of a sci- ence.

ence precisely that only knowable genus (*unum genus cognoscibile*) that, together with its parts and attributes, is characterized by only one mode of abstraction (*unum modum abstractionis*).¹⁰⁴

In comparison with the use of the notion of degree of abstraction that was made by previous authors, Auriol understands this notion in a quite broader way. Although he speaks of lesser or greater abstraction (or even of lesser or greater degree of abstraction), he does not only distinguish between five modes (or species) of abstraction – and of knowledge – but also formulates this classification using criteria that are different from those used by the previous authors in distinguishing the three standard degrees of abstraction. Sometimes the intellect, writes our author, conducts itself (*se habet*) in a reflexive way (*reflexive*), relating to its own acts and concepts; sometimes it conducts itself in an “extensive” way (*extensive*), relating to the objects that are outside it (*ad obiecta et ea quae sunt extra*); sometimes it conducts itself in a totally “abstractive” way (*omnino simpliciter abstractive*). The above mentioned “extensive” conduct (*extensio*), in its turn, can occur in three ways: either through the internal sense, i.e. imagination, or through the external senses, or both through the external senses and the internal sense. The first four modes (of the five ones now listed) by which the intellect relates to its objects can be subdivided again, arriving at a total of twelve species of abstraction and as many sciences.¹⁰⁵

Clearly, Auriol’s epistemology rests on the notion of ‘knowable genus’ and on the relation he establishes between this genus and the mode of knowledge. On this point our author writes that the modes of knowledge are «ex quo cognoscibilia specificè distinguuntur et fiunt quasi aliud genus cognoscibile» and that «cognoscibilia, quantumcumque sint multa, si habent

104. Aureolus, *Scriptum super primum Sententiarum*, Prooemium, q. 5, responsio, a. 2: *Quae sit ratio dans alicui quod possit esse scientiae primum subiectum iuxta id quod videtur*, nn. 44–51.

105. Aureolus, *Scriptum super primum Sententiarum*, Prooemium, q. 5, responsio, a. 2, nn. 46–49. The twelve sciences Auriol enumerates and “justifies” are (in ascending order of abstraction): *i*) first series, speech sciences: grammar, logic, rhetoric (including poetics); *ii*) second series, pure mathematics: geometry, arithmetic; *iii*) third series, sensitive and pure experimental sciences: physics, medicine, and ethics (including law); *iv*) fourth series, intermediate sciences (i.e. mixed): music, astrology, perspective; *v*) fifth series, purely intellectual sciences: metaphysics.

unum modum abstractionis, sunt quasi unum genus cognoscibile». Which does not clarify whether it is knowledge that provides the knowables with this mode of abstraction or they possess it themselves.¹⁰⁶ However, it is certain that Auriol thinks that this genus, although it is not a genus in a metaphysical sense, possesses parts and attributes and that these parts and attributes possess the same mode of abstraction as the genus they are parts and attributes of.¹⁰⁷ Yet, he is not concerned to give reasons for his position.

The doctrines of Scotus's direct pupils – Antonius Andreae, William of Alnwick, Francis of Meyronnes, Nicholas Bonet – should be discussed in a separate essay and this also applies to the second generation of “Scotists” such as Francis of Marchia and Peter of Aquila.¹⁰⁸ Although receptive to the doctrines of their “master”, these authors formulate their positions quite independently. A good example of this phenomenon is represented by the writings of the thinker usually considered as the most faithful to Scotus's positions: Antonius Andreae, the only one I will examine here.

In order to designate the subject of a science, this author does not use the term ‘*obiectum*’, but goes back to the “Aristotelian” ‘*subiectum*’. Nevertheless, he adds the clarification ‘*adaequatum*’ to the notion of ‘*subiectum*’, thus precisely resuming Scotus's reflections on the meaning of the “primacy” of the subject/object of a science. When asking what the *subiectum primum* of metaphysics is, Antonius Andreae makes clear that he does not want to determine what is the subject of metaphysics that is first as to perfection, but rather what is the subject of this science that is first as to adequacy. The subject of a science that is first as to perfection is the most perfect being among

106. Aureolus, *Scriptum super primum Sententiarum*, Prooemium, q. 5, responsio, a. 2, n. 50.

107. Aureolus, *Scriptum super primum Sententiarum*, Prooemium, q. 5, responsio, a. 2, n. 51.

108. For Nicholas Bonet let me refer to M. Forlivesi, «*Quae in hac quaestione tradit Doctor videntur humanum ingenium superare*». Scotus, Andrés, Bonet, Zerbi, and Trombetta *Confronting the Nature of Metaphysics*, «*Quaestio*», 8 (2008), 219–278. For Francis of Marchia cfr. S. Folger-Fonfara, *Franziskus von Marchia: Die erste Unterscheidung einer Allgemeinen und einer Besonderen Metaphysik*, «*Doc. Studi Trad. filos. med.*», 16 (2005), 461–513, and A. Poppi, *Ontologia e 'scienza divina' nel "Commentario alle Sentenze" di Francesco della Marca O. Min. (1319)*, «*Miscellanea francescana*», 104 (2004), 100–120, in part. 105–111.

those considered by the science; in the case of metaphysics, this being is God. By contrast, the subject of metaphysics that is first as to adequacy is being.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, the meaning attributed to the noun ‘*subiectum*’ in Antonius Andreae’s texts does not seem to be identical with the meaning it has in Scotus’s ones. On the one hand, the Catalan Franciscan writes that *subiectum* is that about which properties and causes – within the science having it as its subject – are demonstrated;¹¹⁰ on the other hand, he writes that it is primarily that which is present in all the “things” considered by that particular science and which allows that science to consider them.¹¹¹

In this way Antonius Andreae merges in one notion both what Aquinas called ‘subject’ and what the latter called ‘object’. Moreover, it seems to me that the Catalan Franciscan views the *subiectum* in a way that, although to some extent allowed by Scotus’s *De cognitione Dei*, still does not match the conception held by the Franciscan master. The Subtle Doctor too conceives the subject/object as something whose properties are demonstrated by a particular science, yet he presents it primarily as that which virtually includes the “things” considered by that science as well as the propositions composing it. Only in case such a subject/object does not exist, explains Scotus in the

109. Antonius Andreae, *Questiones super Methaphysicam Aristotelis*, I, q. 1: *Utrum ens simpliciter sumptum quod est commune Deo et creature sit scientie methaphysice subiectum primum primitate adequationis*, respondeo, quantum ad primum, Instantia expensisque m. Nicholai Petri de Harlem coadiuvante m. Hermanno de Levilapide de Colonia, In civitate Vicentina 1477, f. (unnumbered; I identify it through the signature on the fascicle) A2th.

110. Cfr. Ioannes Duns Scotus [but Antonius Andreae], *Expositio in XII libros Metaphysicorum*, I, summa 1, cap. 1, n. 18, in Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Opera omnia*, Sumptibus Laurentii Durand, Lugduni 1639 (repr. Olms, Hildesheim 1968), vol. IV, pp. 10^b-11^a, and Antonius Andreae, *Questiones*, I, q. 1, respondeo, quantum ad tertium, tertia conclusio, f. A4^{va-b}.

111. Antonius Andreae, *Questiones*, I, q. 1, respondeo, quantum ad primum, f. A2th. Here is what he writes about the subject of metaphysics that is first as to adequacy: «*primitas sive prioritas adequationis notat equalitatem prescisam subiecti ad scientias quoniam scilicet scientia non excedit subiectum nec e converso, sed quicquid cadit aliquo modo sub consideratione scientie cadit sub ratione formali subiecti et e converso quicquid participat rationem formalem subiecti cadit sub consideratione illius scientie; verbi gratia si ens in quantum ens ponitur subiectum primum methaphysice tali primitate, quicquid participat rationem entis ut sic cadit sub consideratione methaphysice et quicquid methaphysica considerat sub ratione entis considerat*» (*ibidem*).

De cognitione Dei, we may have recourse to a subject/object common by predication to what that science considers. Well, Antonius Andreae does not hold this position; rather, he presents the *subiectum* simply as something whose *ratio* is included in all the “things” considered by the science of which it is *subiectum* and, conversely, whose inclusion in those “things” is precisely what enables a particular science to consider them.

About a quarter of a century after the *Quaestiones super XII libros Metaphysicae* of Antonius Andreae, the *quaestio* that John Buridan in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* devotes to the nature of metaphysics attests the success of the expression ‘*subiectum adaequatum*’.

The two authors sharply differ: what differentiates them is their conception of the nature of the universal and, as a result, their interpretation of the unity of a science. Nevertheless, the French philosopher shares with the Catalan Franciscan the adherence to the “Aristotelian” terminology (regarding science, he never speaks of ‘*obiectum*’) as well as the syntagma ‘*subiectum adaequatum*’.

However, Buridan appears to adhere more faithfully to the Stagirite’s perspective than Scotus’s pupil had done. He conceives the *subiectum* as that whose parts, principles, attributes, etc. are examined in a science; hence, it remains true that all the “things” a science deals with are referable and referred to the *subiectum* of the science, yet they do not share the fact of “including” the *ratio formalis* of that *subiectum*.¹¹²

112. More precisely, Buridan speaks of *subiectum proprium adaequatum*; cfr. Ioannes Buridanus, *In Metaphysicen Aristotelis quaestiones argutissimae*, IV, q. 4: *Utrum metaphysice sit assignandum unum subiectum proprium adaequatum*, Impensis I. Badii Ascensii, Parisiis 1518 (repr. Johannes Buridanus, *Kommentar zur Aristotelischen Metaphysik*, Minerva, Frankfurt a.M. 1964), ff. 14^{vb}-15^{vb}. On this *quaestio* cfr. also A. Ghisalberti, *Giovanni Buridano dalla metafisica alla fisica*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1975 (*Scienze filosofiche*, 13), 24–26. As already said, Buridan never uses the term ‘*obiectum*’, and yet it seems to me that the question of the *obiectum* of a science is present somehow in his *In Metaphysicen* too. In Ioannes Buridanus, *In Metaphysicen*, IV, q. 5: *Utrum metaphysice proprium subiectum sit ens*, oppositum videtur, f. 16^a, he first writes that all that is considered by the metaphysician is traced back (*reducitur*) to God; then, a few lines below, he states that the metaphysician traces (*reducit*) beings back to the *ratio essendi*. No mediation is set between the two statements; nothing is said to clear up the nature of the *ratio essendi* and its relationship with the *ens* that is *subiectum* of metaphysics. My hypothesis is that he understood this *ratio essendi* as the capability – proper to all that metaphysics considers – of designating the first being or the being which is *subiectum* of metaphysics. In

2.2. *The evolution of the doctrines concerning the subject/object of metaphysics*

The evolution of the question concerning the nature of the subject/object of a science was paralleled by an evolution of the doctrines concerning the nature of the subject/object of metaphysics.

Let us go back to Alexander of Aphrodisias: insofar as this author distinguishes between the subject and the purpose of metaphysics, we may say that he thinks that the purpose of metaphysics consists in elucidating the nature of first substances, i.e. immaterial substances. Nevertheless, he explicitly identifies the subject of this science with being as being and relates also the study of immaterial substances to the study of this subject. Immaterial substances – he argues – are that upon which the other substances depend; thus they are that which enables all beings to exist; it thus belongs to one science to study both being as being and immaterial substances.¹¹³

Among Neoplatonic authors, Ammonius, in his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, takes up Alexander's solution, although with some changes.

this case, these lines would implicitly introduce a thesis according to which the unity of a science is tightened due to a "referring" that each science exerts and considers whenever it considers what it deals with. This may mean that science is centered on its *obiectum* according to Buridan too. It seems to me that this perspective is also shared by Marsilius of Inghen: cfr. E.P. Bos, *Marsilius of Inghen on the Subject of a Science*, in M. Asztalos - St. Ebbesen - D. Føllesdal - S. Knuuttila - A. Inkeri Lehtinen - J.E. Murdoch - I. Niinluoto - R. Työriñoja (ed.), *Knowledge and the Sciences in Medieval Philosophy. Proceedings of the Eight International Congress of Medieval Philosophy (S.I.E.P.M.), Helsinki 24-29 August 1987*, [s.e.], Helsinki 1990 (Acta philosophica Fennica, 48), vol. II, 12-24.

113. Bertolacci, *The Reception*, 79-88 and 136-142; Donini, *Unità*; Bonelli, *Alessandro di Afrodisia*, 88-99. Both Maddalena Bonelli about Alexander of Aphrodisias and Amos Bertolacci about al-Fārābī and Avicenna make clear that these authors assign the role of subject of metaphysics not to being as being but to the existing as existing. Nevertheless, the expression 'being as being' seems to me equally correct, since it would be erroneous to neglect the reference to existence of the term 'being'. This does not exclude that an analytical inquiry should clarify the conception held by each author concerning the reference to existence proper to the being which is subject/object of metaphysics; cfr. for example the observations by Bertolacci, *The Reception*, 123-124, footnote 33, about the different scopes of the concepts of 'existing' and 'thing' in Avicenna's works.

As concerns the purpose of Aristotle's work, he assigns this function both to "developing a theology" and to dealing with being as being. However, the function of subject of metaphysics is only assigned to being as being. This does not prevent metaphysics from including theology within itself: for it is theology precisely because the causes and the principles of beings are separated from all matter and change both in reality and in the mind. Nevertheless, it continues to be the science of all being as being, and this happens thanks to the fact that the above mentioned causes and principles give rise to the whole being.

As I already remarked, up to this point Ammonius seems to be indebted to Alexander of Aphrodisias. And yet – as far as Alexander's surviving texts allow a comprehension¹¹⁴ – the solution he employs to justify the unity of metaphysics seems more complex than the one proposed by the commentator from Aphrodisias. In his commentary on the *Isagoge*, Ammonius distinguishes between the three theoretical sciences on the basis of the different kinds of immateriality that characterize what they deal with. In the case of physics, what it deals with is not separable from matter either in reality or in the thought; in the case of metaphysics, it is separated from matter both in reality and in the thought; in the case of mathematics, it is separated in the thought but not in reality.

Hence, we might affirm that late antique thought formulates the question concerning the nature of the subject/object of metaphysics and the unity of this science in the form it shall keep at least up to the seventeenth century. Does the reason why both the study of being and its immediate inferiors and the study of separate substances belong to one and the same science consist in the fact that the latter are principles of the caused beings? Or does it consist in the fact that the former and the latter share the same degree of "distance" from matter?

114. Donini effectively displays the actual plurality of the solutions advanced by Alexander in his commentary on Arist., *Metaph.* IV concerning the question of the unity of metaphysics. Appropriately he also observes that unfortunately we cannot avail ourselves of Alexander's commentary on Arist., *Metaph.* VI, where Aristotle bases the distinction of the three theoretical sciences on the different kinds of bonds with matter and motion that are proper to the three kinds of "things" the three sciences deal with.

Or else, finally, does it consist in some combination of these two standpoints?¹¹⁵

Boethius, too, in his *De Trinitate* writes that theoretical philosophy is divided into three parts: natural philosophy, mathematics, and theology. He does not use the term ‘*subiectum*’, yet he finds the distinction between these three sciences on the different nature of what each of them considers. The first considers things as moving, not abstract, and not separable (from matter); the second considers things as not moving and not abstract; the third considers things as not moving, abstract, and separable.¹¹⁶

Among Arabic authors, al-Kindī maintains that metaphysics studies the realities existing without matter, the realities existing with matter but not united to matter, and the uniqueness, the names, and the activities of God.

Al-Kindī’s theologically-oriented position was substantially revised by al-Fārābī. In this author’s view, metaphysics is a universal science; precisely for this reason it does not only study what is common to all things (i.e., for instance, existence and unity), but also the opposites of what is common to all things, the species and attributes both of common things and of their opposites (i.e. the ten categories and the different kinds of unity and distinction), as well as the things that are not proper accidents of the subjects of the particular sciences (such as priority and posteriority, act and potency, perfect and imperfect, cause and effect), and finally the common principle of all beings, i.e. – writes al-Fārābī – what can appropriately be called God. Precisely the fact that this principle is principle of being absolutely, i.e. with no exclusions, enables it to fall within the subjects of metaphysics, so that its study constitutes a part of

115. C. Steel, *Theology as First Philosophy. The Neoplatonic Concept of Metaphysics*, «*Quaestio*», 5 (2005), 3–21, in part. 3–6; Th. Kobusch, *Antike bis Hochmittelalter*, s. v. *Metaphysik*, in J. Ritter – K. Gründer (ed.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. V, Schwabe, Basel-Stuttgart 1980, 1196–1217, in part. 1207–1208.

116. Boeth., *De Trin.*, cap. 2. For other passages in Boethius’s works where he mentions the existence of a science superior to physics and mathematics cfr. G. d’Onofrio, *Quando la metafisica non c’era. “Vera philosophia” nell’Occidente latino ‘pre-aristotelico’*, «*Quaestio*», 5 (2005), 103–144, in part. 103–106.

this science and perhaps even its final purpose. Nevertheless, for al-Fārābī the first subject of metaphysics is being absolutely.¹¹⁷

Avicenna preserves the distinction between purpose of metaphysics (strictly speaking, it seems that he further distinguishes between ‘thing searched for’ and ‘purpose’) and first subject of metaphysics, yet he states that in order to understand the former it is necessary to determine what is the latter. Well, he argues, this cannot be God: God’s existence must be demonstrated within metaphysics; but no science can demonstrate its own subject; hence God cannot be the first subject of metaphysics. Avicenna’s *pars construens* might be synthesized as follows: the subject of metaphysics is being as being, or the “common” being. Yet, the thesis held by the Persian thinker, even in the translation of the so-called *Metaphysics* made by Gundisalvi, is more complex.¹¹⁸

The first treatise of this work starts with a chapter devoted to the search (*inquisitio*) for the subject of first philosophy. Here we read that «divinae scientiae», namely metaphysics, «inquirunt nisi res separatas a materia secundum existentiam et definitionem».¹¹⁹ The next chapter is devoted to determining (*stabilire*) the subject of this science. Here we read that «primum subiectum huius scientiae est ens, inquantum est ens; et ea quae inquirunt sunt consequentia entis, inquantum est ens, sine conditione».¹²⁰ Then the author makes clear that some of these *consequentia* are something like species of being, some others are something like its proper accidents, and he adds that the science at issue studies the principles of all particular beings too; the first cause, specifies the Persian author, is one of these principles. Finally Avicenna emphasizes that these principles are not

117. I avail myself of the translation of al-Fārābī’s *Treatise on the Purposes of Aristotle’s “Metaphysics”* and of the considerations offered by Bertolacci, *The Reception*, 66–79 and 96–102. See also O. Boulnois, *Le besoin de métaphysique. Théologie et structures des métaphysiques médiévales*, in J.-L. Solère – Z. Kaluza (ed.), *La servante et la consolatrice. La philosophie dans ses rapports avec la théologie au Moyen Âge*, Vrin, Paris 2002 (Textes et traditions, 3), 45–94, in part. 58–59; Ruffinengo, *Da “ghenos ypokeimenon”*, 63–68; Kobusch, *Antike*, 1210–1211.

118. I am examining Avicenna’s doctrine as it arises from the Latin translation of the Arabic text. As regards Avicenna’s real thought – i.e. as it arises from the texts in original language – about the subject, purpose, and unity of metaphysics, cfr. especially Bertolacci, *The Reception*, 111–131.

119. Avicenna, *Liber de philosophia prima*, tract. 1, cap. 1, vol. I, 2.

120. Avicenna, *Liber de philosophia prima*, tract. 1, cap. 2, vol. I, 13.

principles of being but of all beings: for being, he writes, has no principles.¹²¹

In sum, Avicenna's so-called *Metaphysics*, or at least its Latin translation, describes the nature of metaphysics with the help of four notions. First by means of the pair 'purpose' and 'subject'. Second by means of the pair 'separation' and 'cause', i.e. the two unifying principles of metaphysics which were elaborated in Late Antiquity: on the one hand, the principle by which metaphysics deals with the things separated from matter according to existence and definition; on the other, the principle by which metaphysics has being as being as its first subject and deals with the species of this being, with the proper accidents of this being, and with the principles of all beings (i.e. with the principles of all caused beings).

This work bequeaths two further main tenets to the succeeding thinkers: a strict understanding of the Aristotelian statement according to which no science can demonstrate its own subject; the thesis according to which being has no principles. Both of them will be disputed in the following centuries.

Actually, Avicenna's *Methaphysics* bequeaths a problematic point as well. The point is: what is the reason thanks to which the human intellect grasps a *ratio* that it recognizes as not necessarily bound with matter or movement? A first possible answer is the following: this reason lays in the fact that the human intellect sees or demonstrates that immaterial beings occur. A well-known and widely quoted passage in the second chapter of the first treatise suggests such an answer.

[...] consideratio de substantia in quantum est ens vel est substantia, vel de corpore in quantum est substantia, et de mensura et numero in quantum habent esse et quomodo habent esse, et de rebus formalibus quae non sunt in materia, vel, si sint in materia, non tamen corporea, et quomodo sunt illae, et quis modus est magis proprius illis, separatim per se debet haberi. Non enim potest esse subiectum alicuius scientiarum de sensibilibus nec alicuius scientiarum de eo quod habet esse in sensibilibus. Nam aestimatio est expoliatio a sensibilibus; haec autem sunt de universitate eorum quae habent esse separata a materia. *Manifestum est enim quod esse substantiae, in quantum*

121. Avicenna, *Liber de philosophia prima*, tract. 1, cap. 2, vol. I, 13-17.

*est substantia tantum, non pendet a materia; alioquin non esset substantia nisi sensibilis.*¹²²

A second possible answer to the aforesaid question is the following: the human intellect simply has the power to abstract the *ratio* of being from matter, i.e. to think about it without thinking about matter. In fact, this is what a well-known and widely quoted passage in the fifth chapter suggests.

[...] *res et ens et necesse talia sunt quod statim imprimuntur in anima prima impressione, quae non acquiritur ex aliis notioribus se.*¹²³

Well, how might this be the case if, in order to conceive being as separate from matter, according to the preceding passage one were apparently expected to know that being can be separated from matter in reality?

Averroes's thought is quite complex too and its interpretation is made particularly difficult by the number of passages where he approaches the question of the nature of metaphysics. We might say that he distinguishes between subject and purpose of metaphysics: the first consists in the principles and the causes of being taken absolutely (*simpliciter*); the second consists in the search for the principles of being as being and substance. This explains the reason why Averroes has been regarded as a supporter of the thesis according to which the subject of metaphysics is God.

In fact, his position is more composite. It is certain that, in opposition to Avicenna, he denies that the existence of God is demonstrated within metaphysics: on the contrary, metaphysics receives the existence of God as unmoved mover from physics. Hence, concludes Averroes in his *Long Commentary on the Physics*, God can be – and is – part of the subject of metaphysics.¹²⁴ Still, in the same section of this text Averroes writes both that

122. Avicenna, *Liber de philosophia prima*, tract. 1, cap. 2, vol. I, 10. My emphasis.

123. Avicenna, *Liber de philosophia prima*, tract. 1, cap. 5, vol. I, 31.

124. Cfr. the classical text by Averroes Cordubensis, *Commentaria magna in libros De physico auditu*, I, <com. 83>, in Aristoteles – Averroes, *Physica*, Laurentius Canozius de Lendenaria, Padua 1472–75, f. (unnumbered and with no signature on the fascicle) 26^{va-b}. The text of the Giunti edition is identical with that of the Canozzi edition: Averroes Cordubensis, *Commentaria magna in libros De physico auditu*, I, com. 83, in Aristoteles – Averroes, *Aristotelis opera*, vol. IV, f. 47^{rb-vb}.

separable beings (i.e.: separable from matter) are *subiecta* of first philosophy and that this science reflects (*considerat*) «de ente simpliciter» and «de ente, secundum quod est ens». Moreover, he relates also the argument introduced by Aristotle in *Metaph.* VI, 1 to his own position: «si hic [*i.e.*: within the field of physics] non demonstraretur iste modus entium scilicet separabilium non esset nisi scientia naturalis, et doctrinalis». On the other hand, according to the Renaissance translation of his *Epitome of the Metaphysics*, the *subiectum* of this science is the *ens absolutum*, whereas the *intentio* of this science consists in «contemplari de ente in quantum ens, et de omnibus generibus eius, donec perveniatur ad subiecta artium particularium, et de consequentibus essentialibus ipsius, et complere totum hoc usque ad suas causas primas, quae sunt res separatae».¹²⁵

According to Timothy Noon, the above mentioned *Long Commentary on the Physics*, together with some other texts, shows that Averroes really supported the thesis that the subject of metaphysics is God: the *ens simpliciter* or *secundum quod est ens* is being taken in the most proper sense, that is to say God; and the genus that is subject of metaphysics is the one, writes Averroes, consisting in «esse separatum a materia», i.e. in being something spiritual.¹²⁶ Certainly this reading considers the fact that Averroes denies that being is a genus, yet it is contradicted by the meaning that the phrases ‘*ens simpliciter*’ and ‘*ens secundum quod est ens*’ clearly have in other passages of Averroes’s works, where they denote being taken simply as being, rather than spiritual substances.¹²⁷ I therefore prefer the interpretation held by Amos Bertolacci: Averroes adopts the thesis that being as being, i.e. the subject of metaphysics, is such that it includes material beings as well as immaterial beings, and he justifies this

125. Averroes, *Epitome*, tract. 1, p. 356^a. Let me remind that this text was unknown to medieval authors.

126. Noone, *Albert the Great’s Conception*, 689–690.

127. Cfr. for example Averroes Cordubensis, *Commentaria magna in libros Metaphysicorum*, IV, <com. 1>, in Aristoteles – Averroes, *Metaphysica*, Laurentius Canozius de Lendenaria, Padua 1473, f. (unnumbered and with no signature on the fascicle) 41^{va-b}. The text of the Giunti edition is identical with that of the Canozzi edition: Averroes Cordubensis, *Commentaria magna in libros Metaphysicorum*, IV, com. 1, in Aristoteles – Averroes, *Aristotelis opera*, vol. VIII, f. 64^{va-va}.

position precisely by virtue of the fact that the existence of immaterial beings is demonstrated by physics.¹²⁸

The positions concerning the nature of the subject/object of metaphysics – and more precisely concerning the function of God with respect to this subject – maintained by the Latin authors of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are explained in a renowned essay by Albert Zimmermann.¹²⁹

This essay starts by presenting a first phase – occurring in the middle of the thirteenth century – during which three basic solutions were formulated: the solution maintaining that God is one among the several subjects of metaphysics; the solution maintaining that God is cause of the subject of metaphysics; the solution maintaining that God is part of the subject of metaphysics. The first thesis is held by Roger Bacon, Godfrey of Assall, and Giles of Rome; the second is held by Albert the Great and Richard Rufus; the third is held by Robert Kilwardby, Siger of Brabant, and Henry of Ghent. Actually, Zimmermann includes in the second group also Thomas Aquinas; nevertheless, as I showed above, this is not correct: in fact, Thomas maintains that God is both cause of the subject of metaphysics and part of it.

Then Zimmermann presents the doctrines – formulated between the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth – that can be seen as developments of the three aforementioned basic solutions. The first solution is adopted by Peter Auriol, William of Ockham, and John Buridan; the sec-

128. Bertolacci, *Avicenna and Averroes*. Cfr. also Ch. Genequand, *Introduction*, in Ibn Rushd, *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics. A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics, Book Lām*, ed. Ch. Genequand, Brill, Leiden 1984 (Islamic Philosophy and Theology. Texts and Studies, 1), 1–58, in part. 10–23, and Pickavé, *Heinrich von Gent*, 98. However, I still wonder why Averroes does not clearly express this view commenting on Arist. *Metaph.* VI, 1. I suggest that he is not maintaining – as Pickavé seems to interpret him – that one knows that being is not necessarily material due to the fact that one knows, thanks to physics, that separate substances exist; I suggest that he is just maintaining that, thanks to this aforementioned reason, one knows that the subject of metaphysics includes both material and immaterial beings.

129. A. Zimmermann, *Ontologie oder Metaphysik? Die Diskussion über den Gegenstand der Metaphysik im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert. Texte und Untersuchungen*, Peeters, Louvain 1998² (Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales. Bibliotheca, 1) and Boulnois, *Le besoin*. But cfr. also Kobusch, *Antike*, 1196–1217, and Id., *Von Duns Scotus bis zur Schulphilosophie des 17. Jh.*, s. v. *Metaphysik*, 1226–1238.

ond is adopted by Francis of Marchia and Richard of Clive; the third is adopted by Augustinus Triumphus, Peter of Auvergne, John of Paris, Alexander of Alexandria, John Duns Scotus, and Antonius Andreae.¹³⁰

2.3. *The elements composing the question concerning the nature of metaphysics in the later Middle Ages*

Obviously, the abridged scheme concerning thirteenth and fourteenth century authors I have just presented leaves out several important and interlinked aspects of the history of the question of the nature of the subject/object of metaphysics. In order to pave the way to the researches on the subsequent authors, the following five themes can be pointed out.

The first consists in the different conceptions the different authors develop of the notion of subject/object of a science. The role assigned within metaphysics (more precisely, with respect to the subject/object of this science) to transcendental being, created being, substance, God etc. also depends upon the “epistemology”¹³¹ that governs this role, thus also upon the “epistemological nature” of the subject/object of a science. It follows that in order to understand and situate an author’s thought correctly it is not sufficient to determine whether he thinks, for example, that God is cause of the subject of metaphysics or rather a part of it. It is also necessary to determine what epistemological role the author in question attributes to the subject/object of a science: for instance, what is the link he establishes between the subject/object of a science and all that science considers; whether he thinks that the existence of the subject/object of a science can somehow be grasped within that very science or should be fully given from the latter’s very beginning; whether he thinks that the subject/object of a science must have principles – and of what kind: *in essendo*, or *in cognoscendo*, or both of them – or has not; whether he distin-

130. Besides Zimmermann’s essay, which examines also the works of some anonymous commentators discovered in manuscripts preserved at Cambridge and Oxford, see obviously the several studies mentioned in M. Benedetto – L.I. Martone, *La metafisica nel Medioevo: una bibliografia essenziale*, «Quaestio», 5 (2005), 587–602; the essays by Beccarisi, Pini, and Amerini in the same issue of that journal; Pickavé, *Heinrich von Gent*, in part. 81–127.

131. Once again I use this word in the sense of ‘doctrine of scientific knowledge’.

guishes or not the subject from the object and how he brings forward or removes this distinction.

The second relevant aspect concerns the degree of insight of metaphysics into that which it considers. Assuming that metaphysics deals with transcendental being, or with the created being, or with substance, one may ask whether it deals with all beings – or the created beings, or substances – in detail or just in general. Presenting the problem from the viewpoint of the relationship between metaphysics and the other sciences, one may ask whether metaphysics actually includes in itself all sciences, or all the other sciences are subordinated to it, or again it embraces at least all the sciences dealing with real beings. Presenting the problem from the viewpoint of the nature of the subject/object of metaphysics, one may wonder what is the meaning of the specification ‘as being’ in the phrase ‘being as being’. In other words, one may ask what is the difference between the concept of being as being (an epistemological concept, evidently) and the concept of transcendental being, or created being, or substance (which are metaphysical/ontological concepts).

The third relevant aspect concerns the role assigned to God and separate substances within metaphysics. To a certain extent, this problem is outlined in Zimmermann’s essay, so that there is almost no need to elucidate it further. Assuming that metaphysics deals with being as being (and that this means that it does not deal with all the properties of all beings), one may ask whether this means that it merely deals with *rationes generalissimae* or it also deals with the proper *rationes* of separate substances. Moreover, assuming that these *rationes generalissimae* prescind from matter, one may ask whether this abstraction from matter is simply the result of an operation performed by the mind or it requires that the separate beings are non-contradictory and, possibly, that the mind is informed about this non-contradictoriness; subsequently, whether this piece of information is provided inside or outside metaphysics; finally, if it is provided outside metaphysics, whether it is provided through demonstration or through some kind of “illumination”.

A fourth relevant aspect concerns the relationship between metaphysics, or rational theology, and revealed theology. Assuming that both metaphysics (or at least rational theology) and revealed theology deal with separate substances – and more

precisely with God – what is the relationship between these two disciplines? The problem has been long examined (although not always rigorously investigated on the historical level) and is treated in recent studies too.¹³² It can be formulated as follows. Either metaphysics (or rational theology) and revealed theology have the same subject/object or they have not. If they have, then they are actually identical, hence either revealed theology is subordinated to metaphysics or metaphysics is subordinated to revealed theology; if they have not, then it is necessary to determine what is and how big is the difference separating them.

A fifth relevant point concerns the different conceptions the different authors develop of the notion of being. I reassert that the notion of being and the notion of being as being should not be confused: the first has an ontological/metaphysical value, the second has an epistemological one. Nevertheless, on a regular basis authors connect the two notions, variously founding the second on the first. Thus, the different conceptions of being (is it the same as ‘intelligible’ or not? Has it principles or not? Does it contract according to an order or not?) combine with the different conceptions of the subject/object of a science and, jointly with the latter, affect the way of conceiving being as being.

All the doctrines concerning the nature of metaphysics that were developed between later Middle Ages and early modern age may be described within the frame of the five themes I listed above. As far as I can judge from the contents of the recently published works *A Companion to Metaphysics*, *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, and *Storia dell'ontologia*,¹³³

132. For the question of the relationship between metaphysics and the “two” theologies in Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Ulrich of Strasbourg, cfr. – respectively – P. Porro, *Tommaso d'Aquino, Avicenna, e la struttura della metafisica*, in St.L. Brock (ed.), *Tommaso d'Aquino e la struttura della metafisica*, Armando Editore, Roma 2004 (Studi di filosofia, 29), 65-87; P. Porro, *Filosofia e scienza teologica in Enrico di Gand*, in C. Esposito - P. Ponzio - P. Porro - V. Castellano (ed.), *“Verum et certum”*. Studi di storiografia filosofica in onore di Ada Lamacchia, Levante editori, Bari 1998, 415-442; A. Palazzo, *La “sapientia” nel “De summo bono” di Ulrico di Strasburgo*, «Quaestio», 5 (2005), 495-512.

133. J. Kim - E. Sosa - G.S. Rosenkrantz (ed.), *A Companion to Metaphysics*, Blackwell, Malden 2009² (Blackwell Companions to Philosophy, 7). R. Le Poidevin - P. Simons - A. McGonigal - R.P. Cameron (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, Routledge, London-New York 2009

also contemporary theoreticians could benefit from a cognizance of the history of those doctrines. For instance, in the *Introduction* to the first part of *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics* we can read:

It was Aristotle who first explicitly separated the branch of knowledge now known as metaphysics. He called it “first philosophy” [...]. It was only some centuries later (first century CE) that Aristotle’s highly compressed texts, probably lecture notes, were put together by his editors and dubbed “the works coming after the works on nature” (*ta meta ta physika*). Surprisingly, the more appropriate “ontology,” meaning “science of being,”¹³⁴ was only coined in the seventeenth century by German scholastics.

I believe that the readers of the present issue of *Medioevo* will be less surprised than the author of this writing about the time and context of the coinage of the term ‘ontology’ and will be less confident than him about the appropriateness of the term ‘ontology’ in order to dub those Aristotle’s texts and the branch of knowledge they determined.

(Routledge Philosophy Companions). M. Ferraris (ed.), *Storia dell’ontologia*, Bompiani, Milano 2008 (Studi Bompiani, Filosofia).

134. P. Simons, *Introduction to Part I. Millennia of Metaphysics*, in *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, 3-7; quotation from p. 4. Actually, on the subject of the history of the debate concerning the nature of metaphysics *The Routledge Companion* offers a mere half a page paragraph in the chapter by John Marenbon (*Medieval Metaphysics. Things, Non-Things, God and Time*, 58-67, specifically p. 60). The *Companion* published by Blackwell even provides no information at all about this topic. By contrast, the *Storia dell’ontologia* contains two essays specifically devoted to this theme: the first by Alessandra Saccon (*Metafisica*, 67-97; but it merely repeats the Gilsonian creed); the second by Pietro Kobau (*Ontologia*, 98-145; a sound essay, indeed).