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# **The Possibility of Ontology**

**by**

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degree of

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# Declaration of Authorship

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree apart from the background material in chapter 3 sections 2 and 3.1 which was previously submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Philosophy, at the University of Warwick, Department of Philosophy, July 2014.

# Summary

This thesis investigates the development of ontology as a philosophical discipline in the German philosophical tradition. It starts from what can be considered the invention of ontology and proceeds to the way it was received in the philosophy of Hegel. It is separated into two parts. The first part argues that what can be called the 'traditional' form of ontology is developed by Christian Wolff in his 1730 monograph *Philosophia prima sive Ontologia*, and it traces both the history of the *name* (or concept) 'ontology', as well as the history of the *conception* which led to Wolff's formulation of it. The history of the name tracks the use of the concept 'ontology' from its first occurrence in 1606 up to Wolff. The history of the conception tracks the conceptions of various philosophical disciplines, found in thinkers such as Aristotle, Aquinas, and Spinoza, that ultimately give rise to Wolff's conception of ontology as a science of an entity *qua* entity. The second part traces the development of this Wolffian conception through the philosophical systems of Kant and Hegel. The aim of this thesis is to argue that Wolff's philosophy should be seen as the original formulation of the philosophical discipline of ontology and that the Wolffian conception of ontology is the one shared by subsequent German thinkers up to, and including, Hegel. I refer to this shared understanding of what ontology is as 'the German ontological tradition'. The title of the thesis, *The Possibility of Ontology*, refers to the way in which this traditional understanding of what ontology is, is treated throughout the German ontological tradition. Specifically, Kant argues that the traditional conception is effectively impossible, while in Hegel one can find arguments that are intended to show that some aspects of this traditional discipline are in fact possible. Besides focusing on a fairly under-researched topic of the early history of ontology as a philosophical discipline, this thesis attempts to utilise its historical findings in order to provide novel ways in which the systems of the thinkers such as Kant and Hegel can be understood. There is a serious disregard for, or underplaying of, the Wolffian influence on the philosophical thought of Kant and Hegel, and it is my aim to contribute to the rectification of this situation by demonstrating the frequently overlooked dialogue these thinkers had with Wolff's conception of ontology.



# Abbreviations

BM	–	Baumgarten, <i>Metaphysica</i>
BT/SZ	–	Heidegger, <i>Being and Time / Sein und Zeit</i>
CoPR	–	Kant, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>
DP	–	Wolff, <i>Discursus Praeliminaris</i>
EL	–	Hegel, <i>Encyclopaedia Logic</i>
LoHP	–	Hegel, <i>Lectures on the History of Philosophy</i>
LoL	–	Hegel, <i>Lectures on Logic</i>
PoS	–	Hegel, <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i>
<i>Propaedeutic</i>	–	Hegel, <i>The Philosophical Propaedeutic</i>
<i>Propädeutik</i>	–	Hegel, <i>Philosophische Propädeutik</i>
SCG	–	Aquinas, <i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
Sent. Meta.	–	Aquinas, <i>Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio</i>
SL	–	Hegel, <i>The Science of Logic</i>
ST	–	Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i>
Super. Sent.	–	Aquinas, <i>Scriptum super libros Sententiarum</i>
TdEI	–	Spinoza, <i>Treatise of the Emendation of the Intellect</i>
TN 2	–	Wolff, <i>Theologiae Naturalis, pars II.</i>
VGP	–	Hegel, <i>Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie</i>
WO	–	Wolff, <i>Philosophia prima sive ontologia</i>

# Introduction

In his 2012 monograph, *The Twenty-five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*, Eckart Förster takes to heart two claims from the history of German metaphysics. The first claim comes from Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations of the Doctrine of Right* and states that prior to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (or more precisely, prior to the "development of critical philosophy") there was no philosophy at all. The second claim can be found in Hegel's lecture from Spring of 1806 and says that "the history of philosophy has come to an end."<sup>1</sup> This, Förster continues, suggests that the history of philosophy lasts for merely 25 years. Förster then proceeds with an attempt to show that there is some truth in the idea underpinning these two claims, which, in their combination, assign a short time span to philosophy in the history of human thinking.

My aim here is similar, but instead of the lifespan of philosophy I want to focus on ontology. If one is to look into its history, one can see that there were only 101 years of ontology. This science, or philosophical discipline, can be considered as coming into being with Christian Wolff's publication of *Ontologia sive philosophia prima* in 1730, and ending with Hegel's death in 1831.

I understand that the statements of this sort legitimately make the reader nervous and raise a torrent of questions. Is this name, *ontology*, not still to be found widely employed today? Are there no current philosophical practices that are referred to by such name? Has there been no ontology since Hegel, or before Wolff? Is it not the case that ontology is no longer only a philosophical discipline but also appears in various other sciences, humanistic or otherwise? In one sense, the answer to all of these questions is: 'yes'. But in order to properly understand what is contained in the claim that there were only 101 years of ontology we need to ask the question of what ontology is or, more precisely, what ontology originally was.

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<sup>1</sup> Kant 6:12; Hegel *Werke in zwanzig Bänden* 20:461; both quoted from Förster 2012, p. ix.

If one is allowed to take etymology as one's guide, the very name of ontology suggests that it is a discourse or science concerned with beings or with entities. But what *kind* of discourse or science on that topic is ontology? Does it proceed *a priori* or *a posteriori*? Is it a theoretical or a practical science? Is it a philosophical, natural-scientific, or a culinary discourse? The name on its own cannot reveal this. But what else can a mere name suggest regarding the nature of this discipline? A science that bears the name 'ontology' would concern itself with entities or beings (*ta onta*, from *to on* – *a being, an entity*), rather than concerning itself with what it is for something 'to be' (*einai*, with a possible neologism *einology*), or with questions such as 'what is existence?' or 'what exists?' If scientific disciplines generally ask the question *what is*, ontology would, in that case, ask the question: 'what is an entity'? More than this, however, etymology does not reveal.

If at this point one remains keen to continue the search into what ontology is or what it is supposed to be, and further specifies that one's interest lies in the *philosophical* discipline of ontology, one should look into the history of philosophical practices undertaken under the same name. What then quickly becomes clear is that there are two, up to a point parallel, histories of ontology. To be more precise, in investigating the history of ontology one can find both a history of the *concept* or the *name* 'ontology' and the history of a certain philosophical *practice* or *conception* of ontology. When one connects these two historical threads in a specific manner one reaches the aforementioned, startling conclusion: there have only been 101 years of ontology, as originally conceived, in the philosophical canon.

The manner of connecting the two histories is far from trivial. The history of the name is longer than these 101 years. It does not stretch much further into the past than the aforementioned *Ontologia* by Wolff, but it still predates the year 1730 when the text was published (Wolff himself refers to the earlier instances of the name). Moreover, the name is still actively used today, designating certain philosophical (and increasingly non-philosophical) disciplines and methods. Regardless of this, the history of the name is more or

less a straightforward, yet important, historical question. The history of the name concerns itself with questions such as: ‘when did the term appear for the first time and why?’ The question of *the conception*, or of the practices designated by the name, is more philosophically interesting and much more complicated. Such a question, if one wishes to avoid anachronistic readings of the philosophical tradition, has to start with the investigation into the history of the name, focusing on the earliest appearances of the name. Furthermore, the practices designated by that name then have to be identified and analysed so that it could be possible to reach a point at which a certain practice in the history of philosophy can be presented as the gold-standard of what ontology is supposed to be, or at least how it is supposed to be understood in the practice of philosophico-historical reflection. This gold-standard is then to be compared with similar or kindred practices cropping up throughout philosophical history as well as in the philosophical present, whether they are themselves designated by the name ontology or not. Ideally, a standard proposed by such an undertaking, by which the earlier and later practices are to be evaluated, should *not* be an arbitrary standard. I said that this standard, the one that can legitimately be appealed to as a case of what ontology *originally* was, is to be found in the Latin philosophy of Christian Wolff.

It is true that the name ontology, as mentioned above, precedes Wolff by more than a century. It is also true that the philosophical undertaking, which he named ‘ontology’ and described as a “science of the entity *qua* entity”, is not radically original. The characteristics of the philosophical science developed by Wolff can be found present in philosophical systems and practices long before Wolff, and keep appearing in philosophy since Wolff. But the significance of Wolff that has to be acknowledged lies in the fact that Wolff was the one to take a certain term, *ontology*, from the general set of philosophical lexemes available at his point in history and then solidify and popularise it as a technical term in philosophy, particularly in metaphysics. By doing this, Wolff moves the *name* of *ontology* from the philosophical periphery where it was previously located to the philosophical mainstream, or even to the very core of philosophy.

In that sense, Wolff does to ontology what Plato does to *eidos* and *idea*, or what Aristotle does to *ousia* or *hylē* (by which a non-metaphysical word for forest, woodland, or lumber becomes immortalised in metaphysical discourse as *matter*). These terms, *form*, *substance*, and *matter* were not themselves coined by Plato and Aristotle. One could see them being used by various earlier thinkers, and they survive as parts of general philosophical terminology today, even if what they stand for or are used for differs from the original intent. And yet, despite the fact that the more metaphysical students of Socrates were not the first ones to come up with these terms, have not been the last ones to use them, and have not made their own understandings of them into an indisputable or immutable doctrine, there is still something legitimately belonging to Plato and Aristotle when these terms appear today. Whenever they are used today, they remain of this Platonic/Aristotelian heritage, and should ultimately be informed by it.<sup>2</sup>

The terms inherited from Plato and Aristotle have been widely discussed and their meanings and mutations have been documented in countless histories and commentaries. But what I had trouble finding was such a body of work for the discipline of ontology. I therefore present this historical inquiry motivated by a simple question of what ontology *was* when it was originally conceived. And when one asks the question about the origins of ontology in this way the aforementioned 101 years of its existence become apparent. It is with Wolff's *Ontologia* that a certain name and a certain conception come together and, more importantly, become the part of the mainstream philosophical tradition. This is why Wolff's formulation of what ontology is, is to be seen as the 'original' or 'traditional' formulation. If there were not for Wolff's input it is questionable whether the name 'ontology' would survive to this day, and it is questionable what shape German philosophy would take in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. But 'traditional' conceptions or formulations need 'traditions' to keep them alive. In this thesis I argue that there certainly existed a tradition of this kind, i.e. the one that, by

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<sup>2</sup> Even in the case, as argued in Kosman 2014, when this heritage has to be purposefully ignored in order to understand a new employment of the concept, as it is the case with the *ousia* – *substance* relation and the Early Moderns.

the name 'ontology', understood and designated precisely this discipline devised by Wolff. Perhaps out of a lack of imagination I refer to this tradition as 'the German ontological tradition' and the two most important members I discuss are Kant and Hegel.

But what characterizes this tradition, besides the shared understanding of what the name 'ontology' stands for, is the fact that it is also a tradition that asks whether ontology the way it was conceived by Wolff is *possible*. This question is what gives my thesis its name. As we shall see, Kant raises the question of the possibility of ontology and he answers it in the negative. Hegel, on the other hand, attempts to preserve some key aspects of Wolffian ontology arguing, to put it simply, that some key aspects of Kant's rejection of it are mistaken. However, with Hegel's rehabilitation the history of this 'original' or 'traditional' conception of ontology ends. While arguing for the preservation of some of its aspects against Kant's rejection of it, Hegel ultimately does not see much use in either the name ontology or the way it was conceived by Wolff. Due to this, the Wolffian conception of ontology falls into temporary oblivion, while the name gets subsequently assigned to various different kinds of philosophical disciplines. Due to this, I mark the year of Hegel's death as the, perhaps symbolic, end of the traditional conception of ontology. If we see Wolff's *Ontologia* as a place where ontology is formulated for the first time, and the death of Hegel as a point at which the last thinker who understood it in this way died, we arrive to the meaning of the claim that there has only been 101 years of ontology, at least of ontology in the way in which it was originally conceived.

My aim is to provide a story of ontology that is both historically and philosophically informative. As I mentioned earlier there has been very little research within English-speaking scholarship regarding the history of ontology as such. Out of the consulted literature, the two papers I managed to find that specifically deal with the early history of ontology were by Peter Øhrstrøm et al., which were delivered as part of a conference on Computer Science, rather than philosophy. In addition, there is another paper that

focuses on this history by J. F. Mora.<sup>3</sup> Specifically speaking, that seems to be it. While there are other works that are informative regarding this history they mostly deal with it tangentially, while focusing on other topics.<sup>4</sup>

But besides this historical research it is my aim, by focusing on the discussions of the *possibility* of ontology within the German ontological tradition, to see whether reading canonical thinkers such as Kant and Hegel from the perspective of this tradition, can reveal something new and interesting about the nature of their philosophical systems. It seems to me that today no one denies the influence Wolff (or Wolffianism) had, if not on both Kant and Hegel, at least on Kant. It is well known that Kant lectured on Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*, which is rightfully seen as a version of Wolffian metaphysics, even though in his writing he rejects it as dogmatism. The 2014 publication of Kant's copy of Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* is a witness to the awareness and interest the scholarship has in the Wolffian or 'dogmatic' tradition. However, while there is plenty research on Humean, Leibnizian, Spinozist, Aristotelian, Sceptic, Cartesian and other influences on Kant and Hegel, it is extremely difficult to find anyone discussing Wolff's influence. Due to the fact that we all seem to agree that Wolff certainly *was* significantly influential, at least on Kant, I find this lack of research surprising. While focusing on Kant's awakening from dogmatic slumber, we fail to investigate what that long sleep looked like. One consequence of this is an interesting situation in which there are plenty of debates about whether Kant or Hegel are metaphysical or not, ontological or not, etc., without considering what these terms originally *meant* to Kant and Hegel. Of course, Kant and Hegel come to their own conceptions of what metaphysics is supposed to be and how ontology is to be properly conceived, but, by ignoring the Wolffian tradition

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<sup>3</sup> Another very useful paper is Vollrath's *Die Gliederung der Metaphysik in eine metaphysica generalis und eine metaphysica specialis*, but as one can see it is written in German, rather than English.

<sup>4</sup> An excellent source is, for example, Beck's *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors*, but due to the vastness of material this book covers it is not surprising that it does not spend much time on the early history of ontology. Gilson's *Being and Some Philosophers* is another very helpful example of this kind of literature.

they belong to, we risk losing sight of the fact that their conceptions of metaphysics and ontology are also to be seen as *responses* to the earlier, Wolffian conceptions. One notable exception to the lack of research into the Wolffian influence on both Kant and Hegel is certainly the work of Karin de Boer, who carefully examines the meaning behind the word ‘ontology’ that was at the disposal of the two thinkers, and also convincingly argues that interpretations of Kant and Hegel’s philosophy benefit greatly by being informed about their concern regarding the possibility of Wolffian ontology. Although this thesis reaches slightly different conclusions from de Boer regarding how we should interpret Hegel’s philosophy in light of his responses to Wolff and Kant, I am significantly indebted to her work for orienting me in my own research regarding the early history of ontology and the influence of this history on the systems of Kant and Hegel.

The thesis is separated into two parts. The first part is concerned with the history of the formulation of the science of ontology in its ‘traditional’ or ‘original’ form in the philosophy of Wolff. It traces, as I have previously mentioned, both the history of the concept or the *name*, and the history of the *conception*, of ontology. The history of the name is traced through various little-known figures of the philosophical past, such as Lorhard, Goclenius, and Clauberg, since there is an argument to be made that this is the trajectory that puts the term ‘ontology’ at Wolff’s disposal. The history of the conception has to do with the nature of Wolff’s science. Since Wolff understands ontology as a part of metaphysics, specifically the science of an entity *qua* entity, I provide a very general trajectory of a science of this kind, which ultimately leads to Wolff’s formulation. Since the formulation of a “science of an entity *qua* entity”, also called ‘primary philosophy’, first appears in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* this serves as my starting point. I then proceed to investigate how this Aristotelian ‘primary philosophy’ develops through the centuries, how it relates to metaphysics and theology, and how and why it appears in the shape it does in the philosophy of Wolff, under the name ‘ontology’.

The second part concerns the trajectory Wolffian ontology takes after Wolff. It investigates the tradition of this ‘traditional’ conception of



metaphysics. It starts with investigating Kant’s arguments for the rejection of ontology and its replacement with the transcendental analytic, as well as the nature of Kant’s ‘legitimized’ sense of ontology. This is followed by the investigation of Hegel’s relation to ontology. I first attempt to show that when Hegel uses the term or refers to ontology he indeed has in mind Wolff’s (or Wolffian) ontology. Secondly, I argue that Hegel attempts to rehabilitate a certain key aspect of Wolffian ontology, the ability of thought to grasp things as they are in themselves, through his critique of Kant’s rejection of it.

Before starting the thesis I need to say something regarding the method I have been using throughout. This concerns the way I have traced the conceptions of ontology prior, but also subsequent to Wolff. What I have done is relied on certain, what I call, morphological correlates in order to demonstrate the connections between various texts. What do I mean by that? One difficulty of this thesis is that it navigates across 4 different languages. Wolff formulates what ontology is in his Latin works, specifically in *Ontologia*. It is seen as a science which investigates “ens quatenus ens est” or, as I often refer to it, “ens qua ens”. This, I have translated as “an entity *qua* entity.” The potential difficulty is that I also claim that this formula is a valid way of translating the Aristotelian investigation of *to on hē(i) on*, which is sometimes translated as the “science of being qua being”. What I have done, however, is reserved the term ‘being’ (or ‘Being’) for Greek *einai*, Latin *esse*, and German *Sein*. What I am doing, therefore, is assuming the direct translatability between these four, as well as between the Greek *to on*, Latin *ens*, German *das Seiende*, and English *the entity*. For clarity and ease of reference consider the following table:

Greek	Latin	German	English
<i>einai</i>	<i>esse</i>	<i>Sein</i>	<i>Being</i>
<i>to on</i>	<i>ens</i>	<i>das Seiende</i>	<i>the entity</i>

While there might be historico-linguistic reasons that make this equivalence between the terms not as straightforward as I have presented them, I do not believe that the way I have made use of such equivalences is

problematic. As I show at various points at the thesis, these terms were seen as translations for the earlier terms, especially when shifting from Greek to Latin. Some difficulties might be encountered when we reach German and English. For example, 'ens *qua* ens' or 'to on *hei on*' might be more familiar to the reader as 'being *qua* being'. I have, however, avoided to use 'being' in order to translate *to on* or *ens* in order to clearly differentiate it from *einai*, *esse*, and especially *Sein*. There is a difference present already in Aristotle regarding the question 'ti to on' and 'tis he einai'. Moreover, there is a sharp differentiation in Aquinas between *ens* and the *esse* of something and, once we reach Hegel, the category of *Sein* is significantly different from anything that would have been designated by *ens* either in Wolff's philosophy or before. Another possible difficulty is that in German the term *Wesen* could stand for both the terms 'entity' and 'essence', but it seems to me that the context in which *Wesen* appears makes it clear to what meaning of the two it might refer. Similarly, starting with Kant, but already present in Wolff's German texts, although the term 'das Seiende' can be found appearing as a correlate of *ens*, the preferred term used tends to be *das Ding*. Although a distinction between *ens* and *res* existed in mediaeval philosophy, this does not seem strictly adhered to in German translations where *das Ding* tends to be used as a more natural equivalent for *ens* rather than 'das Seiende'. Hence Kant's *Ding an sich* stands as a term for Wolff's *ens per se*, exemplifying the dogmatic aspect of the Wolffian *ens* that Kant tries to go beyond, while for Hegel, the category of *das Ding* shows itself to be the closest correlate to Wolff's *ens*. But the term *das Seiende* still appears in the German ontological tradition, even though *das Ding* tends to be preferred and as such I do not find this shift problematic. The consistent use of 'das Seiende' for *ens* does not, as far as I am aware, come into practice until Heidegger's formulation of the ontological difference. However, the nuances between these terms and their translations will become clearer throughout the thesis, which is now ready to begin.

**Part I:**

**The History of Ontology**

## Chapter One: History of the Name

### I. Lorhard and Goclenius

The earliest record of the term 'ontology' known of today can be found in Jacob Lorhard's (or Lorhardius') book *Ogdoas Scholastica* published in 1606.<sup>1</sup> The work, which was likely intended as a textbook for teaching<sup>2</sup> is delineated into eight [ὀγδοάς] “typicam artium”, which include Latin and Greek grammar, logic, rhetoric, astronomy, ethics, physics, and, most important for the purposes of this chapter, “Metaphysices, seu Ontologiae.” For each *ars* there is a particular chapter which attempts to present it through the formal separation of its elements by distinguishing the fundamental concept of each art into opposed pairs, using a form of a tree diagram where possible. For example, the section on Logic, which is understood as the “art of good employment of reason” (and not seen as belonging to Metaphysics/Ontology) is separated into Theme and Argument; Theme is further separated into Simple and Connected; Argument is separated into Declarative, Demonstrative, Broadening, and Illustrative. This process continues for almost 40 more pages and then the whole procedure is repeated for rhetoric, etc.<sup>3</sup>

With regards to ontology, Lorhard provides neither a definition of, nor a reason for, the inclusion of this neologism in his book. In fact, in the whole work, which spans over 400 pages, the term itself appears only three times. It can be found, as mentioned above, in the front matter of the book (“Metaphysices, seu Ontologiae”), followed by an occurrence at the beginning of the section on metaphysics/ontology (“METAPHYSICAE SEU ONTOLOGIAE [sic] Diagraphae”), and finally at the very end of that section and the book itself (“FINIS ONTOLOGIÆ”). The first entry of the metaphysics/ontology chapter is “Metaphysica” which Lorhard understands as:

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<sup>1</sup> Øhrstrøm et al. 2005, p. 428.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 429.

<sup>3</sup> Lorhard 1606, pars 3. All translations from Latin are mine unless otherwise specified.

knowledge of the intelligible by which it is intelligible since it is intelligible by man with [the help of] the natural light of reasoning without conception of anything material.<sup>4</sup>

After the definition of metaphysics is provided, Lorhard informs the reader that there are only two parts of metaphysics: *Universalis* and *Particularis*.<sup>5</sup> Interesting for the present purposes is the fact that, at this point at which metaphysics is defined and divided, unlike in the section title right above it, metaphysics is *not* equated with ontology – but neither is it distinguished from it. The term *Ontologia* simply falls out of the picture until the very last line of the book. But where does it go? If one is to look at this separation from a more modern perspective, by which I mean by having in mind the separation of metaphysics into *Metaphysica Generalis* or *Ontologia* and into *Metaphysica Specialis*, still well known today (but non-existent in 1606), one would then expect the name *Ontologia* to be joined with what is here called *Metaphysica Universalis*. This, however, is not the case, at least not explicitly. What Lorhard specifies is that *Metaphysica Universalis* consists of the *Intelligibles* [*Intelligibilium*] as well as *Entities* [*Entium*], where an Intelligible “is called everything which is perceived by the intellect and can be comprehended,” while Entities are “anything positive, possessing essence.” The explicit naming of the universal part of metaphysics (or the metaphysics

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<sup>4</sup> *Metaphysic[a] quae est ‘ἐπιστήμη τοῦ νοητοῦ ἢ νοητόν’ quatenus ab homine naturali rationis lumine sine ullo materiae conceptu est intelligibile.* Translation Øhrstrøm, *et al.*, 2005, p. 429. ‘Ἐπιστήμη, translated as “knowledge”, is here to be understood in the sense of Latin word *scientia*, rather than our contemporary term ‘knowledge’, as noted in Øhrstrøm *et al.* 2007, p. 377. It might be possible to argue that this definition appeals to what I will shortly call the *apriority* of metaphysics or metaphysical method. This is, for example, in contrast to Aristotle for whom the absence of matter in metaphysics implies the need of this science to discuss entities independent of (or *independently from*) matter, but Lorhard’s phrasing seems to potentially point towards something else: a need for a *methodological apriority*. By this I mean that he attempts to claim that metaphysics is to be undertaken in an *a priori* fashion, rather than attempting, at this point, to designate the object of metaphysical science.

<sup>5</sup> “*Metaphysicae* (...) partes sunt dua; Altera...” The inclusion of the term *alter* suggest exclusive disjunction, hence there being *only* two parts.

of universals) as ontology is, however, missing from the text. In fact, the two prior uses of the term (front page and the title) suggest the equivalence between the very terms *Metaphysica* and *Ontologia*, and, as mentioned before, the term *Ontologia* appears once again, this time without mentioning metaphysics, in the closing line of the section. This suggests that Lorhard did not intend to use the term to name just one of the two parts of metaphysics, or to posit and name some new, separate part of metaphysics or a new philosophical discipline altogether. The reason why he does use it, however, remains uncertain.

One might argue that it is still possible to make a case that Lorhard intended *Ontologia* to be used as a novel name for *Metaphysica Universalis*, therefore foreshadowing the separation often attributed to Wolff, even though Lorhard fails to do so explicitly. After Wolff, as will be discussed later, *Metaphysica Generalis* or ontology is understood, loosely speaking, as the science of entities. In Lorhard's text, *Metaphysica Universalis*, similarly to Wolffian *Metaphysica Generalis*, is posited as a part of metaphysics explicitly tasked with dealing with *Entities*, as well as the Intelligibles. If one is, however, to follow Lorhard's schema further, it quickly becomes clear that this case is difficult to make. Firstly, the other part of metaphysics, *Metaphysica Particularis*, also deals with entities or, more precisely, it "deals specifically with the non-complex entity"<sup>6</sup> and is composed of the part on Substance and a part on Accidents. Moreover, as Lorhard's separation continues under the heading of *Metaphysica Universalis*, Intelligibles are distributed into Nothing (understood as "simply not [being] something") and Something ("Whatever is simply not nothing"). The section on Something is further differentiated into the Negative and the Positive, the latter of which is divided into Essence and Entity [*Ens*]. Hence, *Metaphysica Universalis* cannot be exhaustively understood as the science of entities. This is because a) entities themselves are understood as "anything positive" while the science in question also deals with the negative, with non-entities; and b) because *Metaphysica Particularis* is also supposed to treat of a kind of entity (the non-complex kind). In short, the later, Wolffian conception of *Metaphysica Generalis* conceives of it as the science of

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<sup>6</sup> "...agitur de Ente incompleto in specie."

entities *qua* entities, while Lorhard distributes the investigation of entities across universal *and* particular metaphysics.

Hence it seems that some key questions still remain unsolved: why does Lorhard coin and use the term *Ontologia*? What is that term supposed to designate and what is its relation to *Metaphysica*? What is its role within the text of *Ogdoas Scholastica*? In order to attempt to provide some indication of Lorhard's possible motivations for coining and employing the term in this text it might be beneficial to look at his other works. His earlier work, *Liber de adeptione* from 1597, contains the following definition of metaphysics:

Metaphysics, which considers all things in general, as far as they are ὄντα and as far as they are of the highest genera and principles without being supported by hypotheses based on the senses.<sup>7</sup>

This short definition, visibly different from the definition of metaphysics found in the *Ogdoas*, might provide some hints towards a loose hypothesis about Lorhard's motivation for including the term *Ontologia* in the text he publishes 9 years later. First of all, from a philological perspective, what the *Liber de adeptione* definition suggests is: a) that Lorhard seems to have preferred the Greek term ὄντα, rather than the Latin equivalent *entia* at some point; and b) that he probably did not have the term *Ontologia* at his disposal in 1597. He might have devised the neologism *Ontologia* due to a preference for the Greek, rather than Latin term for *entity*.<sup>8</sup> Since it is problematic to speculate about a thinker's preference and since the Greek term ὄντα does not appear in *Ogdoas Scholastica* while *Ens* and *Entia* seem to be used without

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<sup>7</sup> *Metaphysica, quae res omnes communiter considerat, quatenus sunt ὄντα, quatenus summa genera & principia, nullis sensibilibus hypothesis subnixa.* Lorhard 1597, quoted from Øhrstrøm et al. 2005, p. 428. Translation slightly modified.

<sup>8</sup> The troubles of translating Greek philosophical terms into Latin, and the complains about how ugly the new terms sound belongs a tradition much older than the 16<sup>th</sup> Century as can be seen, for example, from Seneca's comments on translating οὐσία with *essentia*, are discussed in Kosman 2014, q.v.

reservation, I would not put much emphasis on this possibility. The most likely reason why Lorhard decides to form a neologism from Greek, rather than Latin, is due to a common practice of observing the derivational purity in coining neologisms (since *-logia* is a Greek suffix, the principle of derivational purity does not allow the stem to be Latinate). Moreover, using Greek names for all disciplines in the *Ogdoas* demonstrates stylistic consistency, since all the names for the eight *artia* are Greek-derivatives.<sup>9</sup>

What does the difference in the definition of metaphysics between the *Liber de adeptione* and *Ogdoas Scholastica* suggest from a philosophical, rather than philological, perspective? In the *Liber*, Lorhard claims that metaphysics investigates ὄντα, but there is no reference to the Intelligibles. In *Ogdoas*, metaphysics is defined through the appeal to the Intelligibles, but without the reference to ὄντα. The reason for this shift is unknown to me, but it is possible that Lorhard decides, between the writing of the two books, that it is more important to understand metaphysics by appealing to the Intelligibles than by appealing to entities. This might be due to the case that Lorhard seems to be suggesting, in the *Ogdoas*, that the Intelligibles form a wider class than entities. The first-order Intelligibles in *Ogdoas* are *Nihil* and *Aliquid*. *Nihil* does not separate further, while *Aliquid* separates into *Positivum* and *Negativum*. *Negativum* further separates into *Vera et Ficta* (*Truths* and *Fictions*). *Ficta*, however, are considered *Entia*, although *rationalis*. In this case, the study of negative Intelligibles, that is, *aliquid negativum*, is, ultimately, the study of entities, although *entia rationalis*, rather than *entia realis*. On the other hand, there are two areas, according to Lorhard's schema, which can be seen as investigations into Intelligibles that are not investigations into entities, not even *rationalis*. These are the investigations into Nothing, and into Essence (the latter falling under the subset of *aliquid positivum*, alongside *ens*). On the other hand, while Nothing does not separate further, each part in the separation of

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<sup>9</sup> A potential neologism *ent(i)ology* would be a result of a Latin-Greek combination. Moreover, there is a curious practice on the title page where the Greek genitive (-es) is used instead of the Latin genitive (-ae), e.g. "Diagraphen Typicam Artium (...) *Metaphysices*." In the actual chapter on metaphysics, however, the Latin genitive is used ("METAPHYSICAE (...) Diagraphé).



Essence is explained by referencing how essence relates to entities, suggesting that, as far as essence is concerned, there might not be a real (although there might be a valid nominal) distinction between the science of the Intelligible and the science of entities.<sup>10</sup> But the original question remains: why does Lorhard, after changing the definition of metaphysics so as to *not* include an explicit reference to ὄντα, suddenly introduce the term *Ontologia* as a synonym for *Metaphysica*?

A potential answer could be that this new name, introduced in the *Ogdoas*, was not introduced to *replace*, but rather to *expand* or further specify the object of metaphysics. The motivation for introducing the name ‘ontology’ in the *Ogdoas* could therefore be seen as being motivated by Lorhard’s desire to specify that metaphysics is, fundamentally and ultimately, a science of entities, even though the new 1606 definition of metaphysics, unlike the 1597 one, does not in itself refer to entities.<sup>11</sup> To summarise this point, in 1606 Lorhard defines metaphysics as the science of what is *intelligible* and does not mention entities in that definition. However, his further analysis of metaphysics discloses that metaphysics is about entities, as well as intelligibles. Furthermore, the only intelligibles that are not themselves entities are “nothing” and “essence”; and even essence is in fact inseparable from entities, so strictly speaking the only intelligible that is not an entity is “nothing”. This means that metaphysics, though not explicitly defined as such, is in fact (with the exception of “nothing”) the science of *entities* and the alternative name for it, *ontology*, is here to remind us of that.

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<sup>10</sup> Since essence is itself described as “[that] by which [an] entity is that what it is,” [*per quod Ens est id quod est*].

<sup>11</sup> I do not believe this is in tension with my previous claim that the new definition of metaphysics emphasises the *apriority*, i.e. the *method* of metaphysics, rather than the *object* of metaphysics. On the contrary, the change of definition suggests that Lorhard puts more of a direct emphasis on the method, while the neologism *Ontologia*, identified with *Metaphysica*, is here to suggest to the student that the object of our investigation is, ultimately, ὄντα as it has been in the *Liber*.

Whether this desire to explicate the kind of things metaphysics deals with was the main motivator for Lorhard's positing of the name *Ontologia* is difficult to claim with authority. At this period of history, as I shall discuss in a later chapter, there was a desire to specify precisely what Metaphysics is supposed to be and precisely what it is supposed to investigate, in order to disambiguate Aristotle's view on the subject and bring it in line with a specific, Christian, meaning of 'theology', unknown to Aristotle. However, whether Lorhard coins the term ontology in order to argue for a specific understanding of metaphysics against a different one is unclear to me. Another puzzling thing is the fact that in his second, expanded edition of *Ogdoas Scholastica* from 1613 entitled *Theatrum Philosophicum*,<sup>12</sup> Lorhard takes away the identification of Metaphysics and Ontology from the front cover of the book, leaving only 'metaphysics'. What is more confusing, however, is the fact that the section on metaphysics remains unchanged. Metaphysics is still identified with ontology in the title, and the section still ends with "FINIS ONTOLOGIÆ". The occurrences of the term are reduced from three instances to two, but no other change is present.<sup>13</sup>

This *aporia* might be a good place to leave Lorhard for now and see what happens with the concept 'ontology' further on. As I mentioned above, I will return to the discussion of the *philosophical* significance of the appearance of that name in pre-Wolffian, German metaphysics in a later chapter. But this chapter is primarily concerned with the *name* 'ontology', and I would like to see what happens with that name after Lorhard.

The second important thinker in the history of the name 'ontology' is Rudolf Göckel (or Goclenius), although his contribution to the naming of the new discipline is very humble. The term appears, as a *hapax legomenon*, in his

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<sup>12</sup> The change of title is probably due to the fact that Lorhard adds Hebrew grammar, arithmetic, mathematics and music among the *artes* he investigates and hence treats more than 8 topics.

<sup>13</sup> In the interest of historical precision it is important to say that *Theatrum* is published posthumously in 1613, four years after Lorhard's death, making it difficult to say which editorial decisions were his.

*Lexicon Philosophicum* of 1613, in a margin to the article on Abstraction, in the discussion of *abstractio materiae* according to Alexander of Hales, in which it is stated: “ὄντολογία, *philosophia de ente*,” and nothing else. The term appears at no other place in the text, there is no further discussion of it within the article in which it appears, nor can there be found a separate entry on it, or even on metaphysics itself.<sup>14</sup> As Mora suggests, it seems that there is no careful plan behind Goclenius’ introduction of the term into his text. In fact, the mention of the term seems to be a purely casual and inconsequential remark.<sup>15</sup> This raises the question of why even mention Goclenius in this path towards the concept of ontology, since he was neither the first person to use the term, nor did he say anything significantly more or different from Lorhard. The reason for Goclenius’ inclusion is twofold, on the one hand regarding the history of the conception, on the other the history of the name *ontology*.

Starting with Goclenius’ contribution to the history of the conception of ontology one can say that it is subtle and indirect, but still worth

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<sup>14</sup> Goclenius 1613, p. 16, quoted from Mora 1963, p. 38, q.v. In this otherwise excellent paper on the history of ontology, Mora, while correcting a common misconception that the term first appears in Clauberg’s work, mistakenly claims that this is the first occurrence of the term *ontology* in the history of philosophy (the same error is present in Vollrath’s 1962 article). Notice how Goclenius writes the word *Ontologia* in Greek script, interestingly with the *spiritus asper* (rough breathing), which suggests that the transliteration and pronunciation into English would be *hontology*, in line with ἱστορία – *history*. The presence of the accents on both the first and the last syllable is also confusing, suggesting an enclitic synthesis. One way to solve both the strangeness with the *spiritus* and with the double accentuation is to see it as a combination of the nominative masculine definite article (ὁ) and the noun (ὄντολογία), but one would expect this noun to be feminine and I am unfamiliar of ἦ + ὁ > ὀ crasis appearing anywhere else. The most likely explanation is that this is a typographical error by Mora, since the actual breathing sign present in the original work by Goclenius is illegible.

<sup>15</sup> Mora 1963, p. 39. More significance to the use of the term is given by Bardout (2002, p. 132) who connects it to the practice of mathematical abstraction, the place at which the apostilis appears, which he describes as ontological since “it allows for access to being and the transcendentals.”

mentioning, since it concerns the connection between ontology and *first philosophy*. I have already pointed out that the *Lexicon* contains no article on ontology or on metaphysics; however, one article that can be found within it is the article on Philosophy. This article contains many definitions, the most important one for the present purposes being the fourth one: philosophy, Goclenius writes, can be understood *per excellentiam* as *prima philosophia*.<sup>16</sup>

As will be discussed later on, this philosophical *primacy* is one of the main characteristics (along with the aforementioned methodological *apriority* and some others) of Wolff's conception of ontology. One could even say that it is more than an aspect, since the title of Wolff's *Philosophia prima sive ontologia*, even identifies, rather than simply connects the two.<sup>17</sup> Philosophy itself, for Goclenius, is to be properly understood as *first philosophy*.

But what is this *first philosophy*? For this it is helpful to consult Goclenius' earlier work, *Isagoge*. It contains, unfortunately, no reference to ontology, but in it Goclenius clarifies what he understands by *philosophia prima*. It is nothing other than what is "vulgarly" called *metaphysics*.<sup>18</sup> In the *Isagoge*, Goclenius writes the following:

1. There are two liberal disciplines [that are] the most general: Logic, and Metaphysics, which is called wisdom...
3. Metaphysics or first philosophy is <the> knowledge of those <things>, that are the highest causes and first principles...
9. First philosophy <is the> science of the entity qua entity, that is, <of> what is altogether.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Goclenius 1613, quoted from Mora, 1963, p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> See Curley's note on translating *seu/sive* in Spinoza, *Ethics*, xix.

<sup>18</sup> What is even expressed in the very title of the work: *Isagoge in peripateticorum et Schoalsticorum primam philosophiam quae vulgo dicitur Metaphysica*.

<sup>19</sup> 1. *Duae sunt communissimae disciplinae liberales: Logica, & Metaphysica, quae dicitur sapientia...* 3. *Metaphysica seu prima philosophia cognitio communis est eorum, quae sunt*

Through the series of identifications we arrive at the following inference: *metaphysics* is properly to be called *first philosophy*; *first philosophy* is, among other things, the science of the *entity qua entity*; the *philosophy of the entity* is, in a text that discards the concept of metaphysics, called *ontology*. What seems safe to assume, therefore, is that by the time of the *Lexicon*, there is at least a partial (although not explicit) identification, for Goclenius, between ontology and first philosophy. As mentioned above, this identification will later be crucial for Wolff's own account of how ontology is to be understood as a philosophical discipline. One should notice, however, the ambiguous nature of first philosophy expressed in point 3, where first philosophy, unlike in point 9, is understood as the knowledge of the *highest causes and first principles*. This ambiguity between the object of first philosophy — whether this object is constituted by the investigation of *ens qua ens*, or by the investigation into the first causes and principles — arises from various attempts at interpreting Aristotle's work on the subject, and is present throughout the whole history of (post-Aristotelian) metaphysics. It is also integral to the history of the conception of ontology since it gives rise to a need to posit a specific science of *ens qua ens* in contrast to the science of the first principles of all entities. I will return to this discussion in a later chapter, but now it is necessary to mention the second contribution of Goclenius to the history of ontology, specifically, to the history of the name.

As I mentioned above, Goclenius does not say much about ontology, using the name only once, in a marginal note. It could be pointed out that, unlike Lorhard, Goclenius does provide something resembling a definition of ontology, even if it is only three words long. On the other hand, the significance of Goclenius in the history of the name lies in the fact that he was read far more widely than Lorhard. Even though very few sources on this topic are available today it seems safe to assume that Goclenius, a professor of logic, ethics, and mathematics in Marburg, hears the name *ontology* from Lorhard, and incorporates it in his work, although casually, due to possible discussions

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*altissimis causas & prima principia... 9. Prima philosophia scientia de Ente qua ens, hoc est, universaliter sumto.* Goclenius 1612, quoted from Mora 1963, p. 38. Translation mine.

with Lorhard during Lorhard's short tenure at Marburg as a professor of theology.<sup>20</sup> This being so, Goclenius can be seen as a bridging figure between Lorhard's coining of the term, and its subsequent development leading to Wolff. Unlike Lorhard, whose works never became very famous, Goclenius was relatively well known, earning titles such as 'the Marburg Plato', 'the Christian Aristotle', 'the teacher of Germany', and 'the light of Europe'.<sup>21</sup> From this it seems safe to assume that the name *ontology* survives through his modest inclusion of Lorhard's term into his *Lexicon*. He, along with Suarez and Fonseca on the Catholic side, and Timpler on the German Protestant side, forms the crux of Early Modern Scholasticism,<sup>22</sup> which, from the perspective of the history of ontology, culminates in Wolff.

The name *ontology* in this way, starting with Lorhard, and being bridged by Goclenius, re-emerges through a third significant figure of this history: Johannes Clauberg – another representative of Early Modern Scholasticism, although with Cartesian tendencies.

## 2. Clauberg

There are various reasons for the importance of including Clauberg in this trajectory of the history of ontology. Firstly, he is one of the first thinkers to provide a detailed elaboration of how the term *ontology* is supposed to be employed, and to argue that the term should designate a specific philosophical discipline, rather than simply being a synonym, or an elaborative term for metaphysics.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, and important for the purposes of the next chapter, it

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<sup>20</sup> Øhrstrøm et al. 2007, pp. 375–6.

<sup>21</sup> Øhrstrøm et al. 2005, p. 431.

<sup>22</sup> Bardout 2002, p. 129.

<sup>23</sup> Clauberg is not the first, after Goclenius, to use the term *Ontologia*, neither is he an inventor of the term *Ontosophia*. In *Elementa* he himself credits Calovius for the former term, and Carmuel Lobkowitz for the latter (see Mora 1963, p. 42). On the other hand, as Bardout (2002, p. 129) puts it: "While he did not himself invent the term "ontology," he nonetheless contributed decisively to metaphysics' orientation towards this area, and even published the first true treatise on ontology." Among his other influences are the first formulation of a theory now known as occasionalism.

is clear that Wolff himself has read Clauberg and refers to Clauberg's *Metaphysica de Ente* in his *Ontologia*.<sup>24</sup>

The first of Clauberg's works relevant for the content of this chapter was *Elementa philosophiae sive ontosophia, scientia prima, de iis quae Deo creaturisque seu modo communiter attribuntur*<sup>25</sup> of 1647. From the very title of the work it can be seen that the kind of philosophy Clauberg is interested in is a) to be called *ontosophy* (interestingly, not *ontology*); b) the first science; c) an investigation of "those things" (i.e. predicates) which can be applied to both God and Creatures, i.e. to all entities *qua* entities. The interest in this kind of predicates, called *transcendentals*, and the idea that metaphysics is to be understood as the science of entities *qua* entities, Clauberg inherits from Suárez and his work *Disputationes metaphysicae* from 1597.<sup>26</sup> The novelty of Clauberg with respect to Suárez, and in part with respect to Lorhard and Goclenius, lies in the fact that he explicitly calls for a new name to be given to this discipline which investigates entities *qua* entities. *Metaphysica* will no longer suffice; this discipline is to be called *Ontosophia*.<sup>27</sup> *Elementa* will

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Wolff, *Ontologia, Prolegomena* §I; pars. I, sect. 2, cap. 3, §169.

<sup>25</sup> *The Elements of Philosophy, or Ontosophia, First Science, concerning those things that can be attributed both to God and Creatures.*

<sup>26</sup> Bardout 2002, p. 131. After their appearance, Suárez' *Disputationes* became the main textbook of Scholastic metaphysics (for later adoption of Suárez into Protestant Scholasticism and more general Protestant Philosophy see Beck 1969, p. 73; §VII, *et passim*), since it was the first work which systematically presented Christian metaphysics, and that from purely philosophical perspective, i.e. without including theological aspects within the metaphysical discussion (i.e. those based on Revelation). Suarez' philosophy also serves as a basic metaphysics for the Jesuit order, in contrast to, for example Thomism of the Dominicans, or Scotism of the Franciscans. Descartes' philosophical education, undertaken by the Jesuits, leaves him heavily dependent on Suarezian terminology and fundamental ideas (for more on philosophy of monastic orders and their impact on Early modern metaphysics see Heidegger 1988, pp. 79–81).

<sup>27</sup> The need for the specification of the name is only implicit in Lorhard and Goclenius' uses (or rather utterances) of *Ontologia*, unlike with Clauberg who consciously posits the new name. Regardless of his apparent preference for *ontosophia*,

subsequently be republished in various editions, undergoing profound changes.<sup>28</sup> In 1660 it is published as *Ontosophia nova, quae vulgo Metaphysica* and in 1664 as *Metaphysica de ente, quae rectius Ontosophia*. Finally, it is included in the posthumous 1691 edition of Clauberg's works called *Opera Omnia Philosophica*. According to Beck *De Ente* becomes a standard Scholastic textbook of the time, although the term *Ontosophia* does not survive, except in mention, Wolff's preference for *Ontologia*.<sup>29</sup>

What is *ontosophy* supposed to be? In the *Elementa* Clauberg calls it *scientia prima* or a *prima philosophia* and defines it as *scientia quae speculator Ens, prout Ens*.<sup>30</sup> In *Elementa*, he also states that Metaphysics was called "the first, supreme, trans-natural philosophy; divine, catholic, universal science," and that it has been the most properly named *Ontosophy* or *Ontology*, even before him, by Caramuel Lobkowitz and Calovius.<sup>31</sup> In *Metaphysica de Ente* of 1664 one finds the following account:

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Clauberg does not distinguish between *Ontosophia* and *Ontologia* and uses them interchangeably.

<sup>28</sup> Bardout 2002, p. 131. Most of the changes regard adding Cartesian metaphysical ideas to the text as Clauberg becomes more in favour of Cartesianism. *Elementa* of 1647 is, however, Clauberg's pre-Cartesian work (see Strazzoni 2015, p. 71).

<sup>29</sup> Beck 1969, p. 185. It is a bit problematic to discern whether Beck intends to claim that the *De Ente* version itself became the standard textbook. The reason for that is that Beck dates *De Ente* to 1647, when *Elementa* was published. The similar confusion arises in Mora (1963, p. 43) who dates *De Ente* to 1656. I am following the timeline of Clauberg's works given in Vollrath (1962, p. 265) which is also partially supported and not contradicted by the account of Bardout (2002, p. 131). The only reference to the term *Ontosophia* after Wolff I am familiar with comes from Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* (§4), where he lists it among various names for *Ontologia*.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted from Mora 1963, p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> *Metaphysicam dixere primam, supremam, transnaturalem, philosophiam, divinam, catholicam, universalem scientiam: novissimè Ontosophiam Caramuel Lobkowitz, Ontologicam post alios Abr. Calovius, aptissimè uterque, nominaverunt*. Quoted from Mora 1963, p. 42. Translation mine.



§1. There is a certain science that investigates the entity *insomuch as it is an entity* [ens quatenus ens est], that is, the entity understood as having a certain common nature or a degree of nature which is, in its own way, in both corporeal and incorporeal things [rebus Corporeis & Incorporeis], in God and in Creatures, and in each and every singular entity.

§2. This science is commonly [vulgò] called *Metaphysics*, but more properly *Ontology* or catholic science, *eine allgemeine wissenschaft* [sic], and universal philosophy.<sup>32</sup>

Firstly, it is important to notice that Clauberg defines ontology based on its scientific object, i.e. the *entity qua entity*. As such, ontology is seen as investigating the nature common to God, creatures, and whatever else is. Secondly, this form of philosophy is universal, not just as philosophy, but as *scientia*. Thirdly, this description, as Bardout points out,<sup>33</sup> corresponds to Aristotle's understanding of metaphysics (or more correctly of *first philosophy*) in *Metaphysics* Γ.<sup>34</sup> Importantly, Clauberg's understanding of what ontology is, or what metaphysics is, since ontology is its proper name, appears to stand firmly on one side of Aristotle's ambiguity regarding the nature of first philosophy / metaphysics. If one recalls what was previously said in the discussion of Goclenius, Goclenius retains the Aristotelian ambiguity of what *Metaphysics* is by identifying first philosophy with *both* the knowledge of first

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<sup>32</sup> Clauberg, *De Ente*, §§1, 2. Original emphasis. Translation slightly modified from Bardout 2002, p. 131 and Gilson 1952, p. 112. I am uncertain whether these sections appear in earlier or later works since I was only able to consult *De Ente* and *Opera Omnia* which seem to contain identical texts. All quotes from *De Ente* are from the 1664 copy and from *Opera Omnia* from the 1691 copy. References to other works by Clauberg are taken from secondary sources.

<sup>33</sup> Bardout 2002, p. 131.

<sup>34</sup> "There is a science which investigates being as being [τὸ ὄν ἢ ὅν] and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature. Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences; for none of these others deals generally with being as being." Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 4, 1.1003a21-25.

causes and principles (theology) and with the science of the entity *qua* entity.<sup>35</sup> One could already see Goclenius' objection to the 'common' name *metaphysics*, and preference for the term *first philosophy* over it, as an attempt to rescue the conception of metaphysics from Aristotle's ambiguity by focusing on only one of the two senses of first philosophy / metaphysics. However, what seems to be happening in the very opening of Clauberg's text is an additional shift. Clauberg is here identifying *first philosophy* with the science of the entity *qua* entity and, due to that, names this science *Ontosophia / Ontologia*.

An additional account provided in favour of understanding metaphysics properly under the name *Ontosophy / Ontology* can also be found slightly earlier in the text:

Since the science which is about God calls itself *Theosophy* or *Theology* [θεοσοφία vel θεολογία], it would seem fitting to call *Ontosophy* or *Ontology* [Ontosophia vel Ontologia] that science which does not deal with this and that entity, as distinct from the others owing to its special name or properties, but with the entity in general.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> In the Scholastic context, first philosophy/metaphysics was also sometimes considered to be properly called theology, not only because it concerned itself with first causes and principles, but also because it was considered properly conceived when it was seen as a science of God and Intelligences, i.e. incorporeal entities such as angels and human souls, rather than as a science of *ens qua ens*. This is the case, for example, for Pererius and Suárez, although the latter also acknowledges the *ens qua ens* approach as properly belonging to metaphysics (see Vollrath 1962, p. 267).

<sup>36</sup> "Sed circa ens in genere versatur." Clauberg, *De Ente, Prolegomena* §4. Translation modified from Gilson 1952, p. 112. Interestingly, Clauberg uses the Greek script to write *Theology* and *Theosophy*, however, shifts to Latin for *Ontosophy* and *Ontology*. Commenting on the paragraph Gilson (1952, p. 112) writes: "This text can be seen as the birth certificate of ontology as a science conceived after the pattern of theology, yet radically distinct from it, since being qua being is held there indifferent to all its conceivable determinations." I must admit that I find this claim confusing. It is unclear what kind of *theology* Gilson refers to which serves as a pattern for ontology, or what he understands by conceiving something "after the pattern" of theology.

For Clauberg, this supports the claim that the justification for naming this science ‘ontology’ seems to be grounded in the object investigated by this science. As can be seen from earlier quotations, the focus on this object, the entity qua entity, implies a certain universality of this discipline as a science, and a certain primacy of this discipline with respect to other philosophical disciplines. The question now arises as to how or why such an object constitutes this primacy and universality and how such primacy and universality are supposed to be understood.

To understand the notion of primacy it is good to explicate the idea behind the notion that was on the mind of the thinkers of that time. The idea of primacy comes, naturally, from Aristotle and, as it is to be expected, it is present in Aristotle’s work in two senses. These two senses can be explicated by appealing to the two separate ‘orders’ posited by Aristotle – the order of *nature* and the order of *knowing*.<sup>37</sup>

The primacy in the order of nature (I) is what defines, for Aristotle, the discipline of πρώτη φιλοσοφία [*prote philosophia*] or first/primary philosophy, later named metaphysics. Among the multiplicity of philosophical disciplines, this one is first or primary since it treats of the first things in the order of

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What seems clear is that Gilson here does not refer to theology as *knowledge/science by Revelation*, or as Aristotelian *science of the first causes and principles*. What he seems to refer to is theology as a study of the nature of God and intelligences, but also of that which is common to them as well as Creatures, the science of *ens commune*, or, if I understand him correctly, as what Heidegger calls *onto-theology*. On the other hand, I am unsure why this is to be seen as a conception of discipline *after the pattern of theology* since it sounds more similar to Aristotle’s second conception of first philosophy as a science of entity *qua* entity, and more akin to what Aquinas has called *philosophical*, rather than *theological order* of inquiry, of which I will speak in a later chapter. The only ‘pattern’ that I can here identify is the one of naming a discipline with regards to its object, in this case God (theology) or entity *qua* entity (ontology).

<sup>37</sup> These can be found posited in *Physics* 1, 1.194a10-21 and *Metaphysics* 7, 3.1029b1-12, although not as explicitly as I have done so here. Rather, Aristotle discusses them using a more Aristotelian syntax.

nature. What Aristotle means by ‘treating of the first things in order of nature’ is ambiguous as well and forms the crux of what I have been earlier referring to as the ‘Aristotelian ambiguity’. One meaning of this “treating of the first things” present in Aristotle stands for an investigation into first causes and principles (1a).<sup>38</sup> This ultimately shows itself to be investigation into what is known as the ‘god of Aristotle’ and Aristotle will himself name this discipline ‘theology’.<sup>39</sup>

The second sense of treating the first things in the order of nature (1b) for Aristotle signifies the science of an entity *qua* entity, τὸ ὅν ἢ ὅν [to on he(i) on], which shows itself to be the science of substance, or οὐσία [ousia], or of the formal cause of everything. In the period surrounding Clauberg, this sense of first philosophy develops into the specific discipline of ontology, due to attempts to resolve the ambiguity and relegate the former sense (1a) to Revealed theology, or theology as a religious discipline, and the latter sense (1b) to philosophy as, one could say, a ‘secular’ discipline.<sup>40</sup>

In the unresolved form, both senses of primary philosophy were united in the post-Aristotelian term *metaphysics*. So united, the discipline of metaphysics also contained a third sense of primacy which can also be found in Aristotle. This is the sense connected to the ambiguity of the preposition *meta* and designates a discipline whose object falls ‘beyond’ the object of physics (1c). In Aristotle, although the term meta-physics is never used, this means that first philosophy deals with the world beyond the world of motion (which constitutes the domain of physics) and deals with the formal cause of all entities, especially the ones free from material causation. It deals with the

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<sup>38</sup> For example *Metaphysics* 1, 1.982a3, *et passim*.

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 6, 1.1026a19. Later, of course, one can witness a complete or partial identification of the god of Aristotle with the God of Abraham.

<sup>40</sup> Inclusion of God as one of the objects investigated by ontology is not a problem for such an endeavor. The presence or absence of God, I would argue, has always been and remains, a metaphysical question, independent of Revelation, for which Revelation claims specific kind of access to itself. In Clauberg’s period, the distancing of ontology from theology refers more properly to the distancing from Revelation or from metaphysics derived for the purposes of explaining the Revealed.

world of pure actuality, ἐνέργεια [*energeia*].<sup>41</sup> In the Middle ages, this sense becomes more connected to the science of the Intelligences, i.e. of entities independent of matter (primarily Angels and Souls), while in the early modernity it is connected with the investigation of the world in some sense 'beyond' extension.<sup>42</sup>

These were the three senses of the idea of primacy in reference to the order of nature. Allowing for a slightly anachronistic categorisation they can be called: 1a) theological, 1b) ontological, and 1c) the super-natural sense. This leads to the sense of primacy in the order of *knowing* (2). For Aristotle, first philosophy is the first in the order of nature, or more precisely, it treats of the first things in the order of nature. On the other hand, it falls *last* in the order of knowing. This is so because it concerns itself with things *more knowable in themselves*, but *less familiar to us*. In this sense (2), the second ambiguity of *meta* comes to fore. In the order of knowing, understood as both the didactic order and the order of progression of a scientific method, metaphysics comes, i.e. is to be studied, *after* physics. This, however, according to Aristotle, does not provide Physics with the claim to primacy proper, regardless of its didactic and systematic primacy, since the proper conception of primacy rests with the primacy of nature.<sup>43</sup> A similar conception of primacy in the order of knowledge can be found present in Descartes, if one is to read the term *first* in the *Meditations on First Philosophy* as referring to the discovery of the *Cogito*

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<sup>41</sup> As one can see, this sense (1c) is in a way a combination of (1a) and (1b) since the entities *qua* entities are to be investigated through the formal cause, and actuality which is identified with substance (1b), while this way of being is exemplified in the way of being of Aristotelian god (1a) who is the prime example of substantiality and the first (final) cause of everything.

<sup>42</sup> Mostly due to Boyle and Descartes' identification of the term φύσις / *natura* with extension. See Beck, 1969, p. 162. In this sense, Cartesian God and *res cogitans* are metaphysical or super-natural since they belong to the non-extended world, the world 'beyond' extension.

<sup>43</sup> Aristotle contemplates the possibility of Physics being the primary philosophy and says the condition for that would be the non-existence of the world beyond motion. Since this condition does not hold, he claims, physics cannot be first philosophy. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 6, 1.1026a27-30.

through the method of doubt, from which subsequent philosophising is later to be developed. In this case, what is first in the order of knowing, the *Cogito*, is itself *second* in the order of nature, since the primacy of the natural order lies with God, while the two *res, cogitans* and *extensa*, exemplify a form of quasi-substantiality, due to their independence from everything but God.

What becomes important during the historical period in which the term ‘ontology’ itself appears, is the development of a different idea of the priority in the order of knowing. Under this conception, the priority of the order of knowledge is conceived on the model of the hierarchical epistemic dependency in which ‘lower’ knowledge is unattainable without prior attainment of the ‘higher’ knowledge.<sup>44</sup> This idea, combined with the idea of the primacy of the object of metaphysics in the order of nature (understood in the sense Ib), leads to what can be called the “double primacy of metaphysics” in which the highest knowledge that can be gained is also the first knowledge to be sought after. The order of nature and the order of knowing are combined and as the ‘higher’ structures of nature ground the ‘lower’ ones, so the ‘higher’ structures of knowledge, ground the ‘lower’ ones.<sup>45</sup> This can be called the

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<sup>44</sup> This is not completely novel. The idea itself is Platonic in nature.

<sup>45</sup> An example of the double primacy can be found in E2P10s of Spinoza’s *Ethics*: the proper order of philosophy proceeds from God to the particulars, since God is prior to everything in *both* knowledge and in nature. In fact the idea of double primacy is fundamental to the structure of the *Ethics*. See E1A4, E1P15, and the definition of Substance (E1D3). The precise way in which this grounding operates on the ‘lower levels’ depends on the thinker. For example, in Spinoza it is explained through the parallelism of attributes derived from the single substance, while, for example, in Leibniz it depends on the pre-established harmony. These two principles are usually seen as solutions to the quandaries regarding the relation between the mind and the body, but they could, in my view, also be read as principles underpinning the relation between the order of nature and the structure of science explicating that order. Similar idea of double primacy can be found in Descartes’ conception of the tree of knowledge (*Principles of Philosophy*, preface to the French Edition of 1647, quoted from Descartes *Meditations*, xviii), although, as I have mentioned previously, his metaphysics does not explicate the proper double primacy since the first knowledge is not of God. On the other hand, the proper relation between God and the *Cogito* is

*systematic* unity of thought and being and it seems to be a principle implicitly or explicitly operating across the thought of the early ontologists.<sup>46</sup>

The significance of this new double primacy of metaphysics, on which the systematic unity of thought and being is based, lies in the fact that such a position is impossible for Aristotle. Aristotle himself cannot start from the highest parts of nature, be that God, or *ousia*, or the Immobile, since his method requires beginning from what is more familiar “to us”. And the familiar is hylo-morphic, spatio-temporal, and in motion. The idea of double primacy holds that one can, and indeed should, start a scientific inquiry from the highest principles, where the first principles in the order of nature become the methodologically first concerns within the order of knowing.

It is not the case, of course, that this idea appears without any historical precedent. For example, it can be seen in Plato’s insistence that prior to knowing the individual cases of something one must first familiarise oneself with the higher, purer form of it. With Plato, however, it can be said that the order of knowledge follows the order of nature more closely than for Aristotle since for Plato the investigation of phenomena through which the noumena are reached is not treated, in itself, as *epistēmē*, *Sophia*, *scientia*, *Wissenschaft* or however we want to call it. Plato, unlike Aristotle, does not see the process of proceeding from the shadows towards the knowledge of the Forms (or at least the *initial* proceeding towards them) as a scientific or philosophical activity, but as a didactic development of one’s character towards the beginning of philosophy and of philosophising. The question which now arises is the

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difficult to pinpoint since the *Cogito* is circularly dependent on God’s existence and benevolence.

<sup>46</sup> The terms ‘unity’, ‘thought’, and ‘being’ are to be loosely understood here. The phrase ‘unity of thought and being’ is commonly used in discussions of German Idealism, and the nature of Hegel’s *Logic* in particular. Here I have a similar conception in mind, but I would want to qualify it with the adjective *systematic* in order to avoid confusion with the much earlier, Ancient conception of the *isomorphism* of thought and being, which lacks a comparable conception of a system.

following: how does Clauberg argue for the possibility of this double primacy of metaphysics, which the discipline of ontology now exemplifies?

The answer is: through his conception of what an entity is. From the way entities are conceived, ontology, the science of entities *qua* entities, will reach the double primacy in the sense of dealing with the most universal nature of all things (including both God and Creatures) and as being the most universal science grounding all the others. What is, in that case, Clauberg's conception of an entity?

The *ens*, or entity, the subject matter of ontology, can for Clauberg, echoing Aristotle, be considered in three senses. These are: 1) what can be thought [*intelligibile*]; 2) something [*aliquid*]; 3) the thing or a substance [*substantia*].<sup>47</sup> Clauberg presents this trichotomy in the section 4 of his *Ontosophia* in the following way:

First of all, three senses of "entity" are to be distinguished. It can denote everything that can be conceived (for which reason some call it "[the] Intelligible") and this cannot be opposed to anything; or it can designate what is truly something, even if no one thinks it, and the opposite of which is nothing. Or it can signify a thing that exists by itself, such as substance, the opposite of which is ordinarily taken to be accidents.<sup>48</sup>

### **2. 1. The Intelligible**

It is important to take note that this first sense of *entity* shows that the subject matter of ontology does not concern itself with *existing* things, or existence itself. The only condition for anything to be counted as an entity is for it to be *thinkable*. In fact, for Clauberg this means not only that non-existing

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<sup>47</sup> Mora 1963, p. 43.

<sup>48</sup> Clauberg, *Ontosophia*, §4. Translation modified from Bardout 2002, p. 131.



‘Thinkables’ or ‘Intelligibles’ are to be counted as entities, but that the ideas such as ‘nothing’ are to be considered to be entities as well:

An entity is everything which, in whatever manner it may be, can be thought and spoken of. *Alles was nur gedacht und gesagt werden kan* [sic]. Thus I say ‘Nothing’ and when I speak of it I thus think it, and when I think it, it is thus in my understanding.<sup>49</sup>

As Bardout puts it, this makes the concept of an entity “equivalent to the intelligible as such, or whatever can be thought, including a chimera or nothing. It is therefore characterised as the possible, pure and simple – the not self-contradictory.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, according to Bardout, *ens* in this first sense is reducible to the pure object, understood as the necessary correlate of every thought. From this, Clauberg continues to claim that there is no significant difference between *ens* as a pure object, object of knowledge, object of actually occurring thought, or an object of a proposition:

This ‘to be’ [Hoc esse] which is attributed to it [i.e. to the entity], in so far as it is the object of the understanding and is known in itself, is called *the objective being* [*Esse objectivum*] or the being-known of the Entity [esse cognitum Entis]. Everything else – that is, whatever can be thought and

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<sup>49</sup> Clauberg, *Ontosophia*, §6. Translation modified from Bardout 2002, p. 131.

<sup>50</sup> Bardout, loc. cit. This is different from some earlier conceptions of *ens*, such as the one proposed by Aquinas in *De Ente et Essentia* for whom *ens* encompasses whatever can be the subject of an affirmative proposition “even though this [might] posit nothing in reality” (Aquinas, *De Ente*, Cap. 1). In this case, *Nothing* could not, traditionally, be a subject of affirmative proposition since one cannot say that Nothing *is* (*true*). The chimera Bardout mentions is not to be understood, as it sometimes is, as a ‘self-contradictory term’. It refers to mythical creatures, fictions, or creatures which are not self-contradictory but for which we know they do not or cannot actually exist. In *Ontosophia* §12, Clauberg argues that the concept of Entity is the most known of all concepts (“*notissimus*”) since it can be found contained even in the ideas such as “Cerberus and other fictions”, Nothing, and Chimera.

spoken of – is easily included within this alone, to the extent that ‘to be’ [esse], being thought and being spoken of... do not differ much at all.<sup>51</sup>

This concept of *ens* understood as thinkability serves as the starting point of metaphysics for Clauberg and brings him closer to what I have called the ‘double primacy of metaphysics’. The double primacy requires of metaphysics that it treat of an object which is universal and that it place the discipline treating this object, whether one calls it ontology or metaphysics, as the first scientific discipline which precedes and, in some sense, grounds other scientific disciplines. For Clauberg, the name for this discipline will be ontology or ontosophy. It will be universal in its subject matter and it will come first in the methodological order. For Clauberg, this will be possible due to the way the object of ontology, the entity *qua* entity, is conceived, which is primarily understood to be *thinkability* in the sense described above.

It is easy to see how Clauberg derives the universality of the object of ontology from his conception of thinkability. If the object of ontology is all that is possible, in the sense of not being self-contradictory, the only region this discipline does not treat of is the one composed of all that is self-contradictory. Putting aside, for the moment, the possibility of dialetheism or (post-)Hegelian dialectics, such position would satisfy the majority of current and historic philosophical appetites as treating of everything that is worth being treated of. Furthermore, Clauberg claims that all that is possible in this way is also thinkable. This allows him a further claim that a discipline that treats of such a universal object is not beyond the reach of the thinker attempting to engage in it. If one can think, one can think on the level of universal abstraction and requires nothing more but the ability to think in order to do so. To think about *ens qua ens* is to think universally since the concept of *entity* conceived in Clauberg’s manner “pertains indifferently and univocally to everything, to God and creatures.”<sup>52</sup> This forms the ground for Clauberg’s adopting a position that aligns with the first leg of the ‘double primacy of metaphysics’,

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<sup>51</sup> Clauberg, *Ontosophia*, §16. Translation modified from Bardout 2002, p. 132

<sup>52</sup> Bardout 2002, p. 132.

the condition of universality, or the primacy in the Aristotelian order of nature. Consider the following two passages:

§IO. The concept of entity seen in this way is *the first* or the most general and the highest, since no one is able to apprehend a genus above it. For that by which we apprehend is, by that very quality, already intelligible, and consequently Entity in the first sense. But if one does not descend from the universals, instead you begin to count from the particulars in an ascending logical order, the concept of Entity will be *the last*.

§II. The concept of entity is the simplest, because to this most general thought something is always added in all thoughts which we possess that concern all things whatsoever (certainly we are talking about [thoughts such as] a thing or a something). Anyhow, no concept is given in our soul, which would be finer or more delicate or would include less. Entity is like the first and the thinnest string, to which different and different thicker <ones> must be gradually added, in order that we weave a whole philosophical web, which we construct while we descend from the general to the particular, and we conceive in our mind this and that Entity, just as [we conceive] God, Star, Soul, Body, etc.<sup>53</sup>

The two passages reinforce the idea that the concept of entity, the subject matter of ontology, is the most universal concept available to our thought and hence, due to Clauberg's earlier identifications, the most universal concept possible. The question remains, however, about Clauberg's position on the second leg of the 'double primacy', i.e. the methodological primacy of ontology, or the possibility of starting one's scientific or philosophical system with the 'entity *qua* entity'. In §IO of *Ontologia*, Clauberg states that if one looks at Entity from the position of a philosophical method

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<sup>53</sup> Clauberg, *Ontosophia*.

that is based in abstraction from the particulars the concept of entity comes last. This suggests that Clauberg does not adhere to the double primacy, if he is here stating that the entity is, in that sense, the last in the philosophical order. On the other hand, Clauberg seems to be only referring to the order of proceeding from the particulars, rather than endorsing it for his philosophical method. In fact, in §II Clauberg provides an analogy of how ontology is supposed to proceed. He compares it to the weaving of the philosophical from the finest thread (entity) thereby illustrating the process of descending from the most general to the particular, rather than vice versa. This suggests that Clauberg proposes an inversion of the established Aristotelian order of inquiry that proceeds from the particulars towards universals in its investigation of the entity *qua* entity. Since, for Clauberg, Entity is all that is thinkable and is, as such, present to our mind in any operation of thought, there is no need to reach it through the process of logical abstraction. The concept of Entity is always given to the thinker, allowing for the positing of the methodological primacy, as well as natural primacy, of ontology.

Certain claims by Clauberg, however, complicate the idea behind this deductive picture. Specifically I am referring to his apparent endorsement of Descartes' method. As discussed earlier, Descartes' *philosophia prima* does not exemplify the double primacy of metaphysics in the sense I have been conceiving of it. Descartes' method starts from the investigation of the particular thinking mind and subsequently establishes from it the *res cogitans*, one of the two most universal quasi-substances, subsequently establishing God as the only true substance. Descartes, specifically in his allegory of the Tree of Sciences, does posit metaphysics as the First Science, upon which physics and other sciences are ultimately to be based upon, but his investigation into metaphysics does not start with God or substance, the only true universal in nature, but from the particular thinking mind. Problematically for the purposes of establishing my sense of double primacy in Clauberg, consider his following statement:

§5 Let us give priority to some aspects of Entity in its first and second senses and begin universal philosophy with the *thinkable entity* [ab *Ente cogitabili*], just as first philosophy,† as it begins with the particular, looks first at the *thinking mind* [*Mente cogitante*].

† First philosophy – so called not because of the universality of the object it treats, but because of the fact that someone who wants to philosophize seriously must begin from it; namely from the knowledge of one’s mind and of God, etc. This first philosophy is contained in Descartes six Meditations. First part of the Principles <of Philosophy> exhibits it to the highest degree.<sup>54</sup>

This seems to raise certain problems with the narrative I have so far been presenting. I have argued that Descartes’ method does not exemplify the double primacy of metaphysics. I have also suggested that ontosophy, if understood as first philosophy, exemplifies the double primacy of metaphysics. On top of that, I agree with Clauberg that Descartes’ *first philosophy* can be said to take its name not from the universality of its object, but from it being understood as first philosophical discourse one must adopt prior to building a system. This is precisely why Descartes’ method lacks the *double* primacy. It does, indeed, posit a hierarchy of dependence in a scientific procedure; however, it does not start with the most universal object. The problem now arising comes from the possibility that Clauberg’s approach, if he is aligning himself with Descartes, might also not exemplify this double primacy.

Recall my earlier account that, in the *Elementa* of 1647, Clauberg characterises ontosophy as the science of *ens qua ens*, but also as a “divine, catholic, universal science,” and as “first philosophy.” This 1647 account suggests that the universality and primacy of ontosophy is based on the object of its research, i.e. on the *ens qua ens*. This being the case, *first philosophy*

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<sup>54</sup> Clauberg, *Ontosophia*. Translation extended and modified from Bardout 2002, p. 132.

draws its *primacy* from the nature of the object treated by this science. This results in the double primacy of ontosophy: both the primacy in nature and knowledge depend on the universality of the object of the science. On the other hand, if the term ‘first philosophy’ is to be understood as encapsulated in Descartes’ method then this account which connects the double primacy of ontosophy with the universality of its object cannot hold, since such primacy, as I argue, does not occur in Descartes’ system. I have also mentioned above that Clauberg slowly turns towards a more Cartesian way of thinking throughout the years. This suggests that by the 1664, and the edition of Clauberg’s work I quote above, Clauberg changes his mind with regards to what constitutes the primacy of ontosophy. Its *universality* is still based on the universality of its object, but if the approach to this object is to be more Cartesian, then *Ontosophia* would not start with what is the most universal, i.e. *ens qua ens*, but with a particular thinking mind and its ability to doubt.

There are, fortunately for the purposes of my narrative, several reasons one can point to in order to show that this is not the case. Firstly, calling something ‘first philosophy’ not due to the universality of its object, but due to the necessity of beginning with such a discipline does not of itself prevent the establishment of the double primacy. In fact, the primacy of knowledge requires such a position. In §5 quoted above, Clauberg distinguishes between ‘universal philosophy’ (primacy in the order of nature), which he attributes to his own discipline, and the ‘first philosophy’ (order of knowledge), which he attributes to Descartes. Secondly, Clauberg’s denial that the primacy of first philosophy is grounded in the universality of its object of study does not entail that Clauberg therefore adopts Descartes’ *starting point*, if by that one is to understand identifying first philosophy with the Method of Doubt or with the *Cogito*. In fact, what Clauberg is here doing is drawing an analogy between his conception of the philosophical starting point and the methodological primacy exemplified in the Cartesian conception of first philosophy. It is made clear, in §5, that Clauberg does not intend to start, as Descartes did, by investigating a particular thinking mind (“*Mente cogitante*”), but by investigating a thinkable entity (“*Ente cogitabili*”). Since there is no ‘unthinkable entity’, and Clauberg does not specify any particular thinkable entity he aims to begin with (God,

Soul, etc.) it seems safe to interpret this section as stating that universal philosophy beings with the entity *qua* entity. The aim of introducing this analogy between the universal philosophy and Descartes' first philosophy is to illustrate that Clauberg's starting point is meant to exemplify the primacy of knowledge in a way similar to Descartes, i.e. "the fact that someone who wants to philosophize seriously must begin from it," rather than to point out Clauberg's intention to start, like Descartes, "from the knowledge of one's mind and of God, etc." In fact, far from adopting Descartes' starting point, this claim by Clauberg should be seen as his attempt to rehabilitate Descartes' approach in the face of the Scholastic approach to philosophy, by attempting to show that Descartes is fundamentally attempting to do what Clauberg is doing, rather than vice versa.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, there is a more general point to be made which points to the connection between the universality of the *ens qua ens* and its suitability to provide a ground for Clauberg's systematic primacy in the order of knowledge. One characteristic of the systems constructed to proceed from a particular towards the universal rests on the idea of the opposition between the things more familiar 'to us' and the things more familiar 'by nature'. The approaches of this kind, such as that of Aristotle, believe that what is more familiar to us, and therefore first in one's metaphysical investigations is the particular, which therefore serves as the starting point for philosophising.<sup>56</sup> Clauberg, on the other hand, explicitly states that *ens qua ens* is what is most familiar or known to us (*notissimus*),<sup>57</sup> enabling him to conceive of ontosophy as the first in the order of knowledge, just as Descartes conceived of the first philosophy: as the philosophical activity coming before and grounding any subsequent one, this time, however, with a more universal object. This, therefore, constitutes the double primacy of ontosophy: the first philosophical step, which serves as the

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<sup>55</sup> For more on Clauberg's rehabilitation of Descartes see Strazzoni 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Aristotle, *Physics* I, I.194a10-21. The similar intuition is present in Descartes: the familiarity of the Cogito is expressed through its indubitability, unrivalled even by the familiarity of God or embodiment. It could also be pointed out that Descartes even starts with everyday particular, such as towers, wax, and passersby.

<sup>57</sup> See footnote 50.

necessary precursor to any further philosophising, is the investigation of that which is the most universal in nature, or the *entity qua entity*.

## **2. 2. Further senses of entity**

Having said a lot in the above section about Clauberg's conception of the entity in the primary sense, or the sense of the Intelligible, this account would be incomplete without mentioning the other two senses: the entity understood as a something, and as a substance. Understood as the Intelligible, the entity remains the most important sense regarding the concerns of this historical narrative of ontology, since it is the one grounding the double primacy of metaphysics I have spoken about. Nevertheless, the other two senses provide a fruitful insight into what ontology is (or was) supposed to be and what it was not supposed to be. These two more determinate, i.e. less universal, senses of entity will therefore paint a more determinate picture of what the science investigating them is intended to look like.

Starting with Something, or *aliquid*, Clauberg says the following:

§18 If what we think about does not involve any impossibility in our thought, (...) such that we might judge it to be in the nature of things or at least that it can be, we thus not only attribute to it *objective being* [*esse objectivum*], but also *real being* [*esse reale*], and we call it not only *νοητὸν*, “intelligible,” but also *ἐτὸν*, properly Something, *τί*, *ichts/etwas*.<sup>58</sup>

The question presenting itself now concerns the difference between Entity in the first and second sense. Clauberg says that to treat “what we think about” not merely as the “intelligible” (first sense of entity), but also as “properly Something”, should not involve any impossibility in our thought. However, it seems that this condition was already there for treating anything as merely ‘intelligible’. What, in that case, constitutes the difference between the first and the second sense?

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<sup>58</sup> Clauberg, *Ontosophia*. Translation modified from Bardout 2002, p. 133.



The solution seems to lie in the qualification presented: when talking about the ‘properly Something’ it is possible to judge it to be, or at least judge it to be able to be, in the nature of things. This, as Clauberg explains in §21, does not mean that the thing in question, in order to be ‘properly Something’, needs to exist: “To posit a reality, it is enough if something [quid] can be, even if it does not really exist... (it is enough if it does not involve a contradiction).”<sup>59</sup> In fact, similar to the first sense, “reality is determined by the conditions for thought: what is real is what can be positively thought, what is the content of a concept... Clauberg’s ontology thus completely disassociates what is “real” from what exists.”<sup>60</sup> A way to gain an understanding of what Clauberg proposes is to see what the second sense of Entity excludes. Recall that in the first sense of Entity what is included is everything thinkable *simpliciter*. This includes “Cerberus and other fictions, and Nothing itself...”<sup>61</sup> Entity in the first sense knows not of its opposite. In fact, “*it is not possible for anything to be opposed to Entity* or to the Intelligible, of which we are in presence of, not even by fictions of the mind.”<sup>62</sup> *Something*, on the other hand, is understood as “the opposite of Nothing.”<sup>63</sup> In the second sense of Entity, therefore, the first duality or opposition arises for Clauberg: the opposition between Something and Nothing.

As mentioned before, Something and Nothing can both be attributed “objective being”, *esse objectivum*; however, Nothing is what lacks *esse reale*. To be Nothing, one must judge it impossible to be in the nature of things. This seems to refer to what could be called ‘oxymoronic entities’, such as ‘wooden iron’ or ‘a man with horse’s essence’. In fact, in the note to §18 which is supposed to clarify the idea of the “impossibility in our thought”, Clauberg points out that all impossibility arises from something composed “by the mind

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<sup>59</sup> Translation modified from Bardout 2002, p. 133. Bardout mistakenly references this paragraph as §12, rather than as §21. Cf. Aquinas’ second sense of *ens* in *De Ente*, Cap. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Bardout 2002, p. 133.

<sup>61</sup> Clauberg, *Ontosophia* §12.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, §9.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, §§4, 24.

and in the mind”, while simple concepts can never exemplify impossibility, suggesting that Nothing is constituted by the set of composite entities with contradictory natures. What the second sense of Entity allows, therefore, is the differentiation between Something and Nothing, i.e. between thoughts expressing entities (since they are all entities in the first sense) with consistent and inconsistent natures. Such an opposition is not present under the first sense, since the opposition to the first sense of entity cannot be conceived and if it cannot be conceived it cannot be. Based on this, Clauberg further discusses the uses of ‘Nothing’ and ‘*non Ens*’ in common speech arguing that, although it might seem so, they never refer to a Nothing in the primary sense, but in the secondary sense from which they ground the ideas of contradiction, privation, and negation.<sup>64</sup>

The final of the three senses of Entity Clauberg considers is ‘substance’. In a vein similar to Something, the sense of Something is invoked in order to distinguish between a thing [res] and its accidents and modes.

§42 The third meaning of *entity* is also, in the most proper sense called a *Thing* or... *real Entity (ens reale)*. We have this meaning in mind when we distinguish thing from mode of a thing... a thing such as the human soul, from its attributes, such as the faculty of understanding.<sup>65</sup>

Similarly to the way in which the Something and Nothing distinction of the second sense was used to ground the differentiation between those entities which are ‘really something’ and those which are not, which are fictions or entities of reason, the third sense of entity is posited in order to ground the distinction between what is essential for a particular entity and what is accidental. In that way, the *nothing* of the second sense of Entity is transformed from ‘that which cannot be judged as possibly belonging to any nature’ into ‘that which does not necessarily belong to a particular nature.’ It might be important to note that Clauberg’s conception of substance is different from

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. Clauberg, *Ontosophia* §24 note to *Non ens*, and §§31, 34, 36.

<sup>65</sup> Translation modified from Bardout 2002, p. 133.

that of Aristotle. Substance is not seen as the primary sense of entity, i.e. entity in its most general conception in the order of nature.<sup>66</sup> In fact, Clauberg's understanding of Substance is straightforwardly Cartesian:

§44 Substance, or that which exists in such a way that it does not need a subject in which to exist, is usually opposed to *Accident*, which is that which exists in something else as in a subject or whose being is to "be in" [cujus esse est inesse].

### 3. The Early History of Ontology

More can be said, at this point, about Clauberg's notions of Something, Nothing, Substance, etc. It will, however, not be necessary for the course of this narrative on the history of ontology. The important point I wanted to stress is Clauberg's adoption of what I have called the double primacy of metaphysics. From the way he has described his starting point I have argued that he has started a system which starts from what he conceives to be the most universal in nature (Entity as the intelligible) and proceeds from the universal towards the particular. Starting in such a way, as well as claiming that this procedure is required in order to ground any subsequent philosophical and scientific discipline is what constitutes Clauberg's appeal to the double primacy of metaphysics, or of the discipline he names *ontosophia* or *ontologia*. From here the next step is Wolff, but before proceeding to his philosophy I will finish with a summary provided by Bardout:

The rest of Clauberg's *Ontosophia* proceeds in a more traditional fashion, as a manual devoted to presenting the definitions of the principal concepts of metaphysics and to describing the principal properties of beings...

Through its variety of topics, Clauberg's *Ontosophia* presents itself, under the guise of a general metaphysics or universal

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<sup>66</sup> For a historical account of the historical change of the conception of Substance or *οὐσία* from Aristotelian to the Early Modern understanding see Kosman 2014.

science that studies and describes the most general aspects of being, as a prolegomenon to all the sciences that subsequently treat of particular kinds of being. It thus presumes for its subject a primacy with respect to physics, medicine, or ethics.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Bardout 2002, p. 134.

## Chapter Two: Wolff's Ontology

### I. The Name from Clauberg to Wolff

Wolff occupies an important place within the history of the name 'ontology' since it is due to him that the term becomes 'fixed' within the general philosophical lexicon. As discussed before, he is not the first one to use the *name* ontology, and he is not the first to use it as a technical term describing a certain foundational philosophical discipline.<sup>1</sup> Wolff is very aware of this and himself provides multiple references to, for example, Clauberg whose work on the topic preceded Wolff's and it is very likely that it is due to Wolff that the term *ontologia* is the one to survive rather than Clauberg's preferred *ontosophia*.<sup>2</sup> The significance of Wolff, in this historical trajectory, is not in his originality, but in his ability to popularise the term which he finds in use prior to him. This phenomenon in itself is neither novel, nor outlandish. One simply has to recall the fixing of the Ancient Greek words ὄλη and εἶδος (literally 'forest; woodland' and 'that which is seen; form; shape') by Plato and Aristotle, and *Dasein* by Heidegger in order to see other instances of previously used terms being transformed to a new philosophical meaning.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Another appearances of the term *Ontologia/Ontosophia*, besides the ones I focused on in the previous chapter, can be found, for example, in Micraelius' 1653 Lexicon, Calovius' *Metaphysica divina* of 1636, and Caramuel de Lobkowitz' *Rationalis et Realis Philosophia* of 1642. For a short account of the differing conceptions in these works see Mora 1963, pp. 40-3. Mora (ibid. p. 46) points out that the first one to properly introduce "ontology" as a technical term was Jean Le Clerk in his *Ontologia sive de ente in genere* of 1722 (8 years before Wolff's *Ontologia*). On the other hand, Mora suggests that this work did not influence Wolff, with whose conception "the early history of ontology ends", but that Wolff was rather influenced by Clauberg and Leibniz.

<sup>2</sup> The last use of the term *ontosophia*, according to Mora (ibid. p. 44) appears in Étienne Chauvin's *Lexicon Philosophicum* of 1713. Mora does not point out that it can also be found in Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*, §4, although this cannot truly constitute a 'use' of a term, since it is mentioned only in passing as one of the synonyms for *ontology*.

<sup>3</sup> In contrast to *Ontologia* the three mentioned terms carry an additional complication of also being used as ordinary language terms in their respective languages. Since the term *Ontologia* never had an ordinary language counterpart, emerging as a purely

Regarding the history of the name with respect to Goclenius and Clauberg it would be interesting to see what Wolff has to say about the two thinkers. In fact, in his *Ontologia*, Wolff refers rather positively to both authors. Specifically, he refers to Goclenius' *Lexicon* at multiple places in the text, as well as Clauberg's *Metaphysica de Ente* which I have spoken of earlier, and his *Physica Contracta* which I have not spoken of.<sup>4</sup> Somewhat unfortunately, however, Wolff does not refer to their *conceptions* of ontology/ontosophy or their relation to the term itself.<sup>5</sup> Wolff refers to the two thinkers mostly in discussion of specific topics of ontology, such as causation, possibility, or essence. Additionally, although probably not surprisingly, Wolff refers to the full title of Clauberg's *Metaphysica de Ente sive Ontosophia* only once, preferring to refer to the text as *Metaphysica de Ente* which he often quotes. The name 'ontosophia' itself is not discussed. Regarding Clauberg, Wolff sometimes refers to him as "excellent", a "strenuous propagator of Cartesian philosophy", and "the best interpreter of Descartes."<sup>6</sup> Perhaps interestingly, the aim of most of the sections in which Wolff refers to the two thinkers tends to be to demonstrate the continuity of Wolff's definitions of ontological concepts through the same or similar concepts found in preceding traditions, be they Aristotelianism, Cartesianism, or Scholasticism.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, as already

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technical term, achieving a unified conception is much easier. As is the case with every term, however, this unity does not last indefinitely.

<sup>4</sup> For Goclenius see, for example WO, §§485, 502, 567, 760, *et passim*; for Clauberg: WO, §§7, 103, *et passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Clauberg is, however, listed among the people "who have improved First Philosophy" (WO, §7). At this point in the text, however, the term 'First Philosophy' is used as a generic term for metaphysics, lacking any particular determination, Wolffian or otherwise. As such, First Philosophy is here attributed to the Scholastics (who engaged in it badly) and to the subsequent thinkers who have 'improved it', such as Descartes, Clauberg, and Leibniz, by engaging with it using "scientific and also philosophical method".

<sup>6</sup> WO, §§169, 865, 761.

<sup>7</sup> Wolff here aims at something more than mere agreement. He believes that if one is to use proper philosophical method, which he holds himself as the first clear developer of, one might "disagree with the words used by another, even though he

mentioned, none of these references to Clauberg or Goclenius concerns the name ontology, or Wolff's preference for that term in contrast to ontosophy. The only reason Wolff gives for his decision to name first philosophy ontology is "because this part [of philosophy] treats of the entity in general, whereby it has obtained its name from the object, with which it is concerned."<sup>8</sup>

The history of the name, in the way it is conceived of in this thesis ends with Wolff. After him the term is established as belonging to overall philosophical terminology and is free to be mutated and re-conceptualised by subsequent thinkers. As such, the history of the conception of ontology is far from over. In that case, where is Wolff in the history of the conception?

Besides 'fixing' and popularising the term, Wolff popularises a certain conception of metaphysics, or even of scientific knowledge in general, in which ontology, as conceived by Wolff, plays a crucial part. Generally speaking, I refer to the idea of the separation of sciences, especially but not exclusively of metaphysics, into an arboreal hierarchical system in which sciences 'further down the line' presuppose (in a certain way) the 'higher' sciences. In Wolff's system specifically this takes the form of the still well known (although rarely utilised) division between *Metaphysica Specialis* and *Metaphysica Generalis*, the latter of which is also known as *Ontologia*.

Such a conception of a system, or of a structure of human knowledge, is itself not completely new. One can find similar conceptions of a system in Descartes's conception of the *Tree of the Sciences*, or in the works by Francis Bacon, or in Scholastic Aristotelianism (none of these use the term ontology, but tend to present science or human knowledge in a general, systematic

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does not disagree in regard to the subject matter (...) and vice versa..." (DP, §158). This is because what Wolff sees himself doing, by properly employing the philosophical method, is changing the words "of vague signification" inherited from the previous traditions to words "of fixed signification," (ibid.). For more details about Wolff's eagerness to conform to established usage of terms and how this plays into his wider systematic concerns see Fugate and Hymers in BM, Introduction, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> WO, §In.

structure). Once again, therefore, the greatest significance of Wolff lies in the popularity of his ideas rather than their exceptional originality.

In fact, one can trace the influence of Wolff to the conceptual division of Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopaedia*. The main division of human knowledge in the *Encyclopaedia* is taken from Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning* and separates all knowledge into three categories: Memory/History, Reason/Philosophy, Imagination/Poetry. The philosophy section is separated in a broadly Wolffian manner with, most importantly, the main category of the section being "General Metaphysics, or Ontology, or the Science of an Entity in General..."<sup>9</sup>

The incredible popularity which Wolff's conception of Philosophy achieved in Europe in his time has been documented elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> A helpful remark regarding this popularity for the purposes of my project can be found in Gilson:

When today we make use of the term "ontology," what it means to us is just the same as "metaphysics." Not so in the philosophy of Wolff, who needed a new word to designate a

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<sup>9</sup> Similarly to Wolff, and controversially for the time, the Science of God in the *Encyclopaedia* is put on a parallel level to Ontology, and subjugated to Philosophy. Unlike in the case of Wolff, encyclopaedic notion of Natural Theology is *not* subjugated to Ontology and there are differences in the division of some other sciences. The inclusion of ontology on the fundamental level of philosophical knowledge is, I believe, Wolffian in influence. Wolff does feature in the *Encyclopaedia*, although primarily in the section on *Cosmology*. Mora (1963, p. 46) also points out that there is "a curious, and rather neglected, reference to Ontology in the article "Ontologie" of the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, t. XI, N-PAR (Neufchastel, 1765)" which presents the term in a way "rather uncritical of Wolff's *Philosophia Prima sive Ontologia*..."

<sup>10</sup> For the early popularity of Wolff's work in Germany see Beck, 1696 p. 258. For the spread of Wolffianism to France and Prussia and the popularity of his philosophy among women, which has resulted in a "veritable lycanthropy" see Beck 1969, p. 260 & 260n28. For its spread to Scandinavia via Jens Kraft, see Øhrstrøm et al. 2005, p. 432.



new thing... Nothing can now give us an idea of the authority which his doctrine enjoyed throughout the schools of Europe, and especially in Germany. To innumerable professors and students of philosophy, metaphysics was Wolff and what Wolff had said was metaphysics.<sup>11</sup>

Wolff's works are generally separated into his German works written during his position in Halle and his Latin works written after his banishment from Halle to Marburg by Frederick William I and the censure of his metaphysical works in Prussia.<sup>12</sup> Since my main interest in Wolff's philosophy in this work regards his conception of ontology I will focus on the set of Latin works, since this is where the term really gains prominence. The key work to refer to is, of course, *Philosophia Prima sive Ontologia* of 1730, but also *Discursus Praeliminaris* of 1728, an introductory work attached to his Latin Logic whose aim is to provide a short and concise introduction to the nature and structure of Wolff's overall system.

## **2. The Division of Metaphysics and the Position of Ontology**

The belief that Wolff is the one who divided metaphysics into *Generalis* and *Specialis*, the former of which being called ontology and treating of entities in general, while latter is subdivided into specialised disciplines dealing with particular metaphysical objects, is today fairly commonplace. Interestingly, to follow the terminology I have been using so far, although the *conception* of the separation of metaphysics into *Generalis* and *Specialis* is present in Wolff's work, the terms *Metaphysica Generalis/Specialis* are not.<sup>13</sup> While Wolff does talk about 'special' disciplines of metaphysics in his Latin works, which he separates from ontology, the often-invoked, clearly posited Wolffian division

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<sup>11</sup> Gilson, 1952, p. 119.

<sup>12</sup> For reasons and a colourful description of Wolff's banishment, including the punishment involved with breaking the censure on teaching of his metaphysics see Schönfeld, 2002, pp. 546-7.

<sup>13</sup> And, according to Vollrath (1962, p. 262), they cannot be found either in Wolff's German works, or in his Latin Logic, or in *Discursus Praeliminaris* or in the *Prolegomena to Ontologia*.

of metaphysics into *Generalis* and *Specialis* does not appear in these works, but is a later convention.<sup>14</sup>

As Vollrath points out, Wolff was the first to make the *Generalis/Specialis* division, which becomes standard by the time of Baumgarten and is, as such, utilised by Baumgarten.<sup>15</sup> To use my terminology, Vollrath is here referring to Wolff using the division *in conception*, not in the name. This can be seen from the fact that he supports his claim by referring to §2 of Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*, which states: "To metaphysics belong ontology, cosmology, psychology, and natural theology." In the text of the *Metaphysica*, however, Baumgarten, similarly to Wolff, does not use the terms *Metaphysica Generalis* and *Specialis*, and the closest he comes to that is by defining ontology as '*metaphysica universalis*'. The literal separation of metaphysics into *Generalis* and *Specialis*, which is held to epitomise pre-Kantian metaphysics and its most famous proponents, is therefore not to be found in either Wolff or Baumgarten.

However, to risk repeating myself, while Wolff and Baumgarten do not tend to designate the separation of metaphysics using the terms the subsequent tradition has assigned to them, the tradition is faithful to the

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<sup>14</sup> Caygill prudently and correctly ascribes it "to the tradition of Wolff and Baumgarten" (CoPR, Introduction, p. xv). The closest terminology I could find in Wolff is in his explanation of the definition of Natural Theology which he explains is defined not by expressly mentioning "attributes and operations of God", but by conceiving of it "in general terms by which it is deduced as a special definition from the general definition of philosophy." DP, 57n.

<sup>15</sup> Vollrath 1962, pp. 259-60. I have already spoken about the fact that the division of metaphysics into universal and particular already appears in Lorhard and how it was different from what is usually accepted as Wolff's division. It is not the case that Wolff was the first one to *attempt* to divide metaphysics as a science. In fact, such an attempt lies at a core of any medieval interpretation of Aristotle and is connected to what I have called the Aristotelian *ambiguity of metaphysics*. What Vollrath seems to refer here is the fact that the specific manner of dividing metaphysics that became synonymous with 18<sup>th</sup> Century German (or, for Kant, *dogmatic*) metaphysics originates from Wolff. For this, see also de Boer, 2011, p. 53.

conception of the separation present in their works. They both subscribe to a form of general metaphysics, which precedes the disciplines of special metaphysics. Metaphysics conceived in this general manner is conceived as a science of an entity in general which intends to ground subsequent (metaphysical) sciences and, besides being a science of universal predicates of an entity *qua* entity, general metaphysics is simultaneously seen as “the science that contains first (or primary) principles of human cognition.”<sup>16</sup>

In this chapter I will focus on elucidating Wolff’s conception of this ‘general metaphysics’ or ontology. Beyond general elucidation, my aim here is to show that Wolff’s ontology exemplifies what I have called ‘the double primacy of metaphysics’. However, in order to spell out what this means and how it manifests itself in Wolff, and to explicate, the historical or traditional meaning of the term ‘ontology’, it will be necessary to explain Wolff’s conception in more detail. Besides showing what ontology itself is for Wolff, I will need to show how ontology relates to the special metaphysical sciences. Wolff was, for better or for worse, aiming to construct a comprehensive system of sciences, and as such the architectonic connection between the grounding discipline of ontology and the subsequent disciplines needs to be explained. But this cannot be the starting point, since Wolff’s division of metaphysics is dependent on his understanding of what philosophy is, what philosophical cognition is, and of what constitutes the scientific manner of philosophising. And since the beginning is usually a good place to start from, I will start from Wolff’s *Discursus Praeliminaris* and his division of cognition.

### **2. 1. The division of knowing**

Wolff divides cognition [*cognitio*] into three separate kinds: historical, philosophical, and mathematical. Historical cognition can be found in an act of merely knowing a certain fact, or as Wolff puts it, it is a “cognition of that

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<sup>16</sup> *Metaphysica est scientia prima cognitionis humanae principia continens*. See Vollrath, 1962, p. 259.

*which is and occurs* either in the material world or in immaterial substance...”<sup>17</sup>

Some examples Wolff provides of this kind of cognition are: knowing that the sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening, that buds blossom in spring, etc. In fact, reading the *Discursus* one can quickly notice how general and widely-encompassing Wolff’s definitions tend to be. There is, for Wolff, no difference in kind between knowing that I am feeling slightly chilly and that the surrounding layer of Jupiter is made of liquid metallic hydrogen with some helium. Both, as examples of knowledge of facts, fall under historical cognition.<sup>18</sup>

Philosophical cognition, on the other hand, is understood as “the cognition *of the reason* of that which is or occurs.”<sup>19</sup> In order for us to cognize something philosophically, we first need to cognize it historically. Historical cognition tells us what is and occurs, i.e. what is actual, and hence what is

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<sup>17</sup> DP, §3. Emphasis mine. I have consistently modified Blackwell’s translation of *cognitio* (when referring to the 3 kinds of cognition) from *knowledge* to *cognition*. The reason for this is not a mere desire for etymological proximity. Rather than that, it seems to me that Wolff’s division is better understood if one looks at it as a separation of the kinds of *activities* of knowing or gaining knowledge, instead of as a separation of *states* of having knowledge. Etymology might help, however, since the *cognition* comes to English directly from *cognitio*, a noun-form of *cognoscere* which designates activity, meaning ‘to become acquainted with’; ‘to inquire’; ‘to learn’.

<sup>18</sup> Although the former would probably fall under the “common” or even “vulgar historical knowledge” since Wolff further separates historical cognition into these two kinds. See DP, §12. On the other hand, there is something more to say about Wolff’s ideas on the indubitability of the immediate sensory experiences, but that would be irrelevant for this point, since regardless of their ability they both count as examples of historical cognition since they exemplify a knowledge that a certain fact obtains, or that certain state or thing is or occurs.

<sup>19</sup> DP, §7 translation modified. Emphasis mine. Also as Beck (1969, p. 262) puts it: the goal of philosophy is “the knowledge of why things must be as they are – why they are possible if they are possible, and why they are actual if they are actual,” although I am getting slightly ahead of myself by quoting this.

possible, since what is actual is possible. These things are then to be cognized philosophically, i.e. one needs to understand *why* these things are or occur.<sup>20</sup>

From the mutual relation between these kinds of cognition it is clear that for Wolff the difference in the type of cognition is not determined by the *content* of one's cognition, but the nature of it, or the way in which a certain fact is understood. For example, I might know that the motion of the universe requires a Prime Mover since I have read this in Aristotle's *Physics*, and who am I to disagree with the Philosopher? Assuming that Aristotle is correct, this cosmological knowledge of mine is hereby *not* an example of my *philosophical* cognition of the origin and the condition of motion in the universe. Instead, my understanding of the universe is historical. I have merely used Aristotle as a source of my cognition of the brute fact about the reason for the motion in the universe. In order to gain *philosophical* cognition of the said motion, I need to *understand* the sequence of arguments (Aristotle's or someone else's) that resulted in the proposition that the motion requires a First Mover. The best way to reach such a state of understanding the *why* of the fact, rather than the mere *what* of the fact, is to form a "habit of demonstrating propositions, i.e. the habit of inferring conclusions by legitimate sequence from certain and immutable principles."<sup>21</sup> For Wolff, this means to engage in *science*. Wolff writes:

He who knows and understands the propositions of philosophy but cannot demonstrate them has historical cognition of philosophy. For he who knows and understands the propositions of philosophy knows what is taught in philosophy. Hence, since he knows a fact, he has historical cognition (§3). But since he cannot demonstrate the truth of these propositions, he lacks science (§30). Hence, he who is void of philosophy (§29) has only historical cognition of

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<sup>20</sup> Another point that illustrates the generality of Wolff's definitions: "He is a greater philosopher who can give the reason of more things, and he is a lesser philosopher who knows the reason of fewer things." DP, §47.

<sup>21</sup> DP, §30.

philosophy. Thus he cannot be called a philosopher (§46), unless you speak inconsistently, which has no place in philosophy.<sup>22</sup>

At this point one must again remember that what is described here is not a state of knowing of a fact, be that a fact of *how* or a fact of *why*, but a way of understanding or cognizing a fact. If Aristotle has already proven the requirement of the Prime Mover for the motion of the universe to a sufficiently scientific standard it is not enough for me to simply know or be able to recount his proof. The mere recounting of the proof would provide me with what Wolff refers to as “the historical knowledge of the philosophical knowledge of another man.”<sup>23</sup> I am certainly allowed to utilise Aristotle’s proof. There is no need for a philosopher to start proving everything *ab ovo*. But in order for me to be able to claim *philosophical* cognition of the status of motion in the universe I am required to understand the validity of the proof for such a state of affairs and be able to demonstrate its conclusion myself from the shared premises.

Wolff’s distinction between historical and philosophical cognition, at least regarding the way in which the possession of philosophical cognition of a subject matter is concerned, is analogous to the distinction between knowing, or using, mathematical theorems and proving them. The definition of philosophical cognition itself, i.e. the cognition of the *reason* of that which is or occurs, does not, in and of itself, necessarily invoke mathematics or mathematical thinking. But once it is, as Wolff intends it to be, formulated as a *scientific* philosophical cognition, i.e. the habit of inferring conclusions by legitimate sequence from certain and immutable principles, the distinction reveals itself to be akin to the aforementioned distinction in mathematical thinking. I have a historical knowledge of the Pythagorean theorem. I can state what it is, I can write it down, and I can use it to solve certain low-level geometrical problems or measure distances in physical space. I can, therefore,

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<sup>22</sup> DP, §50. Translation modified.

<sup>23</sup> DP, §8.

provide someone with the Pythagorean theorem, but I cannot provide a *reason for* the Pythagorean theorem. Specifically, I cannot infer it by legitimate sequence from certain and immutable principles such as, for example, Euclidean axioms. Hence I lack the *philosophical* cognition of the Pythagorean theorem.<sup>24</sup>

This analogy with mathematics is not accidental. Wolff is adamant that in order for philosophical cognition to be scientific it has to follow the demonstrative method, the best examples of which, according to Wolff, have been historically found in mathematics.<sup>25</sup> According to Beck (1969, p. 190) this idea comes from the influence of von Tschirnhaus' mathematical methodologies which is the model on which Wolff bases his syllogistic logic, and to which all proofs are intended to conform.<sup>26</sup>

This leads me to Wolff's third kind of cognition, *mathematical* cognition. For Wolff mathematical cognition is the cognition of the quantity of things<sup>27</sup> and as such differs from both philosophical and historical cognition: “[for] history rests in the bare knowledge of the fact (§3). In philosophy we discover the reason of things which are or can be (§6). And in mathematics we determine the quantities which are present in things.”<sup>28</sup> In a fashion analogous to philosophical cognition, there can be historical knowledge of mathematical truths, which I have illustrated above. The difference between philosophical and mathematical cognition of a truth, however, does not concern the *object* or phenomenon they treat of, but the *way* that object is treated. What an *object*

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<sup>24</sup> And if I attempt to prove this theorem by merely appealing “to Euclid and universal agreement of mathematicians” I would be universally laughed at. See DP, §156n.

<sup>25</sup> “If philosophers would imitate the mathematicians by handling, with an accurate method, what has already been discovered, they would continually progress further and acquire many new truths.” DP, §38n.

<sup>26</sup> Beck (1969, p. 262) also notes that, *pace* Descartes and von Tschirnhaus, Wolff considers the definition and the syllogism as essential to mathematics, rather than, *pace* Kant, intuition and construction. On Wolff's early and changing relation regarding syllogism in mathematics and philosophy see Corr 1970, pp. 135-7.

<sup>27</sup> DP, §14.

<sup>28</sup> DP, §17.

determines is a scientific discipline, such as philosophy or mathematics. If one is to read Wolff expecting this distinction in cognition to map to the knowledge of different objects or knowledge through different disciplines (history, philosophy, mathematics), one will find oneself with a history that is not historical, mathematics that is not mathematical, and philosophy that is not philosophical. This can be seen in Wolff's example that is supposed to "clearly illustrate the difference":

He who knows that the heat of the midday sun sometimes increases and sometimes decreases has historical knowledge. He who knows that a greater degree of heat depends on a greater density of the rays striking a plane and on a less oblique angle of incidence has philosophical knowledge. And he who can determine the density of the rays and the size of the angle, and hence the degree of heat, has mathematical knowledge.<sup>29</sup>

If I am reading Wolff correctly, this curiously suggests that the *scientific* understanding of the Pythagorean theorem as such, that I have described above, i.e. my ability to derive it from firm and immutable principles does not result in a *mathematical* cognition of the theorem, but in a philosophical one. This is because *mathematical* cognition concerns *quantities*, while philosophical concerns *reasons*. In that way, if I can prove the Pythagorean theorem from Euclidean axioms, i.e. I can demonstrate *why* this relation holds, I have a philosophical understanding of the theorem. If I know that my computer screen is a 13" screen because I have read so on the box it came in I have a historical knowledge of quantity. If I can derive that information by deriving the length of the diagonal of the screen from the length of the catheti, my cognition is to count as mathematical, since I "can determine" the length of the diagonal (and probably the size of the angles, if I so wanted).

This shows that what Wolff has in mind in his separation of cognition into three fundamental kinds does not of itself constitute a separation into

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<sup>29</sup> DP, §17n.



scientific disciplines. Division of kinds of cognition, likewise, is *not* based on the treatment of different kinds of objects (e.g. historical facts VS mathematical objects VS synthetic *a priori* judgments). On the other hand, it can be seen from *Ontologia* §7, that philosophy (or at this place more specifically metaphysics) and mathematics as *sciences*, not as kinds of cognition, differ on the basis of the object they treat.<sup>30</sup> Since the division of cognition distinguishes different possible ways of cognizing phenomena, rather than disciplines, Wolff is able to a) allow for the mutually enhancing combinations of different kinds of cognition (as he shows in his example); and b) allow for scientific disciplines to be mutually informative. The latter point is enabled by not restricting kinds of cognition to a discipline. This means that philosophy, a scientific discipline that most closely correlates with philosophical cognition, can use mathematical discoveries even if we define mathematics as a science of mathematical *objects* such as numbers, functions, sets, and imaginary planes. Since kinds of cognitions transcend disciplinary boundaries and are univocally applied across the sciences, this opens a possibility of connecting sciences in a mutually supportive network, or the system.<sup>31</sup>

That being so, kinds of cognition are separate from the sciences they might resemble. In relation to this, Hettche, for example, points to Wolff's distinction between 'common' or 'vulgar' knowledge which he sees as the 'natural way of thinking' and 'scientific knowledge'.<sup>32</sup> However, he then claims that three types of cognition (which he refers to as three types of knowledge)

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<sup>30</sup> “[W]hat metaphysical concepts correspond to, does not fall in the same way as mathematical under the senses and imagination and also is not as easy to put to proof.” Interestingly, for Wolff a scientific object is characterised by objects to which concepts of a specific science correspond to, but the criteria of such a division does not seem to be very strict. See DP, §145: “Philosophical terms [*termini philosophici*] are the names given to thing which are discerned by the philosopher, but not by the common man.”

<sup>31</sup> Indeed, as I will discuss subsequently, Wolff frequently attempts to point out from which other discipline a certain discipline has to “borrow its principles” in order to provide a legitimate demonstration of something (see, e.g., DP, §38n).

<sup>32</sup> Hettche, 2016, §3.

fall under the scientific one. And while I do agree with the former point, I do not agree with the latter one. Wolff does distinguish between “common” [*cognitio communis*] and “vulgar” [*cognitio vulgi*] cognition, making the former “the lowest grade of human knowledge”.<sup>33</sup> However, Wolff claims that both instances are instances of *historical* cognition, meaning that they, as a genus, cannot be opposed to historical cognition if historical cognition is understood, according to Hettche, as a species of scientific knowledge.<sup>34</sup> So if scientific knowledge is separate from Wolff’s three kinds of cognition, what is it that makes something into a science?

## **2. 2. Demonstrative, philosophical, and mathematical method**

Philosophical cognition, as I have mentioned above, is understood as “the cognition of *the reason* of that which is or occurs.”<sup>35</sup> In order for a science to be formed on the basis of this kind of cognition it will have to be a science that will provide the reason for that which is or occurs by following a scientific method or by “inferring conclusions by legitimate sequence from certain and immutable principles.”<sup>36</sup>

In and of itself this description of the scientific method does not tell us much since it does not specify what is meant by ‘legitimate sequence’ or what ‘certain and immutable principles’ are. I have mentioned in the last section that Wolff models the conception of this method on mathematics, which Wolff understood as proceeding in a syllogistically deductive manner. Indeed, Wolff claims that: “If philosophers would imitate the mathematicians by handling, with an accurate method, what has already been discovered, they would

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<sup>33</sup> DP, §§22, 23.

<sup>34</sup> He does proceed to state that: “each category [of cognition] is again sub-divided into particular scientific disciplines”. I agree with this to the extent that categories of cognition are separate from their disciplines, but not to the extent that they perfectly map to these disciplines, i.e. are exclusive to them.

<sup>35</sup> DP, §7.

<sup>36</sup> DP, §30.

continually progress further and acquire many new truths.”<sup>37</sup> Later on in the text of the *Discursus* he goes even further:

The rules of philosophical method are the same as the rules of mathematical method... The identity of philosophical and mathematical method will be a surprise only to him who does not know the common source from which the rules of both mathematics and philosophy are derived. We have deduced the rules of philosophical method from the notion of certitude (...) [a]nd if one searches for the reason for mathematical method, he will find that it is the certitude of knowledge which every mathematician seeks in his own field... Therefore, since the rules of both philosophical and mathematical cognition are based upon the same reason, it is no wonder these rules are the same.<sup>38</sup>

This statement of identity raises the question of what then constitutes this mathematical method and how philosophy is to imitate such a method. One thing this identity in method does not mean, however, is that philosophy is to ‘do’ exactly what mathematics ‘does’ or that philosophical reasoning is to become a case of mathematical cognition. As Wolff says, the identity of method has its ground in the shared characteristic of philosophical and mathematical cognition (and cognition in general): the desire for certitude. Be that as it may, mathematical cognition concerns quantities of things,

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<sup>37</sup> DP, §38n.

<sup>38</sup> DP, §§139, 139n. Translation modified. A similar idea can be seen resurging in Lambert’s 1761 *Abhandlung zum Criterium Veritatis*, §21 (*apud* Watkins 2009). Lambert there argues that “Ancient mathematicians realised that one must distinguish between propositions that one admits without proof and those for the acceptance of which the proof is needed. The truth of the latter, they saw, could only be clear if deduced from the former. A way of doing so gave them a concept of method that was for a long time called the mathematical method, but it can be called the natural method, because it is the soul’s true way of thinking and can be utilized in every science.” Wolff would certainly agree that the mathematical method is a formalisation of the soul’s true way of thinking and that it could be utilized in every science.

philosophical cognition concerns reasons *why* the things are the way they are. So the mathematical method in philosophy cannot merely consist in ‘doing whatever mathematicians do’. In discussing Wolff’s preference for mathematical method, Corr characterises mathematical method thus: “Mathematics [understood as a discipline] moves steadily forward because of its strict, procedural standards of clarity and certitude. Each step in a mathematical chain of arguments is subjected to rigid scrutiny to assure its absolute accuracy and necessity. Since nothing less is accepted, the whole series of demonstrations takes on the indubitable character of its smallest step.”<sup>39</sup> This is what it means for Wolff to emulate mathematical ‘method’. It does not mean, to provide a caricature, to reduce all judgments to points on a function.

From an earlier part of the passage quoted above we can see that when Wolff talks about identifying philosophical and mathematical method, he conceives of what a ‘method’ is very loosely. This way of conceiving of a method, similarly to his division of kinds of cognition, is not bound to any particular object or field of study. Hence we find out that the rules of the philosophical method, which are identified with the rules of the mathematical method, are the following: a) only use accurately defined terms; b) admit as true only that which was sufficiently demonstrated; c) accurately determine the subject and predicate of every proposition; d) order everything so that “those things come first through which later things are understood and established.”

After this identification has been established, and after Wolff has shown what it consists of, he proceeds to show that philosophico-mathematical method is, in fact, neither properly speaking philosophical, nor mathematical, but that there is only one, univocally applied method of science:

Even if mathematics did not exist, or if it were not sufficiently developed to offer certain knowledge to its devotees, there still would be no other philosophical method than the one

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<sup>39</sup> Corr 1970, p. 134.

which we have established... Therefore, it is vain and useless to apply every discrepancy in mathematical method to philosophy, for philosophy does not borrow its method from mathematics; rather, both philosophy and mathematics derive their methods from true logic.<sup>40</sup>

Once characterised in this way the identification of philosophical method with the mathematical one does not seem very significant (or strictly speaking methodological). We find out that the separation of the method of science into mathematical and philosophical is merely accidental. It just so happens to be the case that mathematicians historically aligned their method closer to this true logic. But the characteristics of the true logic itself do not seem to be very specific. Such characterisations, to be rigorous, accurate, rigid, etc., are, in my view, characters of *style* rather than method.<sup>41</sup>

However, one characteristic of this method is probably more important than the others, and that is the idea that the true method orders everything so that “those things come first through which later things are understood and established.” This feature comes to characterise the scientific method as such, to which philosophical and mathematical cognition need to conform to in order to establish philosophy, mathematics, or any other branch of knowing as

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<sup>40</sup> DP, §139n. See my note on Lambert, above. Corr (1970, p. 135) further points out that in his 1703 dissertation, entitled *De philosophia practica universalis, mathematica methodo conscripta*, Wolff was guided by the idea “philosophy must become the twin of mathematics to the last detail,” and says that Wolff’s “slavish adherence to mathematical form” was later “abandoned under the stimulus of Leibniz.” It seems that Wolff did at one point attempt to “apply every discrepancy” of mathematics to philosophy. Corr also further notes how in the years starting with the publication of the Latin Logic, the subtitle of Wolff’s dissertation changes to *methodo scientifica pertracta*.

<sup>41</sup> By which I am *not* referring to Wolff’s conception of the philosophical style. Blackwell (DP, Introduction, p. X) puts it correctly: “Philosophy attains to complete certitude insofar as it shares in the *values* of mathematical method.” Interestingly, Kant uses similar terms during the rare moments of praising Wolff’s method.

a science.<sup>42</sup>

Let us take the example of philosophy. Wolff argues that philosophy is a science. Since philosophy is a science, the things which it treats should be inferred by legitimate sequence from certain and immutable principles.<sup>43</sup> From this Wolff concludes that “those parts of philosophy which provide principles for the other parts should come first; and those parts which borrow principles should come later.”<sup>44</sup> Since this characteristic follows merely from the fact that philosophy is (or should be) a science, this suggests that any science, in Wolff’s view, ought to be a hierarchical system with certain principles having priority and other principles being accessible through derivation from these prior principles. This means that certain disciplines cannot reach a scientific status before they have been shown to be legitimately derived from prior disciplines, or as Wolff puts it they “cannot be developed according to the demonstrative method.”<sup>45</sup> This means that Wolff’s division of metaphysics arises as a consequence of the way he understood the scientific method itself:

Philosophical method is the order which the philosopher ought to use in treating dogmas... Philosophy should be ordered so that those things come first through which later things are understood and demonstrated... Therefore, the *supreme law of philosophical method* is that those things must come first through which later things are understood and established... This is the same order which must be observed in *ordering the parts of philosophy*. Therefore, one and the same

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<sup>42</sup> Hence Wolff will sometimes refer to this as a scientific method or as philosophical method, mathematical method, or demonstrative method. There does not seem to be significant difference between these, once it is understood that they depend on this order of derivation.

<sup>43</sup> From the DP, §30 definition of science.

<sup>44</sup> DP, §86.

<sup>45</sup> DP, §73n.

order is used throughout the whole of philosophy... This is the main point of philosophical method.<sup>46</sup>

Now that the philosophical method has been established and I have shown how, in Wolff's view, it follows from the very understanding of what a scientific method is, it is time to proceed to the division of metaphysics and see that part of philosophy which is supposed to be the first in the philosophical order.

### **2. 3. Science, experiments, and special metaphysics**

Philosophical *cognition* provides one with an insight into "the reason of that which is or occurs". Philosophical *method* is the process of the derivation of these reasons in a strict, hierarchical way by a legitimate sequence from certain and immutable principles. Philosophy, as a *discipline*, however, is something more specific: it is "the science of the possibles insofar as they can be."<sup>47</sup> This does not merely mean that philosophy is in the business of showing what is possible. Since philosophical cognition concerns the question of the reason of facts, philosophy must also "demonstrate why the possibles could actually occur,"<sup>48</sup> and if there are many possibles only some of which occur and others do not, philosophy must provide the reason of why some occur and others do not.<sup>49</sup>

This shows that philosophy is concerned with possibility and actuality, however, with an emphasis on possibility. The reason for this goes back to the separation of the kinds of cognition. Historical cognition is rooted in actuality. It consists in cognising something as a brute fact. As such, historical cognition provides one with an understanding of *what* is actual and, since it is actual it shows that it *is* possible. However, it is the job of philosophical cognition to answer the *why* of the fact that something is actual and possible. This is

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<sup>46</sup> DP, §§133-134n. Emphasis mine.

<sup>47</sup> DP, §29.

<sup>48</sup> DP, §31.

<sup>49</sup> DP, §32. Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1P11d2.

achieved through the scientific (hierarchical, syllogistic) investigation into the relation of possibilities, or more specifically, *conditions of predication*:

[W]hatever is predicated of an entity belongs to it only under a certain condition. It makes no difference whether this condition is sought for in the definition or somewhere else. Now he who is acquainted with philosophy knows the reason why a thing is or occurs (§7). Therefore, he perceives the condition under which something is predicated of an entity, and consequently, he does not attribute the predicate to the entity unless he sees that the condition is present.<sup>50</sup>

This tells us that the aim of philosophy is to determine the conditions of predication, i.e. under which circumstances something can be predicated of something. This is primarily an investigation into the possibility of predication, since actual predication needs to be preceded by the establishment of the presence of the condition of predication. Furthermore, what makes something actual is existence, and existence is itself a *complement of possibility*.<sup>51</sup> As such, it is considered to be something added to possibility, therefore requiring the possibility of the thing, of which it is predicated, to be established beforehand.

In the previous section we have seen that Wolff's conception of method requires a hierarchical separation of sciences. This separation will be undertaken according to the order of possibilities and the order of actuality. By the order of possibility I mean the order in which sciences 'borrow' principles from one another. By the order of actualities I mean whether the science in question is supposed to treat of an actually existing entity and if yes, of which.

Philosophy is thereby separated into three parts. First, practical philosophy is the part of philosophy treating of "the use of the appetitive

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<sup>50</sup> DP, §41.

<sup>51</sup> WO, §174.



faculty in choosing good and avoiding evil.”<sup>52</sup> Second, there is metaphysics, which is the common name for ontology, general (or transcendental) cosmology, and pneumatics (which is itself the common name for psychology, as well as natural theology).<sup>53</sup> Third, there is physics, which “gives the reason of those things which can occur through bodies,” and which is further separated into general physics (the science of things that pertain to all bodies or to diverse species of bodies), cosmology (which treats of the totality of bodies in the world and teaches how the world is composed from them), and many other more specific sciences, such as the science of atmospheric phenomena, minerals, fluids, etc.<sup>54</sup>

Wolff considers these three as “primary disciplines, which embrace all the others.”<sup>55</sup> Out of the three, metaphysics holds demonstrative primacy, meaning that the principles it discovers will be used, or ‘borrowed’, in the other two disciplines. This is because “practical philosophy, as well as the rest of philosophy, must use in its demonstrations the universal notions which are developed in ontology,” and likewise, practical philosophy “borrows principles from ontology, psychology, and natural theology, which are parts of metaphysics.”<sup>56</sup> Physics is similarly dependent on metaphysics:

If everything is to be demonstrated accurately in physics, then principles must be borrowed from metaphysics. Physics explains those things which are possible through bodies.... If these things are to be treated demonstratively, then the notions of body, matter, nature, motion, the elements, and other such general notions must be known... Now these notions are explained in general cosmology and in ontology...

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<sup>52</sup> DP, §62.

<sup>53</sup> DP, §§78-79.

<sup>54</sup> DP, §§75-85; 107. It might be interesting to point out that Wolff treats physics as a part of philosophy, but not of metaphysics. He does not see it as a separate science as, one could argue, he treats mathematics.

<sup>55</sup> DP, §106.

<sup>56</sup> DP, §92.

Indeed almost every notion developed in ontology is used in physics, for every demonstration from cause to effect in physics depends upon ontological principles.<sup>57</sup>

There is, however, something more to be said about physics, which demonstrates the relation of Wolff's system to actuality and what can be called his empirical or experimental 'bent':

Physics gives the reason of those things which can occur through bodies... [General cosmology shows] that we cannot arrive at the ultimate reasons [*rationes ultimas*], but must be satisfied with reasons which are derived from proximate causes. Therefore, principles must be derived from experience, which can provide the reason of the things which occur. Since such principles are not always evident by observation, they must be brought to light by experiments.<sup>58</sup>

This inability to arrive at the ultimate reasons of physical phenomena through derivations from General cosmology suggests that it is impossible, or at least scientifically impractical, to attempt to derive *everything* through syllogistic deduction from absolutely first principles. It also suggests, conversely, that experimentation, i.e. empirical investigation into reasons for a fact, can be informative for philosophical cognition of the fact and be undertaken scientifically. The reason for this is that knowledge of actual existence is a result of historical cognition. If philosophy is the 'science of the possibles' it will not concern itself with existence and actuality in the sense of investigating what actually is or occurs. The only way it will concern itself with existence and actuality is to the point of defining what existence is, or what actuality is. When dealing with sciences directly concerned with certain

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<sup>57</sup> DP, §94.

<sup>58</sup> DP, §107.

existing phenomena, especially in physics, experimentation, rather than deduction, is to play a crucial role.<sup>59</sup>

It is important to note that Wolff here does not have in mind something resembling Kant's qualitative distinction between understanding and sensibility, resulting in a Wolffian version of Kant's empty thoughts and blind intuitions. There is no equivalently sharp distinction in Wolff. Possible concepts provided by metaphysics, which are themselves accessible through *a priori* demonstrations, are considered as presuppositions in more specialised sciences and are as such predicated of entities treated in more specialised sciences. If I am correct regarding Wolff, he does not rule out the possibility of deriving an actual existent from the *a priori* syllogistic relation of essences and possibilities. What he seems to be saying, however, is that this procedure is impractical. Regarding the previous quotation about experimental physics, Wolff warns that if experimental physics is to be undertaken, what was treated in it must again be treated in 'dogmatic physics', which is the "science of those things which are possible through bodies," in order to "carefully and wisely acquire the complete certitude which we seek in philosophy."<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, when talking about practical philosophy Wolff claims that "there are general principles upon which every theory and practice of practical philosophy depend," and he attempts to prove this claim by simply pointing out that there *are* such principles.<sup>61</sup> However, he does say that there is an *a priori* proof of this, although it would be too difficult to provide it in the preliminary discourse since "such a proof presupposes things from ontology and psychology which are not known by the common man."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Wolff does suggest extending experimentation "to all the other parts of philosophy", although the examples he gives refer only to 'teleology' and 'moral and political philosophy'. See DP, §107n.

<sup>60</sup> DP, §110n. Today this would probably be understood as experimental physics and for Wolff it is likely to be more linked to syllogistic deduction than experiments.

<sup>61</sup> DP, §69.

<sup>62</sup> DP, §69n.

Even if it is not ultimately possible for Wolff to derive the existence of an actual entity from *a priori* metaphysical principles (except in the case of God) Wolff's inclusion of experimentation does not split the ground of scientific certainty into two heterogeneous methods. What it does is to perform two other functions. Firstly, since there is no sharp distinction between actuality and possibility (such as in Kantian sensibility and understanding) there is no need for a kind of Transcendental Deduction. To be actual is simply a state of possessing an additional predicate over and above those that make the thing *what* it is, that is, those that constitute its possibility. The sciences of possible predicates provide us with discoveries which are to be used in experimental sciences. Through experimental sciences, however, one can 'glimpse' the necessary structures or conditions of predication discoverable *a priori* in metaphysics, which then have to ground experimental findings in order to reach complete certainty. For Wolff, therefore, due to the lack of any qualitative distinction between what Kant will call understanding and sensibility there is no fear regarding the validity of our fundamental concepts (such as Kantian categories) if they are deduced legitimately, i.e. in a hierarchical syllogistic manner. Furthermore, there should be no fear of empirical nominalism towards universal concepts, i.e. of these concepts simply being Humean 'habits' of our thinking, since any experimental discovery should ultimately conform to the metaphysical discovery from which it borrows principles. Secondly, empirical observations are allowed to provide content for metaphysics and as such guide metaphysical investigations. This does not mean, however, that the metaphysical investigations derive their certainty from the empirical ones. What experimentation does is provide metaphysics with new content that needs to be explained. If we recall the distinction between historical and philosophical cognition, the empirical investigation can show that a certain branch of metaphysics needs an additional principle in order to fully explain an empirical discovery, but the final proof and explanation of the discovered phenomenon rests with the metaphysical inquiry into the order of possibility. If the experiment and observation ultimately cannot conform to the metaphysical structure, the problem is probably with the experiment.<sup>63</sup> In fact, Wolff points out that

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<sup>63</sup> This allows Wolff to be less concerned than Kant with the possibility of *a priori*

experimentation provides an “intermediary level of knowledge between history and philosophy” which serves as “the proper *preparation for the science of physics*.”<sup>64</sup> Remember that ‘science’ is a derivation from certain and immutable principles by a legitimate method. It seems unlikely that an ‘intermediary’ stage of anything would provide one with certainty and immutability.

This relates to what I have referred to as the ‘order of actuality’. Wolff does not provide *a priori* derivations of actually existing entities from the order of possibility (except in the case of God). Historical cognition of such entities, however, provides content for the science of possibility to inquire into; to investigate the reason *why* some entities are actual. Hence physics and practical philosophy become relevant as explanations of actuality. They depend on metaphysics in the order of possibility in order to reach ultimate certainty. However, we are more familiar with the objects of physics and practical philosophy than of metaphysics, since they feature prominently in our historical cognition.<sup>65</sup> They are both at the same level of actuality, in the sense just referred to: they are the sciences which concern the phenomena we encounter in everyday life. Furthermore, they are at the same level of

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concepts being ‘impure’. Furthermore, this license to use empirical observations and experiments to inform metaphysical investigations can be used to address a deficiency Hegel might see in Wolff’s system, namely that there is no immanent principles of derivation of metaphysical categories from one another. There is a valid *way* in which Wolff can reach a category B from a category A, but there does not seem to be a reason implicit in the category A itself which would make such a transition necessary. For this criticism see Hegel’s introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and his concerns with the geometrical method.

<sup>64</sup> DP, §107. Emphasis mine.

<sup>65</sup> For this reason Wolff does not have to concern himself with Cartesian doubt. Actual entities are simply given and, as given, provide content for the investigation into their possibility. For example, the object of practical philosophy is either man *qua* man, or man *qua* citizen (DP, §63). Wolff is not worried about the possible, illusory society of coats and hats roaming the streets.

possibility since they do not borrow any principles from each other and as such they can both be treated “immediately after metaphysics.”<sup>66</sup>

In the similar manner, questions about the actuality or existence within metaphysics will be relegated to what has become known as *special* metaphysics. These special metaphysical disciplines will treat of entities ‘closer’ to the level of actuality, of those more familiar to us, or similarly, of entities understood through a more specific determination.<sup>67</sup> The three ‘special’ metaphysical disciplines, unlike the kinds of cognition, but similarly to non-metaphysical disciplines, are determined on the basis of the objects they treat. These objects are “the proper objects of philosophy”<sup>68</sup> and are based on the three most abstract genera of an entity which we know to exist: God, human souls, and bodies or material things.<sup>69</sup> The three sciences are, consequently, natural theology (“Science of those things which are known to be possible through God”), psychology (“The science of those things which are possible through human souls”), and general or transcendental cosmology (“Science of the world in general... The general understanding of the world which explains those things which are common to the existing world and any other possible world.”).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> DP, §§105-6. That is, if one is following a properly demonstrative method.

Interestingly, regardless of this Wolff suggests treating of physics *after* practical philosophy, due to their relation to teleology. See DP, §106n.

<sup>67</sup> This is Baumgarten’s understanding of Wolff’s difference between actuality and possibility. For Baumgarten, an individually existing entity, or a “singular” is an entity understood in its “complete determination” meaning as the “collection of all determinations compossible in an entity,” (BM, §148). Since existence, for Wolff and Baumgarten, is a complement of essence of or possibility, an actually existing thing is the one which is completely determined with its essential predicates plus existence. Only in God, however, is existence an essential compossible, rather than an accidental, meaning that in every other entity the cause of existence will be something external to its essence. For a development of Baumgarten’s ‘complete determination’ from Wolff’s ‘complement of possibility’ see Gilson, 1952, p. 126.

<sup>68</sup> DP, §56n.

<sup>69</sup> DP, §§56-56n.

<sup>70</sup> DP, §§57-8, 78.

It is important to note that for Wolff these three sciences are based on the three *genera* of entities. This means that when considering an entity *in abstracto* it can be treated under one of the three general determinations. Furthermore, at the same place Wolff points out that these genera are here because we simply “know that they exist” and we do not know of any others which do exist.<sup>71</sup> He does say, however, that there can be a derivation of them from prior principles, i.e. that these abstract genera of an entity are at the moment allowed here on the basis of our confused knowledge of them, but that there is a possibility and the desirability for discovering their certitude<sup>72</sup>, i.e. demonstrating them from more abstract principles. In fact, the three disciplines themselves are not architectonically placed on the same level of possibility. The most abstract and indeterminate is general cosmology which borrows no principles from the other two, followed by psychology and ultimately, by natural theology. All three are, however, dependent on the ‘higher’ discipline which investigates an entity *qua* entity, i.e. an entity at its lowest level of determination. This is first philosophy or ontology.<sup>73</sup>

### 3. Philosophy and Ontology

There are some things which are common to all entities [*enti omni communia*] and which are predicated both of souls and of natural and artificial bodies. That part of philosophy which treats of an entity in general [*de ente in genere*] and of the general affections of entities is called *Ontology*, or *First philosophy*. Thus, ontology, or first philosophy is defined as the science of an entity in general, or insofar as it is an entity [*scientia entis in genere, seu quatenus ens est*].<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> He, however, does not exclude the possibility of another, yet unknown genus of the same level of determination.

<sup>72</sup> DP, §56n. As one can see, these claims are drawn from the *Discursus Praeliminaris* which does not follow the proper demonstrative method, but is somewhat of a student’s guide to logic and metaphysics.

<sup>73</sup> DP, §99.

<sup>74</sup> DP, §73. Translation modified. Original emphasis.

From this we can find out that there is a science called first philosophy or ontology. It treats of general affections of entities *qua* entities, rather than entities understood as constituting a certain proper object of metaphysics (God, Souls, Universe), or as constituting a certain other realm of phenomena (e.g. moral or natural). In fact, this more abstract level of treating entities is presupposed by all other sciences since the object of ontology (i.e. an entity *qua* entity) is predicated of both psychology and general cosmology.<sup>75</sup> They ‘borrow principles from it’ in the sense that the objects of this first philosophy are predicates universally applicable to all specific metaphysical or scientific objects. Let us examine these characteristics in more detail.

I have discussed earlier how for Wolff ontology is a part of metaphysics. Even today, this is not very surprising. There are several characteristics of Wolff’s ontology, however, which differ from the way ontology may be sometimes understood today. Firstly, for Wolff, ontology does not deal with a set of existing entities, either in a fundamental or in a specialised sense. Rather, it deals with a set of possible predicates, logically interconnected, applicable to any possible entity and presupposed in any possible scientific discipline. As such, it neither deals with *existing* entities through cataloguing them, nor concerns itself primarily with existence, besides defining what it is. As Wolff puts it: “The concept of an entity in general involves minimal existence, save the non-repugnancy of the existent, or, what is the same, the possibility of the existent.”<sup>76</sup> Moreover, unlike Heidegger’s conception, ontology is not a science of Being [*Seinswissenschaft*]. What it deals with are the universal predicates of entities [*die Seienden*] in general. In contrast to how Heidegger conceives of the aim of Ontology in *Being and Time*, the task of Wolff’s ontology is *not* “to explain Being itself [*die Explikation des Seins selbst*] and to make the Being of entities stand out in full relief.” Moreover, and *contra* Heidegger’s conception, Wolff’s ontology is

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<sup>75</sup> Natural theology is curiously omitted here, although we have seen in the previous section that Wolff does consider it dependent not only on ontology, but also on psychology and general cosmology.

<sup>76</sup> WO §134n. For Wolff, *repugnancy* refers to something being self-contradictory.



“some definite philosophical discipline standing in interconnection with the others.”<sup>77</sup>

In *Ontologia*, Wolff also addresses some uses of the term ontology prior to his. He informs the reader that “hardly is another name today more despised than the name of Ontology,” and that “after the sterile investigation of the Scholastics [this] very useful and fundamental part of philosophy has been left in contempt.”<sup>78</sup> Unfortunately, Wolff does not specify any thinkers who have referred to ontology in this way, only stating that this was the fate of “Scholastic ontology” once Descartes excluded indistinct and obscure concepts from philosophy.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, he defends ontology from the charge of being a ‘lexicon of barbaric philosophy’, by which he means a text or an endeavour that simply explains or clarifies (ancient) philosophical terms. This label, Wolff claims, “brought ontology even more in contempt.”<sup>80</sup> Unfortunately, he does not refer to anyone who used this label, implying that it came about due to the fact that ontology uses highly abstract concepts whose names usually derive not from everyday terms, but from Latin expressions of which people are in general ignorant.<sup>81</sup>

This general overview of the treatment of the term ‘ontology’ provides us with an insight more interesting than the one about the status the term enjoyed in 1730. What Wolff seems to be attempting to achieve with this overview is to identify ontology with first philosophy. The claims in which he refers to ontology falling into contempt are always preceded by the same description being applied to first philosophy. Wolff tends to characterise

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<sup>77</sup> See BT49/SZ27. This might not be very surprising since in the same paragraph Heidegger notes that “the method of ontology remains questionable in the highest degree as long as we merely consult those ontologies which have come down to us historically... Since the term “ontology” is used in this investigation in a sense which is formally broad, any attempt to clarify the method of ontology by tracing its history is automatically ruled out.”

<sup>78</sup> WO, §1n.

<sup>79</sup> WO, §7.

<sup>80</sup> WO, Preface, §§25-26n.

<sup>81</sup> WO, §26.

ontology and first philosophy in the same way. They were both prominent in Scholastic philosophy where they were badly utilized, both are necessary for a properly scientific philosophy, and both have fallen in disrepute after Descartes. Wolff does not explicitly claim that the Scholastics and the Cartesians used both terms interchangeably. What he is attempting to do instead is to identify the two, or more precisely, to identify first philosophy with ontology and show that the thinkers preceding him implicitly shared his identification without realising they were doing so, which caused them to run into mistakes.

Wolff's identification of first philosophy and ontology, and the way he conceives of this primacy, might sound strange to a lot of philosophers today for various reasons. For example, Wolff's identification of the two and the understanding of what such identification implies does not leave space for 'regional ontologies' (e.g. an ontology *of* something). There is only one science of ontology, which deals with predicates common to all entities "either absolutely or under a specific condition" since it is "the science of the entity in general, or insofar as it is an entity."<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the idea of the primacy of ontology of the kind noted above cannot be encountered very often in the philosophy of today. For Wolff, all other sciences are dependent on ontology in a sense that they borrow principles from it. This dependence is very strict, since "without ontology, philosophy cannot be developed according to the demonstrative method"<sup>83</sup> or reach the certainty it aspires to. This is even

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<sup>82</sup> WO, §§1, 8. Wolff does differentiate between 'natural ontology' and 'artificial ontology', however, these are not two separate *ontologies* which treat of different regions of being or kinds of entities. In fact, 'natural ontology' is the name for "commonplace and confused ontological notions" while 'artificial ontology' is "a clear elaboration" of the natural ontology. What Wolff's calls 'artificial' we would call 'formal' since for him this distinction is analogous to his distinction between 'natural logic' which is our innate ability to reason and 'artificial logic' which is a scientific formalization of our innate ability (see WO §§21-24). In that vein, natural ontology is simply a phenomenon of ontological notions being used in everyday speech and artificial ontology is their systematization.

<sup>83</sup> DP, §73, WO, §6.

inclusive of mathematics which “owes all of its certainty to First Philosophy, from which it takes its first principles.”<sup>84</sup>

What might be at the heart of a possible perplexity regarding Wolff’s identification of ontology with first philosophy today is the fact that the term ontology enjoys a wide usage, while the term and concerns about first philosophy might be deemed too archaic for civilised discourse. In Wolff’s time, however, the situation was the exact opposite. The significance of Wolff’s identification of first philosophy and ontology, seen even in the title of the work, *Philosophia prima sive ontologia*, is not aimed to emphasise the claim that ontology is first philosophy, but that first philosophy *is ontology*. As Wolff puts it: “the present work (...) contains First Philosophy in a completely new form.”<sup>85</sup> The term *first philosophy* is significantly older than ontology, originating from Aristotle as a name for what now is referred to as *Metaphysics*. The term kept appearing, being utilised, and being discussed after Aristotle, sometimes as a synonym for metaphysics, something as a designation of something more specific than the term metaphysics might designate. Due to this, even the clear statement that first philosophy is not a synonym for, but a part of metaphysics is significant.<sup>86</sup>

Wolff’s aim is to show that the proper conception of first philosophy is *qua* ontology, i.e. as the science of an entity in general. This leads to a certain conception of the relation of the philosophical disciplines with which anyone in academic philosophy is familiar today, namely, that metaphysics is a generic name for a set of more determinate disciplines defined by their subject-matter, such as ontology, mereology, aetiology, etc., but excluding disciplines such as ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of science, etc. So while Wolff’s

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<sup>84</sup> WO, Preface. Interestingly, Wolff does not subsume mathematics under his schema of a philosophical system. It is neither metaphysics, physics, or practical philosophy and its object is different from the one of metaphysics. See WO, §7.

<sup>85</sup> WO, Preface.

<sup>86</sup> I will be discussing this use in the next chapter. An interesting example of the interchangeableness of these terms can be seen in Descartes whose *Meditationes de prima philosophia* are originally translated into French as *Méditations Métaphysiques*.

conception of ontology differs from the ones encountered today, his conception of metaphysics, i.e. as a philosophical discipline with various subdivisions, is not very different. Wolff's identification of first philosophy with ontology is therefore an attempt at establishing the relation between first philosophy and metaphysics and providing a way for engaging with them scientifically. But the identification of the two that Wolff provides is not only a normative one. Wolff's point is not merely that first philosophy *should* be understood as ontology. Through his vague historical references to the usage of first philosophy and ontology prior to him, and constant attempt to show that certain concepts and relations he derives are in accord with previous thinkers such as Descartes or Aristotle, Wolff is trying to show that first philosophy has always already been ontology, even though the thinkers engaging in it did not clearly realise this. The lack of this realisation was what led them to mistakes in judgment and to the positing of confused concepts.

To identify first philosophy with ontology in the way Wolff does is to claim that the fundamental and paradigmatic metaphysical discipline is to be understood as “the science of the entity in general, or insofar as it is an entity?”<sup>87</sup> For Wolff, this means that such a science “must demonstrate that which belongs to all entities either absolutely or under a certain given condition.”<sup>88</sup> By a ‘given condition’ Wolff does not have in mind conditions covered by other, more specialised sciences. We are not here demonstrating what belongs to an entity conceived as “God” or “a Soul” or “a Physical body”. That will belong to special metaphysics. Ontology is concerned with that which applies to all entities *qua* entities. The issue is, however, that for Wolff not all of these characteristics can be possessed by all entities at the same time. He explains that by ‘given condition’ he means predicates such as ‘similar’ and ‘dissimilar’ which “are to be explicated in Ontology and the general principles of similarity and dissimilarity derived from that.”<sup>89</sup> To recapitulate, ontology will investigate that which applies to all entities absolutely, i.e. that which

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<sup>87</sup> WO, §I.

<sup>88</sup> WO, §8.

<sup>89</sup> WO, §8n.

follows from the definition of an entity.<sup>90</sup> Besides these absolute characteristics, ontology will also treat of those characteristics which, in themselves, can apply to any entity whatsoever, but are not *compossible*, i.e. cannot belong to the same entity at the same time. Such characteristics are, for example, similar/dissimilar, but also simple/composite, or material/immaterial.

As can be seen from the opening quotation in this section, these characteristics of entities are not merely nominal. They really belong to any possible entity. But besides being characteristics they are also concepts or *predicates*, meaning that they perform the double function of serving as characteristics of entities themselves and as the structures by which we think and make judgments about entities. De Boer stresses this point very strongly, arguing that Wolff considers these two approaches to the task of ontology, the investigation into properties of entities *qua* entities, and the investigation into the grounds of our cognition, as amounting to the same thing. According to de Boer, ontology understood as a discipline concerned with pure concepts to be discovered by analysis makes it possible for us to achieve knowledge of entities through the use of it.<sup>91</sup> In fact, the full title of the *Ontologia* expresses this ‘epistemic’ characteristic: ontology is a science that “contains the principles of all human cognition.”<sup>92</sup> This includes, but also goes beyond the idea that ontology contains the principles necessary for any subsequent science as has been previously described. What it suggests is that there is no qualitative difference between a way in which a thought of an entity is structured and the way in which the entity is structured in reality. This allows the possibility of an *a priori*, deductive, and therefore, for Wolff, analytic inference of the necessary structure of reality. As Fugate and Hymers put it:

Ontology is the most important science since it is the key to practical success in all further sciences, morality, and

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<sup>90</sup> WO, §303.

<sup>91</sup> De Boer, 2011, p. 53n10.

<sup>92</sup> *Philosophia prima sive Ontologia, methodo scientifica pertractata, qua omnis cognitionis humanæ principia continentur.*

religion. This is because ontology is nothing other than the clear and distinct representation of the most general principles in human knowledge, i.e. the very laws of thought regarding beings. Now, since these are at the same time the most general principles of the beings thereby thought, a science of such concepts provides us with a complete conceptual scheme under which empirical experience, if it is to become philosophical knowledge or science, must be carefully and methodically subsumed... Since ontology concerns the most universal principles of beings, these are also present in *every act of thought* about a being.<sup>93</sup>

As we have learned from Wolff's ideas about philosophical cognition and scientific method, ontology cannot simply be a list or a catalogue of the predicates that belong to an entity as such. It also needs to address the reasons *why* such predicates are to be attributed to any possible entity. This is to be achieved *a priori* through the process of analysis:

It does not suffice to invoke absolute or relative predicates [of an entity], but one has to specify the reason why these predicates belong to an entity, so that we are convinced *a priori*, that they are attributed to it by right and can always be attributed to it... By their development it is to be shown what is contained within them, so that we judge [that] the predicate cannot be separated from the concept of the subject.<sup>94</sup>

This derivation and grounding of the predicates is to be undertaken by employing the two fundamental principles of ontology. These are the Principle of Contradiction and the Principle of Sufficient Reason. The two principles can be linked to Wolff's very understanding of what philosophy is.

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<sup>93</sup> Fugate & Hymers, Introduction to BM, pp. 17-18.

<sup>94</sup> WO, Preface.

For Wolff, philosophy is “the science of the possibles insofar as they can be.”<sup>95</sup> What is possible is determined by the principle of contradiction, since what is self-contradictory is *impossible*. For Wolff, therefore, “what is impossible is a non-entity,”<sup>96</sup> that is to say, “existence is repugnant,” to it.<sup>97</sup> Wolff explains that this repugnancy of existence does not refer to entities which do not *actually* exist, such as “fruits of a future summer”, or those which do not exist anymore such as corn that was eaten. In such entities existence is not repugnant. Instead, repugnancy of existence refers to “true non-entities [such as a] two-sided square and silver iron” for which “the possibility of existence is removed.”<sup>98</sup> To say that existence is repugnant to something, therefore, means that such a thing cannot possibility exist since its conception would violate the law of contradiction. This shows that the fundamental way in which Wolff conceives of possibility is as logical possibility, i.e. as the absence of internal (or essential) contradiction. So for Wolff things are possible if they do not contain any internal contradiction. However, since the task of philosophy is not merely to show which predicates necessarily belong to any possible entity, but also why, and since existence is not an essential predicate of any entity but God, the principle of sufficient reason needs to be invoked to explain *both* why certain entities, as mere possibles, contain some predicates rather than other, *and* why certain entities *actually* exist. These questions will be answered scientifically, i.e. through two ‘certain and immutable principles’: those of contradiction and sufficient reason.

For Wolff, the principles of contradiction and sufficient reason are self-evident upon reflection, or as he puts it “we experience [them] as the nature of our mind.”<sup>99</sup> The former provides an explanation of the reason for the mere possibility of something. The latter is involved in explaining the question ‘why’

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<sup>95</sup> DP, §29.

<sup>96</sup> WO, §138.

<sup>97</sup> WO, §137.

<sup>98</sup> WO, §137n.

<sup>99</sup> WO, §§ 27, 74. I have discussed at multiple points above why for Wolff, unlike for Kant, this does not mean that they might not exist as the real relations beyond the nature of our mind, hence I will not repeat myself at this point.

of particular existences. This does not mean, however, that the principle of sufficient reason concerns only the order of actually existing entities and the reason why they are actual. As Hettche points out, Wolff interprets the principle of sufficient reason as applying “either to the realm of possibility or to the realm of actual reality... [a]s a definition of a thing’s essential nature... [or] serves to furnish the causes, or grounds, for why a real individual comes into actuality.”<sup>100</sup> This is because for Wolff the principle of sufficient reason is involved in the cognition of an essence of something: “Essence is that which is conceived of an entity in the first place, and in which is to be found the sufficient reason why all the rest either actually belongs to it or is able to belong to it.”<sup>101</sup> When the principle of sufficient reason serves as a ground of that which *is able to* belong to an entity, or as a “ground of the possibility of another,” it is understood as the ‘principle of being’ or *principio essendi*; when understood as an explanation for the actual existence of an entity it is understood as the ‘principle of becoming’ or *principio fiendi*.<sup>102</sup>

The important aspect to point out, however, is that the principle of sufficient reason is itself reducible to the principle of contradiction. As Beck writes:

The principle of sufficient reason is itself a consequence of the principle of non-contradiction (*Ontologia* §§66, 70). So whatever exists, exists necessarily. For anything (but God) this is an extrinsic necessity, but also a logical necessity (since it comes from non-contradiction)... [Wolff] often writes as if a false judgment were self-contradictory or reducible to a self-contradiction, i.e., as if judgments were all analytic.<sup>103</sup>

That being the case, the two fundamental principles which ontology discovers, the principle of sufficient reason, and the principle of contradiction,

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<sup>100</sup> Hettche, 2016, §6.

<sup>101</sup> WO, §168. Translation modified from Hettche, 2016, §6.

<sup>102</sup> See WO, §874.

<sup>103</sup> Beck 1969, pp. 266; 264.



are ultimately reducible to the principle of contradiction, which constitutes the first principle of ontology and is necessary for the rest of it and any other science.

I have, however, stated multiple times that the object of ontology is 'an entity in general'. The understanding of this formula will be connected to the two principles. I have mentioned above how a non-entity is understood as something to which existence is 'repugnant' because it involves internal contradictions. This means that one characteristic of an entity *qua* entity will be its lack of internal contradictions, i.e. the non-violation of the principle of contradiction. But I have also quoted Wolff saying that the job of philosophy of an entity in general is not simply to invoke absolute or relative predicates of an entity in general, but that one has to specify the reason why these predicates belong to it. And the principle of contradiction provides one such explanation or reason, although not a very exciting one. The requirement that an entity, first and foremost, must be non-contradictory counts as a sufficient reason why something is an entity. In that vein, Wolff writes:

What can exist, and consequently, that to which existence is not repugnant, is called an *entity*.

Therefore, a blossoming tree in a garden is an entity, which actually exists, and free from care, [about] what could exist: not any less is true [that] *the tree still concealed in a seed* is an entity, on account of that it grows from the seed united with the earth, and truly it prevails to exist. Similarly, an acute rectilinear triangle, which is *traced* on the *paper*, is an *entity*, which actually exists; equally, a triangle which can be traced, is an entity, on the account of that it can exist, when it is first drawn... The temperature of the stone can exist, and so it is an *entity*, not as actually existing, but because existence is not repugnant to it. The concept of an entity in general involves

minimal existence, save the non-repugnancy of the existent, or, what is the same, possibility of the existent.<sup>104</sup>

Hence an entity as such is defined through its possibility or non-contradictory nature. Whatever is possible, in a sense of their essences not being contradictory, is an entity.

Now, “*that which is conceived of an entity in the first place, and in which is to be found the sufficient reason why all the rest either actually belongs to it or else may belong to it*” is called an ‘essence’.<sup>105</sup> Wolff claims this definition to be derived *a priori*.<sup>106</sup> Essence, therefore, is what contains the sufficient reason for something, either as *principio fiendi* or *essendi*. From what has been mentioned before, we can see that these two versions of the principle of sufficient reason primarily depend on the principle of non-contradiction. If one is to conceive of something as an entity, but try to include a characteristic that is repugnant to another characteristic, the two characteristics could not belong to an entity either actually or possibly. In fact, for Wolff, the essences of things are absolutely necessary and he argues for it on the ground of their non-repugnance:

*The essences of things are absolutely necessary.* The essences of things are constituted by the non-repugnance of those things that are together in the same thing... Now, since it is impossible for the same thing to be and also not to be, it is likewise not possible for those same things that taken together are not mutually repugnant to each other – although they are not reciprocally determined *per se*, nor determined through any other – to be mutually repugnant to each other. This non-repugnance is therefore necessary and consequently the essences of things are necessary.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> WO, §§134-134n.

<sup>105</sup> WO, §169. Translation modified from Gilson 1952, p. 116.

<sup>106</sup> See WO, §169n.

<sup>107</sup> WO, §229. Translation from Fugate & Hymers, Introduction to BM, p. 119n.

In addition to the principles of contradiction and sufficient reason, definitions of entity, essence, and existence, Wolff's *Ontologia* will attempt to provide an *a priori* proof of numerous other principles and formulate various definitions. These include the principle of the excluded middle, the notions of a singular and universal entity, quantity, quality, order, simple and composite entity, cause, existence, etc. These are understood as predicates predicable of any possible entity and utilised in any subsequent science. They are likewise *real*, not in the sense that ontology demonstrates that they *do* belong to any particular, existing entity, but in the sense that they apply necessarily, in a non-nominal sense, to any possibly existing entity. Historical cognition will provide us with the fact of there being entities at all which are then to be explained by these predicates. General cosmology can now begin.

#### **4. Wolff's Conception of Ontology**

Ontology is first and foremost to be understood as a science. This means that it is a 'habit' of inferring conclusions from certain and immutable principles by a legitimate sequence. It is a *philosophical* science, which means that these conclusions will be explanations of the question *why* something is or can be. It is the first part of metaphysics; in fact it is both first philosophy and first science. It provides us with 'certain and immutable principles' that any other science is supposed to use. It treats of entities in general. For Wolff, this means that it attempts to discover necessary predicates predicable of any possibly existing entity. It is an *a priori* science and proceeds through the demonstrative method. The demonstrative method orders everything so "that those things must come first through which later things are understood and established."<sup>108</sup> This method proceeds through syllogistic inference and conceptual analysis grounded in the principles of contradiction. Ontology does not concern itself with listing a set of existing entities (fundamental or otherwise), but in fact, looks for necessary predicates of any possible entity. As such, it is fully concerned with possibility, rather than actuality.

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<sup>108</sup> DP, §134n.

Ontology exemplifies the double primacy of metaphysics. It contains, as its subtitle states, “principles of the whole human cognition.” As such, ontological principles ground any other possible scientific discipline whose principles depend on ontological principles from which these post-ontological principles derive their certainty. Moreover, since fundamental ontological principles, the principles of contradiction and sufficient reason, are clearly and distinctly accessible to us through reflection, there is nothing preventing philosophy from beginning by positing them. Philosophy can, and ideally should, begin with ontology. As such, ontology is first in the order of knowing. Moreover, these predicates exemplify actual characteristics of actually existing, mind-independent entities, the things-in-themselves. As such, ontology is first in the order of nature, since there are no possible characteristics of entities which would be more general than the ones found in ontology, or which would ground ontological characteristics of entities (unlike the case of, e.g., physical or psychological characteristics of entities).

These are the characteristics of Wolff’s ontology and, due to everything said before regarding its history, the characteristics of what can be considered the *original* (or at least *traditional*) *conception of ontology*. To some, if not many, who consider themselves to be ontologists today, it might look unrecognisable in comparison with what they understand by this term. However, it was fairly familiar to the thinkers within German philosophy who succeeded Wolff. When they refer to ‘ontology’, this conception is what they have in mind.

The name and the conception of ontology have hence come together and we are ready to step forward. But I first need to take a step back.

## Chapter Three: History of the conception

### I. The Prehistory of Ontology

The previous chapter completed the history of the name ‘ontology’ by explaining the conception of a philosophical discipline so named at the point of its entry into the mainstream philosophical lexicon. Throughout the history of philosophy there have been various conceptions of philosophical disciplines that resembled or enabled the formulation of the discipline that becomes known as *Ontologia* by the time of Wolff. In this chapter, I intend to follow the history of the conception of ontology, i.e. the history of the philosophical, rather than philological changes, which led to ontology the way Wolff conceived of it.

In the previous chapter I discussed how Wolff identified ontology with Primary Philosophy. While the latter term tended to be used around Wolff’s time as a synonym for metaphysics, the significance of Wolff regarding the use of this terminology lies in his identification of Primary Philosophy with the investigation into ‘an entity insofar it is an entity’ [*ens quatenus ens est*]. If a discipline is conceived in this manner, then it corresponds to the way Primary Philosophy was conceived by Aristotle, who was the first to formulate it as a science of an entity qua entity [*to on hē(i) on*].<sup>1</sup> This proximity of the conceptions of Primary Philosophy of Wolff and Aristotle demands a comparison between their respective conceptions of Primary Philosophy, as well as an attempt to uncover in what way the historical reception of Aristotelian metaphysics has led to the way Primary Philosophy was conceptualised by Wolff. The latter question will be addressed through following what I have earlier deemed the ‘Aristotelian ambiguity’, which refers to the claim that the object, which according to Aristotle, Primary Philosophy

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<sup>1</sup> I translate both *ens* and *to on* as ‘entity’ due to their morphological equivalence as present active participle forms of *esse* and *einai* respectively. What an entity is and what it means to investigate it will be different for Wolff and Aristotle, however, I do not find that this impacts the way these terms are translated or referred to in English.

is supposed to investigate, is ambiguous, possibly even contradictory.

Wolff's philosophy, especially today when it is mostly invoked in contrast to Kant's, tends to be referred to as the "Leibniz-Wolff tradition". This categorisation arose very early on, indeed early enough to be disliked by both Wolff and Leibniz.<sup>2</sup> Wolff himself claimed that he learned more from Aquinas than Leibniz and saw himself as someone who belonged to and was engaging in modifying the Suarezian philosophical tradition.<sup>3</sup> Due to this, I will include a discussion of Aquinas' philosophy in this chapter. Focusing for a moment on the philosophy of Aquinas will allow me further specify the trajectory the conception of Primary Philosophy took after Aristotle, on its way to Wolff. Moreover, it will allow me to explicate the idea of the 'double primacy of metaphysics' which I have been using, as well as provide some context to certain non-ontological, rationalist systems of metaphysics which arose around the times of Wolff's conception of ontology.

## **2. Aristotle's *Protē Philosophia***

Let us recall that for Wolff the terms '*Philosophia Prima*' and '*Ontologia*' referred to the highest branch of metaphysics. This presents any attempts at the comparison of the two thinkers with a glaring difficulty generated by the fact that the terms 'metaphysics' and 'ontology' were completely unknown to Aristotle. As I have shown previously, we know of no appearance of the term *Ontologia* prior to Lorhard's brief use in *Ogdoas Scholastica* of 1606. Moreover, Aristotle's ignorance of the term 'metaphysics' forms such an unavoidable part of any introduction to Aristotle's philosophy that it might not even be worth repeating here.<sup>4</sup> These two observations, trite as they may be, still allow us to

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<sup>2</sup> Beck p. 257.

<sup>3</sup> Beck pp. 257, 259.

<sup>4</sup> One commonly shared story which might be interesting to question is that the name has its origins in Andronicus of Rhodes' placement of the work in the library of Alexandria after the work on nature – *meta ta physika*. Owens (1963, p. 74) disputes this claim, but argues in favour of the idea that the prefix '*meta*' signifies the fact that the philosophical work *Metaphysics* undertakes comes after the *Physics* in the doctrinal

draw attention to the need for caution when undertaking this sort of a historical comparison. Beyond the fact that the two thinkers do not use the same ‘Aristotelian’ terms (in this case due to the fact that some of these terms – such as metaphysics – were unknown to Aristotle while the others – such as substance – are Latin interpretations), another danger lies in the fact that for Wolff Primary Philosophy can be seen as a part of something called Metaphysics, whereas for Aristotle such a classification would be something rather alien. The terminology of his time allows the use of terms such as ‘ontology’ or ‘metaphysics’ and further discussion of their relations, e.g. as parts of a whole. Moreover, Wolff’s use of the terms ontology and metaphysics, as well as his positing of the relations that hold between them, is underpinned by centuries of Aristotelian interpretation, and by the new conceptions of science and systematic approach to knowledge arising from Early Modern thought and Enlightenment. Aristotle’s texts were written with altogether different baggage behind them.

One reason I see this as important to point out is to stress that the aim of this chapter is not to try to argue for or against the claim that Aristotle’s work can be considered ‘ontological’ or that it is ‘an ontology’. Since I have decided to investigate how Aristotle’s philosophy ultimately enables Wolff’s *Ontologia* to come about, how Wolff develops *from* Aristotle/Aristotelianism, the answer to the question whether Aristotle’s Primary Philosophy is ontology *à la* Wolff is a trivial ‘no’. I will, throughout this chapter, make the reader aware of the differences between the two systems, however my aim is not ultimately to show whether Aristotle is an ‘ontologist’ or whether his work could be called an ontology.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons I will avoid referring to the terms ‘ontology’ and ‘metaphysics’ (except when referring to the text) in my

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sequence, while also referring to its treatment of issues which lie beyond the physical order. This interpretation is shared by Aquinas in *De Trinitate*, pars 3, q.5, a. 1, co.

<sup>5</sup> It has not been uncommon to claim that there is an ‘ontological’ component in Aristotle’s philosophy, or that Aristotle is at heart an ‘ontologist’. These concepts were mostly posited as contrasting terms in order to distinguish what commentators have seen as the (Neo-)Platonic elements present in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, in contrast to ‘purely’ or ‘properly’ Aristotelian elements. See Owens, 1963, pp. 16, 51-66.

discussions of Aristotle and instead focus on what is present in his text: *Protē Philosophia*.

The term Aristotle uses to describe the work undertaken in the *Metaphysics* is *Protē Philosophia* or *Sophia* – *Primary Philosophy* or *Wisdom*.<sup>6</sup> A wise man, according to Aristotle, knows all things [*epistasthai panta*], although not *each of them individually*.<sup>7</sup> What kind of philosophy can elevate one to the state of understanding everything? If there is such a philosophy it should truly be called *Primary*, if this honorific is to be based on the universality of understanding which it would provide to the one engaged in it. In order to achieve this goal, this Primary Philosophy will be the one which investigates an *entity qua entity* [*to on hē(i) on*]. More specifically, in Aristotle's terms, Primary Philosophy will investigate an entity as an entity [*theōrei to on hē(i) on*] and the attributes [*kai ta toutō(i) hyparchonta*] which belong to it in itself [*kath' hauto*].<sup>8</sup> We can phrase this as an *investigation into what anything is simply in virtue of the fact that it is*. If conceived in this way, Primary Philosophy achieves the universality required for its primary status by not confining itself to any particular sense, or way of being, of an entity, beyond the most general one, the one belonging to an entity *qua* entity. This sets it apart from other sciences. In a certain way, all sciences investigate entities [*ta onta*], their causes and principles. However, unlike Primary Philosophy, they all mark off some particular kind of an entity, some genus, and confine their theorizing to one such class of entities.<sup>9</sup> For example, the science of nature deals with things which are inseparable from matter but are not immovable, while some parts of

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<sup>6</sup> *Metaphysics* 1, 1.981b29; *Ibid.* 4, 2.1004a35.

<sup>7</sup> *Metaphysics* 1, 2.982a7-9. Arguing for a different point, Kosman (2013, p. ix) points out that the scholarship on Aristotle benefited from reading *epistēmē* as *understanding* rather than *knowledge*. If we adopt this practice the claim that the wise man has a general *understanding* of all things, while not having a technical, particular, or specialized *knowledge* of all possible topics becomes more intuitive than what might be seen as a strange state of knowing all things, but none of them individually. This should, however, not necessarily be seen as parallel to Wolff's distinction between kinds of cognition.

<sup>8</sup> *Metaphysics* 4, 1.1003a20-1.

<sup>9</sup> *Metaphysics* 6, 1.1025b7-10.



mathematics, according to Aristotle, deal with things which are immovable, but embodied in matter.<sup>10</sup> Primary Philosophy, on the other hand, investigates entities themselves, and what belongs to them *qua* entities. It will be free from the limitations of the species and genera under which entities can ultimately be categorized.

...[T]he attributes of this [entity] in so far as it is an entity [he(i) on] (...) it is the business of no other science [epistēmēs] than *philosophy* to investigate; for to physics [physikē(i)] one would assign the study of things not *qua* entity [ouch hē(i) onta], but rather *qua* sharing in movement; while dialectics and sophistry deal with the attributes of things that are, but not of things qua an entity, and not with an entity itself in so far as it is an entity.<sup>11</sup>

At this initial and general point there seems to be little difference between the conception of Aristotle's *Protē Philosophia* and Wolff's *Philosophia Prima*. Both are conceived to be a science of an entity *qua* entity, different from any other science due to the object of their investigation: an entity in its most universal sense. For both, this exemplifies one sense of primary in "Primary" Philosophy. It is the science that treats of the nature of an object, which, while discussed in other sciences, is not by them understood as it is in itself, but as it is under a certain determination.

There is another reason this science deserves to be called primary and this is also shared between Aristotle and Wolff. This concerns the fact that it comes 'before' other sciences in the order of nature, or that other sciences somehow depend on it. In the quotation I have provided above, Aristotle asserts that one difference between Primary Philosophy and other sciences is

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<sup>10</sup> *Metaphysics* 6, 1.1026a10.

<sup>11</sup> *Metaphysics* 11, 3.1061b4-9. Original emphasis. Modified. The term *episteme* which I have talked about as *knowledge* or *understanding* is now used in a way in which the word 'science' would be used today and this translation can be found in both Ross' and Tredennick & Armstrong's translation.

that the other sciences focus on a specific way of being of an entity, while Primary Philosophy, or Wisdom, investigates an entity *qua* entity. Shortly afterwards,<sup>12</sup> Aristotle uses this observation to conclude that due to this, both mathematics and physics should be seen as “subdivisions” or “parts” [*merē*] of this “Primary Science” [*tēn de prōtēn epistēmēn*] which is called Wisdom.

This claim is very similar to Wolff’s idea, at least to the extent that Primary Philosophy for both thinkers forms a kind of scientific primacy on which other sciences are dependent. Wolff’s idea, however, is not the same as Aristotle’s. Aristotle is not clear about how this part-whole relation between mathematics, physics, and Primary Philosophy is supposed to be understood. For Wolff, on the other hand, Physics and Mathematics (as sciences) could not be called ‘parts’ of his Primary Philosophy (or of *Ontologia*). For Wolff other sciences depend for their scientific grounding on the discoveries of Primary Philosophy but it would be wrong to look at them as forming some sort of a part-whole relationship. What they do is employ concepts and predicates ultimately provable only by Primary Philosophy. And this constitutes the second difference between Wolff and Aristotle on this topic. While for Wolff, Primary Philosophy investigates *universal predicates* of thought which apply to both to the way thought and reality operate, this position does not seem to be shared by Aristotle. In Wolff *ens* operates as the most universal predicate, as a genus, and the investigation into *ens qua ens* will reveal the structure of this predicate as well as any other possible predicates which can, or have to, be combined with *ens* according to the principles of sufficient reason, non-contradiction, etc. For Aristotle, *to on*, and the investigation into its nature, will prove to be something different from the investigation of the emptiest of concepts and predicates. In order to gain a deeper understanding of how exactly the science of *to on* is supposed to proceed and how other sciences are to follow from it we need to focus on what could be considered to be Aristotle’s method.

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<sup>12</sup> *Metaphysics* II, 4.

## 2. 1. Aristotelian method of equivocation

Two facts, on which Aristotle insists, will be familiar to any reader of Aristotle. The first is that for Aristotle ‘an entity’ is not and cannot be a genus.<sup>13</sup> The second is that “entity” (although not just “entity”) is “said in many ways” – “*to on legetai pollachōs*.”<sup>14</sup> Both claims have a significant impact on how Primary Philosophy is able to proceed in its investigation of an entity *qua* entity.

I will not go into details of Aristotle’s argument for *to on* not being a genus. Any interested reader is invited to consult the book 3 of the *Metaphysics* (along with innumerable secondary texts on the topic). For my purposes, however, the ‘correctness’ of Aristotle’s assertion that *to on* is not a genus is less important than the consequence of it for the procedure of Primary Philosophy:

In so far as we know each thing by its definition [*eidōn*], and the genera are the principles of definitions, the genera must also be the principles of definable things. And if to get the knowledge of entities [*kan ei esti tēn tōn ontōn labein epistēmēn*] is to get the knowledge of the species according to which they are named, the genera are at least starting-points of the *species*.<sup>15</sup>

If *to on* is not a genus then there cannot be a species according to which it is so named. If, moreover, in order to define something the thing in question has to fall within a certain relation of genus and species then we are left with

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<sup>13</sup> *Metaphysics* 3, 3.998b23.

<sup>14</sup> *Physics* 1, 2.185a22; *Metaphysics* 4, 2.1003a33, b5; *Metaphysics* 7, 1.1028a10. Also *Metaphysics* 5, 11.1019a5, although *pollachōs* here refers to *to einai*, rather than *to on*.

<sup>15</sup> *Metaphysics* 3, 3.998b4-8. Slightly modified Ross translation. The actual aim Aristotle seems to have in this section seems to be to show that *eidōs*, which can be translated as either *species* or *form*, exemplifies these two distinct senses. Hence, *ho logos tēs ousias* will be different from *tōn genōn horismos*. Cf. *Ibid.* 3.998b10-13. Later in the *Metaphysics* (8, 1.1042a19) we are told that a “definition is a formula” [*epei de ho horismos logos*], but as we have seen here, this will refer to a different kind of definition than the genetic-specific one.

two options. The first is that we cannot know the nature of an entity *qua* entity, since to know something is to know it through a definition, and since ‘an entity’ is not a genus it cannot be talked or thought about in the context of genera and species. The second option is to look for a way to understand an entity *qua* entity that would be different from the definitional, genus-species model of knowing. Aristotle proceeds with the latter option and to understand how he conceives of it one must first understand the idea of *pros hen* equivocation.

Let me start by explaining what Aristotle means by equivocals or equivocation. Aristotle’s explanation can be found in the *Categories*:

When things have only a name [*onoma*] in common and the definition of being [*logos tēs ousias*] which corresponds to the name is different, they are called *homonymous* [*homōnyma*]. Thus, for example, both a man and a picture are animals... for if one is to say what to be an animal is [*to zō(i)ō(i) einai*] for each of them, one will give two distinct definitions... When things have the name in common and the definition of being which corresponds to the name is the same, they are called *synonymous* [*synōnyma*]... for example, both a man and an ox are animals... for if one is to give the definition of each – what to be an animal is for each of them – one will give the same definition [*ton auton logon apodōsei*].<sup>16</sup>

Several points have to be made before proceeding. Firstly, the terms Aristotle employs are *synonym* and *homonym*, rather than *univocal* and *equivocal*. Since the latter terms are Latin, this is not at all surprising. I will, however, following Owens, favour the use of the terms ‘univocal’ and ‘equivocal’ since, as he points out, it is a more common practice today to use the Greek pair of terms to designate relations between words and concepts, while for Aristotle, particularly in the context of the *Metaphysics*, they are

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<sup>16</sup> *Categories*, 1.1a1-12. Translation slightly modified.

intended to designate relations between *things*.<sup>17</sup> The second point I wish to make is that Aristotle, in the section just quoted, explains equivocity and univocity through its relation to a different or shared definition. Since I have interpreted Aristotle as ruling out any attempt to answer the question of the nature of an entity *qua* entity through the definitional route it seems puzzling how the employment of equivocity, if it is to be solely understood through its reference to a common *definition*, can help to answer such a question. The solution lies in the conception of *pros hen* equivocity.

*Pros hen* equivocity, literally equivocity “towards/according to/in reference to one” stands for the relation between equivocals which share a reference towards a common single *nature* or *way of being*.<sup>18</sup> The referent, as seen from Aristotle’s description of this relation in the *Metaphysics*, does not have to be towards the same *definition*. In fact, Aristotle explains that things are related as *pros hen* equivocals when they are united through a reference to a single thing, or a way of being, which possesses, or exemplifies, the nature in question in the primary sense. Hence:

Everything which is healthy is related to health, one thing in the sense that it preserves health, another in the sense that it produces it, another in the sense that it is a symptom of health, another because it is capable of it. And that which is medical is relative to the medical art, one thing in the sense that it possesses it, another in the sense that it is naturally adapted to it, another in the sense that it is a function of the medical art...<sup>19</sup>

For each of these [terms, i.e. medical and healthy] also we use in many senses [*pollachōs legomen*]; and each is used in this way because the former refers somehow to medical science

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<sup>17</sup> Owens 1963, p. 112.

<sup>18</sup> Other kinds of Aristotelian equivocity that I will not go into are: accidental [*kata symbebēkos*], analogical, and equivocity due to a common origin [*aph’henos*].

<sup>19</sup> *Metaphysics* 4, 2.1003a33-b4.

and the latter to health. Other terms refer to other things, but each term refers to some one thing. For a prescription and a knife are called medical because the former proceeds from medical science, and the latter is useful to it. And a thing is called healthy in the same way; one thing because it is indicative of health, another because it is productive of it.<sup>20</sup>

Kosman provides a useful clarification:<sup>21</sup> urine, exercise, and medicine can all be called ‘healthy’, but not in the same sense. What it is for urine to be healthy is different from what it is for exercise to be healthy. But something still unites them. Healthy urine is *indicative* of health, exercise *contributes* to and *maintains* health, and medicine *produces* or *restores* it. What unites them is the fact that they are all called ‘healthy’ in relation to a single [*pros hen*], primary sense of being healthy: to the health of an animal, or to an animal’s being healthy. Importantly, these instances of the derivative senses of ‘healthy’ are not in themselves, or according to their own nature [*kath’ hauto*], united by falling under the same genus. Urine, exercise, and medicine are entities or things with their own individual natures and definitions, and in themselves they are not related as different species belonging to the same genus as, for example a man and an ox both belonging to the genus ‘animal’.<sup>22</sup> Neither are they related in the way members of the same species are. Their relation consists in their equivocal reference to a paradigm instance of the equivocal term, in this case a healthy animal. The reference is equivocal because of the *way in which* every other instance besides the paradigm one is different from the paradigm one. This equivocity is *pros hen* – according to one – since the equivocal senses are related to the one paradigm sense in a derivative and functional way (e.g. producer, restorer, indicator, etc.). To understand what

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<sup>20</sup> *Metaphysics* II, 3.1060b35-1061a6.

<sup>21</sup> Kosman 2013, p.8.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle even suggests that the aim of Primary Philosophy is to provide the solution to the problem “as to how there can be one science of several things which are different in genus” (*Metaphysics* II, 3.1061b17-18. Trans. Tredennick & Armstrong). If *pros hen* approach does not concern itself with the genus-species structure and can point to a unity independent of it, this presents Aristotle with a possible solution.

'health' or 'healthy' is, one needs to understand the nature of the paradigm instance, in this case the health of an animal. This is where the proper nature of health resides; its primary instance, where health *qua* health can be found. This can be reached through tracking equivocal instances through things we call 'healthy' and, once the investigation is complete, it allows us to posit the science of health which will be able to treat across the equivocal instantiations of it regardless of the genus or species of things in which these instances are found.

*To on*, an entity, just like 'healthy' is "said in many ways" and Aristotle sees the approach of treating it as a *pros hen* equivocal as a proper way to investigate an entity *qua* entity:

There are many senses in which a thing may be said to 'be' [*to de on legetai men pollachōs*], but they are related to one certain point [*pros hen*], a single nature [*mian tina physin*]... Everything which is healthy is related to health... And that which is medical is relative to the medical art... And we shall find other words used similarly to these.<sup>23</sup>

In a later part of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle reintroduces this relation:

Since the science of the philosopher treats of an entity *qua* entity universally and not of some part of it [*tou ontos hē(i) on katholou kai ou kata meros*], and 'an entity' has many senses [*to d' on pollachōs (...) legetai*] and is not used in only one (...) if it is used in virtue of some common nature, it will fall under one science. The term seems to be said in the way we have mentioned, like 'medical' and 'healthy'.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Metaphysics* 4, 2.1003a33-b4. Translation slightly modified from Ross who translates *mian tina physin* as "a definite kind of thing."

<sup>24</sup> *Metaphysics* II, 3.1060b31-6. A careful reader will notice that I omit an interesting claim by Aristotle which appears in the same parts of the text I quote here in order to

If *entity* is to be treated of in a manner of a *pros hen* equivocal this shows another difference between Wolff's and Aristotle's conception of Primary Philosophy. *Ens* is, for Wolff, ultimately univocal. If something is to be called an entity it will be so in the same manner as any other, whether we are talking about God, man, or anything in between. For Aristotle, if the investigation into *to on* stands parallel to the investigation into 'healthiness', there should be a certain hierarchy, or at least plurality of the ways in which something is not only *called* entity, but also of the ways something *is* an entity. Exercise is healthy *qua* producer of health in an animal, while an animal is that which exemplifies the nature of health in itself. If we follow this comparison between health and *to on* further, we can also infer that there should be, for Aristotle, some specific entity which serves as a paradigm case uniting the equivocal nature of *to on*. Such a requirement, or anything of that kind, is absent from Wolff.

Another difference between Wolff and Aristotle that is relevant here, and which will provide us with an indication as to why Aristotle sees the

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support the idea that *to on* is a *pros hen* equivocal. The claim is, simply put, that being is *not* said equivocally (II, 3.1060b33 – *ei men oun homonymōs*; 4, 2.1003a34 – *kai ouch homonymōs*). With respect to this *aporia* I follow Owens, who claims that in this paragraph *homonymōs*, which Aristotle urges us not to consider being to be, refers to things which are *totally* equivocal, i.e. equivocals of the kind of the bank or the dog star. I will not present Owens' argument here, but it is important to point out that he argues for this through the appeal to the "equivocal nature of equivocality itself" (Owens 1963, pp. 121-2). Another interesting fact Owens points to in the same discussion (Ibid, pp. 124-5) is that the *pros hen* type of equivocals are not called "analogous" by Aristotle, but that such denomination of them was common in the subsequent Scholastic tradition. While, Owens argues, these two kinds of equivocality are not mutually exclusive, they are clearly distinct. To distinguish them simply, *pros hen* is a two-term (knife is medical as a tool, prescription is medical as a product) while analogy is a four-term relation (cf. *ibid*, p. 123: "As the stone is to Sisyphus, so is the shameless man to his victim"). Owens does not speculate about the reasons why the tradition took over the name *analogy* to render *pros hen*, but we could assume that it might owe to the tradition's not sharing the thought Owens expresses by his claim that *homonymōs legetai pollachōs*.



method of investigation through equivocals as a legitimate philosophical method, concerns what I have, in previous chapters, referred to as the ‘double primacy of metaphysics’. To recapitulate, I have used the phrase ‘double primacy of metaphysics’ to refer to an attempt to posit a philosophical discipline which will be ‘primary’ in the order of nature and in the order of knowledge. It should be clear from the previous section that for Aristotle Primary Philosophy is supposed to stand first in the order of nature. It is supposed to discuss the nature of an entity *qua* entity, and the objects of other sciences are dependent on the results of its investigations. However, is it primary in the order of knowledge? In one sense it is. If we understand the primacy of knowledge as grounded in a discipline that reaches certain knowledge that is the most general then this is what Primary Philosophy is supposed to be. However, if we look at the primacy of knowledge from the perspective of the order of *method*, then the situation seems different.

Aristotle opens the *Physics* with the claim that if the object of an inquiry has principles, causes, or elements, knowledge and understanding [*to eidenai kai to epistasthai*] of the object will be achieved through the acquaintance with these principles, causes, or elements.<sup>25</sup> What Aristotle calls the *natural way* of attaining such knowledge is to “start from the things which are more knowable and clear to us and proceed towards those which are clearer and more knowable by nature [*tē(i) physei*].” Since the same things “are not knowable relatively to us and knowable without qualification” we must “advance from what is more obscure by nature, but clearer to us, towards what is more clear and more knowable by nature.”

The *Metaphysics*<sup>26</sup> expresses a similar thought. “[L]earning proceeds,” Aristotle stresses, “for all in this way – through that which is less intelligible by nature [*physei*] to that which is more intelligible [by nature] (...) so it is our work to start from what is more intelligible to oneself and make what is intelligible by nature intelligible to oneself... [O]ne must start from that which is barely intelligible but intelligible to oneself, and try to understand what is

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<sup>25</sup> *Physics* I, 1.194a10-21.

<sup>26</sup> *Metaphysics* 7, 3.1029b1-12.

intelligible in itself, passing (...) by way of those very things which one understands.”<sup>27</sup>

This can be understood as Aristotelian ‘induction’. For Aristotle, the science of metaphysics will not take the course of an *a priori* deduction in the style of Wolff or Spinoza. Aristotle’s method cannot start from certain universal principles and deductively proceed towards the particular. For him, the procedure is reversed. As Owens writes: “Unlike Parmenides, and to a lesser degree Plato, [Aristotle] does not commence by taking a ‘one’ and asking how it can be many. He is taking a ‘many’ and asking how it can be one.”<sup>28</sup> The answer to the question of unity in plurality will be some form of *pros hen* unity exemplified in the primary instance of the object in question. And this is possible since the scientific inquiry is supposed to start from what is given, from sensible particulars and existing linguistic practices. For Aristotle, if a group of words exemplifies *pros hen* equivocity there is something in their nature which grounds this. In this sense there is no primacy in knowledge from the perspective of method in Aristotle. What we *begin* from in knowledge is not itself *primary* in knowing. We have to reach that which is primary by starting from what is immediately clear *to us*. We have to begin, and it is legitimate to begin, from the particulars. This however, as Owen points out, is not to proceed through abstraction from sensible things, as mathematics would do, but is in fact a demonstration through effects.<sup>29</sup> Since science is ultimately an investigation into causes and principles, the knowledge of these causes can be, and has to be, ‘reverse-engineered’ from the effects of these causes that are found in the world.

By the methodological order, it is important to point out, I do not mean merely *pedagogical* order. This is not the question of how philosophical

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<sup>27</sup> In Scholasticism this will be called a *philosophical order* and contrasted with the *theological order* of inquiry. See Aquinas, *De Trinitate, Prooemium*; Gilson 1961, p. 22; Wippel 1984, p. 124 & 2000, p. xxvii.

<sup>28</sup> Owens 1963, p. 460. Kosman (2013, p. 111) contemplates whether Aristotle’s thought in general is rooted in or influenced by his earlier endeavours in biological thinking.

<sup>29</sup> Owens 1963, p. 26.

doctrine is supposed to be taught after it has been investigated and discovered, but what a proper method of discovery in science is. In Wolff one can find passages that suggest that Primary Philosophy is to be undertaken subsequently to historical cognition or the study of logic. But the priority exemplified in these passages regards the enabling conditions of a science and the pedagogical order of learning it. They do not refer to the essential method of scientific enquiry that is *a priori* and deductive. For Aristotle, on the other hand, proceeding from the particulars is the proper method of sciences and the way this will be done, particularly in Primary Philosophy, is through following the *pros hen* equivocals of entity to their ultimate causes.

Bearing all this in mind, how is the equivocal treatment of *to on* supposed to proceed? Firstly, as in the case of health, Aristotle needs to identify the ways in which *to on* is said equivocally. Most of the discussion of the equivocal instances of *to on* can be found in books 5-7 of the *Metaphysics*. Two instances that Aristotle provides (out of several), in which something is equivocally referred to as *to on*, are: “what a thing is or a ‘this’ [*to men ti esti kai tode ti*]” and the sense known from the categories.<sup>30</sup> I will not go into more detail regarding these or other instances, but will proceed immediately to the question Aristotle claims exemplifies the primary nature of an entity *qua* entity which is to be investigated:

[T]he question which, both now and of old, has always been raised, and has always been the subject of doubt, viz. what an entity is [*ti to on*], is just the question, what is substance? [*tis hē ousia*] (...) and so we also must consider chiefly and primarily and almost exclusively what that is which *is* in this sense.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. 2. *To on and hē ousia*

It might seem *prima facie* strange to claim that the primary object of the question ‘what is an entity?’ should be something called ‘substance’. This

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<sup>30</sup> *Metaphysics* 7, I.1028a10-13.

<sup>31</sup> *Metaphysics* 7, I.1028b4-7. Translation modified.

strangeness, however, is due to the historical path the term has taken from its original instantiation as *ousia*.<sup>32</sup> The word which I refer to as ‘an entity’ – *to on*, that which is, – is a neuter active participle of *einai*, *to be*. *Einai* also possesses masculine and feminine present participle forms – *ōn* and *ousa*. From the feminine form, the substantive form *ousia* is derived.<sup>33</sup> A more literal way of rendering *ousia* would be, rather than substance, *beingness*.<sup>34</sup>

Besides the etymological link, the reason why the question of the nature of entity *qua* entity is to be posited as the nature of *ousia* can be understood if we recall the two equivocal instances in which *to on* is used that I mentioned above, i.e. ‘what a thing is’ and the categorical sense. Aristotle elaborates:

While *to on* has all these senses, obviously that which is primarily is the ‘what’ [*proton on to ti estin*], which indicates the *ousia* of the thing [*hoper sēmainei tēn ousian*]. For when we say of what quality a thing is, we say that it is good or

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<sup>32</sup> Kosman (2014, *passim*; also cf. Owens 1963, pp. 138-145) gives an account of the “two interwoven stories” of Stoicism and Christianity in an attempt to explain the historical factors contributing to the decision of the Latin, and subsequently English, tradition to understand *ousia* as *substantia* and how this resulted in a great deal of historical misinterpretation of Aristotle. This misinterpretation, Kosman argues, influenced the philosophies of Locke, Descartes, and Spinoza to such an extent that our abandonment of such a translation could be problematic for our understanding of the philosophical tradition following early modernity.

<sup>33</sup> No pun intended.

<sup>34</sup> It seems that the contemporary scholars rarely tire of making this point – cf. Owens 1963, pp. 18, 139, 140, 188, *et passim*; Gilson 1952, p. 74. Kosman (2014, p. ix) also points out that *ousia* tends to be translated as *being* in translation of Plato’s texts and that translating it as *substance* obscures the fact that Aristotle responds to the Platonic worries about being. Another very interesting point is Owens’ (Owens 1963, pp. 138-151) attempt to argue that the translation of *ousia* as *Entity* manages to capture the semantic implications in English which *ousia* might exhibit in Ancient Greek. Regardless of my debt to his work, I have not followed Owens in this practice in my use of the term ‘entity’.

beautiful, but not that it is three cubits long or that it is a man; but when we say *what* it is [*ti estin*], we do not say ‘white’ or ‘hot’ or ‘three cubits long’, but ‘man’ or ‘God’. And all other things are said to be because they are, some of them, quantities of that which *is* in this primary sense, others qualities of it, others affections of it, and others some other determination of it... Therefore that which is primarily and *is* simply (not *is* something) must be *ousia*.<sup>35</sup>

This shows us that the answer to the question of ‘what is an entity *qua* entity’ will not be found in asking what something is like, how big it is, or what colour it is. It has to be sought by asking the question of *what* something is. This *what* needs to be understood in a sense different from any quality, quantity, relation, etc., that the thing in question might exemplify, i.e. from the way something is understood when subsumed under categories. To investigate a man in this way, is to investigate *humanity*; to investigate fire is to investigate *ignicity*; to investigate *to on* is to investigate *beingness*, or *ousia*. So to say that to investigate an entity *qua* entity is to investigate *ousia* is to reconceptualise the way the question is asked. It simply means to ask *what* an entity is, in a sense of what it is in itself, simply and primarily. The question of what is *ousia* is primary since, it serves as a question of the nature of entity *qua* entity, and both man and fire are themselves entities. Moreover, it is primary since in order to investigate entities in any other sense, we need to know the *what* of those other senses or ways of being:

[W]e think we know each thing most fully, when we know what it is [*ti estin*], e.g. what man is or what fire is, rather than when we know its quality, its quantity, or where it is; since we know each of these things also, only when we know *what* [*ti esti*] the quantity or the quality *is*.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Metaphysics* 7, I.1028a13-31.

<sup>36</sup> *Metaphysics* 7, I.1028b1-3.

*Ousia* will appear as the name for a fundamental object of investigation in various other sciences. For example, it is discussed in the *Categories*, book 5 and in the *Physics*. However, in these various other sciences it does not appear in its primary sense. The primary sense is discussed in the *Metaphysics* and since this is the description of the primary nature of the entity *qua* entity, and since all sciences are concerned with entities, it will appear, in one way or another, in all of them. Indeed, similarly to *to on*, *ousia* is also spoken of equivocally, and is as such present in other sciences. In the *Categories*, a logical work, it will be understood as the ultimate subject of predication<sup>37</sup> and in *Physics*, which is the investigation into the changeable world, it will be understood as the underlying matter of change.<sup>38</sup>

What this tells us is that the question ‘what is an entity *qua* entity?’ is to be interpreted as the question ‘what is substance/*ousia*?’ It does not yet tell us, however, what an entity *qua* entity *is*. But we can already see that this investigation differs from Wolff’s. Wolff’s question of what an entity *qua* entity is, is not rephrased in this way. It does not point towards the question of what has sometimes been called the “Being of beings”, as we might see Aristotle’s investigation doing. Unlike Aristotle’s question of *ousia*, Wolff will see the question of entity *qua* entity as the question regarding predicates of any possible entities, what seems to be more in line with Aristotle’s categorical sense, rather than the primary sense. But what is Aristotle’s primary sense?

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<sup>37</sup> A lot of work has been undertaken in discussing how the account of *ousia* translates from the *Categories* to *Metaphysics*. Owens (1963, *passim*) shows that the correspondence is rather erratic and that there is no simple transposition of primary and secondary *ousia* of the *Categories* into the context of *Metaphysics*. For a more specialized treatment of the problem see Driscoll 1981.

<sup>38</sup> Owens 1963, p. 326. Similarly, since the object of the *Physics* is not predicates, but the realm of change, the subject of predication in the *Physics* comes to be understood as the subject of change. See *Physics* I, 7.190a.

### 2. 3. *Actuality and formal causation*

*Physics* investigates the changeable realm, the world of motion. Anyone familiar with the *Physics* will be familiar with Aristotle's definition of motion: "actuality of potential *qua* potential."<sup>39</sup> There has been a lot written about the proper interpretation of this cryptic formula, but I cannot go into much detail about it. The thing to remember is that motion (and hence change and the realm characterized by it) is itself a certain *actuality* [*energeia*]. Motion is telic: it exists between two points and stops when it reaches its goal. It is, as Kosman calls it, a "suicidal mode of being".<sup>40</sup> Motion itself is fully actual; however, unlike substance, motion in its complete actuality *qua* motion is incomplete. It is incomplete since its end is not *within itself* and therefore once it reaches its end the motion disappears. If this incomplete actuality, activity, or *energeia* is what characterizes the realm of the physical, is there a way to understand *energeia* in its complete form?

One might now interrupt and ask why we are suddenly concerning ourselves with actuality. We were promised a discourse on an entity *qua* entity, then we suddenly turned to a discussion of substance, and we are now changing the topic once again with a discussion of actuality. The reason for this, however, will soon become clear.

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle reflects on the physical treatise and tells us that the sense of substance as described in the *Physics*, i.e. substance as a substratum, is generally recognized by other philosophers. To understand substance in such a way is to understand it in the sense of potentiality and as matter.<sup>41</sup> This is, Aristotle acknowledges, "the strictest sense of potentiality [*dynamis*], but not the most useful for our present purposes"<sup>42</sup> because "both

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<sup>39</sup> *Physics* III, 2.201a11.

<sup>40</sup> Kosman 2013, p. 44. I will not go further into the interpretation of motion, but I rely on Kosman's 1969 interpretation and its development in his *Activity of Being* (2013) to which I direct an interested reader.

<sup>41</sup> *Metaphysics* 8, 2.1042b9-10.

<sup>42</sup> *Metaphysics* 9, 1.1045b35-6.

potentiality [*dynamis*] and actuality [*energeia*] extend further than the mere sphere of motion [*kinesis*].”<sup>43</sup> Instead, what we must now do is to ask about substance of sensible things as *actuality* or *energeia*, rather than as substratum, or as matter and potentiality [*dynamis*].<sup>44</sup> From the *Physics* we see that *energeia* “is in the strict sense identified with movement,” but our understanding must be extended “from movements to other things.”<sup>45</sup> This is because for Aristotle actuality is the primary way of understanding substance, because “both substance or form is actuality,” and actuality as such is prior to potentiality.<sup>46</sup>

Why is this so? For Aristotle, *to ti ēn einai* of each thing, the phrase commonly translated as *essence*,<sup>47</sup> “is what it [the thing] is said to be in virtue of itself [*kath’ hauto*].”<sup>48</sup> It belongs primarily and simply to substance, and it is a *pros hen* equivocal in the same way ‘entity’ is.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, we only know each thing when we know its essence,<sup>50</sup> and each “primary and self-subsistent thing [i.e. each substance] is one and the same as its essence.”<sup>51</sup> In short, *to ti ēn einai*, is one of the ways in which substance is said.<sup>52</sup>

In the realm of sensible, physical things, substance is usually understood as a substrate, *hypokeimenon*. We have already said that this is not supposed to be the primary way of understanding substance, but Aristotle says that it is common and important to discuss. Aristotle tells us that by

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<sup>43</sup> *Metaphysics* 9, 2.1046a1.

<sup>44</sup> *Metaphysics* 8, 2.1042b10.

<sup>45</sup> *Metaphysics* 9, 3.1047a30-2. By “most strictly” Aristotle seems to refer to the way the Greek word is most generally understood.

<sup>46</sup> *Hē ousia kai to eidos energeia estin. Metaphysics* 9, 8.1050b.

<sup>47</sup> Owens translates the phrase as “what-IS-being” in order to eliminate any subsequently developed connotations the word *essence* might bear which would lead us away from the proper understanding of what *to ti ēn einai* is supposed to mean for Aristotle. For his arguments and distinctions see Owens 1963, p. 173.

<sup>48</sup> *Metaphysics* 7, 4.1029b12-14.

<sup>49</sup> *Metaphysics* 7, 4.1030a35.

<sup>50</sup> *Metaphysics* 7, 6.1031b20.

<sup>51</sup> *Metaphysics* 7, 6.1032a4-5.

<sup>52</sup> *Metaphysics* 7, 3.1028b34.



*hypokeimenon* people commonly refer to either matter [*hylē*], shape [*morphē*], or the compound of the two, i.e. the concrete thing in question. If we take Aristotle's example of a bronze statue, we understand *hypokeimenon* to either be the bronze, the shape/form,<sup>53</sup> or the statue as a compound. Now, if substance is to stand for the nature of an entity understood as an entity, as a *this*, and if it is to be identified with *essence* which is what something is said to be in virtue of itself and that by which things are knowable, what does it take to know what a statue is *kath' hauto* or *qua* statue? It is not to know its matter. If we know the matter of the statue *kath' hauto* we know it as bronze *qua* bronze, not *qua* matter of the statue. It tells us nothing about what this statue is *qua* statue. With the form, however, things are different. If we know the form of the statue, we know the statue *qua* statue, we know *what it is to be* a statue. If we phrase this in terms of potency and actuality, bronze *qua* bronze, *kath' hauto*, is actually bronze, but not potentially a statue. There is nothing in the nature of the bronze itself which would point towards it being a statue. On the other hand, bronze *qua* statue is bronze as *potentially* a statue; it is bronze as the matter of the statue. But then it is no longer *kath' hauto*. It stops being *entelic* and becomes *telic* – its actualization lies in something else, in a form to which it belongs, the form of a statue, rather than to the form of bronze.

In this way, form is prior to matter in the sense that form is the seat of determinacy, actuality and knowability. If we are to know something as it is in itself, we must know it *qua* form. Knowing it *qua* matter requires us to understand what it is the matter of. Matter *kath' hauto*, i.e. matter conceived as matter without the “*of something*” is unknowable, since it lacks the necessary determination for knowability – it lacks the “*of something*.” Substance, even as a *hypokeimenon*, cannot be *of something*, since it *is that something*. Substance, therefore, if it is the essence, form, and *energeia*, is prior to matter because it is what gives matter its determination, it gives matter shape, purpose, and context for understanding. This does not mean that the material component in artefacts is something ‘less real’ or ‘not really’ part of an artefact, or that every

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<sup>53</sup> Aristotle here uses *morphē*, but he seems to treat *shape* and *form* equivalently in general. Cf. *Metaphysics* 5, 8.1017b22; 7, 8.1033b5.

compound features two *things* competing for explanatory space. As Owens puts it:

The matter, then, *is the thing itself*. It and the form *are one and the same thing*. The matter is the thing as *potency*. In saying that a statue is bronze, you are expressing the Being of the statue. You are saying *what* it is. Everything in the statue is in some way bronze. But you are expressing the Being of the statue only as potency. If you say: “It is a figure of Hercules” you are expressing the very same Being, but you are expressing it as act... there is nothing in the statue considered from a material viewpoint, that is not bronze. The bronze expresses everything in the statue, but only as its matter... the matter has to be conceived as being the whole composite – potentially.<sup>54</sup>

This suggests that for Aristotle, substance [*ousia*], essence [*to ti ēn einai*], actuality [*energeia*], and form [*eidos*] are equivalent in their primary instance. This, then, provides us with context for the interpretation of what an entity *qua* entity is. An entity, considered just as an entity, in itself, *kath’ hauto*, is substance, essence, actuality, and form, and this is the context through which we need to interpret all other, non-primary instantiations of it.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Owens 1963, p.341.

<sup>55</sup> I recognise this is a very nuanced and complicated matter and I have presented it very swiftly and crudely. To gain a complete understanding of Aristotle’s ideas, one would need to be clear about how a thing can be one thing in number but different in being (e.g. a statue as potency and a statue as actuality are one and the same *thing*, but different *in being*), understand the difference in substance or being between natural things (e.g. *horse*), accidental instances of natural things (e.g. *grey horse*), and artefacts, and be clear on Aristotle’s mereology, especially ideas of how a dead body is a body equivocally, or how a blind eye is not an eye. Even *apropos* essences, I have only provided one instantiation of ‘essence’, *to ti ēn einai*, while the others remain undiscussed. The lack of space and time prevents me from discussing these issues in any more detail; however, it might be of interest to note that my understanding of the background nuances is largely based on Kosman’s (2013) interpretation.

## 2. 4. *Reduction to Form and Aristotle's Theology*

In his *Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger writes:

For a long time we have been accustomed to representing cause as that which brings something about. In this connection, to bring about means to obtain results, effect. The *causa efficiens*, but one among the four causes, sets the standard for all causality... The doctrine of the four causes goes back to Aristotle. But everything that later ages seek in Greek thought under the conception and rubric "causality," in the realm of Greek thought and for Greek thought per se has simply nothing at all to do with bringing about and effecting. What we call cause [*Ursache*] and the Romans call *causa* is called *aition* by the Greeks, that to which something else is indebted.<sup>56</sup>

One might disagree with Heidegger's interpretation of the four causes, and I do not intend here to put a Heideggerian tint on my interpretation. The reason I am bringing up Heidegger is because this way of understanding causation is in my view helpful for understanding what I have described Aristotle doing so far. If we look at the four causes of through the perspective of indebtedness, we can see why Aristotle posits the formal cause as the most important kind of cause for Primary Philosophy. A thing is indebted to the formal cause for *what it is*, and, as I discussed earlier, to truly know something is to know *what* it is. A thing owes what it is to its form, and to be what it is *actually*, rather than what it could be potentially. To its matter it owes what it is made of, and matter on its own, devoid of any form, is absolutely indeterminate and unknowable. It is not anything.

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<sup>56</sup> Heidegger 1977, p. 7.

This enables us to draw an important comparison between Aristotle's and Wolff's Primary Philosophy. What results from Aristotle's investigation into the nature of an entity *qua* entity is the positing of a group of *pros hen* equivocals which have to be understood as form in the sense of an act. An entity *qua* entity is understood as a particular actuality grounded on formal causation. This is what all entities primarily *are*. For Wolff, however, the primary sense in which an entity is to be investigated is as a logical possibility. Wolff's *Ontologia* presents us with a group of predicates attributable to any *possible* thing. There is no reduction to causality, except in a sense that all predicates in *Ontologia* are derived through the principle of sufficient reason which can be understood as *causa essendi*. In a sense, both Aristotle and Wolff are formalists.<sup>57</sup> Primary Philosophy will be an investigation into the primary essences of everything. Nevertheless, for Aristotle primary essence will refer to the formal actuality of an essence, while for Wolff essences will refer to a set of compossible predicates of a thing. The ultimate reduction for Wolff does not result in formal cause or actuality of an entity, but in the principle of non-contradiction. For Wolff, actuality has to do with empirical existence and as such has no place in Primary Philosophy.

This brings us to another similarity between the two. In Aristotle's Primary Philosophy there is also no place for existence. In fact it is difficult to locate the conception of existence in Aristotle in general. This might seem strange since in *Metaphysics* 9, for example, Aristotle writes that "actuality means the existence of the thing" – *hē energeia to hyparchein to pragma*.<sup>58</sup> The problem with this quotation, however, is that *hyparchein* ordinarily means *to begin* or *to be present*, rather than *to exist*. In Tredennick's rendition of this passage in his Loeb translation he uses *presence* rather than *existence*. Ross translates *hyparchein* interchangeably as either *existence* or *presence* in

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<sup>57</sup> In Gilson's (1961, p. 33) terminology they are 'essentialists' as opposed to 'existentialists'. For Gilson essentialism holds that the element of the form, achieving completion in substance, is the very core of reality. Alternatively, within Gilsonian existentialism the form is further actualized by existence.

<sup>58</sup> *Metaphysics*, 9, 6.1048a38-b4.

*Metaphysics* 7, 1041b4-6 and throughout the text he uses the word *exist* or a certain combination (e.g. *an existing thing*) to render *einai* or *to on*.

While suggesting that there is no specific word for existence in the Ancient Greek, this also seems to suggest that there still is an understanding or a sense of it. Owens (1963, p. 146) and Dancy (1986, p. 50) confirm that there is no separate verb for *to exist* in Greek. All of them, however, Gilson, Owens, and Dancy, argue that even the *sense* of our term 'existence' is either lacking, overlooked, or ignored by Aristotle. Gilson writes:

Aristotle has never stopped to consider existence in itself and then deliberately proceeded to exclude it from being. There is no text in which Aristotle says that actual being is not such in virtue of its own "to be", but we have plenty of texts in which he tells us that to be is something else. In fact, everything goes as if, when he speaks of being, he never thought of existence. He does not reject it, he completely overlooks it.<sup>59</sup>

Owens shares a similar sentiment. He argues that in Aristotle existential problems and a sense of existence are not denied, but reduced to the level of accidents. Therefore, there cannot be a scientific treatment of them, Primary Philosophy cannot deal with them, since primary science does not deal with the accidental.<sup>60</sup>

All that is scientifically knowable in the efficient cause is the form... Aristotle has shown no interest in any existential problems. He sees, most certainly, efficient causality as a fact in the world of nature (...) but is satisfied with its explanation in terms of form... The agent has the form, and so is able to cause that form in another matter. All that has to be accounted for is the *same* form in a different matter... Nothing

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<sup>59</sup> Gilson 1952, 45-6.

<sup>60</sup> Owens 1963, p. 309.

prompts him to ask how *existence* can be given to the new individuals by their efficient cause. The fact is taken for granted. The problem is ignored.<sup>61</sup>

This is due to the fact that from the perspective of Primary Philosophy the efficient cause, the one which we would today understand as the cause of the existence of a thing, is reduced to the formal one. For this, we have to look a bit closer at book 7 of the *Metaphysics*. When talking about the production of things, i.e. the efficient cause, Aristotle uses the phrase “man begets man”. For example:

Both that from which [things] are produced is nature, and the type according to which they are produced is nature (...), and so is that by which they are produced – the so-called ‘formal’ nature, which is specifically the same as the nature of the thing produced.<sup>62</sup>

Similarly, “in some cases it is even obvious that the producer is of the same kind as the produced (not, however, the same nor one in number, but in form), e.g. in the case of natural products (for man produces man).”<sup>63</sup>

The significance of the phrase for the status of the efficient cause can be additionally clarified by appealing to the *Physics*, where we are told that: “the mover will always transmit a form (...), which, when it moves, will be the principle and cause of the motion, e.g. the actual man begets man from what is potentially man.”<sup>64</sup>

This shows us that the efficient cause and the formal cause are “formally identical but materially different,”<sup>65</sup> meaning that they differ with

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<sup>61</sup> Owens 1963, p. 359.

<sup>62</sup> *Metaphysics* 7, 7.1032a22-5.

<sup>63</sup> *Metaphysics* 7, 8.1033b29-33.

<sup>64</sup> *Physics* 3, 2.202a9-11.

<sup>65</sup> Owens 1963, p.359.

respect to matter. The essential difference between a man and his son, when observed on the primary level of substance and *to ti ēn einai* lies solely in matter. Their form is the same, i.e. the form of “man”, but each is made of different ‘stuff’. Therefore “since the matter is unknowable, the efficient cause must, for the purposes of scientific knowledge, be reduced to the form.”<sup>66</sup> This suggests that from the metaphysical perspective, the only interesting aspect of efficient causation is *that* it is a certain transmitting of form. How certain forms get transmitted, how a man begets a man, is of no interest to Primary Philosophy. From the perspective of substance, i.e. the perspective of a thing simply in virtue of its being, the only thing which happens in the efficient cause is the formation of matter, a form being transmitted. As such, Primary Philosophy is concerned only with the form that is transmitted, and not *how* it is transmitted.

So far I have explained why for Aristotle the question of what an entity *qua* entity is has to be understood as the question of what a substance/*ousia* is. The answer is that an entity *qua* entity is to be understood in terms of actuality or form, which constitutes the ultimate ground of reality. An entity *qua* entity is the form. But the form of what? Of that particular entity. This, however, does not seem to give us the kind of answer we might have been hoping for. For Aristotle there are many different forms in the world, since every particular entity, natural or artificial, has a form, nature, or essence. But what seems to be lacking is an overarching unifying principle, such as Thales’ water, Plato’s form of the Good, or the Neo-Platonic One. There is no such ultimate principle of unity in Aristotle. Forms, the ultimate instances of actuality, are found in the state of unreduced plurality. But it would be hasty to say that since there is no such principle to be found in Aristotle’s writings explicitly, that such a principle cannot be implicitly present in his thought. Let us recall the discussion of the *pros hen* equivocation by which the investigation into entities *qua* entities proceeds. With the example of health, the equivocals were tracked towards a particular *entity* that exemplified the characteristic of health in the primary instance: an animal. The same will be true for the investigation into entity *qua* entity. *Health* is concept that unites disparate entities to which it

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<sup>66</sup> Owens 1963, p.359.

equivocally refers, through the reference to the same nature exemplified in a particular entity that is a healthy animal. Similarly, *to on*, *ousia*, and *energeia* are equivocals that unite everything and they will themselves have a paradigmatic instance which will demonstrate the single nature towards which they all point and explain how they relate to it (e.g. as the way in which exercise relates to health as its preserver). To understand what this is and how it is supposed to operate we need to understand the reduction of the final cause to the formal one.

In Book 12 of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle argues that there must necessarily be an eternal immobile substance. He appeals to the necessity of the eternal continuity and existence of motion, which he has proven in the *Physics*.<sup>67</sup> In order to guarantee the eternity and continuity of motion, this immobile substance must be actuality [*energeia*] itself, for if there were any potentiality in it there could be no *eternal* movement, since the movement would *be able to stop*, even if it were never to actually stop.<sup>68</sup> Such a mover moves the first heavens without being moved and is eternal, is *ousia* and *energeia* itself. Aristotle then likens this mover to the object of thought, since the object of thought moves thought without being moved. This allows Aristotle to introduce the idea of the final cause, or “that for the sake of which”, through the eternal mover. The final cause is “both that *for* which and that *towards* which,” and in that sense, all other things move towards the first mover through love<sup>69</sup> – for when thought is moved by an object that itself does not move, it is moved by love. Because such a mover is conceived as pure actuality it “of necessity is an entity,”<sup>70</sup> and “in so far as it is necessary, it is good, and in this sense a first principle.”<sup>71</sup>

If, therefore, the final cause is primarily understood in the sense of love towards the absolutely actual, unmoved, eternal mover, and actuality has

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<sup>67</sup> *Metaphysics* 12, 6.1071b5-10.

<sup>68</sup> *Metaphysics* 12, 6.1071b20-3.

<sup>69</sup> *Metaphysics* 12, 7.1072a24-1072b3.

<sup>70</sup> *Metaphysics* 12, 7.1072b10-11. ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἄρα ἐστὶν ὄν. Translation mine.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*



already been identified with substance and form, we can see how the final cause has its primary instance with respect to actuality. As pure actuality which is not in motion, the eternal mover is *entelic* rather than *telic*. Its final cause is not outside it, but within it; it is its substance and essence.

Through this series of reductions we reach the primary way and primary instance of an entity – an entity as an entity is actuality, *energeia*, pure separate form exemplified in the god of Aristotle and other separate substances. This will constitute the paradigmatic instance of the *pros hen* equivocal *to on* to which other entities relate as subjects of love. Of course, any particular entity will possess a particular final cause. When I spoke of motion I have mentioned how for Aristotle motion exemplifies a kind of actuality that is telic, incomplete, and aiming for fulfilment, the completion and stasis exemplified by the separate substances and the Prime Mover. This applies to all living beings and is at heart of Aristotle's eudaimonic ethics. Our striving for *eudaimonia*, our final cause, is a striving for actualisation, for the unity of ourselves with our essence, which is given in our form since form, actuality, and essence are one. But while particular entities strive towards the reaching of their actualisation through unity with their particular essence, an entity *qua* entity must be seen as striving towards the unity with the perfect and purely actual separate substance, with the pure form of god. The whole structure of final causality, regardless of the particular ways it instantiates itself in complex substances, is grounded in this *immitatio dei*.

This part of Primary Philosophy constitutes what can be called Aristotelian Theology, and he would not object to it being called so. Aristotle himself tells us that Wisdom will be the most divine and honourable science since it is supposed to deal with god amongst the causes of all things, and as a first principle, and with divine objects.<sup>72</sup> Due to this, Aristotle names it *theologikē* – theology (or theologies).<sup>73</sup> Indeed, it is very important for Aristotle that Primary Philosophy deal with separate substances besides dealing with entities *qua* entities. Hence in book 6 of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle distinguishes

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<sup>72</sup> *Metaphysics* I, 2.983a8-9.

<sup>73</sup> *Metaphysics* 6, I.1026a19.

physics and mathematics from Primary Philosophy by saying that the former deals with things inseparable from matter, but not immovable; mathematics deals with things which are immovable but embodied in matter; Primary Philosophy deals with what is separable and immovable.<sup>74</sup> In fact, Aristotle raises the possibility of there being no substance other than natural substance, in which case the science of nature would be the first science.<sup>75</sup>

This raises a question to which I have in previous chapters referred to as the question of ‘the Aristotelian ambiguity’. At the heart of it is the question of what kind of science Aristotle’s Primary Philosophy is supposed to be. Is it supposed to be a science of the entity *qua* entity or a science of supersensible entities? The problem arises since if understood in the latter sense it is understood as a science of a particular kind of entity; in the former sense it deals with no particular kind of entity, be that sensible or supersensible. In this chapter I have presented an interpretation that attempts to resolve the problem through the appeal to the method of *pros hen* equivocation. Aristotle’s philosophy, according to this, *is* a theology. It is a science ultimately concerned with separate *ousiai*. But the nature of an entity *qua* entity, and hence of any sensible entity is ultimately understood through the reference to the primary instance of what it is to be an entity exemplified in an absolutely immobile *ousia*, with final causality serving as the referent connecting the two. Understood in this sense, Aristotle’s Primary Philosophy is fundamentally different from Wolff’s. Wolff’s understanding of the nature of *ens* is independent from any of its particular instantiations, including in the *ens perfectissimum*. *Ens perfectissimum*, God, is an object of theology which is a completely separate and ‘subserving’ science to *Ontologia*. *Ens qua Ens*, on the other hand, is a predicate of greatest abstraction and comprehension, and the most empty in content. It requires nothing but non-contradictory conceivability and, as such, is a concept for which there is no correspondent in Aristotle’s Primary Philosophy.

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<sup>74</sup> *Metaphysics* 6, 1.1026a10.

<sup>75</sup> *Metaphysics* 6, 1.1026a27-30.

For this interpretation I relied heavily on the work of Joseph Owens presented in his book *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*. The success of Owens' interpretation, and of my understanding and presentation of it, is open for discussion, but regardless of whether it is a correct reading of Aristotle or whether it is a coherent theory in its own right, the fact remains that Aristotelian ambiguity is a problem any interpreter of Aristotle has to address. In the next section I will show that Aristotelian ambiguity, in one form or another, has been a persistent problem throughout the centuries of the interpretation of Aristotle and, more importantly for my purposes, that there is a possibility of tracking attempted solutions to it up to Wolff's conceptualization of ontology.

### **3. Aristotelian Ambiguity**

The interpretation of the problematic nature of Aristotelian ambiguity in the precise form I have described above is, according to Owens, a relatively recent problem:

The systematic dismembering of the traditional metaphysics into different sciences, familiar enough from Francis Bacon and Christian Wolff, has during the past few years been carried back to Aristotle himself. Instead of dealing with a philosopher who had one science of a proposed contradictory object, or who at successive stages of his career developed different conceptions of the science that upon close scrutiny turn out to be contradictory, one has now to meet also an Aristotle who himself developed and held simultaneously two distinct metaphysical sciences each having a different object.<sup>76</sup>

The two sciences are the science of the supersensible *only*, described as Primary Philosophy or theology, and the science of *to on hē(i) on* subsequently described as metaphysics or ontology. This is, however, a problem with the

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<sup>76</sup> Owens 1963, p. 16.

interpretation of Aristotle that occurs after the historical period that is of interest for my project. Owens attributes the origin of this interpretation of Aristotelian ambiguity to Paul Natorp's *Thema und Disposition der aristotelischen Metaphysik* of 1888 where, according to Natorp, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is composed of two series of texts expressing a "mutually exclusive" conceptions of Primary Philosophy.<sup>77</sup>

This is not, however, as Owen himself explains, the first time in the long history of the interpretation of the *Metaphysics* that what I call Aristotelian ambiguity has caused problems. Owens points out that under this conception of ambiguity the Aristotelian entity *qua* entity is understood as the most empty of notions. This, however, was not the case in Mediaeval interpretations of Aristotle, where *ens qua ens* is understood as both widest in comprehension, but also the richest in content. I will discuss some medieval interpretations in the next section of this chapter, but at this point I would like to investigate Aristotelian ambiguity in a different sense, the one that does depend specifically on how one interprets Aristotle's entity *qua* entity.

One can see that in the form of Aristotelian ambiguity described above the key tension can be posited as lying between the concepts of Primary Philosophy and Theology. Is Primary Philosophy fundamentally a theology or is it also something else? The additional problem arises with the introduction of the term *metaphysics*. As everyone knows the term *metaphysics* is absent from Aristotle; however, following the ambiguous time of its conception it has, within philosophical terminology, superseded both Primary Philosophy and Theology. Wolff's claim that ontology and theology are to be seen as parts of this science called *metaphysics* would make no sense to Aristotle. However, it makes sense to us, and it did to Wolff. One would even see it as a trivial matter today (at least if one is a philosopher) that ontology (whatever it may be) properly belongs to metaphysics (whatever that may be). But this was not always so, and here I wish to see how it was possible for it to become so.

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<sup>77</sup> Owens 1963, p. 35.

The relationship between Aristotle's Primary Philosophy and Theology, the study of an entity *qua* entity and of divine *ousiai*, when we consider the work of his early Greek commentators, seems to follow the lines of my interpretation presented in the previous sections. The universality of an entity *qua* entity is seen as the universality of the divine *ousiai* by the way of reference through causality. Divine *ousiai* are causes of all other entities, and as such investigating them reaches the universality desired in the investigation of an entity *qua* entity.<sup>78</sup> The dissociation between Primary Philosophy and theology seems to occur around the 12<sup>th</sup> century, likely due to the connotations the term 'theology' gained, i.e. becoming the science of the Revealed Truth. The question of the nature of the entity *qua* entity becomes understood as the question of *ens commune*, of what is common to all entities *distinct from* God. In order to elaborate on this position I will now focus on the philosophy of Aquinas.

### **3. 1. Aristotle and Aquinas**

No thinker, including Aquinas, can solely speak on behalf of the whole of Scholasticism, not to mention of the whole of mediaeval philosophy. The reason I focus on Aquinas is due to the influence he had regarding the introduction of Aristotelian metaphysics into systematic theology and due to influence that he had on Wolff, at least according to the latter's claims. Subsequently, Aquinas will allow me to formulate a certain conception of non-ontological metaphysics that we can point to in the development of metaphysics after Wolff.

One noticeable change that happens by Aquinas' time is the adoption of the term *metaphysics* into general philosophical vocabulary. This term was used, similarly to how it remains in use today, to refer to both Aristotle's text and the science Aristotle named Primary Philosophy. The term *theology*, however, is understood as the science of Revelation, although some overlaps with Aristotelian conception persist. Hence for Aquinas metaphysics is, similarly to Aristotle, a divine science, although less perfect than the science of

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<sup>78</sup> See Owens 1963, pp. 43-9.

Revelation, and proceeds through a different order. One noticeable difference is that in Aquinas *divinity* will refer to what pertains to the God of Abraham, unlike for Aristotle and other Greeks for whom “god” and “divine” served as predicates to indicate greatness.<sup>79</sup> Aristotelian separate substances also undergo a contextual transformation and are interpreted through the hierarchy of angelic intelligences.<sup>80</sup>

Another characteristic of Aquinas’ interpretation of Aristotle regards the positing of two different orders of inquiry. These are called the Philosophical and Theological order and are discussed briefly in the *Prooemium* to *De Trinitate* and *SCG* Lib. 2, cap. 4. There Aquinas maintains that for philosophers, who follow the natural order of cognition, the knowledge of creatures comes before the knowledge of the divine things, but for theologians the order is reversed. The science of metaphysics will, as is the case in Aristotle, proceed through the philosophical order, studying creatures prior to studying the Creator, i.e. from the particulars to the universals. Theology, will proceed from universals to the particular, or more specifically, from the highest reality of God towards the creatures, guided by Revelation.

There are two points I would like to make before proceeding. Firstly, Aquinas adopts the philosophical order in his metaphysical texts as it can be seen in the *Prooemium* to *De Ente*, although he does not call it by that name explicitly. His metaphysical conclusions, however, are required not to contradict what was revealed in the Scripture and in Aquinas’ eyes the two are unable to contradict each other. If philosophy contradicts Revelation it is not philosophy in anything but in name, and the contradictory conclusion must come as a by-product of bad reasoning.<sup>81</sup> This position, more often than not, results in Aquinas ensuring that his interpretation of the Scripture and Authority supports his interpretation of Aristotle’s thought, rather than vice versa. This makes it possible for a philosopher of today to read and engage

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<sup>79</sup> See Owens 1963, p. 171.

<sup>80</sup> For more details on the Aquinas’ distinction between philosophy and theology regarding their objects, see *De Trinitate*, pars 1, q.5, a.4, co.

<sup>81</sup> *De Trinitate*, pars 1, q. 2, a. 3, co. 1-2; *Contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, cap. 9, n. 2.

with Aquinas on the metaphysical level, without the need to take over Aquinas' theological project and concerns.<sup>82</sup>

The second point I would like to make is that the differentiation between the Philosophical and Theological order does not need to be limited strictly to attempts to posit a methodological difference between philosophy and theology. These terms could be utilised in order to differentiate between philosophical methods and systems in general. Aristotle's approach can then be listed as following the philosophical order - the approach was named after him after all - but so could Kant's. They both start from the givenness of sensible, empirical reality and proceed to investigate the universal principles underpinning it. On the other hand, thinkers such as Spinoza, Wolff, or Hegel<sup>83</sup> start from a kind of a universal starting point from which the particular is supposed to be derived. Hence the reasoning proceeds from the causes to the caused, rather than vice versa. This, of course is not supposed to exhaust or collapse the differences between the systems and methods used by these thinkers. It is more intended as a tool for quick categorisation and comparison and the systems grouped within the same order can and will contain substantial differences beyond this one unifying category.

So the first difference between Aristotle and Aquinas, and the one regarding the Aristotelian Ambiguity, is the use of the term *metaphysics* and the differentiation between metaphysics and theology as two different sciences. What happens to Primary Philosophy? For Aquinas, metaphysics is still understood to be Primary *Philosophy*; however, as mentioned above, philosophy is no longer considered to be the most perfect science. This will be

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<sup>82</sup> This is, in few words, Wippel's position and method of reading Aquinas (Wippel, 2000, p. xxvii), however, it is not a universally accepted interpretation amongst the Thomists and scholars of Thomism. Wippel, for example, criticises Gilson for the insistence on reading Aquinas' philosophy as *Christian* philosophy and for the denial of the possibility to focus only on the philosophical parts of Aquinas' work (cf. Ibid, p. xx & Gilson 1961, pp. 21-2).

<sup>83</sup> At least in the *Logic, Phenomenology of Spirit* could be seen as a novel way of employing the philosophical order.

reserved for theology, since it is the study of God. This shows us that Aquinas' metaphysics will not have God as one of its objects, and that the Aristotelian structure of understanding an entity *qua* entity through its primary instance exemplified through god understood as a separate substance will not hold. Metaphysics, for Aquinas, remains understood as a study of an entity *qua* entity,<sup>84</sup> although this now becomes a search for *ens commune* or *esse commune*, i.e. that which is common to all entities, or *common being* of entities. This *ens/esse commune* will take the place of Aristotle's *ousia*, now referred to as *substantia*.

In Aquinas, as in Aristotle, 'entity' is not a genus of things and as such it is not susceptible to being defined.<sup>85</sup> *Ens* is also spoken of in multiple ways, but it is absolutely, or primarily, said only of substance.<sup>86</sup> Within Aquinas' philosophy the concept of *substantia* remains almost identical with the Aristotelian concept of *ousia* described in the previous chapter. It will signify the *kath' hauto* way of being of individual entities (composite or simple) primarily expressible through *energeia*, which will be rendered in Latin as *actuality* or *act*. Another similarity with Aristotle is the concept of *essentia* which is understood similarly to Aristotle's *to ti ēn einai*. It applies without qualification to substances<sup>87</sup> and signifies *what* a thing is. Essence is also related to the form of a thing: "by the form, which is the act of matter, an entity is made actual and [made] this something."<sup>88</sup>

While both thinkers similarly conceive of the philosophy of an entity *qua* entity, the key difference between them lies in where they locate the ultimate ground of reality. For Aristotle, the complete actuality of a thing is found in its essence, which is its form, or in the formal cause of the thing. The

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<sup>84</sup> *De Trinitate*, pars 3, q.5, a.4, ad.6; pars 3, q.6, a.1, co.22.

<sup>85</sup> SCG Lib. 1, cap. 25, n. 6 refers to *Metaphysics* 3, 3 to make this point, as does ST Lib. 1, q. 3, a.5, co.

<sup>86</sup> *De Ente*, Caput 1.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Per formam enim, quae est actus materiae, materia efficitur ens actu et hoc aliquid – De Ente*, cap. 1.



thing is not made 'more actual' if it exists. Existence, if it is to be found in Aristotle, designates merely the transference of form, the matter taking shape. An existing man, of course, is more actual than what is potentially a man, but that has no impact on the nature or form of a man. Nothing is added to the form if it exists. To borrow the term from Heidegger, the existence of an entity, for Aristotle, is only of ontic concern and does not relate to Primary Philosophy. This, however, changes in Aquinas through his positing of the concept of being, *esse*.

For Aristotle, separate (or simple) substances, those which do not possess any matter or potency, are wholly actual. They are pure actuality and serve as an example of the primary, formal nature of an entity *qua* entity. Aquinas tells us that separate (or simple) substances are those which philosophers prove to be without any matter,<sup>89</sup> such as the soul, intelligences, and the First Cause.<sup>90</sup> The essence of such substances is the form alone. Although such substances are forms alone "there is no utter simplicity in them nor are they pure act, but have an admixture of potency."<sup>91</sup> Through the example of the phoenix in *De Ente*, Aquinas explains what this means or how a substance without matter can have an "admixture of potency" (since matter is traditionally what mixes potentiality into a substance).<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> *De Ente*, cap. 3.

<sup>90</sup> At this point in *De Ente*, the First Cause is not identified with God, but Aquinas will do that shortly. In the subsequent works, such as the two *Summae*, Aquinas will see the identification of God and First Cause as unproblematic and will focus on explicating in what sense God is considered to be the First Cause. Kenny (2002, pp. 25-6) understands the soul as referring to "the souls of human beings, in the intermediate state between death and the final resurrection" existing disembodied, while by intelligences he understands "both the angels of biblical tradition and the immaterial agencies that in Aristotelian theory were responsible for the movement of the heavens".

<sup>91</sup> *De Ente*, cap. 3. Cf. also *SCG*, Lib. 2, cap. 52, n. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Another argument can be found in *SCG*, Lib. 2, cap. 52-4 based on the distinction between God and Created Intellectual Substances. The same basic thought about the admixture of potentiality in simple creatures is repeated in the discussion on the nature of Angels in *ST*, Lib. 1, q. 50.

The example is as follows: no essence can be understood without its parts, because whatever is not of the essence or quiddity comes to the thing from outside of it and makes a composition with essence. Any essence can be understood without anything being understood about its being – it is possible to understand what a man is, or what a phoenix is, without knowing whether they exist in reality. Therefore, the being [*esse*] of a thing is different from the essence or quiddity of the thing, except in a case where the thing’s quiddity would be its being, and the thing would itself be pure being.<sup>93</sup>

Whatever belongs to something, it belongs to it either as caused by the principles of its nature or comes to it from an external principle. The being of a thing cannot be efficiently caused by its own form or quiddity because in that case the thing would be the cause of itself. For Aquinas self-causation is impossible.<sup>94</sup> In that case, every thing which has being other than its nature has being from another.<sup>95</sup> What has being ‘from another’ is led back to its first cause. To avoid infinite regress there has to be something which is the cause of being of all things because it is itself wholly being [*esse tantum*]. Such a cause must be God and First Cause.

But this does not yet answer the question about the exact relation between the form and being in simple substances and how an entity which is

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<sup>93</sup> Scholars disagree whether this passage is successful in proving, or whether it is even supposed to prove, the so-called thesis of the real distinction between *esse* and *essence*, however it has been traditionally taken to be Aquinas’ early attempt at doing so. Cf. Wippel 1984, p. 113, Kenny 2002, p. 35. The question of how and even *whether* Aquinas posited the real (rather than either conceptual or modal) distinction between being and essence is among the most controversial questions about Thomism and is beyond the scope of this work. For an interesting interpretation of the distinction, which argues against the traditional “misreading” Suarez is culpable for, i.e. of the real distinction as a distinction between two “things”, see Gilson 1952, pp. 99-105.

<sup>94</sup> *De Ente*, cap.3; *ST*, Lib.I, q.2, a.3, co.

<sup>95</sup> “*Habeat esse ab alio*.” Owens (1985, p. 77) argues that even if this is the case it still allows for the distinction between essence and *esse* to be only conceptual, rather than real.

simple, i.e. consists purely of form, the principle of actuality, can have an “admixture of potentiality”. As Aquinas has already argued, simple substances receive their being from God. Whatever receives something from another is in potency to what it receives. That which is received then constitutes the thing’s act. Therefore, the form of intelligences is in potency to that being they receive from God and that being is received as an act. In a sense, one can therefore find potency and act in simple substances, in their *essence* and *esse*, even though they are pure forms without matter.

Hence, unlike for Aristotle, a formal cause cannot be the ultimate expression of actuality. The highest conception of actuality is found in the pure simplicity of God and the First Cause. It exemplifies an actuality purer than that of a simple substance composed only by form. God, however is not the final or formal cause of everything, and does not correspond to *ousia*, whether one is to identify *ousia* with *substantia* or *essentia*. God’s nature is pure *esse*. By using this term, derived from the infinitive of *to be*, Aquinas develops a sense that was not present in Aristotle’s grammatical equivalent: *einai*. Gilson translates *esse* as “act-of-being” or even “the very act-of-being”.<sup>96</sup> This is supposed to emphasize the difference between the infinitive *esse* from the participle *ens*. *Esse* designates an act, while *ens* designates a state. *Ens* signifies *quasi esse habens*<sup>97</sup> or *quasi esse participans*.<sup>98</sup>

Importantly, since *esse* is not *ousia* it is also not the formal cause of a thing. God is not “that universal *esse* whereby each and every thing formally is,”<sup>99</sup> or *esse commune/formale*. Formal being [*esse formale*] is divided into the being of substance and the being of accidents and, since God is neither, *impossibile est igitur Deum esse illud esse quo formaliter unaquaeque res est*.<sup>100</sup> From this can be seen that, for Aquinas, God is not a formal cause of everything, not

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<sup>96</sup> Gilson, 1961, p. 29.

<sup>97</sup> Sent. Meta., Lib. 12, l. 1, n. 4.

<sup>98</sup> Super. Sent., Lib. 2, d. 16, q. 1, a. 1, ad. 3.

<sup>99</sup> *De Ente*, cap. 4.

<sup>100</sup> SCG, Lib. 1, cap. 26, n2

a substance, and not even an entity, except analogically.<sup>101</sup> What God is, is pure *esse*. Pure actuality of being. The reason why we sometimes talk about God in substance terms is because our intellect, due to its limitations, needs to comprehend everything through the model of complex substances.<sup>102</sup> The being of God is qualitatively different from the being of entities, which is formal. This is the reason why the science of theology will supersede metaphysics. Metaphysics, while remaining primary *philosophy* will not be a primary science since it cannot reach beyond the level of formal substances, which do not represent the fundamental level of reality. This way of inquiry into God is insufficient, since due to God's not being a substance or an entity His nature is ultimately unknowable, or inaccessible through reason. Anything we can say about God we can only say analogically and through *via negativa*.

But that does not mean that metaphysics cannot say anything interesting about God, even if it can grasp His nature only in an inadequate manner. For example, we can say that God cannot be a formal cause, and furthermore that as the First Cause He must be understood as the first *efficient* cause. If God were not the first efficient cause He would need to be caused either by Himself or by something prior to Him. Efficient self-causation is impossible for Aquinas, and if we are talking about a god that is caused by something else, then we are not talking about something absolutely primary. Aquinas bases this reasoning on an argument, similar to Aristotle's argument for the necessity of the first unmoved mover. There has to be the first unaffected efficient cause in order for there to be efficient causation in the universe at all, and God, since He is the First Cause, and not in the formal sense, is to take such a position.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> SCG, Lib. 1, cap. 33, n6.

<sup>102</sup> ST, Lib.1, q.3, a.3, ad.1.

<sup>103</sup> ST, Lib. 1, q. 2, a. 3, co. A careful reader might observe that I have not talked about the possibility of God being the material or final cause, but have played this game of elimination only between efficient and formal. I do not wish to go into much detail about this, but Aquinas does address the possible suggestions that God could be so understood. He argues at various points that God cannot be conceived as matter, not even prime matter, since matter is potentiality, while God is pure actuality. The reason why God should not be primarily understood as the final cause is because

An important difference between Aquinas and Aristotle that needs to be mentioned here is that, for Aristotle, the Prime Mover is not the first *efficient* cause. The Prime Mover is, *qua* simple entity, the paragon example of formal causality, and influences other entities as their *final* cause. Moreover, the efficient causality of God present in Aquinas is different from efficient causality as conceived by Aristotle. It is connected to the Christian idea of Creation and to the problem of the existence of the world as such. This is not Leibniz' problem of why there exists something rather than nothing, although it might be seen as its precursor. The answer to a question posited in this way is trivial for Aquinas: because God willed it so. But the question concerns the problem of what it means for God to Create.

Aquinas distinguishes two kinds of efficient causation – the cause of being [*esse*] from the cause of becoming [*fieri*]. A builder is an efficient cause of the becoming of the house, i.e. the one which forms the house from pre-existing material, and as such the cause of motion or change, the efficient cause as conceived in the Aristotelian realm of substance. For God, to Create is *not* to start the process of becoming, to put matter into motion and give it form, or to transmit a pre-existing form to it. It is to imbue the world with being, to give being where once there was none.<sup>104</sup> This, Aquinas agrees, violates the *ex nihilo nihil fit* principle, but he does not see this as problematic in this case. He argues that this principle does not apply absolutely. It only applies when we understand the efficient cause *qua* the cause of becoming. It does not apply when talking about it as the cause of being. The mistaken idea of the absolutely universal applicability of this principle is due, according to Aquinas, to the Ancient philosophers' misunderstanding of what it means to *make* something. They understood it, Aquinas argues, as restricted to motion and change. They believed that every case of 'making' necessarily involves

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unlike the Aristotelian Prime Mover which is a final cause in virtue of its entelic completeness, Aquinas' conception of God's final causality needs to be understood in the terms of God's free creative Will (Gilson 1961, 78-9) and hence, as connected to creation, it sees its actualization in efficient causality.

<sup>104</sup> *ST* Lib. I, q. 104, a. 1, co. & ad2.

motion or change, burdening themselves with images of building when thinking of efficient causation. "A builder constructs a house, by making use of cement, stones, and wood which are able to be put together in a certain order and to preserve it. Therefore the "being" of a house [*esse domus*] depends on the nature of these materials, just as its "becoming" depends on the action of the builder."<sup>105</sup> In the case of becoming, an efficient cause puts pre-existing matter into motion and simply transmits a form to it. Its *esse*, however, is pre-given, presupposed. The builder is therefore an efficient cause of becoming, of forming, not of being in the sense of existing, of bringing the house out of non-being. But God cannot be compared to the builder, to "an agent which is not the cause of 'being' but only of 'becoming'."<sup>106</sup> Creation, on the other hand, is a 'making', but it is not becoming, or change, except metaphorically<sup>107</sup> and God is the First Cause in the sense of the first cause of being.

### **3. 2. From Aquinas to Wolff**

There are many differences between the philosophies of Aquinas and Wolff. For Wolff, the highest principles of philosophy, those treated in *Ontologia*, will be conceived as possible predicates predicable of any entity. In themselves they do not express any actuality since actuality is relegated to the realm of empirically given entities. For Aquinas and Aristotle, the more one moves towards the realm of determinate particulars, the more potentiality one introduces. Moreover, even though one can find an 'ontological' argument in Wolff, i.e. the one which identifies existence as an essential attribute of God, the differences between the Thomist and Wolffian conceptions of God remain significant. For Wolff, God is ultimately just another entity, albeit a special one, and theology as a science is subjugated to ontology. The predicate of existence, which Wolff's God is unique in possessing essentially, does not signify a qualitatively different way of being from any other entity. Existence in the case of God, as in the case of any other entity, remains a complement of possibility. For Aquinas, God is not an entity, but *esse*, or Being itself

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<sup>105</sup> *ST*, Lib. I, q. 104, a. 1, co.

<sup>106</sup> *Non est simile de agente quod non est causa essendi, sed fieri tantum.* *ST*, Lib. I, q. 104, a. 1, ad. 2.

<sup>107</sup> *SCG* Lib. 2, cap. 37, n.2-4.

understood as existence. He cannot be understood through predicates belonging to entities, except analogically. Moreover, for Aquinas, entities *qua* entities are ultimately to be understood as creatures in the sense that their substantial form does not provide a complete explanation of what it means for them to be. For their complete actualisation they depend on the efficient causality of God which falls beyond the realm of substance and rational conceivability. For Wolff, however, entities are fundamentally understood as non-contradictory thinkables, i.e. as whatever can be conceived without contradiction. So can we say the following: for Aristotle, what an entity is is its *actuality* (its form), not just its possibility, but also its existence. For Aquinas, too, an entity has its “what” or essence (which, as for Aristotle, is its actuality); but it also has its Being (*esse*) or existence through God (as well as its specific coming-to-be through the causality of another entity). For Wolff, what an entity is is its *possibility* and whether it exists is an empirical question.

The main difference lies in the fact that Wolff’s philosophy is more modern than Aquinas’. Hence, while Aquinas will provide explanations through Aristotelian causes, ultimately grounding the being (but not coming to be) of all entities on the efficient causation of God, Wolff will provide explanations through logical principles that are supposed to serve as principles applicable to reality. For Wolff, reality is not ultimately explained through either the efficient causality of God, or formal causality of substance, but through principles of contradiction and sufficient reason. One interesting similarity, however, is that Wolff distinguishes two modes of the principles of sufficient reason which he refers to as causes, i.e. *causa essendi* and *causa fiendi*. The former provides the sufficient reason for an essence of something, while the latter explains how a certain particular entity came to exist. These are similar to Aquinas’ two conceptions of the efficient cause (divine and natural), although it would be difficult to say that this is the direct result of Thomist influence.

Another important similarity lies in Aquinas’ conception of *ens commune*. What Aquinas sees as the goal of metaphysics is to find a common predicate which would unite all disparate ways in which *ens* is spoken of. One

characteristic of *ens commune* is that this is a way of being which can be predicated of any entity.<sup>108</sup> This differs slightly from Aristotle, since if *ousia*, to which *ens commune* corresponds, is understood in the sense of predication then it serves as the ultimate *subject* of predication, rather than the most universal predicate. For Wolff and Aquinas, however, it becomes understood as a predicate predicable of anything that is.

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The differences between Aquinas and Wolff are great. Wolff claimed to be influenced by Aquinas, and even though one of his aims was to modernise Scholasticism he was neither a Thomist, nor a Catholic. The purpose of this chapter, however, is not to show the direct influence Aquinas had on Wolff, but to show how it became possible for Wolff's concept of ontology to develop between the times of Aristotle and Wolff. This will concern the way scholasticism developed after Aquinas, hence Aquinas's philosophy is only one step on this trajectory. As de Boer writes:

Emancipating itself from the traditional theological orientation of metaphysics, general metaphysics increasingly geared itself toward the challenges posed by the modern sciences. Its primary task came to consist in a systematic investigation of the conceptual determinations that can be predicated of all beings, determinations which, as such, are necessarily presupposed in the other sciences. This is the conception of first philosophy that we also find in Wolff's philosophy.<sup>109</sup>

My aim here is to give a short account of what led to this result, focusing on the problem of defining the object of metaphysics or the problem of Aristotelian Ambiguity. Let us remember that, according to the timeline I have established in the first chapter, the name 'ontology' first appears in

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<sup>108</sup> SCG Lib. 2, cap. 37, n2-4.

<sup>109</sup> De Boer 2011b, p. 54.



Lorhard's *Ogdoas Scholastica* of 1606. I have also spoken of Goclenius' *Lexicon philosophicum* of 1613 and various works by Clauberg, specifically *Ontosophia* of 1647. The trajectory presented here will both overlap and extend beyond the already discussed period in order to trace the history of the conception of ontology rather than of the name.

As de Boer has said, one characteristic of this new conception of primary philosophy is its emancipation from theological problems. In fact, prior to the period in which the term 'ontology' appears, according to Beck, philosophy in Germany has for a longer time than anywhere else considered philosophy to be *ancilla theologiae* or *ancilla theologorum*.<sup>110</sup> We have seen a way in which this relation can be understood from the discussion of Aquinas. But in order to distinguish metaphysics and primary philosophy from theology one must devise a new way of classifying the objects of the science which appears in Aristotle's work now known as *Metaphysics*.

While there were various attempts throughout history to propose more clear-cut distinctions between metaphysics, primary philosophy, and theology, there was no interest, according to Mora, to do so by classifying philosophy into different branches and sub-branches. To do so, and to treat the results of such divisions as new philosophical disciplines with specific names, becomes much more of a common practice after 1635.<sup>111</sup>

One of the early distinctions relevant for this trajectory comes from Albertus Magnus (1200-1280), an Aristotelian who influenced Aquinas, although Aquinas himself does not follow Albertus' philosophical classification.<sup>112</sup> Albertus Magnus divides philosophy into logic, *Philosophia realis*, moral philosophy, and theology. His works on logic consist mostly of commentaries on the *Organon* influenced by Avicenna. For Albertus, however, logic is seen as the science of reason, rather than the science of language (or

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<sup>110</sup> Beck 1969, p. 9.

<sup>111</sup> Mora 1963, p. 41.

<sup>112</sup> For more detail on Albertus' philosophy see Beck 1969, pp. 31-8, on whose work I base this account.

*scientia sermocinalis*). Regarding *philosophia realis*, Albertus divides it into three parts: physics, mathematics, and metaphysics. Physics deals with substance in which there is a principle of motion and rest; mathematics is understood as knowledge of that which can be presented in the imagination but without empirical observation as its verification; metaphysics, sometimes called *prima philosophia*, *divina philosophia*, or *theologia*, is knowledge of the intelligible entity by the exercise of reason alone. As knowledge through reason, metaphysics is contrasted with knowledge through Revelation. However, since God transcends all the categories, including such categories as *cause* or *ens*, this knowledge necessarily remains (as in Aquinas) analogical and inadequate. For the adequate knowledge of God, Revelation is necessary, although reason can be used to defend what was revealed.

This shows us that there is no clear resolution of the Aristotelian Ambiguity in the philosophy of Albertus Magnus. It is true that theology as a science of Revelation is separated from *philosophia realis* and metaphysics, but the concept “metaphysics” is still used synonymously for *prima philosophia* and *theologia*. However, according to Mora, the basic division of philosophy into logic and *philosophia realis* becomes very influential for the subsequent attempts at the division of metaphysics into separate sciences that occur after 1635. Logic becomes seen as a science [*ars*] that studies no object, but only the way, or ways, in which objects are studied by other sciences. *Philosophia realis*, or *metaphysica*, is supposed to deal with ‘real’ objects in the most general sense of ‘real’, meaning whatever can become the subject of a true or false proposition.<sup>113</sup> The majority of divisions of philosophy in this new period are presented as branches of the ‘theoretical’ or ‘real’ science, with *metaphysica* as its crowning discipline, and other branches those such as physics, medicine, or theology.<sup>114</sup>

The popularity of the division of philosophy into logic and *philosophia realis* can be attributed to the rising popularity of Thomism and Albertism

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<sup>113</sup> Mora 1963, p. 39. This is, interestingly, only one sense of *ens* for Aquinas, and certainly not the primary one. See *De Ente* Cp. 1 & *ST* Lib. 1, q. 48, a.2, ad 2.

<sup>114</sup> Mora 1963, p. 40.

after the Counter-Reformation. German universities, while originally being opposed to Albertism and Thomism in favour of nominalism, turn to these philosophies, which get subsequently adopted by Protestant Scholasticism based on Aquinas and Suárez.<sup>115</sup> Before Protestant Scholasticism, let us see how the distinction between metaphysics and primary philosophy features in the Late Scholasticism of the Jesuits.

Within Jesuit Scholasticism, according to Mora, there was a keen awareness of the ambiguity of terms such as first philosophy and metaphysics. On the other hand, while the distinctions between the science of the entity *qua* entity and sciences of particular kinds of entities were often sharply posited, it appears there was no will to posit a science of the entity *qua* entity that would be called something different from *Metaphysica*.<sup>116</sup> Pedro de Fonseca, for example, identifies the term *Metaphysica* with *Philosophia prima*: “object [*subjectum*] of metaphysics [is] the entity *per se*, and real, insofar it is said not in a way of one true essence of an entity, but *per se* in another way.”<sup>117</sup> Considered as *prima philosophia*, metaphysics is ‘indivisible’; however for de Fonseca there is also “a great number of metaphysical sciences.”<sup>118</sup> As indivisible, *prima philosophia*, since it concerns itself with *ens qua ens*, precedes all of these other metaphysical sciences, including theology. It is the only science, besides the science of *dialectics*, that “treats of [*versantur*] the genus of entity as a whole”.<sup>119</sup>

Several things should be pointed out here. Firstly, while de Fonseca presents a distinction between metaphysics as *philosophia prima* and ‘metaphysical sciences’ inclusive of theology, the two kinds of science are still subsumed under the generic term ‘metaphysics’. Another important characteristic is the inclusion of *dialectica* into the science of the genus of entity as a whole, which, according to Mora, suggests that de Fonseca takes into account that metaphysical and logical principles are often the same. If one

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<sup>115</sup> Beck 1969, p. 72.

<sup>116</sup> See Mora 1963, p. 37.

<sup>117</sup> Quoted from Mora 1963, p. 37; translation mine.

<sup>118</sup> Loc. cit. Translation mine.

<sup>119</sup> Loc. cit. Translation mine.

recalls an earlier chapter, we have seen the similar conjunction of logic and primary philosophy in the systems of Wolff and Clauberg: fundamental metaphysical principles served, at the same time, as fundamental logical principles, or laws of thought. Finally, de Fonseca treats the concept *ens* explicitly as a genus, in contrast to how it was treated by Aristotle and Aquinas.

A second representative of Jesuit Scholasticism I would like to point to is Benedictus Pererius who greatly influenced 17<sup>th</sup> Century German school-philosophy, including Goclenius.<sup>120</sup> In his *De communibus* he writes:

It is necessary to draw a distinction between two sciences; One, which treats of the transcendentals, and the most universal things; the other, of intelligences. The first will be called Primary Philosophy and universal science; the other is properly called Metaphysics, Theology, Wisdom, Divine science.<sup>121</sup>

As Vollrath points out, every commentator and interpreter of Aristotle, be that Albertus Magnus, Aquinas, or Suarez, attempted to resolve the ambiguity arising from the relation between primary philosophy and theology. But Pererius' solution is specific, due to his differentiation between primary philosophy and metaphysics, where primary philosophy is exactly *not* metaphysics.<sup>122</sup> For Pererius, Primary philosophy is *scientia universalis*, a science of transcendentals, which are predicates applicable to any entity regardless of the category the entity might be considered under. The term metaphysics, on the other hand, is a name for a group of particular sciences of intelligences, such as God, angels, and human souls. This distinction between primary philosophy as *scientia universalis* and metaphysics as *scientia*

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<sup>120</sup> Vollrath 1962, p. 267.

<sup>121</sup> Quoted from Vollrath 1962, p. 267; translation mine.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, p. 269.

*particularis* lays the ground, according to Vollrath, for the later division of metaphysics into *generalis* and *specialis*.<sup>123</sup>

One strange result arising from Pererius' division concerns the way one is to understand the term *metaphysics*. The term is, as we know, not Aristotle's, but to exclude primary philosophy from metaphysics appears strange. If primary philosophy is to treat of the entity in the most universal signification could it be anything but *meta-physics*? At least if metaphysics is supposed to signify a discipline that treats of what lies 'beyond' the physical order. If we do not consider the object of primary philosophy as merely logical, or nominal, i.e. as merely concerning the way we talk about reality, rather than concerning the structure of reality as such (or "the most universal things," as Pererius himself puts it), the exclusion of primary philosophy from metaphysics seems an unfortunate consequence of this particular attempt at resolving the ambiguity.

This leads us to Suárez. Like Pererius, Suárez uses the term 'metaphysics' to designate the study of intelligences, i.e. entities abstracted from matter, however he also uses it for the science of *ens qua ens*.<sup>124</sup> In fact, metaphysics is for Suárez first and foremost the science of *ens qua ens*, and studies it with respect to its principal properties, i.e. the transcendentals.<sup>125</sup> From this we can see that there seems to be no new progress towards disambiguating the term 'metaphysics'. Unlike for Pererius, it signifies both primary philosophy and theology, the latter being understood as a special science of intelligences. However, in this narrative Suárez is more significant for his specific contribution regarding the way the entity *qua* entity is to be investigated. The Wolffian definition of the entity, as that which can be conceived without contradiction comes from Suárez.<sup>126</sup> For Suárez, one meaning of *ens* signifies a real essence [*essentia realis*]. Real essence is the one which is not an arbitrary product of thought, which means that it is not self-

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<sup>123</sup> Vollrath 1962, p. 267.

<sup>124</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>125</sup> Bardout 2002, p. 131

<sup>126</sup> Beck 1969, p. 126.

contradictory, or brought about by some play of imagination. Instead, real essences are true in themselves and hence susceptible to actual realisation. Moreover, for Suárez actuality is understood as a particular case of possibility.<sup>127</sup> To exist is simply to have a fully actualised essence.<sup>128</sup> Even though for Wolff *ens* is not understood as signifying actual essences, most of the other Suarezian ideas are present in his system. For both Wolff and Suárez, primary philosophy will concern essences in some way. The specific nature of these essences will be discovered through conceivability without contradiction, while the existence of them, or of entities possessing such essences, will not form an integral part of the original investigation of such essences. Moreover, whether an essence is actual or possible will not, unlike for Aquinas, impact on the nature of such an essence at all. For Wolff, therefore, existence will only be a complement of possibility, i.e. something only complementing an essence, rather than expanding it.

The thinkers so far concerned have all been representatives of Jesuit Scholasticism. We see that during this period various distinctions within metaphysics have been made; however, there was no attempt to come up with a new name for the philosophy of the entity *qua* entity. As mentioned earlier, the practice of devising novel philosophical disciplines becomes popular after 1635 and we are now moving to that period. Before we do, I will point out that since the term *Ontologia* starts appearing from 1606, we are now reaching the period in which thinkers will start using that term in order to describe *prima philosophia*.

This, however, is not the case with Johan Heinrich Alsted, who according to Vollrath, was influenced by Pererius.<sup>129</sup> Alsted was a Calvinist taught by Goclenius. For him, *pace* Pererius, Metaphysics is to be strictly understood as a science of the entity in general. In his *Cursus philosophici Encyclopaedia* of 1620 he divides metaphysics into general and specific.<sup>130</sup> The

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<sup>127</sup> Gilson 1952, pp. 97-8.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, p. 101.

<sup>129</sup> Vollrath 1962, p. 267.

<sup>130</sup> Account of Alsted taken from Vollrath 1962, p. 268.

general part is to treat of the transcendentals, while the special part is to treat of what he calls “species of an entity”, referring primarily to the concepts of substance and accident. One thing to point out here is that once again the concept of *ens* is treated as a genus (since it can have species). This seems to become commonplace, in contrast to possible protestations by Aristotle or St Thomas. Moreover, in stark contrast to Pererius, Alsted attempts to exclude theology from metaphysics. Since metaphysics is the science of the entity in general, or the science of substance and accident, theology as the study of particular kinds of entities, such as God, angels, and souls, cannot be metaphysics. In fact, such an investigation forms a part of a different, independent science which Alsted names *pneumatica* or *pneumatologia*, with the latter reappearing in Wolff’s system as the name for the investigation into the same kinds of entities.

This separation of metaphysics and theology into two separate sciences, although opposite to Pererius’ separation, can be reproached with a similar difficulty. What it does is to deny the name *metaphysics* to theology and, once again, if metaphysics is supposed to designate what is ‘beyond’ physics then the exclusion of God, angels, and souls is at best strange, or at worst pantheistic. An attempt at a solution, however, comes from Micraelius’ 1653 *Lexicon Philosophicum*. There, Micraelius unites both the investigation of the entity *qua* entity and theology under the same heading of metaphysics. He does that through employing the term *ontology*:

*Metaphysics*, as a science after or beyond physics, considers what is beyond natural bodies... The object of metaphysics is an Entity insofar it is an entity. Hence by some it is called ὄντολογία. Let that designate how an Entity may be understood in general [*in communi*] under the aspect of indifference in total abstraction. *Metaphysics* is divided into General, which treats of an Entity in the most abstract way and in all sort of indifference, both of nature and of affections, both together and apart; and into Special, which treats of an Entity in those species of substances, which are

free from all matter, such as GOD, angels, and separate souls: though some do not consider Theology, Angelography, and Psychology, in which God, Angels and Separate substances are treated, as parts of metaphysics, but they suppose them to be particular (separate) disciplines.<sup>131</sup>

He subsequently informs the reader that ontology is considered by some to be “a particular philosophical discipline, which treats of an entity: which is nevertheless posited by others as an object of metaphysics itself.”<sup>132</sup> In this separation we can see a solution to Aristotelian Ambiguity through positing metaphysics as a general concept uniting both the philosophy of *ens qua ens* under the name of ontology and theology under special metaphysics. The same division can be found in Wolff, with Pererius’ term *pneumatologia* for the study of separate substances. Interestingly, however, Micraelius does not seem to identify or use the term *philosophia prima*, or its Greek equivalent for either metaphysics or ontology. Instead, it only appears listed as one of Aristotle’s names for metaphysics.

Besides dividing metaphysics into Special and General, Micraelius divides philosophy in general into *Theoretical* or Contemplative, *Practical* or Active, *Organic* or instrumental, also called Canonical or Philological. Theoretical philosophy is further divided into metaphysics, physics, and mathematics. Besides the previously mentioned branches of metaphysics there are certain others. These are *gnostologia*, which investigates everything knowable ‘in itself; *hexologia*, which investigates habits of the intellect; *archielogia*, concerned with the principles of scientific disciplines; and *didactica*, which investigates the ways of teaching and learning.<sup>133</sup> A difference that can be drawn between this division and the General-Special division is that these disciplines, although metaphysical, do not seem to treat their objects as certain kinds of entities. Their focus seems to be epistemological. As Mora points out,

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<sup>131</sup> Micraelius *Lexicon*, p. 654. Translation mine.

<sup>132</sup> Micraelius *Lexicon*, p. 752. Translation mine. Mora 1963, p. 44, strangely claims that there is no separate entry for ontology in the *Lexicon*, while quoting this passage.

<sup>133</sup> Micraelius, *Lexicon*, p. 925.



however, the difference between *Ontologia* and *Gnostologia* seems very minor. They both concern something that would be knowable ‘in itself’ since to know an entity *qua* entity would be to know it ‘in itself’. For Mora, this suggests that Micraelius attempts to formulate the question of ‘what is an *entity*’ in two senses: either as *qua* entity, and *qua* knowable.<sup>134</sup> But the two seem to overlap, and hence what is the most universal *qua* entity, would be most universal *qua* object of knowledge. This once again points to the double primacy of metaphysics, i.e. to the idea that the most universal way in which something is known corresponds to the most universal way in which something is. This idea of the identity of the thing as it is in itself and as it is *qua* the object of cognition is one of the key features of what I call the ontological tradition in German philosophy and the one that will be attacked by Kant.<sup>135</sup>

Following further the trajectory of the historical conceptions of ontology we must mention two additional thinkers. The first is Juan Caramuel de Lobkowitz whom Clauberg credits with the invention of the term *ontosophia*, and Abraham Calovius, whom Clauberg credits with the invention of the term *Ontologia*. For de Lobkowitz:

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<sup>134</sup> Mora 1963, p. 40.

<sup>135</sup> One could here object that the way Micraelius defines gnostology does not require there to be an identity between the *object* of cognition and entity *qua* entity. He simply states it is an investigation into what is *scibile qua tale*, knowable in itself, or ‘as such’. This could, on the other hand, and more similar to the way he describes other ‘epistemological’ branches of metaphysics, be understood to refer to principles, e.g. non-contradiction. There are two things to point out against this interpretation. Firstly, if it is correct, we need to remember that for Wolff, the principles of non-contradiction will fundamentally be the answer to the question of what an entity *qua* entity is. However, it is at the same time the fundamental characteristic of an entity *qua* entity. It is not merely logical, or epistemological, but also a metaphysical principle. Secondly, Micraelius does not provide any additional entry to explain what gnostology is beyond the one already quoted. What he does, however, is refer to the entry on *the knowable [cognoscibile]* next to the entry on gnostology in the index, which he defines as “το γνῶσθόν, the object of our knowledge.” Micraelius, *Lexicon*, p. 147. Translation mine.

The object of metaphysics is the ENTITY. Ὀντοσοφία is called, what is ὄντος σοφία or SCIENCE OF the ENTITY. It is spread through various faculties, of which it investigates predicates and essential differences of an object, which are nothing but properties, passions, attributes. Presupposed by all Arts, the one which presupposes none... It is impossible for the one who accurately understands ontosophy not to be the most learned in all sciences.<sup>136</sup>

Although the term is not used in this passage, we can see that de Lobkowitz understands ontosophy as primary philosophy in the sense that will also be present in Wolff, i.e. in the sense that all other sciences presuppose it. This does not tell us much regarding the Aristotelian Ambiguity. It seems that ontosophy is identified with metaphysics, or at least is the name for metaphysics from the point of view of its object. Another explicit similarity with Wolff is that it is posited as the science of predicates and essential differences. Moreover, the identity between the way an object is and the way it is known, at least in its most abstract sense, can be seen from de Lobkowitz' list of 'ontosophical principles'. Some of them include: 1) It is impossible for two contradictory truths to be given simultaneously; 2) It is impossible for two contradictory falsities to be given at the same time; II) Everything that is, provided it is necessary, is to be; 13) He proceeds with impudence, who multiplies entities beyond necessity.<sup>137</sup>

As Mora points out,<sup>138</sup> the only thing that can be seen to be in common to these principles, from our perspective, is that they can be seen as general and universal. The first two, however, appear to be general logical principles, the third one seems to belong to modal logic, and the last one to pragmatic rules. But the way Mora interprets the fact that de Lobkowitz considers all of them 'ontosophical' is that such grouping is due to the idea that such a list is

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<sup>136</sup> De Lobkowitz, *Rationalis et Realis Philosophia* (1642, p. 65). Quoted from Mora 1963, p. 41. Translation mine.

<sup>137</sup> Taken from Mora 1963, p. 42. Translation mine.

<sup>138</sup> Mora 1963, p. 42.

supposed to contain “all the possible general rational principles which they [de Lobkowitz and all first ‘ontologists’] thought could be applied to all reality as such.”<sup>139</sup> Once again, therefore, the fundamental structure of reality is identified with the structure of cognition of such reality.

The final person to briefly mention is Abraham Calovius whom, as mentioned before, Clauberg credits with the invention of the term *Ontologia*. When talking about Micraelius I have raised a question regarding the difference between *Ontologia* and *Gnostologia*, i.e. whether they described the science of the same object approached from two different perspectives. The answer to this question is unclear in the case of Micraelius; however, there is more evidence to indicate that Calovius had a practice like this in mind. For Calovius the science of the entity is called *Metaphysica* when one considers it from the perspective of the ‘order of things’; however, from the perspective of its proper object [*ab objecto proprio*] it should be called ὄντολογία. Besides this name, however, Calovius coins another name for it which is *Noologia*.<sup>140</sup> Now, if we consider that *Noologia* is a derivative of νοῦς or νόος, which is *mind*, and *Gnostologia* of γνῶσις, inquiry or investigation, both thinkers seem to posit sciences related to knowing or cognition as very similar, if not identical, to ontology.<sup>141</sup> This, once again, leads us towards the identification, or at least affinity, between the ways the things are fundamentally thought of and the way they fundamentally are.

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<sup>139</sup> Mora 1963, p. 42.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, pp. 41-2.

<sup>141</sup> Interestingly, Kant will use the term *Noology* to designate what he sees as differing ideas regarding the origins of pure rational knowledge. If one believes such knowledge comes from reason alone, they stand with Plato and Leibniz. If one believes it comes from experience they are with Locke and Aristotle, and are called ‘empiricists’. CoPR A854-5. The term *noology* appears before Calovius in Micraelius. For more details on Micraelius’ *noology*, which he connects with metaphysical archaeology rather than gnostology, see Mora 1963, p. 43.

#### 4. A Spinozist Digression

The preceding section has shown a historical progression of metaphysical concepts and conceptions of metaphysics that led to Wolff's philosophy adopting the form presented in the previous chapter. What I have primarily focused on are terminological developments that enabled Wolff's conception of ontology as a science of predicates of any possible entity to develop, as well as on the way in which the idea of ontological primacy in nature and knowledge developed. This is one aspect of what I have called the double primacy of metaphysics. Another aspect of this double primacy is the primacy in order. It is the idea that the kinds of predicates that ontology discusses can be discovered through, what Kant would call, pure reason alone. One thinker that can be associated with this particular idea of primacy is Spinoza. In fact, Spinoza's idea of a metaphysical system at moments comes very close to Wolff's conception of such a system. In this section I will provide a short comparison of the two and argue that Spinoza should not be seen as belonging to the 'ontological' tradition. This, historically speaking, should not be too surprising. What I call the ontological tradition, or maybe I should call it the historical trajectory of ontology, is closely connected to German school-philosophy of the Jesuit and Protestant kind, of which Spinoza, as a resident of Amsterdam, was not a part. Spinoza is, besides other sources, influenced by Descartes, who is himself, although trained by the Suarezian Jesuits, an opponent of the Scholastic way of philosophizing. From this perspective, Spinoza's refusal to take a university position, with universities being predominantly Scholastic in some way, was a prudent one.<sup>142</sup>

Furthermore, in the letter to Boxel of 1674 Spinoza writes: "The authority of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates, does not carry much weight with me."<sup>143</sup> If we understand the development of the discipline of ontology as

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<sup>142</sup> Spinoza was, however, aware of Scholastic terminology, at least to a certain degree. This can be seen from the way he distinguishes between terms such as essence, accident, and *proprium*, and from his reference to the "scholastic term" of *causa essendi rerum* in IP24c.

<sup>143</sup> Spinoza, *Correspondence*; in Elwes (trans.) 1955.

partially motivated by an attempt to clarify certain terminological relations stemming from Aristotle's philosophy, it is not surprising that the author of the previous quotation would not be moved by such a project. Even though Spinoza's writings appear between 1660 and 1677, with his first work being published the same year as Clauberg's *Ontosophia Nova* (a second edition of his *Elementa Philosophiae sive Ontosophia* of 1647) and appearing after all the works discussed in the previous chapter that use the term *ontologia*, this term does not, to my knowledge, appear anywhere in Spinoza's writings.

The discussion here does not concern itself with Spinoza's contribution to the history of the concept of ontology. It would be possible to track some indirect influence his work had on this history, but it appears fairly late in the history of the conception, and does not feature in the history of the name. The reason why I make this Spinozist digression is to point out that his system can be seen as being fairly similar to Wolff's, but still qualitatively different. This allows me to posit two types of metaphysics present in this period. These could be called ontological and non-ontological metaphysics, or ontological and non-ontological rationalism. By ontological and non-ontological I mean pertaining or not pertaining to the kind of metaphysics exemplified by Wolff's conception of what ontology is, not anything else such a designation could stand for today.

Few, if any, historically oriented philosophers today would agree with the claim that the separation of the philosophical traditions of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries into Rationalism and Empiricism is either a clear or an exhaustive representation of philosophical works and ideas available at that time. If we observe the Rationalist tradition from the perspective of the ontological tradition this provides us with a way to make finer distinctions between the thinkers categorised under this genus. In this case, Spinoza, sometimes seen as an ur-Rationalist serves as a key example of a kind of Rationalism different from the Wolffian kind.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> I could be reproached for generally excluding Leibniz from this thesis. Kant's positioning of Leibniz as one of the Noologists does make him relevant to this discussion, however, since the understanding of ontology I work with concerns what

One similarity between the two thinkers can be found in their attempts to ground metaphysics on the geometrical or mathematical method. I have already discussed how Wolff thinks that this approach should proceed. Today, it is safe to assume that anyone familiar with Spinoza, must know that *Ethics* is to proceed *in more geometrico*. For Spinoza, geometrical, or Euclidian/mathematical method provides “the new standard of truth”.<sup>145</sup> In this respect, the method of the *Ethica* and the method of the *Ontologia* are very similar. They both operate through constant reference back to already demonstrated propositions. The only noticeable difference between the mathematical expositions of the two is that Spinoza goes to great pains to employ as many Euclidean terms in his *Ethics* as he can; the terms such as a *proposition, definition, axiom, corollary, lemma*, etc. On the other hand, Wolff, although originally a proponent of this practice, abandons such attempts at mimicking the geometrical method to the letter after his early works. But this does not make Wolff’s style of philosophising less, or differently, ‘geometrical’. In fact, Wolff’s praise of the usefulness and necessity of the geometrical method brings him into the dangerous waters of appearing to provide a defence of Spinoza:

There is no danger to religion, to virtue, or to the state if full freedom to philosophize is given to those who philosophize according to the philosophical method...

It might be objected that experience indicates otherwise. For Benedict Spinoza philosophized according to the mathematical method, which is the same as the philosophical method (§139). Nevertheless, this did not prevent him from teaching things which are contrary to religion and virtue. To

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Vollrath called “the systematic dismemberment” of metaphysics into disciplines, I omit Leibniz due to the lack of his own system.

<sup>145</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics* I.app, II/79.

this I reply that it is possible to err in applying philosophical method, and thus harmful errors do arise.<sup>146</sup>

Wolff does not want to go into detail regarding Spinoza's errors in the text from which this quotation is taken. It seems that Wolff's sole criticism of Spinoza focuses on his deviation from the established signification of words due to which Spinoza predicated, in his definitions, only of God that which, in Wolff's view, could be predicated of both God and man (e.g. freedom). For Wolff, to put his criticism in terms developed after him, this provides validity to Spinoza's definitions and derivations, but does not provide them with soundness. Wolff says there are other problems, but he decides not to mention them. While it is true that Spinoza's use of terms such as 'God', 'Nature', or 'Cause' deviates from the established significations of words (purposefully, in my opinion), this criticism is at best fairly weak. But beyond this similarity, explicitly addressed by Wolff, there are other, more general ones.

One of them lies in the fact that Spinoza provides us with the clearest example of the Theological order of proceeding in metaphysics. For Spinoza, as is well known, God/Substance/Nature is the cause of everything and, by IA4, "The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause." Moreover, by IP15: "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God," and all those who believe otherwise, believe otherwise because

they did not observe the [proper] order of philosophising. For they believed that the divine nature, which they should have contemplated before all else (because it is prior both in knowledge and in nature) is last in the order of knowledge, and that the things which are called objects of the senses are prior to all.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Wolff, *DP* §§167 & 167\*.

<sup>147</sup> EIIP10s2.

To remind the reader, I do not refer to Spinoza's order as *theological* because it starts with God. I am referring to the earlier described Thomist distinction between a system that begins with what is most general, rather than with objects of senses or similar particulars. If Spinoza decided never to refer to Substance, or Nature, as God, the same description of his procedure would apply. Aristotle himself at one point concludes that the knowledge of *ousia* is the first in the order of nature and, *qua* knowledge of nature in-itself, the primary and greatest kind of knowledge. But he did explicitly state that it is the last in the *order* of knowledge, something philosophising cannot start with, since the latter must in fact start from concrete particular entities. The priority of knowledge with regards to *ousia* is analogous to the final causality of the First Mover. It is the primary goal of enquiry, rather than a starting point.

Spinoza's order, moreover, proceeds in the way analogous to the order of Wolff's system. The ground of Wolff's system is called neither *God*, *Substance*, nor *Nature*, but *ens qua ens*. However, Wolff does not start from the particulars, but from what he sees as the most universal both in knowledge and in nature. God, however, is relegated to the status of an entity explainable through that primary science of the entity *qua* entity. Regardless of this, the order of both Spinoza's and Wolff's proceeding can be called *theological*.

Another similarity between Spinoza and Wolff is that the highest way in which something can be known corresponds to the primary way in which something is. The most well known passage from Spinoza expressing this idea is certainly the proposition on what is known as 'parallelism': "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things."<sup>148</sup> But this idea is ubiquitous throughout the *Ethics*, and can be found everywhere. For Spinoza, if something can be it can be conceived, and if it cannot be it cannot be conceived. This can be found implicitly there in the already quoted IA4, but also explicitly in IP14: "Except God, no substance can be or be conceived," *et passim*.

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<sup>148</sup> EIIP7.



In short, what unites the systems of Spinoza and Wolff is the shared adherence to the double primacy of metaphysics. They both hold the idea of the congruence between the fundamental way of knowing and being (what is first in nature is first in knowledge), and also adopt the theological order, starting their systems from the investigation of these primary elements. But this is where the clearer similarities between the two stop and the dissimilarities that show why Spinoza's philosophy cannot be seen as an ontology *stricto sensu* can come to fore.

One of the characteristics of Wolff's philosophy is the identification of Primary Philosophy with *Ontologia*. Spinoza uses neither of these terms. Wolff also specifies that *Ontologia* is a particular metaphysical science, standing in a certain relation to other sciences and ways of cognition. *Ethics* could be called Primary Philosophy, either if we use this term simply to designate a synonym for metaphysics,<sup>149</sup> or in reference to the proper order of philosophy. Spinoza, however, does not provide us with an exact explanation of what kind of inquiry *Ethics* is supposed to be, either *qua* science in general, or *qua* philosophical discipline. When reading Wolff, we see that he makes it clear that *Ontologia* is to be understood as a fundamental part of the science of metaphysics dealing with *ens qua ens*. With Spinoza, we are thrown into a series of definitions, axioms, and propositions concerning God's nature without an 'external' discussion of the nature of the treatise. The only thing we know is its name – *Ethica* – and that it is *in ordine geometrico demonstrata*. The text itself never directly explains what this *ethics* is supposed to be. If we look through it, looking for a metaphysical treatise or a science similar to Wolff's *Ontologia*, we will find that such a thing is not present in Spinoza's text, beyond the aforementioned characteristics.

The defining question of *Ontologia* is the question of what an entity *qua* entity is. Spinoza does not pose a question of this kind. Going through the text

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<sup>149</sup> A term which Spinoza seems not to be fond of: "...these and similar faculties are either complete fictions or nothing but **metaphysical entities** [*entia metaphysica*] or universals, which we are used to forming from particulars..." EIIP48s. Emphasis mine. Translation modified.

we can see that Spinoza tends to use the term *ens* very sporadically, although consistently.<sup>150</sup> Spinoza uses the term *ens* only to refer to God or Substance. This is, in fact, in line with the Aristotelian tradition of the understanding of the term. We should recall that for Aristotle the question “what is an entity” was identified with the question “what is substance”. And since for Spinoza there is only one substance, it seems only proper for there to be only one *ens*. The identification of *ens* and *substantia* can be seen in E1P10s, where Spinoza discusses the distinction between attributes and says that although attributes can be considered really distinct this does not mean that they constitute “duo entia, sive duas diversas substantias”.<sup>151</sup> *Ens* seems to be applied to finite particulars only when Spinoza is presenting a possible conclusion he disagrees with, such as in E1P11alt2: “if what now necessarily exists are only finite entities [*entia finita*], then finite entities are more powerful than an absolutely infinite entity [*ente absolute infinito*].” References to God as an “absolutely infinite” entity do not appear only here. Whenever Spinoza refers to God as *ens* the reference always includes the qualification of absolute infinity.<sup>152</sup> As already mentioned, there are very few references to *ens* overall beyond the ones I have already given. But they are consistent in being applied to God only. Particular or singular things are not referred to as entities. And Spinoza’s system certainly requires they not be called entities. Spinoza sees particular things as *modes* of the one Substance, and sticking to the traditional terminology modes are not entities (except equivocally), but modifications of an entity or a substance.<sup>153</sup> God is similarly never understood as particular or singular, but

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<sup>150</sup> Curley’s translation unfortunately does not exemplify this consistency in the same manner. Curley uses terms “being”, “beings”, and “Being” to translate either *ens* or *esse* and his choice is, at some points, difficult to grasp. I will continue to translate *ens* as ‘entity’ and *esse* as either ‘being’ or ‘to be’.

<sup>151</sup> See Curley’s note on translating *sive/seu* as an equivalence rather than an alternative in *Ethics*, p. xix.

<sup>152</sup> E.g. E4P28dem.

<sup>153</sup> There are two exceptions in which Spinoza uses the term *ens* for particular things. One is the mentioned *reductio ad absurdum* of E1P10s. The other case is in E5P30dem: “To conceive things under a species of eternity, therefore, is to conceive things insofar as they are conceived through God’s essence, as real entities [*entia realia*], or insofar as through God’s essence they involve existence.” But this is a special case of the third

always as infinite or unique. Hence if there is only one, unique substance, and everything else existing in Nature is its modification then there can only be one entity. In this sense, Spinoza's terminology is fairly consistent with the tradition. But while for Wolff, the science of an entity *qua* entity would apply to the world of particularly existing individuals since everything around us is an entity, this will not be the case for Spinoza. The investigation into God's nature and what follows from it will teach us something about the world, not because, as for Wolff, the world is filled with entities which all share certain essential predicates *qua* entities, but because there is only one entity from which everything else follows.

In fact, there are some passages in Spinoza that suggest that a science in the manner of Wolff's *Ontologia* is impossible. One of the passages refers to Spinoza's short rejection of the Transcendentals. Spinoza writes:

I shall briefly add something about the causes from which the terms called *Transcendental* have had their origin – I mean terms like Entity, Thing, and Something [*ens, res, aliquid*]... When the images in the body are completely confused, the mind also will imagine all the bodies confusedly, without any distinction, and comprehend them as if under one attribute, namely, under the attribute of Entity, Thing, etc. [*sub attributo entis, rei, etc.*] These terms signify ideas that are confused in the highest degree.<sup>154</sup>

From what we have said before about the term *ens*, the problem Spinoza has with it, and with terms such as *res* or *aliquid*, is not the mere existence or use of these concepts, but their being considered as *transcendentals*, i.e. predicates applicable across all Aristotelian categories. I have already provided examples where Spinoza uses the term *ens* himself.

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kind of knowledge in which particular things are not understood as modes, since in their regular signification modes do not involve existence through God's essence. In this case they lose their particularity and temporality and are seen through God.

<sup>154</sup> E2P40s.

With regard to the term *res*, he tends to use it when referring to God, not absolutely, but as expressed through an attribute.<sup>155</sup> Since this passage shows that Spinoza rejects the understanding of *ens* as a transcendental, this seems more troubling for the earlier scholastic conception of *ens* as a transcendental rather than for Wolff's conception of the science of *ens qua ens* from *Ontologia*, the work which will not be published for another 53 years after Spinoza's *Ethics*.<sup>156</sup> There is, however, another paragraph which can be seen as anticipating and rejecting ontology in the style of Wolff:

Perfection and imperfection, therefore, are only modes of thinking, that is, notions we are accustomed to feign because we compare individuals of the same species or genus to one another... For we are accustomed to refer all individuals in Nature to one genus, which is called the most general, that is, to the notion of an entity [*ad notione entis*], which pertains absolutely to all individuals in Nature.<sup>157</sup>

What Spinoza tells us here is that this attempt to philosophise according to what is common to all particulars through the notion of an entity is customary, but mistaken. And this is one of the foundations of Wolff's system: to investigate *ens qua ens*, as that which is common to all individuals. For Spinoza, however, this constitutes the wrong approach to Nature.

On the other hand, someone could say that what Spinoza and Wolff are doing is ultimately the same. If for Spinoza there is only one entity, God, and everything has to be and be known through God, does this not mean that everything is ultimately known through the investigation of *ens qua ens*, i.e. through the investigation of God in His infinity? This certainly does constitute a similarity, and I have begun this comparison by stating that there certainly are similarities between the two. But the way Spinoza's system develops, even

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<sup>155</sup> See, for example, E2D1, P1, P2, P5.

<sup>156</sup> For details on the difference between Wolffian ontology and scholastic *scientia transcendens* see de Boer 2011.

<sup>157</sup> E4 *Prae.* II/207.

admitting this as being reminiscent of Wolff's way of proceeding, does not warrant a claim that the two systems are ultimately the same in their way of investigation, or that Spinoza's system can be called an ontology in the style of Wolff. The reason for that is that Wolff's ontology differs from Spinoza's philosophy, beyond the fact that the former, unlike the latter, investigates *ens* as a genus common to all *entia*, by proceeding to investigate predicates common to all the possible particulars. One difference regarding this aspect is that for Spinoza the only proper predicates, or predicates comparable to the way ontological predicates are conceived by Wolff, are the attributes or "what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence." Modes, on the other hand, are "affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived."<sup>158</sup> Taking that into account, one problem with the comparison between Wolff and Spinoza is that for Spinoza only two of these predicates seem to be knowable: thought and extension. Anything else that might appear in Wolff as a predicate of a possible entity, such as motion, duration, finitude, possibility, necessity, etc. while although they might appear in Spinoza, will not appear as predicates of possible entities, but as results of God's activity. In short, Spinoza is not in the business of cataloguing predicates of all the possible particulars, but instead attempts to understand everything through the explication of the nature of a unique, absolute entity.

Approached from that perspective, and paired with the question of Aristotelian Ambiguity, Spinoza's system seems more similar to the one that sees Primary Philosophy as theology in Aristotle's sense, rather than as a science of *ens qua ens*. Both Spinoza and Aristotle, instead of focusing on the science of the universal concept of *ens*, or *to on*, focus the specific entity which serves as the prime expression of substance and actuality, with its way of being imitated by the particulars.<sup>159</sup> But Spinoza is far from being properly called an 'Aristotelian'. It is true that from the perspective of the Aristotelian Ambiguity he falls more on the theological, rather than *ens qua ens*, or ontological side,

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<sup>158</sup> E1D4 & 5.

<sup>159</sup> In Aristotle this is the telic completion of the Prime Mover, in Spinoza it is the *conatus* through which the infinite power of God is expressed as striving to persevere in existence.

and that for both philosophers God exemplifies the way of being of supreme actuality and is, as Spinoza puts it, “absolutely the first cause.”<sup>160</sup> Moreover, both Spinoza and Aristotle reject the idea of treating the concept of the entity as a genus common to all, but in different ways. In Aristotle, “entity” is a *proshen* equivocal, and for Spinoza it is said only of God or Substance since, *pace* Aristotle, there is only one Substance. Furthermore, for Aristotle, god, who is ultimately only one among many substances, is seen as the first cause, but the first *final cause*. For Spinoza, however, God is the first *efficient cause* “not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence.”<sup>161</sup> As we remember from before, existence is not a concern of Primary Philosophy, neither for Wolff, nor for Aristotle. Moreover, one of Spinoza’s conceptions of God is *Natura naturans* which stands for “what is in itself and is conceived through itself, or such attributes of substance as express an eternal and infinite essence, that is... God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause.” This is opposed to *Natura naturata*, which signifies “whatever follows from the necessity of God’s nature.”<sup>162</sup> *Natura naturans*, therefore, expresses the conception of God as an absolutely active nature, in opposition to the passive (or less active) nature of the modes that follow from God. Now, it is true that Aristotle’s god can be considered to be ‘active’ since he exemplifies *energeia* or activity/actuality in the highest degree, being completely free from any potentiality. However, the source of Aristotelian *energeia* lies in the fact that god is a purely *formal* cause, free from any matter. For Spinoza, however, it lies in the fact that God is the first efficient cause, or rather, in his conception of God’s power, which “is his essence itself.”<sup>163</sup> This means that for Spinoza the conception of the supreme entity will not be understood through its form, through what it is, but through its efficiency, or through what it does. And what it does is to express infinitely many things in infinitely many modes.

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<sup>160</sup> EIP16c. There are some other similarities between Spinoza and Aristotle or Aristotelians. For example, Spinoza’s understanding of a *proprium*, which seems to underpin the way things “follow” from the absolute essence of God, is dependent on this Scholastic-Aristotelian idea.

<sup>161</sup> EIP25.

<sup>162</sup> EIP29s.

<sup>163</sup> EIP34.

This focus on efficient causality as the foundation of everything is more reminiscent of Aquinas than Aristotle. Both Aquinas and Spinoza see the efficient cause as the cause exemplifying the primary way of being, or God's productive power. For Spinoza, as it is for Aquinas, "God's existence and his essence are one and the same."<sup>164</sup> Moreover, for both, God is not the cause of the essence of man, but is the cause of its existence. In Spinoza, we can find this in E2P10: "The being of substance [*esse substantiae*] does not pertain to the essence of man, *or* substance does not constitute the form of man." Now the paragraph containing that similarity also contains an important difference between the two. For Spinoza, God is not the cause of man's essence, of the essence of a finite mode, when God is understood absolutely. However, if God is understood as modified by a modification he "is the only cause of all things, both of their essence and of their existence... Not only of their becoming [*fieri*], but also of their being [*esse*]."<sup>165</sup> This, however, would not work in Aquinas' system. God's efficient causality, for Aquinas, is seen as strictly different from the efficient causality of 'making' or 'becoming', and two ways of perceiving God, absolutely and as affected, has no parallel in Aquinas. Finally, there is an infinite distance between Aquinas' and Spinoza's conception of God, since under latter's conception God is "the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things."<sup>166</sup> But one aspect that significantly differentiates Spinoza from both Aquinas and Wolff is the distinction in the conception of divine volition.

Both Aquinas and Wolff consider God's act of Creation to be a free act in the sense of a voluntary act. God willed to create everything, so He did. For Spinoza, the situation is different. God being free to create, for Spinoza, means simply that God was not forced by an external cause to create. Instead, all that can be called 'creation' follows necessarily from God's nature. Creation is hence not a free voluntaristic act, but instead is a necessary result of God's power. This impacts how one conceives the idea of *omnipotence*. Under the voluntaristic model, omnipotence can be understood as God's power to create

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<sup>164</sup> E1P20.

<sup>165</sup> E1P10s2.

<sup>166</sup> E1P18.

whatever He wills. If God is then seen as the first cause of everything this creates a possibility of God not willing to create or willing to create the world differently. This results in the world that God has chosen to create being characterised by the possibility of being created differently, since we could argue that in order for creation to be an act of free volition God must have been able to create a different world. In that sense, to see the world from God's perspective is to see it as a particular actualisation of a series of potential and possible worlds. *Omni-potentia* can then be understood as a power of actualising any possibility, and creation as an act of actualising a particular possibility. And this is what Wolff's approach to the science of the *entity qua entity* is. It is an investigation into the necessary predicates of any possible entity. Truly actual entities are irrelevant. To see the world from God's perspective is to see the set of possibilities which can be actualised, or not to care what really is actualised, but instead, to concern oneself with what lies in the realm of possibility prior to any actualisation. For Spinoza, the situation is reversed. God has no will, hence there is no voluntaristic act of creation that would require different possibilities to be or not to be actualised. Creation simply emanates necessarily from God's nature:

But to those who ask "why God did not create all men so that they would be governed by the command of reason?" I answer only "because he did not lack material to create all things, from the highest degree of perfection to the lowest"; or, to speak more properly, "because the laws of his nature have been so ample that they sufficed for producing all things which can be conceived by an infinite intellect."<sup>167</sup>

So for Spinoza, *omni-potentia* would not signify God's power to potentially create everything, but the fact that everything potential necessarily follows from the nature of that which is eternally actual. Possibility and contingency for Spinoza, which are essential to ontology as the science of

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<sup>167</sup> EIapp, II/83.



predicates of possible entities, are nothing but the names for our ignorance of causes of singular things.<sup>168</sup>

This comparison between Wolff and Spinoza on the basis of their implicit relation to omnipotence (since neither of them describes omnipotence in those ways) is not meant as a genetic or a similar kind of argument. I do not wish to say that the difference between the two thinkers boils down to their theological preconceptions. The reason I draw this analogy is because it seems useful for expressing a basic difference between the nature of the systems of Wolff and Spinoza. I have already provided several differences between them, regarding the application of the concept of *ens*, and the treatment of predicates, and this is merely the last one, i.e. the one regarding their understanding of the position of the ideas of possibility and actuality in their systems. Spinoza's system does not start from the position of possibility, or by asking the question of what is common to all possible entities. To treat something as possible is simply to be ignorant of its causes. Spinoza is interested in the nature of the actual reality. Wolff is interested in quite the opposite. He remains firmly in the realm of possibility. The predicates of *ens qua ens* are actual in the sense that they will apply to all actual entities. They describe the real structures of both the world and our cognition of it, but they do not themselves fall under the realm of actually existing entities. They signify the real structures of entities, but are not entities. The realm of actuality, for Wolff, is the realm of existing particulars, and is not the purview of ontology. And this difference in relation to possibility is the final thing making both of these systems metaphysical or rationalist, but only one of them ontological.

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<sup>168</sup> EIVd5.

**Part 2:**

**The Possibility of Ontology**

## Chapter Four: Kant and Ontology

With the previous chapter the history of the name and of the conception of ontology has been complete. We have seen both how the name reached Wolff and how the history of philosophy progressed in order to make it possible for Wolff to develop the discipline of ontology in the way he did. Now the investigation shifts to what happens to ontology after Wolff, or more specifically, to the idea of the possibility of such science. The first person we reach on this journey is Kant, and ontology does not seem to be in good standing for him:

“[T]he proud name of an Ontology (...) must, therefore, give place to the modest title of a mere Analytic of pure understanding.”<sup>1</sup>

Besides the above-quoted passage the term *ontology* appears in two more places in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: in the *Architectonic of Pure Reason* as *Ontologia*, and in the *Dialectic*. Moreover, in the three instances in which the term appears, the meaning it bears is not equivalent. This allows us to talk about three *senses* of ontology in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. These I will call: the *proud*, *architectonic*, and *theological* sense. I will argue that every time Kant uses the term ‘ontology’ in these three instances he is indeed using the term in a different sense, but that the three senses stand in a mutual relation. They are connected through different ways they address the question of the possibility of Wolffian ontology.

The chapter will start with a short comment on certain recent literature that discusses, or at least appears to be discussing, Kant’s ontology. Following this, I will explicate the three senses of ontology that can be found in the first *Critique* and argue why and how they are supposed to be understood as three *senses* of ontology. I will start with the Architectonic sense, followed by the

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<sup>1</sup> CoPR, A247/B303.

Proud and Theological, and through this I will attempt to clarify what the term *ontology* meant for Kant himself, and which of the senses he adopts. By doing this, I hope to demonstrate that Kant belongs to the German ontological tradition and explain his position regarding the question of the possibility of Wolffian ontology.

### **1. Kant and Ontology Today**

Kant's rejection of ontology, which is expressed in the opening quotation of this paper, tends to be mentioned in the literature<sup>2</sup> although not discussed in great detail, i.e. there is not much treatment of *what it is* that Kant is rejecting. Allison does specify that the ontology rejected by the Transcendental Analytic (that is, in A247/B303) deals with "beings as such" or "things in general" and he equates it with "general metaphysics" or with a science of "being qua being."<sup>3</sup> From what I have already said in the previous chapters it is clear that this conception of ontology applies to Wolff's conception of ontology. There are some other instances that suggest that when Allison talks about 'ontology' he is talking about Wolff. For example, when discussing the question of whether spatio-temporal predicates can be predicated of things in general Allison argues that Kant rejects "the whole ontological framework in which the question had traditionally been posited." This, Allison continues, makes Kant's move not a "novel move *within* ontology" but a "radical alternative *to* ontology."<sup>4</sup> If I understand Allison correctly, he argues that this is due to the fact that Kant does not intend to ascribe an *ontological* status to spatio-temporal properties, i.e. to claim that they do (or do not) apply to things themselves, but he intends to limit the predication of those properties to the domain of possible experience.<sup>5</sup> What Kant limits, according to Allison, is consistent with ontology as conceived by Wolff and this limitation would indeed be an alternative to rather than a move within Wolffian ontology.

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<sup>2</sup> See Allison 2004, p. 308 and Grier 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Allison 2004, pp. 308, 327; cf. Allison 2015, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Allison 2015, pp. 28-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 33-4.

At the present moment, I am not interested in arguing whether Allison is correct or not about this. What I want to see here is whether Allison uses the term ‘ontology’ when talking about Kant in its historical sense, or in an anachronistic sense. There are two things in Allison’s account that point towards his, possibly unintentional, use of the term *ontology* anachronistically when talking about Kant. Firstly, while I agree that Kant proposes a radical alternative to traditional or Wolffian ontology, and, in a sense, rejects the whole of the traditional ontological framework, I believe it is important to make this qualification (“traditional”) very explicit. This is because, as we shall see later, Kant retains the concept *ontology* within his own system and what he rejects is the *traditional* or Wolffian conception of it. While Allison seems to implicitly, and correctly, identify the *traditional* ontology with Wolffian ontology, there is no explicit or elaborate discussion of that philosophical discipline, or an account what the term *ontology* is used for by Kant. Secondly, if I am correct in reading Allison as claiming that Kant’s rejection of *ontology* is exhaustively explained by his denial of the “ontological status” of certain properties (in this case space and time), then Allison seems to be using the term ontology, or the adjective *ontological*, anachronistically. This is because the phrase *ontological status* is not present in Wolffian philosophy. For Kant, and the Wolffian tradition preceding him, the term *ontology* does not immediately refer to possible ways of treating properties, but to a specific philosophical science. To say in that case, that spatio-temporal properties are not *ontological* predicates would mean that they are not to be derived within the discipline of ontology, and not, as Allison seems to be using it, that they do not apply to things themselves. For example, for Wolff, predicates of special metaphysics are not ‘ontological predicates’, but they still apply to things as they are in themselves.

Another approach to discussing Kant’s conception of ontology is provided by Beiser.<sup>6</sup> In discussing Kant’s pre-critical writings, specifically *The Dreams of the Spirit-Seer* and the *Inaugural Dissertation*, Beiser argues that the metaphysics Kant develops during this period *is and should be an ontology*. On the other hand, Beiser argues, that this is not to be understood as ontology in

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<sup>6</sup> See Beiser 1992, pp. 46–52.

the traditional sense, by which Beiser means “a science about some kind of thing.”<sup>7</sup> By Kant’s new ontology, Beiser means a system of the most general attributes or predicates of things which does nothing more than determine concepts that are the necessary limits and conditions of reason. According to Beiser, the *Inaugural Dissertation* in this way limits metaphysics to an “ontology of pure concepts,” by which he means “concepts about the conditions under which anything can be thought.”<sup>8</sup>

While I find myself agreeing with the structure Beiser sets up, I find it necessary to draw certain distinctions in order, once again, to separate a potentially anachronistic employment of the concept of ontology from the traditional or Wolffian one. Beiser’s definition of traditional ontology seems somewhat vague, especially since we know that the tradition Kant comes from understands ontology as a science of an entity *qua* entity. Unless we specify what we mean by this it is unclear to me why ‘ontology of pure concepts’ would not be a ‘science about some kind of thing’, specifically of pure concepts. Moreover, it is insufficient to define traditional ontology as a “science about some kind of thing”, since all branches of special metaphysics are sciences about some kind of thing (God, Soul, World), while not being ontology. Now if what Beiser has in mind is that the difference between the traditional ontology and the ontology of pure concepts consists in the former being a science about the *thing in itself*, a thing *qua* thing or an entity *qua* entity, which would be the same in this case, while ontology of pure concepts is a science of “concepts about the conditions under which anything can be thought,” while at the same time explicitly *not* being the science of things as they are themselves, then we can recognise this as a distinction between Wolff and Kant. However, the question then arises why call this science of pure concepts *ontology*? If such a discipline, while investigating, as was the practice of traditional ontology, the most general attributes and predicates, limits the domain of this investigation to the objects of cognition should it not rather be called an *epistemology* of pure concepts? The reason for that lies in the fact that for Wolff there was no difference between the most general conditions of our

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<sup>7</sup> Beiser 1992, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp. 52, 50.

cognition and the most general structures of how the things, or entities themselves, are. So if Kant rejects the part of the traditional ontology that claimed knowledge of the structure of *ta onta*, but retained the idea that we can derive the principles of our *cognition a priori*, it seems strange to call his science *ontology*.<sup>9</sup> To emphasise, I am not here arguing that Beiser's interpretation is incorrect, but rather that his use of the concept of *ontology* is ambiguous. It is not clear whether he intends to use it in the Wolffian sense, to argue that Kant himself reconceptualises what ontology is supposed to be, or whether he uses it in a third sense that I am not understanding.

While the works of Allison and Beiser seem to at least touch on the conception of ontology developed by Wolff, although often without referencing him or discussing its shape in details, there are authors discussing Kant and ontology who do not use the term in its traditional or Kantian sense at all. To identify such a practice one needs to look no further than Ameriks' (1992) paper "The Critique of Metaphysics: Kant and Traditional Ontology." While Ameriks' title sounds like a perfect title for this chapter, the way in which ontology in relation to Kant is discussed, and the topics Ameriks treats, are completely different from my approach and focus. For example, the mentioned paper does not provide a discussion of Kant's understanding of what ontology is. Moreover, at various points Ameriks unproblematically equates ontology and metaphysics, either by using them interchangeably or by equating "traditional ontology" with "rationalist metaphysics".<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, when describing "traditional ontology" Ameriks talks, among other things, about Leibniz's position that all events within the spatio-temporal field are

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<sup>9</sup> See de Boer 2011b, p. 56. As she argues Kant rejects the aspects of Wolff's ontology that claims that pure concepts and principles can be attributed to any entity whatsoever, but retains the "epistemological strand of Wolff's ontology."

<sup>10</sup> See Ameriks 1992, pp. 249, 272. One straightforward danger with equating ontology (especially the traditional one) with metaphysics comes from the fact that, as we will remember, the latter served as a more general term than ontology. Metaphysics was itself divided into *metaphysica generalis*, which was called *ontologia*, and *metaphysica specialis*, which was not. Moreover, while one can equate traditional ontology with rationalist metaphysics, the inverse does not hold, as I hope to have shown in the previous chapter.

governed by the principle of sufficient reason, states that ontological questions deal with the exact nature of substance, cause, matter, etc., and categorises the question of whether there are simple substances as “the general ontological question”.<sup>11</sup> The problem with this approach is that it applies the concept of ontology anachronistically, or at least imprecisely regarding the way we have seen it being developed by Wolff. For example, I have shown that “the general ontological question” of Wolff was “what is an entity *qua* entity” and not any sort of “what there is” question, which were the domain of special metaphysics. In that case, what Ameriks exactly means when talking about ‘ontology’ or even ‘traditional ontology’ remains unclear.

This short excursion over these texts hopefully shows that the discussion of ontology in Kant is alive and well in some of the contemporary leading Kant scholarship. The fact, however, which differentiates my approach from the ones that can be found above is that I intend to discuss Kant’s relationship to ontology in a sense dominant in Kant’s own time and in a sense in which he saw himself using the term. As mentioned above, there are three senses in which Kant uses the term *ontology* and them I will call: the Architectonic, the Proud, and the Theological sense.

## **2. The Architectonic sense**

### **2. 1. What is the Architectonic sense of Ontology?**

To undertake an architectonic is to engage in “the art of constructing systems.”<sup>12</sup> In this case this means to construct a system of science, specifically of metaphysics. To understand the Architectonic sense of ontology we first need to sketch out the outlines of Kant’s system of metaphysics.

In the *Architectonic* chapter Kant tells us that Philosophy “in the strict sense of the term” consists of the metaphysics of nature and morals (also called

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<sup>11</sup> Ameriks 1992, pp. 253, 258, 261. The “ontological” question of simple substances is contrasted with the “cosmological issue of whether “beings in the world” consist of simple parts.”

<sup>12</sup> CoPR, A832/B860.



“the system of pure reason”), and of “that criticism [*Kritik*] of reason which serves as an introduction or propaedeutic to metaphysics.” This suggests that philosophy is, strictly speaking, metaphysics, or the employment of pure reason. It is the science of the “higher” (non-empirical) employment of our faculty of knowledge.<sup>13</sup> But there is another element, or part, of philosophy *besides* the system of pure reason, or metaphysics - the propaedeutic or criticism [*Kritik*].<sup>14</sup> The positioning of the *critique* of pure reason (or of metaphysics) as an additional procedure prior to the setting up of the *system* of pure reason is what Kant sees as a key difference between his system and the previous ones, e.g. the Leibniz-Wolff system, and as an essential distinguishing feature between the philosophies of *scepticism*, *dogmatism*, and *criticism* (the third surpassing the former two).<sup>15</sup>

Kant’s system of pure reason, or metaphysics in the narrow sense (i.e. exclusive of criticism), further consists of “transcendental philosophy” and of “physiology of pure reason.”<sup>16</sup> By physiology of pure reason (*physiologia rationalis*), Kant understands the treatment of nature, understood as a sum of objects *given* to the senses.

If objects are treated as given to senses, we are talking about *immanent physiology*, which is concerned with either *corporeal nature* (*rational physics*) or *thinking nature* (*rational psychology*). If the sum of objects is treated in a connection which transcends all experience, i.e. as not given or givable to senses, we are talking about *transcendent physiology*, which is concerned either with nature as a whole (*rational cosmology* – transcendental knowledge of the world), or with the relation of nature as a whole to an entity above nature (*rational theology* – transcendental knowledge of God).

Another part of the system of pure reason is called *transcendental philosophy*. In the *Architectonic* chapter not much is said about it. Kant only

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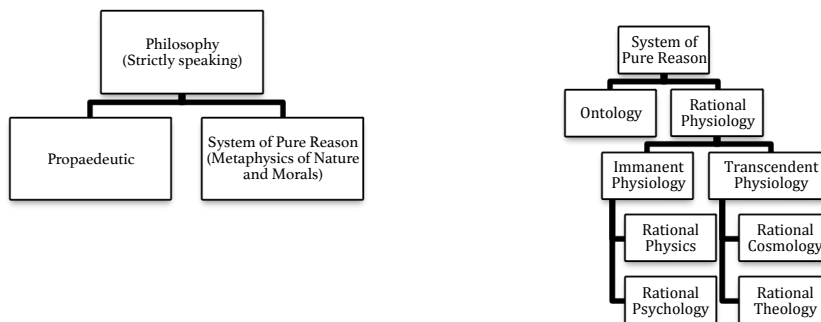
<sup>13</sup> CoPR, A835/B863.

<sup>14</sup> CoPR, A841/B869.

<sup>15</sup> CoPR, A856/B884.

<sup>16</sup> CoPR, A845/B873. Cf. CoPR, A841/B869.

briefly states that it “treats only of the understanding and of reason, in a system of concepts and principles which relate to objects in general, but [which] take *no account* of objects that may be *given*.” What is important for our concerns is that at this point Kant names transcendental philosophy *ontologia*.<sup>17</sup> The following two diagrams could therefore illustrate Kant’s conception of philosophy as a systematic science:



In the A/B Introduction we find out more about Transcendental Philosophy. It is a system of both analytic and synthetic Transcendental *Knowledge*,<sup>18</sup> where Transcendental Knowledge is *all* knowledge concerned with the possibility of *a priori* knowledge of objects.<sup>19</sup> From this we can conclude that ontology in the architectonic sense is the systematic investigation into the possibility of synthetic *and* analytic *a priori* knowledge of objects.

From the fact that we know that one of the formulations of the goal of the critique of pure reason is an investigation into the possibility of synthetic *a priori* knowledge, it seems that there is no sharp separation between the *propaedeutic to* and the *system of* pure reason, or between Kant’s critique and ontology as conceived by Kant. The state of the matter, however, shows itself to be slightly more complex.

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<sup>17</sup> CoPR, A845/B873.

<sup>18</sup> CoPR, A12/B25.

<sup>19</sup> CoPR, A11/B25.

Ontology, or transcendental philosophy, is “only the idea of a science for which the critique of pure reason has to lay down the complete architectonic plan,”<sup>20</sup> i.e. guarantee the completeness and certainty of the structure in all its parts. The critique of pure reason (both as a discipline and as a philosophical text) is “not itself to be entitled transcendental philosophy.”<sup>21</sup> It contains all that is essential *in* transcendental philosophy and is therefore a “complete idea of transcendental philosophy” without being equivalent to it.<sup>22</sup> One reason for this non-equivalence is the fact that the critique of pure reason concerns itself only with the possibility, extent, and application of *synthetic a priori* knowledge, while the complete system of pure reason, would need to contain an exhaustive analysis of the *whole* of *a priori* knowledge,<sup>23</sup> both synthetic and analytic. Furthermore, the system of reason would also include, for example, “the definitions” of the categories and the “predicables” that are to be derived from them.<sup>24</sup>

So one difference between Kant’s Critique and Kant’s Ontology is in the scope of the content they are discussing. While Ontology, or Transcendental Philosophy proper, would provide us with the totality of *a priori* concepts and principles, and with everything derivable from them, critique does this only for the synthetic *a priori*.

But the main difference lies in the fact that the critique, as a propaedeutic, is supposed to be the science of the “examination of pure reason, its sources and limits”<sup>25</sup> while ontology, as a (part of the) system of pure reason, is further philosophising within these limits. This difference is not merely between the extent of the content the two disciplines cover, but establishes the two as different *kinds* of disciplines.

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<sup>20</sup> CoPR, A13/B27.

<sup>21</sup> CoPR, A13/B27.

<sup>22</sup> CoPR, A14/B28.

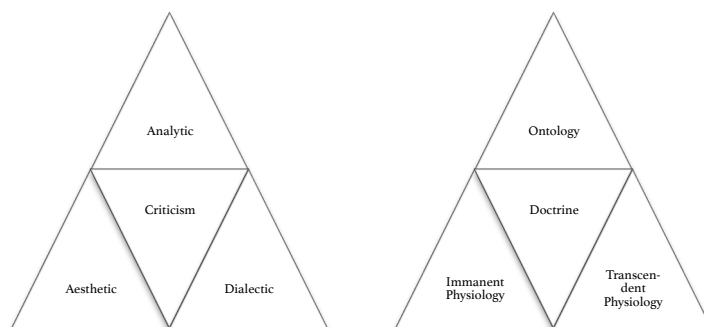
<sup>23</sup> CoPR, A13/B27.

<sup>24</sup> CoPR, B108.

<sup>25</sup> CoPR, A11/B25.

What the critique does is to provide a general *form* under which any more contentful metaphysics (as a science of pure and speculative reason) is to operate. In addition, the critique *justifies* the application of the fundamental concepts and principles essential for metaphysics (in this way providing *some* content itself), which may or may not have traditionally been employed in it. *Critique orients and justifies, ontology further derives.*

The way in which the *Critique* determines the form of subsequent metaphysics can be seen through the division of the text. The division of the *Critique*, understood to be a division of the propaedeutic to the system of pure reason, tells us *how* to treat various topics, traditionally considered metaphysical (in the sense of both general and special metaphysics). This is the sense in which the *Critique* lays down the “complete architectonic plan” for metaphysics. Specifically, Transcendental Aesthetic establishes rational physics and psychology (which together constitute *immanent physiology*), Transcendental Dialectic establishes rational cosmology and theology (together constitute *transcendent physiology*), and transcendental analytic establishes ontology. The following diagrams can further illustrate this division:



The way in which the *Critique* establishes rational physics is by showing that any sort of metaphysics that wishes to discuss the external world needs to understand the world as determined by the form of outer intuition – space. Rational psychology, or the metaphysics of the soul, is to treat of its object as falling under the form of inner sense. In this way, the propaedeutic establishes the form of immanent physiology, or the metaphysics of nature *qua* sum of all objects given to senses. If a metaphysician is concerned with a world

which is not given (and cannot be given) to the senses, i.e. if they wish to treat “the connection of objects of experience which transcends all experience,”<sup>26</sup> the *Critique* also establishes a way to deal with such issues in a scientifically justified manner. The world in its totality and God are not to be understood and treated by rational cosmology and theology, as they once have been, as if they were separate entities whose origin, existence, or essential structure one attempts to deduce *a priori*. What Kant’s propaedeutic establishes, through the *Transcendental Dialectic*, is that such metaphysical topics are to be understood and treated as the Ideas of Reason.

It is important to note that what determines the legitimate treatment and the form of engagement with these topics is not called *ontology*, but *propaedeutic*. For Kant, the form and function of ontology is itself defined by the propaedeutic, more particularly, the *Transcendental Analytic* part of his own propaedeutic: the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The position of ontology in the metaphysical system is determined through using the same criteria utilised in defining the two kinds of physiologies, i.e. its relation to objects of experience. The defining feature of ontology, for Kant, is that it treats of objects in general, without taking into account the specific manner in which they are given in intuition. While immanent physiology treats of specific objects that *are* given in intuition, such as matter and the empirical self, transcendent physiology of objects that *cannot be* given in intuition, ontology will treat of what is common to both kinds of objects. In the architectonic sense, therefore, ontology is the science of the pure form of the thought of possible objects of cognition. In this sense, there is a similarity between what ontology is for Kant and what it was for Wolff. It is still *general metaphysics* or philosophy of the most general concepts and principles, the one that will treat of what is common to all objects of metaphysics indiscriminately.

Transcendental Analytic posits the form and the minimal, essential content of ontology. By the form, I understand the fact that the *Critique* is intended to show that the science of ontology will treat its subject-matter under the phenomena-noumena distinction, under the principle of all analytic

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<sup>26</sup> CoPR, A845-6/B873-4.

judgments (i.e. non-contradiction) and under the *Highest principle of all synthetic judgments*: “every object stands under the necessary conditions of synthetic unity of the manifold of intuition in a possible experience.”<sup>27</sup> From the Highest principle, according to Kant, it follows that the conditions of the possibility of experience in general are conditions of the possibility of the *objects* of experience.

Besides positing only the form of a legitimate metaphysical science, the *Critique* will also establish and justify the essential *content* ontology will work with. By this content I understand, among others, the Pure Concepts of the Understanding, or the Categories, which, analogously to the purpose of Kant’s ontology, “think objects in general, without regard to the special mode (sensibility) in which they may be given.”<sup>28</sup> Additional content posited and justified by the *Critique* can be found in the section 3 of the second chapter of the *Analytic or Principles*.<sup>29</sup> This content is posited in the propaedeutic, but it seems as if it concerns (or falls within) ontology itself, suggesting again a possible interchangeability between them. Regardless of this apparent overlap, there is still a significant distinction between the two disciplines. This distinction is to be found in the way the two deal with such overlapping content.

In the referred-to section, the *Critique* puts forward and works with certain positive metaphysical content. For example, talking about the axioms of intuition, Kant tells us that “[a]ll intuitions are extensive magnitudes.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the first and the second analogy, respectively, tell us that “[i]n all change of appearances substance is permanent,” and that “[a]ll alterations take place in conformity with the law of the connection of cause and effect.”<sup>31</sup> These claims sound as if they could unproblematically apply to the metaphysics of

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<sup>27</sup> CoPR, A158/B197.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. CoPR, A254/B309 & A845/B873.

<sup>29</sup> By this I refer to the Axioms of Intuition, Anticipations of Perception, Analogies of Experience, and Postulates of Empirical Thought in general.

<sup>30</sup> CoPR, A162/B202.

<sup>31</sup> CoPR, A182/B224 & B232.

nature itself, or appear under the heading *ontology* in some previous (or subsequent) metaphysical systems. The reason, however, why they do appear in the propaedeutic and at this point *ground* ontology, rather than *are* ontology, is due to the role of the propaedeutic. Its role is to show which of these principles, which might have appeared before in the metaphysical tradition, can now be used in a legitimate, rather than dogmatic manner. The propaedeutic to metaphysics, in Kant's case the *Critique of Pure Reason*, is here to test and justify the plurality of concepts and principles that have traditionally been at metaphysicians' disposal. The purpose of Kant's ontology is to further develop whatever necessarily follows from these concepts and principles shown to be (il)legitimate by the propaedeutic, even if the ending and the starting point of the propaedeutic and ontology, i.e. the Categories and principles derivable from them, do come together.

Since the propaedeutic formally establishes ontology to be the philosophy of the most general concepts and principles, all of the established distinctions and concepts ontology works under, including the Highest principle, will apply to the domains of special metaphysics (or physiology) as well. Since ontological principles, according to the results of the *Critique*, are the principles of the science of *objects* in general, they also apply to the sciences treating of objects in a specific rather than general way, i.e. specific ways these objects relate to intuition. Due to this, to investigate any domain of theoretical philosophy will be to investigate the concepts and principles applying to *objects* of experience, rather than to *things in themselves*, or Wolffian entities *qua* entities.

This complete architectonic of the system of pure reason, with all its limitations, according to Kant, necessarily follows from the criticism of pure reason. As Kant puts it, the *criticism itself* is prescribed by the originaive idea of a *philosophy of pure reason itself* and is in accordance with the essential ends of reason and so unchangeable and of legislative authority.<sup>32</sup> This means that the system of pure reason follows from the fundamental conception of what criticism is: the attempt to investigate the limits of cognition before cognizing.

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<sup>32</sup> CoPR, A847/B875.

Such a basis ultimately shows that any metaphysical edifice needs to fall within the laws and limits of cognition.

To philosophise is to think under the tribunal of pure reason itself. But to criticise is to investigate and establish such a tribunal.<sup>33</sup> This is what it means to establish a form of philosophical system, while the *actual* system is to be completed subsequently and would be “not half as large, but incomparably richer in content” than the *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>34</sup>

## **2. 2. The name ontology**

Ontology in the architectonic sense is a science that attempts to establish the totality of our *a priori* concepts and principles, synthetic and analytic, within the limits and the sense designated by the philosophical propaedeutic, or the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The *Critique* provides the fundamental concepts required for such a science (categories, schematism, phenomenal-noumenal, etc.) and determines the limit of employment of such a discipline. Ontology, and hence any subsequent theoretical philosophy, can only talk about concepts and principles applicable (or related) to objects of experience and not to things in general, or entities *qua* entities. Any metaphysical discovery is therefore a discovery of the way in which an object is represented in cognition, rather than a way in which a thing itself is.

But why is Kant justified in calling such a science *ontology* and why does he call it so? The first answer concerns the tradition of naming the most general branch of metaphysics. The way in which Kant’s system as a whole (with an exception of the propaedeutic) is described in the *Architectonic* shows that it does not differ very much in its structure from the ‘traditional’ or Wolffian system of metaphysics. Wolff, as we have seen earlier, defines Ontology as “*First Philosophy*, or science of the entity in general [*scientia entis in genere*], or to the extent it is an entity,”<sup>35</sup> the first principle this philosophy investigates being the principle of contradiction. For Baumgarten, similarly,

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<sup>33</sup> CoPR, Axi-xii.

<sup>34</sup> CoPR, Axxi.

<sup>35</sup> WO, §I. Translation mine.



Ontology (which he also names *ontosophia*, *metaphysics*, *universal metaphysics*, *architectonics*, and *first philosophy*) is “the science of the more general predicates of an entity.”<sup>36</sup> Due to this practice, it is not strange to call the most general *metaphysical* (but not critical) investigation ontology, since this is the term the dogmatist tradition used for such an endeavour.

By investigating the architectonic sense of ontology we see that Kant is aware of Wolff’s conception of ontology and as such belongs to the German ontological tradition. But we can suggest that there is a more significant reason why Kant calls Transcendental Philosophy *ontology*. The reason is that we can see what Kant is doing as an act of appropriation: the adoption of a term with intent to dispel the original meaning and replace it with one’s own. By changing the idea of philosophy from the investigation of things or entities as they are *in themselves* (entities *qua* entities) into the investigation of things or entities as they are *for us* (entities *qua* objects of cognition), Kant effectively appropriates the notion of ontology for his new philosophical science, cutting it off from its traditional sense. It is in this sense that Kant’s definition of ontology differs from the ones proposed by Wolff and Baumgarten, to which we are now moving.

### 3. The Proud Sense

In the *Transcendental Doctrine of Judgment* Kant informs us that the Transcendental Analytic reaches an important conclusion. It concludes that the most the understanding can achieve *a priori* is to anticipate the form of a possible experience in general. Since that which is not appearance cannot be an object of experience, Kant continues, understanding can never transcend those limits of sensibility within which alone objects can be given to us. This conclusion immediately leads Kant to the rejection of Ontology:

[P]rinciples [of understanding] are merely rules for the exposition of appearances; and the proud name of an Ontology that presumptuously claims to supply, in

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<sup>36</sup> BM, §4. Translation modified.

systematic doctrinal form, synthetic *a priori* knowledge of things in general (for instance, the principle of causality) must, therefore, give place to the modest title of a mere Analytic of pure understanding.<sup>37</sup>

This description does not seem to fit with what was earlier said about Kant's ontology. In the *Architectonic* there was no mention of ontology *giving place* to the analytic of understanding. Instead, the Analytic was supposed to architectonically ground the legitimate sense of ontology and its essential content, while being separate from it at the same time.

This incompatibility comes from the fact that the term *ontology* appearing in the *Architectonic* is used in a different sense in the *Analytic*. The quoted passage (from the *Analytic*) refers to the conception of ontology as used by Wolff, i.e. to the science of the most general predicates of *things* or entities, with the example in the parenthesis referring to Leibniz's application of the Principles of Sufficient Reason to things in general.<sup>38</sup>

This *proud sense*, therefore, exemplifies the dogmatist, or Wolffian conception of ontology, rather than the critical conception of ontology. It refers to ontology not scrutinised by a prior critique, to ontology as a discipline that believes it is providing an account of the principles of things applicable beyond our possible experience. This reference serves as an example of Kant's appropriation of the term. The dogmatist's illegitimate use of the term *ontology* is to be replaced by the more modest, legitimate use prescribed by the *Critique* (science of entities *qua* objects of cognition, not *qua* entities). The proud, dogmatic, sense rejected in the *Analytic* is to be replaced by the more humble, or deflated sense, proposed in the *Architectonic*. In this case, it is not so much

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<sup>37</sup> CoPR, A247/B303

<sup>38</sup> Although for Wolff the "systematic doctrinal" derivation of the predicates of things in general was supposed to proceed in an analytic, rather than synthetic manner. Kant's arguments for understanding metaphysics and geometry as *synthetic* rather than *analytic* sciences is a significant aspect of his critique of Wolff, but I will unfortunately not go into it in more details.

that *ontology* gives way to the analytic of understanding, but that the *dogmatist* sense of ontology gives way to the legitimate one, i.e. the one established by the *Critique*.

There is, however, a sense in which ontology itself does “give way” to the analytic. The sense in which it does so is as *first philosophy*. What gives way is the idea that, methodologically, philosophy is to start with, aspire to, or be grounded in the investigation of things as *they* are in the most general way. In other words: in God’s perspective of the world.

In what seems like an implicit attack on Spinoza, Kant comments: “in the infancy of philosophy, man began where he should have ended – in the knowledge of God.”<sup>39</sup> But this is not merely a problem of the infancy of philosophy since “[m]etaphysics has accordingly lapsed back into the ancient time-worn dogmatism.”<sup>40</sup> What begins and grounds Kant’s modern, non-dogmatist philosophy, and grants it the much-desired scientificity, is the propaedeutic to philosophy undertaken through the critique of the limits of cognition. The results of this critique show, according to Kant, that all metaphysics is ultimately to be limited by sensibility in some way. Immanent physiology in that case *is* the philosophy of objects that can be (and are) given in sensible experience. Transcendent physiology is its opposite, the philosophy of that which cannot be given in experience, and as such it only has significance due to its immanent contrary.<sup>41</sup> Even the part of metaphysics which by its very definition does not concern itself with mode of givenness (in sensible or any other intuition), i.e. ontology, has been shown by the *Critique* to need to relate ultimately only to what can be given in sensibility and therefore to give us principles only of possible experience, rather than of things in general.

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<sup>39</sup> CoPR, A852/B880.

<sup>40</sup>CoPR, Ax.

<sup>41</sup> As this is, for example, visible through Kant’s inclusion of the Ideas of Reason and Transcendental Illusion within the complete propaedeutic, while arguing that they are to be taken merely in their *regulative* employment.

Rejecting this, or better to say, failing to realise this, is what makes dogmatist philosophy proud. Dogmatism, in Kant's view, does not see a need to begin philosophy by investigating the limits of cognition. Due to this it believes that our cognition can achieve more than it can achieve: that it can achieve what could only possibly be God's perspective on things. For *pride*, or better arrogance, is *superbia*, the seventh sin, the source of all the others, the belief that one's power is greater than it is, making one believe that one's power is more important than God has intended it to be, or even that it is independent from God. *Humilitas* – the opposite of *superbia* – humbleness or groundedness, signifies recognition of one's limitations, self-restraint, and submission to God's grace through clear understanding of one's place in Creation. The critique of cognition shows, according to Kant, that cognition is indeed limited, and limited by sensibility, and what is left for us is to understand this and proceed with philosophy within such, more modest, context.

#### **4. The Theological Sense**

The proud sense, the sense that ignores our God-given limitations, leads us to the third sense of ontology present in the *Critique*: the theological sense. While this sense of ontology can be found in the *Dialectic*, the term does not appear explicitly. Instead, it is to be found in terms such as *ontotheology* and *ontological proof*.

Today we tend to use the term 'ontological argument' for various *a priori* arguments for the existence of God based on His definition or essence, whether we talk about such proofs appearing in Anselm, Aquinas, or Descartes. These thinkers, however, did not call the type of argument they utilised 'ontological' and I was not able to find any use of such a name for this kind of argumentation prior to Kant. It is safe to assume, therefore, that the phrase 'ontological proof' is yet another of Kant's many terminological contributions to subsequent philosophy which we tend to employ uncritically when talking about our contemporaries or about pre-Kantian philosophers.

In the chapter of the *Dialectic*, entitled *The Ideal of Pure Reason*, Kant proclaims that “*There are only three possible ways of proving the existence of God [Dasein Gottes] by means of speculative reason:*”<sup>42</sup> *the physico-theological proof, cosmological proof and ontological proof.*

Kant’s rejection of the ontological proof on the grounds that existence is not a real predicate, and hence does not belong analytically to a concept of an entity containing all reality, is certainly not an obscure or rarely discussed part of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The question I want to ask is: why is this proof called *ontological*, or what is its connection with ontology?

What distinguishes the ontological proof from the other two proofs is the fact that it proceeds from the *nature* of a specific entity – *Ens Realissimum* – to the claim that such an entity exists of necessity.<sup>43</sup> The other two types of proof attempt to demonstrate the need for some sort of necessary existence *and then* ascribe it to *Ens Realissimum*.<sup>44</sup>

This is one of the reasons why I believe this proof is called *ontological*. It starts by appealing to the nature of a most universal *entity*, rather than with an object of cognition. The reason why a dogmatist theologian could not treat *Ens Realissimum* as merely an object of cognition comes from the fact that the concept *ex definitio* contains *all* predicates, not only those which can be given in intuition. To adopt a more traditional formulation: God is a being than which a greater one cannot be conceived, and a being containing all the predicates of possible, sensible experience could not be greater than a being containing all predicates *simpliciter*.

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<sup>42</sup> CoPR, A590/B618 – original emphasis.

<sup>43</sup> *Ens Realissimum* being a term inherited from Wolff for whom “*Ens perfectissimum dicitur, cui insunt omnes realitates compossibiles in gradu absolute summo.*” See TN 2, §6. Emphasis mine.

<sup>44</sup> Here I am adopting Michelle Grier’s reading of the *Dialectic*, as presented in, for example, Grier 2012.

The important factor in calling this proof *ontological* lies in the fact that it starts by focusing on the nature of God and understands God as the most universal *entity* – hence its alternative name *onto-theology*. In this way, it follows the procedure of dogmatist ontology of starting with the most abstract conception of a nature of an entity, the one supposedly shared by all other entities, and deriving conclusions from it, *a priori*.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, again in line with the dogmatist conception of ontology, the ontological proof tries to derive the existence of God, understood as a special kind of entity, from His mere concept. Finally, the entity, whose existence it analytically derives, is the one that would itself transcend the Kantian limits of cognition, i.e. it would be a thing or entity in itself, not one given or able to be given in intuition.

Putting these characteristics together shows that the ontological proof proceeds in a way analogous to the way proud ontology proceeds. It starts from the most general concept of something (in this special case with God, in the general case with the entity *qua* entity) and then attempts to *a priori* derive the characteristics that would apply to entities in themselves, even if these entities could not be given in intuition.

Another parallel with dogmatist ontology comes from Kant's claim that the other two theological proofs are grounded in the ontological one. This suggests that the ontological proof relates to the other two, as the Wolffian, or

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<sup>45</sup> There is a long tradition of such philosophical way of thinking into which we can place, for example, Aristotle's identification of Primary Philosophy with Theology, that is his idea that the formal way of being of entities is the best exemplified by the purely formal, simple way of being of god (see *Metaphysics* 6, 1.1026a19, *Metaphysics* 12, 6.1071b20-3 & 7.1072b10-11). Aristotle, however, while believing that the order of *nature* proceeds in that direction, posits the inverse order or *knowledge* (*Physics* 1, 1.194a10-21) and hence does not fall neatly in this picture. Interesting comparison is with Aquinas' who defines metaphysics as a science of what is common to all entities, or the science of *esse commune*, and argues that the order of *theology* starts from the positing of the most universal (God) and from it deriving the particular (*De Trinitate*, pars 3, q.5, a.4, ad.6; pars 3, q.6, a.1, co.22.; ST, Lib. 1, q.3, a.4, arg.1; SCG Lib. 2, cap. 4). Aquinas, on the other hand argues against the idea that God is an entity and rejects the ontological argument.

proud, ontology relates to the Wolffian specific metaphysics. The posits of proud ontology (i.e. the posits about the most general concepts and principles applicable to things, or to entities) determine the structure and apply to subsequent investigations of rational specific metaphysics.<sup>46</sup> Analogously, the ontological proof can be seen as grounding any kind of rational theology in the same way. It serves as the first theology, in the same way as proud ontology serves as the first philosophy.

In summary, what makes ontological proof *ontological* is the fact that Kant sees it as unfolding analogously to the procedure of traditional ontology. It is not the case that it is called ontological because it is *ultimately* concerned with the *existence* of a certain entity. What is significant is the *original* concern of the ontological argument, and that is the *nature* of a certain *entity*, rather than *its* existence or existence itself. Moreover, I would argue that even the fact that it is *ultimately* concerned with the existence of a particular entity, or the fact that it presupposes that existence is a real predicate, is not relevant in calling this proof ontological.<sup>47</sup> The reason why it is ontological is due to the fact that it does what dogmatic ontology does. It concerns itself with entities, or things in general, rather than objects of cognition, and believes that from such concepts it can infer *a priori* properties of things that cannot be given in intuition and of things as they are in themselves.

The theological sense of ontology is therefore nothing more than the *proud sense* applied to a domain of special metaphysics. They are both rejected in the same way: they belong to the pre-critical dogmatist belief that philosophy can begin without the previous critique of the limits of cognition.

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<sup>46</sup> We should remember Wolff's conception of subsequent sciences "borrowing" predicates from ontology.

<sup>47</sup> Except maybe accidentally. The reason why the proof is ontological is not because it attempts to posit the existence of *something*, but due to the fact that it wants to posit the existence of something *in itself* from its mere concept, as traditional ontology attempted. In that case, if it were possible to posit the existence of God *qua* object of cognition from the mere concept of God, the name "ontological argument" would be less suitable.

Once the critique has established those limits, i.e. the legitimate limits of ontology, it shows that such endeavours do not possess the legitimacy required for making theoretical judgments. This allows Kant to further appropriate ontology, and appropriate God Himself, within the framework of transcendental philosophy.

## 5. The Impossibility of Ontology

In this chapter I have argued that in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant uses the term *ontology* in the three different, but mutually related senses which I have called: the *Architectonic*, *Proud*, and *Theological sense*.

Ontology in the *Architectonic* sense is the science of objects of cognition in general, i.e. regardless of the way they may actually be given in intuition. Its goal is to collect and systematise the totality of our *a priori* concepts and principles, both synthetic and analytic, under the framework set by the *Analytic of Understanding* in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and from the minimal content posited (and shown to be legitimate) by the *Critique*. This is the primary and the only legitimate sense of ontology and is seen as a replacement of the earlier Wolffian conception of ontology. As such, is *Kant's conception of Ontology*.

Ontology in the *Proud* sense is ontology as understood by dogmatist metaphysicians: an *a priori* science of the most general principles of *things* or *entities qua entities*. It is traditionally seen as the beginning of any scientific philosophical system, and as the science on whose findings all subsequent metaphysics (and science in general) depends. As such, it believes that the most general concepts and principles available to us are applicable to the world as it is in itself and fully derivable *a priori*.

Ontology in the *Theological* sense, is the example of the proud sense as applied to rational theology. It derives the name from the fact that it starts with the most general, or indeterminate concept of an entity, proceeding in the same way as ontology in the proud sense does. The part of the *Critique* in which ontology in the theological sense is rejected, i.e. the transcendental



dialectic, is intended as a refutation and replacement of Wolffian special metaphysics. However, the refutation of the ontological argument serves as a synecdoche for the refutation of Wolffian ontology in general, and the argument derives its name from this relation it holds regarding Wolff.

The three senses of ontology are united in the way they relate to the propaedeutic to systematic philosophy – to the *Critique of Pure Reason*. While the architectonic sense is the ‘correct’ or ‘legitimate’ one, the other two exemplify the way we go (and have gone) astray in metaphysics if we forgo a propaedeutic criticism. For Kant, criticism is necessary and ultimately shows that theoretical, speculative philosophy has to be limited by sensibility. On the other hand, Kant intended to adopt huge parts of Wolffian ontology for his finished system of pure reason. The concepts and predicates Wolff derives in his philosophy are not, for Kant, all incorrect. What had to be done though, is to show that they do not, and cannot, apply to entities as they are in themselves. In that sense Kant does not reject ontology if by this we understand a science more ‘modest’ than the one of Wolff. But the core of Wolff’s ontology, it being a first philosophy and a science of entities *qua* entities, one cannot maintain upon awaking from the dogmatic slumber.

## Chapter Five: Hegel and Ontology

By reaching this section we have arrived at the last stage of this history of ontology. The first chapters described how the term was coined and the intellectual trajectory that led it to its realisation in the system of Wolff. The Kant chapter showed how the term passed through Kant and what place it took in his philosophy. Now it is time to see how it showed itself by the time it reached Hegel.

My aim in this section is to show that Hegel belongs to what I have called the 'German ontological tradition'. As a reminder, by this I mean that Hegel's understanding of what ontology is, is based on Wolff's conception of that philosophical science. Similarly to what was the case with Kant, this does not mean that Hegel is undertaking a kind of scientific investigation *identical* to the one Wolff was undertaking. In fact, it means that, again as is the case with Kant, whenever the term 'ontology' is used it is used in a way that either criticises or adopts certain features of Wolffian ontology, which Hegel more often than not tends to call either 'the old metaphysics', 'common metaphysics', 'previous metaphysics', or simply 'metaphysics'. As members of the German ontological tradition, therefore, both Kant and Hegel show themselves to be engaging in a dialogue with Wolff, and with Wolff's conception of ontology (or scientific philosophy in general), more than they are usually credited with. Moreover, reading Hegel from the Wolffian perspective will show us whether any new light can be cast on the nature of Hegel's philosophy in general. Finally, the treatment of Hegel's use of the concept and the conception of ontology will show us the further fall of this discipline into temporary obscurity and continue the story of the loss of the unified significance of the concept and conception of ontology reached in Wolff. This will ultimately enable us to showcase the period after which our contemporary, disparate conceptions of ontology were allowed to develop.

The primary aim of this chapter, as a part of the whole, is historical, and that primarily regarding the history of *ontology*. It is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis or history of Hegel's philosophy. However, when Hegel's

text is read from the perspective of Wolff's ontology, as is the case with any perspectival reading, a certain interpretation of the nature of Hegel's system is bound to arise. One can find many different interpretations of the nature of Hegel's system amongst current scholarship and what all of them minimally do is argue for a level of plausibility of their interpretation. Regarding Hegel, I am not attempting anything grander. I believe that if we read Hegel from the perspective of the history of ontology a certain way of reading Hegel's *Science of Logic* gains additional traction. By this I mean that a certain interpretation of the nature of this text, rather than, say, a particular transition or a category within the text, becomes more and more plausible. One difficulty with claims to plausibility in general, however, is that the criterion of what makes something plausible does not necessarily need to be shared among the commentators.

One way to make a theory found in a historical text plausible is to aim to present the most 'charitable', 'reasonable', or 'useful' reading of the text: to devise a reading which would make Hegel palatable to modern readership, or relevant for modern debates. This, however, is not my aim. There is nothing inherently wrong with these approaches attempting to make an old system topical. But throughout the thesis I have tried as hard as I could to avoid the danger of anachronism. To try to do so *and* to present a reading that would kindle an interest in Hegel for scholars focusing on what they see as 'contemporary problems' is too great a task for me.

What I believe is that approaching Hegel from the Wolffian perspective is conducive to understanding the nature and aims of Hegel's philosophy itself. My aim is to use this history to discover the nature of Hegel's philosophy as he himself conceived of it, or more precisely, to suggest a possible avenue for the interpretation of Hegel's *Logic* which presents itself as a believable perspective on the nature of his work on the basis of this specific historical trajectory. If such philosophy is ultimately 'wrong' or impossible by today's standards, or standards of any time, I have no horse in that race. As Kreines puts it, it is one thing to defend one's philosophical position, either through historical philosophising or by other means, but "it is hard to see why we

should view *Hegel* through the lens of [a] particular contemporary ambition.”<sup>1</sup> If the ‘historically correct’ interpretation of Hegelianism leads to its overturning on the basis of Hegel’s own mistakes, if we can show that Hegel is immanently wrong on his own terms, then such a reading is as valuable, if not more, as the strongest defence of it. On the other hand, if I am overplaying the influence of Wolffianism on Hegel, seeing it as present where it is absent as a conspiracy theorist would, or if my misreading of the former leads to the misreading of the latter, then I am in trouble.

All this being said, we begin by investigating Hegel’s use of the concept ‘ontology’ to see how it is used and whether it can be said to have its origins in Wolff. Then we investigate how Hegel conceives of this ontology regarding its scientific status and seem to witness a rejection of ontology as a dogmatic, pre-Critical activity. Subsequently, imitating the movement from immediacy through mediation, we reach the moment of sublation and Hegel’s formulation of the possibility of ontology. At the end, we will look at Hegel’s texts from a slightly greater distance and observe what this reading could tell us about Hegel’s system and how to see it in the context of some other, more or less similar, interpretations of its nature in contemporary academic literature.

### **1. Hegel and the Name “Ontology”**

Before looking into where the term ‘ontology’ appears in Hegel’s works, let us remind ourselves where we have left this term so far. The last place I have discussed it was in Kant’s philosophy. For Kant, ontology is a ‘proud name’ used in dogmatic metaphysics that is to be replaced by the more modest name of the ‘analytic of the understanding.’ In its more modest, Kantian, form the place of ontology is in the completed system of metaphysics that was planned to follow the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but was never finished. In the *Critique*, the term ‘ontology’ explicitly appears twice (as *Ontologie* and *Ontologia*, i.e. in German and Latin respectively), and implicitly several more times of which the most significant, as I have argued, is in the construction *ontological argument*.

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<sup>1</sup> Kreines 2006, p. 468.

In the *Science of Logic*, the term also does not appear very frequently, and when it does appear it is primarily in the adjectival form present in the term ‘ontological argument’. I have previously argued that Kant’s naming of this kind of argument or proof ‘Ontological’ should be seen as significant, indeed should be seen as a synecdoche for Kant’s critique of the science of ontology, or dogmatic philosophy in general. The failure of the ontological argument, itself a part of special metaphysics, or its arrogant insistence that it can, of its own power, infer existence from an essence stands for, or is seen as a consequence of, the arrogant belief of dogmatism or Wolffianism that their ‘proud’ ontology or general metaphysics can derive the predicates of the in-itself from pure thinking. With regards to Hegel’s use of the *term* ‘ontological argument’ there is no evidence to support the claim that he intends to use it in the same sense Kant does, i.e. as an implicit critique of dogmatism. Instead, in the 35 years between the first editions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Science of Logic*, it seems that the name ‘ontological argument/proof’ has simply become a standard name for what was previously referred to as ‘a priori proof’, “Anselm’s proof”, etc. This is how it remains used to this day, its name devoid of any significance it might have held within Kant’s system. However, in the *Logic* Hegel rarely uses the term without connecting it to Kant, so we can see his usage of the term as referring specifically to Kant’s discussion and refutation of the ontological argument.<sup>2</sup> But putting its adjectival use on one side, what does Hegel actually say about *ontology*?

Hegel starts the *Logic*, more specifically the first Preface to it, with what seems to me to be a lamentation for ontology, or more precisely, for the old metaphysics:

That which (...) was called metaphysics has been, so to speak extirpated root and branch and has vanished from the ranks of the sciences. The ontology, rational psychology,

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<sup>2</sup> See LoHP, v3, p. 44, f56. I will say more about what we can learn from Hegel’s discussion of Kant’s *conception* and *refutation* of the ontological argument, but at this point I am limiting myself only to the use of the term.

cosmology, yes even natural theology of former times – where is now to be heard any mention of them, or who would venture to mention them? The fact is that there no longer exists any interest either in the form or the content of metaphysics, or in both together... It is (...) remarkable when a nation loses its metaphysics, when the spirit which contemplates its own pure essence is no longer a present reality in the life of the nation.<sup>3</sup>

Looking simply at this passage, one could say, it remains ambiguous whether this is a lamentation or a celebration. Sure, it would also be remarkable to see a country losing its fundamental economic mode of production, but if that mode is based on, for example, slave labour, then good riddance to it. To note that a loss is remarkable by witnessing the consequences of it is not the same as lamenting what was lost. In the same place we find out that this loss, amounting to the “renunciation of speculative thought”, was brought about by the “exoteric teaching of Kantian philosophy”, i.e. that the understanding should not overstep the boundaries of experience, lest it generate nothing but the “fantasies of the brain.” Maybe Hegel is claiming that we are better off being free from such fantasies and that we have Kant to thank for liberating us from them. Maybe what we needed all along was to renounce speculative thought and Kant finally brought this forward.

The *Introduction* to the *Logic*, however, suggests something different. Hegel claims that Kantianism cannot be seen as a sufficient replacement for Wolffian dogmatism. Its deficiency lies in the fact that it has focused on the “so-called *transcendental* aspect of the categories”, which yields “a blank result,” since it cannot contribute at all to the knowledge of the *nature* of the metaphysical categories. While Hegel believes Kantianism was a necessary step in the history of philosophy so that “the cognition of the *infinite form*, that is, of the Concept, would be introduced,” the Kantian standpoint has to be overcome. The purely formal, and for Hegel subjectivist, aspect under which Kantianism sees and treats the categories has to be reformulated. Pure thought

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<sup>3</sup> SL, p. 26.

has to think itself in its purity. The form of the categories has to be able to give itself content.<sup>4</sup>

So the old metaphysics, now lost through the Kantian renunciation of speculation, cannot be sufficiently supplanted by Kantianism itself. In other words, 'proud ontology' cannot be sufficiently replaced by the 'more modest analytic of the understanding'. Something else must come in its place:

The objective logic then, takes the place rather of *former metaphysics* which was intended to be the scientific construction of the world in terms of *thoughts* alone. If we have regard to the final shape in the elaboration of this science [i.e. of former metaphysics], then it is first and immediately *ontology* whose place is taken by objective logic.<sup>5</sup>

Instead of the analytic of the understanding it will be the 'objective logic', i.e. the parts of the *Science of Logic* known as the Doctrine of Being and Essence, that will replace the former ontology. This identification of the Objective logic with ontology, or the idea that the objective logic replaces ontology, appears at least once more in Hegel's work. It is also stated in the *Propaedeutic*, where Hegel says that the Logic is divided into three parts which he, at that point, calls the ontological, the subjective, and the doctrine of the idea.<sup>6</sup>

But how do we know that this 'ontology' refers to Wolffianism? That this 'final shape' is in the shape of a wolf? This can be inferred from the fact that when Hegel refers to ontology and 'former metaphysics' in his various other works he inevitably links it to the

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<sup>4</sup> SL, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup> *Propaedeutic*, Encyclopaedia for the higher classes (1808), p. 127, §15. By the time the *Science of Logic* is published the Doctrine of the Idea will be placed under the Subjective Logic, however, the 'objective logic' remains to be called, or remains analogous to, ontology, at least in the introduction.

philosophy of Wolff, either explicitly or implicitly. Wolffianism, as it is easy to see, is presented in the *Encyclopaedia Logic* as the culmination of the first ‘Stellung’ of thought regarding objectivity, i.e. of metaphysical philosophy.<sup>7</sup> As Hegel puts it in the *Propaedeutic*: “[t]he objects of the common system of metaphysics are the Thing [*das Ding*], the World, Mind, and God, which give rise to the different metaphysical sciences: Ontology, Cosmology, Pneumatology, and Theology.”<sup>8</sup> From what we know about Wolff, we know that this division of metaphysics is Wolffian in nature.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel tells us that “in its orderly shape this [former, or pre-Kantian] metaphysics had as its *first part*, Ontology. The doctrine of the *abstract determinations of essence*.”<sup>10</sup>

We can here recognise the elements of Wolff’s ontology that I have spoken of in the earlier chapter. Ontology is put in a system of sciences together with cosmology, theology, and psychology, and it regards determinations of essences abstractly. But what about Wolff’s definition of ontology as a science of an entity *qua* entity? Hegel seems to refer to this as well. In the first passage from the *Propaedeutic* referred to above, in which Hegel states that the Logic falls into the ontological, the subjective, and the doctrine of the idea, Hegel defines ontological logic as “the system of the pure concepts of the entity.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in the *Lectures on Logic*, when talking about Wolffianism and the first *Stellung* of thought, ontology is defined as the metaphysics of entities, but also placed in an analogy with one other historical system:

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<sup>7</sup> See specifically EL, §27 for “metaphysics of the recent past” in Germany before Kant, as well as §§33-4 & ad for the characterization of metaphysical thinking through Wolffian framework.

<sup>8</sup> *Propaedeutic*, For middle classes (1810-11), p.76, §6.

<sup>9</sup> It is Wolffian if not strictly speaking Wolff’s since in Wolff’s system what Hegel here calls ‘pneumatology’ is called ‘psychology’, while both natural theology and psychology constitute *pneumatics*.

<sup>10</sup> *Abstrakten Bestimmungen des Wesens*. EL, §33.

<sup>11</sup> “Das System der reinen Begriffe des Seienden.” *Propädeutic, Enzklopädie für Oberklasse* (1808), p. 149, §15. Translation modified.



The first branch of metaphysics is *ontology*, τὸ ὄν, the entity, the metaphysics of what is: the determinations of essence, being, unity, manyness, substance, and the phenomenon on the whole make up the Aristotelian categories. In his *Metaphysics* Aristotle goes through the same categories, the categories concerning whatever is.<sup>12</sup>

It is important here to note that Hegel provides this description in the section specifically talking about the First *Stellung* of thought, or the metaphysical period of the history of philosophy, and that it is not his only identification of Wolff's metaphysical project, or at least of ontology in general, with Aristotle's. For example, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel once again links ontology and Aristotle's first philosophy, but this time with his own term for such a discipline:

Aristotle and the ancients did not know this work by the name of Metaphysics; it was by them called πρώτη φιλοσοφία. This pure philosophy Aristotle very clearly distinguishes from the other sciences as “the science of that which is, in so far as it is, and of what belongs to it implicitly and explicitly.” The main object which Aristotle has in view is the definition of what this substance (ousia) really is. *In this ontology or, as we call it, logic*, he investigates and minutely distinguishes 4 principles: first, determination or quality as such, the wherefore of anything; secondly the matter; thirdly the principle of motion; and fourthly, the principle of final cause or of the good.<sup>13</sup>

Besides this suggested affinity of Aristotle's philosophy with ontology and Hegel's logic, ontology is later in the same lectures further linked to

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<sup>12</sup> LoL, p. 21. Translation modified.

<sup>13</sup> LoHP, v2, pp. 137-8. Emphasis mine.

Aristotle's logic. When talking about Aristotle's *Categories*, Hegel provides this further analogy between the two:

The *Categories* of which the first work [of the *Organon*] treats, are the universal determinations, that which is predicated of the entity [*was von dem Seienden gesagt wird*] (*ha tôn ontôn katêgoreitai*): as well as that which we call conceptions of the understanding [*Verstandesbegriffe*], as the Essentialities of things [*als Wesenheit der Dinge*]. This may be called an ontology, as pertaining to metaphysics; hence these determinations also appear in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.<sup>14</sup>

Seeing Aristotle's logic as the logic of the understanding, connecting it to ontology, and seeing it in the similar way to Wolffianism is repeated later in the lectures on the history of philosophy, this time under the section on Wolff:

*Theoretical* philosophy. It concerns firstly 1. *Logic*, purified of the endless Scholastic elaboration: it is the logic of the understanding that Wolff has systematised; then 2. *Metaphysics*. This contains a) *Ontology*, the doctrine of the abstract and universal categories of philosophising, of Being (*on*), that which is *ens unum, bonum*; [of] the One, Accident, Substance, Cause and Effect, Phenomenon, etc. – it is abstract metaphysics.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> LoHP, v2, p 212. Translation modified. See also EL §24: “[L]ogic coincides with *metaphysics*, with the science of *things* grasped in *thoughts* [*der Wissenschaft der Dinge in Gedanken gefaßt*] that used to be taken to express the *essentialities* of the things [*die Wesenheiten der Dinge*].”

<sup>15</sup> “*Ontologie*, die Abhandlung von den abstrakten, ganz allgemeinen Kategorien des Philosophierens, des Seins (*on*), daß das *ens unum, bonum* ist, das Eine, Akzidenz, Substanz, Ursache und Wirkung, das Phänomen usf. kommt vor; es ist abstrakte Metaphysik.” LoHP, v3. p. 158/VGP III p. 256. Translation modified.

All of this suggests several things. Firstly, on the majority of occasions, Hegel identifies ontology with the sense established by Wolff. While he does, on three quoted occasions, ascribe it to Aristotle, this should not be seen as problematic, since the quotations suggest that Hegel sees the ontological aspects in Wolff and Aristotle to be very similar, if not the same. Importantly, this understanding of what ontology is, which Hegel identifies in both Aristotle and Wolff, corresponds to the Wolffian understanding of what ontology is, rather than certain understandings which might be more popular today. Hence for Hegel, ontology is a science of the abstract determinations of essences, or of universal categories, or the predicates of entities. It is not, for example, an investigation into which entities exist or do not exist.

So when Hegel claims that it is now the job of the objective logic to take place of pre-critical metaphysics in its “final shape” of elaboration, we can see that the *Logic* is supposed to be taking place of ontology understood in the Wolffian sense. This can be seen from the fact that when Hegel talks about pre-critical metaphysics he explains it through the architectonic shape posited by Wolff (ontology, cosmology, psychology, theology), but also from the fact that at several points mentioned above Hegel refers to ontology as a science of the predicates of the *ens*. Moreover, the identification of ontology with the investigation into the nature of the *ens* in general can be seen from the continuation of the above quotation in which Hegel announces the replacement of ontology. Hegel continues:

It is first and immediately *ontology* whose place is taken by objective logic – that part of this [former] metaphysics which was supposed to investigate the nature of *ens* in general; *ens* comprises both *being* and *essence* [Das *Ens* *begreift* sowohl *Sein als Wesen in sich*], a distinction for which the German language has fortunately preserved different terms.<sup>16</sup>

From all of this we can see that Hegel is aware of and understands ontology in the Wolffian sense. Furthermore, he sees his logic as a

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<sup>16</sup> SL, p. 63.

replacement, or a reformulation of this Wolffian ontology after the similar attempt to do so by Kant, according to Hegel, did not show itself to be as fruitful as hoped for. Moreover, he sees ontology, in some shape, appearing as early as Aristotle's *Primary Philosophy* suggesting a metaphysical tradition starting with Aristotle, passing through Scholasticism and experiencing transformation in the systems of Kant and Hegel himself.<sup>17</sup> So what Hegel sees is basically what I refer to as the German ontological tradition, and a history of its conception: a trajectory in the conceptions of metaphysics and philosophy that can be understood through the concept of ontology established by Wolff. In fact, this tradition itself is supposed to be grasped, and improved, logically or philosophically by the first two parts of the *Science of Logic*, while my thesis seems to be trying to do so historically through the totality of its content.

Now that we have identified that there is in fact a Wolffian aspect to be found in the Logic, specifically in the first two parts, let us see where this takes us. Hegel has, so far, told us what he considers ontology to be, that he is dissatisfied by the way it was supposed to be replaced by Kant's Analytic of the Understanding, and that he will provide a proper replacement of it in the Objective logic. More than once, Hegel suggests that there is a certain identity,

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<sup>17</sup> In general, and after making this claim, one could object to my identification of Hegel's references to pre-critical philosophy as exclusively Wolffianism, i.e. as if he does not also refer to Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Leibniz, etc. There is a complex and a simple answer to that. The complex answer is that while placing such canonical thinkers under the heading of 'metaphysical thinking' historically, Hegel seems to treat them as if they somehow stay above its pitfalls. The only person who is described as being completely mired in this thinking seems to be Wolff. This suggests that Hegel's relation to the tradition of pre-critical metaphysics is more complex than I suggest here, but could be argued for. On the other hand, the simple solution, which I believe will suffice, is that when Hegel is talking about Spinoza, Leibniz, or Descartes, he talks about Spinoza, Leibniz, or Descartes. When Hegel is talking about Wolff, or more precisely Wolffian style metaphysics, he tends to speak about 'dogmatism', or 'past metaphysics', 'former metaphysics', etc. What I mean is that while Wolff is not the *only* pre-critical metaphysician for Hegel, whenever Hegel talks generically about '(pre-critical) metaphysics' he can be shown to talk about Wolffianism.

or affinity, between the *Logic* and Wolff's ontology. In fact, both Wolff's *Ontologia* and Hegel's Objective logic seem to have the same content: *ens*.<sup>18</sup> It truly seems that Hegel's *Logic* is supposed to be an argument for, or even an example of, the possibility of ontology after Kant. If Kant replaced ontology by replacing *entia* with *phenomena*, Hegel seems to be putting the *ens* back into the picture. The difficulty with putting the point this way, however, is that while we have established that Hegel knows what ontology is *for Wolff* and seems to suggest some affinity between Wolff's project and his own, we still do not know what ontology is supposed to be *for Hegel*, especially since the objective logic is somehow supposed to replace it. Let us pass, in that case, from the concept to the conception.

## 2. Hegel and the Conception of Ontology

Before going properly into Hegel's critique of Wolffian ontology something more has to be said about the way in which the *Logic* replaces former metaphysics. I have so far twice quoted the passage claiming that the *Logic* is supposed to replace former ontology, but the passage has a continuation that I have so far omitted. It is not, it seems, that only ontology, or general metaphysics, is to be replaced by the *Logic*, but special metaphysics as well:

[I]t is first and immediately *ontology* whose place is taken by objective logic... But further, objective logic also comprises the rest of metaphysics in so far as this attempted to comprehend with the forms of pure thought particular substrata taken primarily from figurate conception [Vorstellung], namely the soul, the world, and God; and the *determinations of thought* constituted what was essential in the mode of consideration.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> By this I do not mean that *Sein* or *Dasein* are what Hegel understands *ens* to be. As we shall soon see, Hegel does not posit a clear category of either *ens* or *das Seiende* and closest he comes to Wolffian conception of *ens* is *das Ding*, with characteristics similar to those of Wolffian of *ens* being first discernable under the category of *Etwas*.

<sup>19</sup> SL, p. 63. Original emphasis.

The reason I am pointing this out now is due to the fact that Hegel criticises pre-Critical metaphysics both in its general and special mode and, while the two are criticised in a different way, I will show that Hegel's criticism of each can be seen as contained in a critique which encompasses both. To begin with, and I will elaborate on this later, we should note that the objective logic is supposed to both *replace* ontology or general metaphysics *and comprise* what was known as special metaphysics.

### **2. 1. The Logic and the Entity qua Entity**

How is this replacement of ontology supposed to be understood? So far we have seen that when referring to ontology Hegel sees it as a science of the *ens*, or *to on*, which he translates by its German morphological correlate 'das Seiende'. If the *Logic* is supposed to be the replacement of Wolff's ontology it will, however, *not* be a replacement that takes the same form of proceeding. Specifically, while the *Logic* is seen to replace Wolffian general metaphysics, Hegel will not do so by proposing an alternative science of an *entity qua entity*. The *Logic* is not presented as the study of *das Seiende selbst*, or of the predicates that are supposed to be applicable to an abstractly conceived Entity lacking internal contradictions. In fact, the *Logic* will be seen as "the science of the Idea in and for itself,"<sup>20</sup> or of "*thinking*, of its determinations and laws," although "not as formal thinking, but as the self-developing totality of its own peculiar determinations and laws which thinking gives to itself, instead of finding it already had it."<sup>21</sup> Unlike what we have seen in Wolff (and earlier in for example Clauberg), Hegel's *Logic* is not supposed to begin with the most abstracted internally non-contradictory thought, name that of 'an entity', and proceed to analytically derive predicates that apply to that possible thought, or to the *object* of that thought. Hegel does start with a pure thought, but this is the pure thought of *Being – Sein* – free from any determination. But what is in a name? Is it the case that Hegel simply decides to call the thought occurring at the starting point 'Being' instead of 'Entity'? If this were the case it seems there

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<sup>20</sup> EL, §18.

<sup>21</sup> EL, §19 & 19\*.

would not be much difference between Wolff's ontology and Hegel's replacement of it, at least with regards to the starting points they posit for their systems. The beginning of the *Logic* with *Sein* rather than *das Seiende* or *ens*, however, is something more significant than a mere terminological preference.

Firstly, in Wolff's system the *ens* is treated as the most abstract *subject* of predication. The aim is to posit it as a starting point from which we can discover predicates which are to be predicated of any possible entity, be that entity finite, infinite, empirically existing, or imaginary. Since some of the predicates are mutually exclusive on pain of contradiction (e.g. finite-infinite, simple-complex), they cannot apply to one and the same entity. But since what we are investigating, and starting from, is an entity *qua* entity, rather than an entity in any particular determination, we have at our disposal a certain abstraction of which these predicates can be predicated. Since Hegel *does* start from an abstraction, indeed, what he sees as the greatest possible abstraction, the starting position is similar. But for Hegel, *Being* from which the logic starts a) does not serve as a possible subject of predication, and b) is not a starting point from which we derive predicates applicable *to it*, guided by principles of thinking such as contradiction and sufficient reason. In fact, the thought of "*Being, pure Being, without further determination*" *vanishes* into Nothing. Neither Nothing, nor later Becoming, is *predicated of* Being. There is no talk of the subjects of predication, possible predicates of those subjects, or predication at all – at least until very late in the *Logic*.

Another difference between the conception of Wolff and Hegel's system regarding the science of an entity *qua* entity can be inferred from the quotation regarding the *Logic* and the concept *ens* given above. "*Ens*," Hegel tells us, "comprises both *being* and *essence*, a distinction for which the German language has fortunately preserved different terms."<sup>22</sup> Later on in the *Logic*, he states that: "The German language has preserved essence in the past participle [*gewesen*] of the verb *to be* [*sein*]; for essence is past – but timelessly past – being."<sup>23</sup> The first thing to note is that in Latin and Ancient Greek there is no

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<sup>22</sup> SL, p. 63.

<sup>23</sup> "...aber zeitlos vergangene Sein." SL, p. 389.

form of a past participle for the verb *to be*.<sup>24</sup> But all three languages have a morphological correlate of the present participle in *to on*, *ens*, and *das Seiende*. So why go with *Sein*? A clue might be in Hegel's description of the relation between *sein* and *gewesen*. Since the Doctrine of Essence is supposed to follow the Doctrine of Being we can assume that Hegel sees the participle form of expression of something to be more determinate or derivative from the infinitive form of expression. This, however, is not to say that for Hegel it simply 'sounds better' to use the infinitive to begin the *Logic* rather than a participle. Hegel believes that language (or at least German language) itself possesses a speculative spirit that can display the relations of the categories present in the *Logic*.<sup>25</sup> This would mean that the concept *das Seiende* could not serve as a starting point of the *Logic* since its participle form suggests it to be a "further determination" – something from which "Being, pure being" needs to be without.

But this argument does not have to be seen as resting only on a grammatical fact that participles are derivable from infinitives. If we keep in mind that the participle form of 'to be' in Latin and Greek can also be translated as 'that which is' or 'the one which is', we could say that it is quite intuitive that these kinds of expressions sound more determinate than simply saying 'to be'. Even without being overly familiar with the relations between thought-determinations of the *Logic* we could agree that simply saying, or more precisely thinking, 'to be', or *Sein/Being* does not provide us with much. But also that to think 'the one which is' or 'that which is' seems to be to think something richer in determination. Such phrases have a ring to them suggestive of particulars with properties, of a certain *one* or a certain *something*

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<sup>24</sup> Strictly speaking, Latin, unlike Greek, does not have a naturally forming present participle of *esse*, with *ens* or *essens*, being purposefully invented to translate Greek philosophical term *ousia*.

<sup>25</sup> See EL, §96ad and Letter to Rosenkranz in EL, p. xvi. Interestingly, Melamed (2009, pp. 45-7) argues that a similar position, i.e. that in Spinoza's *Compendium to Hebrew Grammar* "one can easily find some of Spinoza's most crucial metaphysical doctrines," such as that nouns, adjectives, and participles correspond to substance, attributes, and modes.



describable in a certain way. But this is too much to start from if the thought of 'pure Being' has no further determination than itself.

But there is a case to be made, not dependent on morphological or linguistic phenomena, that Hegel believes that *das Seiende*, or *ens*, as it was conceived by Wolff, cannot serve as a starting point of the Logic. If we read Hegel's claim that *ens* comprises both being and essence, as I do, as referring specifically to the Wolffian conception of *ens*, this tells us that in Hegel's view the problem is not simply that the subject matter of ontology is called *ens*, but that the very way the starting point of ontology as first philosophy is conceived is problematic. The claim then, that *ens* comprises both Being and Essence suggests that the starting point of Wolff's system (or of Wolffianism) is overly determined. Earlier, I have presented various different definitions of Wolffian ontology that Hegel gives, but in general he considers it to be either a philosophy of *to on*, of the Entity, or the "doctrine of the *abstract determinations of essence*."<sup>26</sup> Both of these definitions apply to the shape of Wolff's ontology as discussed earlier in this thesis. If either of these describes the starting point of Wolff's ontology, then his starting point is, in Hegel's view, overly determined. This means that the categories or thought-determinations required for its formulization, for the proper exposition of the category of *ens*, are plentiful. If we were to start with a category, *ens*, which depends on both the determinations of Being and of Essence then the determinations required for its formulation can only be presupposed. Even if one is to object and claim that *ens* should be taken to stand for a simple, indeterminate 'something', 'etwas', this category is still too determinate to serve as a beginning, since in order to reach it one has to pass through Being, Nothing, Becoming, and Determinate Being. Finally, even if we were to disagree with Hegel and say that in some way the *Logic* should start with the thought of the Entity, or *das Seiende*, that there is nothing in its concept or conception which prevents it from serving as a starting point, or which differentiates it from Being or *Sein*, that might work well on its own but cannot on its own be levied as a defence of Wolff's starting point. As mentioned above, Hegel is correct, in my opinion, in his diagnosis of the Wolffian starting point, i.e. Wolff's conception of the entity *qua* entity, as

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<sup>26</sup> *Abstrakten Bestimmungen des Wesens*. EL, §33.

the one that encompasses both essence and being, since Wolffian ontology is supposed to be the science of the predicates of entities *as they are*, but also of the abstract determinations of essences. This is because these predicates are supposed to be combined into the essences of particular kinds of entities. In this sense, unlike Wolff's ontology, the *Logic*, or at least the starting point of the *Logic*, cannot be seen as a science of entities *qua* entities.

Wolffian Ontology and Hegel's Logic are both sciences from which the system of philosophy has to start. As Hegel puts it in the *Encyclopaedia*, the *Logic* as "the system of pure thought-determinations" is the "animating soul" or the "all-animating spirit" of all sciences, since the thought-determinations present in the logic appear in their particular modes in other philosophical sciences.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, the *Logic* is supposed to be positioned at the same place in the system of philosophy as ontology was, i.e. as the first philosophy, or general metaphysics, from which all other sciences, to use Wolff's term, 'borrow' categories. But now, the first philosophical science cannot be the science of *ens* or of *das Seiende*, since that concept is, in Hegel's view, too determinate to serve as a starting point. This we can call Hegel's critique, or problem, of the *beginning* of science as applied to Wolffianism:

But if no presupposition is to be made and the beginning itself is taken *immediately*, then its only determination is that it is to be the beginning of logic, of thought as such. All that is present is simply the resolve that we propose to consider thought as such. Thus the beginning must be an absolute, or synonymously, an *abstract* beginning; and so it *may not presuppose anything*, must not be mediated by anything, nor have a ground; rather it is to be itself the ground of the entire science. It must consequently be *immediacy* itself. The beginning therefore is *pure being*.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> EL, §24, ad2.

<sup>28</sup> "Der Anfang ist also das *reine Sein*." SL, p. 70. Original emphasis. I qualify this specifically with reference to Wolffianism since Hegel has more to say about the

But does the Logic give us an explication of what an *ens* is, or how to properly conceive of it? Unfortunately, it is difficult to say. The term *ens* does not appear, to my knowledge, at any other point in the *Logic* except in the above-quoted passage. When it appears in other works, it tends to appear specifically in reference to Wolffian (Rational) Psychology about which Hegel says that it treated the soul as an *ens* or as a *Ding*. For example, in the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel tells us that spirit “is not supposed to be considered as an *ens* lacking all process [*ein prozeßloses ens*], the way it was regarded in the older metaphysics.”<sup>29</sup> In the same section he tells us that Rational psychology started by considering the soul as a *Ding*, suggesting the equivalence between the two.<sup>30</sup> But what about *das Seiende*?

*Das Seiende* appears minimally 24 times in the *Logic*, but never seems to be posited as a specific category of the *Logic*, the way, for example *Sein* and *Nichts*, *Werden*, or *Schein* are.<sup>31</sup> Miller, for example, translates it in most cases as something ‘affirmatively present’ or as ‘affirmative being’.<sup>32</sup> Another examples of Miller’s rendition are as ‘being’, ‘immediate being’, ‘sphere of being’, or ‘what simply is’.<sup>33</sup> At certain places he renders *Seiendes* as a state of having being. For example, “Etwas aber ist schon ein bestimmtes Seiendes, das sich von anderem Etwas unterscheidet” is rendered as “but the being of *something* is already determinate and is distinguished from another something,” instead of: “but Something is already a determinate Entity, distinguished from another Something.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, “Die vielen Eins sind Seiende,” is rendered as “The

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problem of beginning in philosophy. See SL, pp. 67-78. There are other problems connected to the way *ens* is conceived in Wolff to which I will get to shortly.

<sup>29</sup> EL, §34, ad.

<sup>30</sup> See also LoL, p.21. for the same point and the same identification between the Wolffian *Ding* and *ens*.

<sup>31</sup> The count refers to the substantive occurrences, such as *das Seiende* or (*ein*) *Seiendes*. The purely participle use, i.e. *seiend*, is ubiquitous in the text.

<sup>32</sup> SL, pp. 164, 165, 168, 484.

<sup>33</sup> SL, pp. 117, 122; 224, 700; 439; 546, 627.

<sup>34</sup> SL, p. 83.

many ones have affirmative being” instead of “the many ones are entities.”<sup>35</sup> It is not clear that every instance of *das Seiende* should be translated as *the entity*, or that the way Hegel uses it is intended as a direct correspondent to Wolff’s *ens*. As mentioned above, in the lecture course of 1808 Hegel does refer to the Logic as “Das System der reinen Begriffe des Seienden,”<sup>36</sup> but it is questionable whether he still considered that definition of Logic to be suitable by the time the work on it was complete. Regarding the references to Wolff, there are parts of the Logic where we can say that Hegel does have Wolffian conception of *ens* in mind when talking about entities. For example, above I have spoken of Hegel’s identification of *ens* or *Ding* with the way in which Wolffian rational psychology saw the soul. The same point is repeated in the *Logic*: “In rational psychology, which is an abstract metaphysics, the soul is considered not as spirit but as a merely immediate Entity, as a soul-thing.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, “the definitions of metaphysics, like its presuppositions, distinctions, and conclusions, seek to assert and produce only an *Entity* and indeed an *Entity in itself* [nur *Seiendes* und zwar *Ansichseiendes*].”<sup>38</sup> Finally, if we keep in mind the problem of the beginning regarding Wolff’s philosophy, the following part from the first remark on Becoming can be seen as referring to the Wolffian conception of entities: “*Nothing* is usually opposed to *Something*; but *Something* is already a determinate Entity, which differentiates itself from another *Something*.”<sup>39</sup>

But these examples all come either from remarks or from Hegel’s references to previous metaphysics. How does *das Seiende* feature in the main content of the text, in the actual derivation of categories? The first appearance of it, which does not fall under remarks or introductory parts of the text, can be found under the section on Finitude, where Hegel states:

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<sup>35</sup> SL, p. 170.

<sup>36</sup> *Propädeutic*, p. 149, §15.

<sup>37</sup> “...nicht als Geist, sondern als ein nur unmittelbar *Seiendes*, als *Seelending*”. SL, p. 224. Translation modified.

<sup>38</sup> SL, p. 122. Translation modified. Although this is probably better to translate as “that which is” and “that which is in itself”.

<sup>39</sup> SL, p. 83.

In the first section, in which *determinate being* in general was considered... [determinate being] had, as at first taken up, the determination of the *Entity* [*die Bestimmung des Seienden*]. Consequently, the moments of its development, Quality and Something, equally have an affirmative determination [*affirmativer Bestimmung*]. In this section, on the other hand, the negative determination contained in determinate being is developed.<sup>40</sup>

This suggests that in the quoted section, *das Seiende* is used as a term that encapsulates the *positive* element of the Being-Nothing dialectic. Since all the categories in the *Logic* are, in a way, the result of this fundamental dialectic, it seems that *das Seiende* will be a term used to refer to the positive result, aspect, or determinations stemming from it: to the aspects of the dialectical progression of the *Logic* resulting from the determining of Being, rather than of Nothing. This might tell us something about Hegel's relation to Wolff. Let us consider two other instances. In the section on Repulsion and Attraction, Hegel tells us that: "The many ones are entities [*Die vielen Eins sind Seiende*]. Their determinate being or relation to one another is a non-relation, is external to them – the abstract void."<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, under Contingency: "Similarly, the possibility, as a *simple* in-itself [*Ansichsein*], is an immediate, *only* an Entity [*nur ein Seiendes*], or *opposed* to actuality, it is equally an in-itself that lacks actuality, *only* a possible."<sup>42</sup> What unites the three instances is the fact that we can see these characteristics exemplified in Wolff's conception of an entity. Firstly, regarding an affirmative determination, Wolffian entities are defined and understood *only* through their affirmative determinations. By this I mean that they are supposed to be understood through their essential predicates, which can be shown to belong to them by not being contradictory to other predicates they possess. Wolffian entities, seen as bearers of particular

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<sup>40</sup> SL, p. 117. There is an earlier instance, under the category of Something, but Hegel there talks about *Daseiendes*.

<sup>41</sup> SL, p. 170. Translation modified.

<sup>42</sup> SL, p. 545. Translation modified.

positive predicates, therefore only have affirmative determinations. Secondly, “their relation to one another is a non-relation”. A Wolffian entity can be finite or infinite, but Wolff’s ontology does not postulate a relation between entities of which the predicate ‘finite’ can be predicated and those of which it cannot. This is not the task of Wolff’s ontology. Ontology simply tells us that ‘finite’ and ‘infinite’ cannot be predicated of a same entity. The relation between complete essences, i.e. ones which exhaust the combinations of all non-contradictory predicates, is not its concern. Hence their relation is a non-relation or is external to them, since there is nothing in the nature of finite entities which could relate them to infinite entities, besides the fact that they contain an exclusory predicate. Finally, since Wolff’s ontology is not a science of actually existing entities, but of predicates of possible entities, we can see them in Hegel’s connection of *ein Seiendes* to simple possibility.

The important point to take from this comes from the fact that if we were to understand the concept of entity in this way, as purely affirmative, non-relational, and possible, this would show us the way towards Hegel’s general criticism of Wolffian ontology to which I am now moving to.

## **2. 2. *Understanding, Reason, and Dialectic***

I have already mentioned the problem of the beginning that Hegel identifies in Wolff, specifically, the idea that one cannot begin a philosophical system with a category more determinate than Being, which is what Wolff does. Besides the problem of the beginning we can identify two other general problems with Wolffian metaphysics. I will refer to these as the problem of the Understanding and the problem of the Dialectic.

In the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel states that:

The first form of philosophy that thinking generates is metaphysics, the form of the reflective understanding [*denkendes Verstand*]. The second form is scepticism and criticism directed against this reflective understanding... The second attitude is negative towards the first; it is the critique

of metaphysics, and it attempts to consider cognitive knowing on its own account, so that its determinations are deduced from cognition itself and dealt with as determinations that develop out of cognition itself.<sup>43</sup>

These ‘forms’ of philosophy refer to the ‘positions of thought with regard to objectivity’ expressed in the *Encyclopaedia*. I have already spoken about them, but as a reminder the first position, or *Stellung* called metaphysics, encompasses pre-critical (especially rationalist) metaphysics with its highest form being expressed in Wolff’s philosophy. The second *Stellung* refers to Kant and empiricism and, as Hegel here states, is seen as a reaction to the first *Stellung*. With regards to the second *Stellung* I will focus on Kant when the time comes to discuss the Dialectical problem with Wolff.<sup>44</sup> But first, what does it mean to say that metaphysics takes the form of understanding and why is that a problem?

Hegel’s criticisms of the first *Stellung* of thought can be found scattered across his work. In the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, however, he presents three problems of this philosophising.<sup>45</sup> First problem, Hegel tells us, is that the determinations of metaphysical philosophising (e.g. the categories or predicates of Wolff’s ontology) were “in their abstraction (...) taken to be valid on their own account, and capable of being *predicates of what is true*.” This metaphysics “presupposed that the cognition of the absolute could only come about through the *attaching of predicates to it*.” Moreover, according to Hegel, this metaphysics never investigated these determinations (such as *finite-infinite, simple-composite, one-whole*) in themselves, to see whether they are themselves true and whether they can achieve what they claim to achieve, i.e. the knowledge of the Absolute through predication.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> LoHP, v3, p. 106.

<sup>44</sup> There is also a third *Stellung* which encompasses Jacobi’s philosophy, but I will not address it in this thesis.

<sup>45</sup> Specifically in EL, §§27-33.

<sup>46</sup> EL, §§28 & ad.

The second criticism Hegel gives is that the objects [*Gegenstände*] of this metaphysics were God, Soul, and the World. This is not a problem in and of itself. The problem is that, according to Hegel, the way in which this metaphysics understood these three key objects was through *representation* [*Vorstellung*]. What does that mean? Hegel explains that the basic way this metaphysics discussed the ideas of God, Soul, or the World was not as they were in themselves.<sup>47</sup> As he puts it “it did not allow the object to determine itself freely from within, but presupposed it as ready-made.”<sup>48</sup> By this Hegel means that metaphysics or Wolffianism has simply adopted the common way these concepts are understood and then, by applying predicates to them it tried to match the philosophical or logical conception of them with the ordinary conception. For example, we have an idea of God as omnipotent, as a Creator, as just, etc. or of the soul as some incorporeal substance which persists after death. Hegel’s claim is that pre-critical metaphysics conceived of its traditional objects on the basis of these common ideas. For example, we all know that God is the eternal creator of the world, hence He must be necessarily existing. If He necessarily exists, that means that existence must be a part of His essence. Since we know, from Wolff, that essence is composed of predicates, then existence needs to be a predicate necessarily applicable to God. Similarly, since we know that the Soul survives after the death of the body, then we know that the soul should be incorporeal, since it needs to be of a different kind from the body to survive its perishing. But also, since we know that the soul is supposed to spend eternity with God (or, more likely, in damnation) then it has to be simple, since it cannot perish or be destroyed, and to perish is to be decomposed into simple parts. Hence since the soul needs to be immortal, it cannot be perishable, or composite. Hence it must be simple.

We see that this second criticism applies specifically to *special*, rather than *general* metaphysics. But the two are connected. General metaphysics adopted the traditional predicates and dualities, such as finite-infinite, simple-composite, at face value. Special metaphysics adopted the traditional objects, and the two were then combined. According to Hegel, this practice does not

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<sup>47</sup> Or maybe more precisely, in the way they have to be properly thought.

<sup>48</sup> EL, §31 ad.



extend throughout the whole period of pre-critical metaphysics. Ancient Greeks thought about these objects freely. The problem of importing the content from representation into philosophy comes from Scholasticism which “adopted its content as something given, and indeed given by the church.” This continued into modernity, and “we moderns are initiated, through our whole education, into representations that it is in the highest degree difficult to transcend.”<sup>49</sup> So by the time of Wolff metaphysicians find themselves in a double abyss of merely adopting traditional categories, assuming they are objectively applicable to reality, and assuming that they can describe the objects which they have simply adopted from representation, from custom. In order to understand these objects properly, however: “Genuine cognition of an object (...) has to be *such* that the object determines itself from within itself, and does not acquire its predicates in this external way.”<sup>50</sup>

Finally, due to the kind of finite determinations to which this thinking was limited, it had to assume that “of *two opposed determinations* (...) one must be *true*, and the other *false*.” For Hegel that means that this metaphysics “adheres to one-sided determinations of the understanding whilst excluding their opposites”, such that “the world is *either finite or infinite, but not both*”. Hegelian idealism, on the other hand, will say that “The soul is neither *just* finite nor *just* infinite, but is essentially *both* the one *and* the other, and hence

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<sup>49</sup> EL, §31 ad. One interesting thing to consider is that this does not need to be seen as a result of some religious bigotry of Scholasticism, since Religion is the mode in which the Absolute is expressed in Representation. With that in mind, Hegel’s claim does not have to be seen as merely historico-sociological. Moreover, in reading Scholastic philosophy, Latin or Arabic, one can see that there is a constant tension between philosophical thought and the Scripture, but this sometimes results in either the modification of the philosophical position or in the modification of the Scriptural hermeneutics. Hence, for example, Averroes, rejects the doctrine of the creation of the World since Aristotle has proved that the world is eternal and reads the creation stories as didactic metaphors. Aquinas, on the other hand, at least in the way I read him, posits the *esse* above *ens* and formally simple substances in order to argue that God can create the eternally existing world since God creates by endowing the world with *esse*, rather than with *essentia*.

<sup>50</sup> EL, §28 ad. See also PoS, §31.

*neither the one nor the other.*"<sup>51</sup> Now this one-sidedness of determinations does not apply *only* to predication over objects of special metaphysics. Wolff's ontology presents us with a set of predicates, predicable of possible entities. The problem, for Hegel, does not merely consist in such a system not being able to allow predicating the opposing predicates of the same entity, but in the very fact that these predicates are understood as absolutely opposed binaries, in which the presence, or the very nature of one of a pair completely excludes the other. This is what, for Hegel, made Wolffianism into *dogmatism*.<sup>52</sup> In Hegel's view, however, "these determinations are not valid when they are isolated from one another but only when sublated".<sup>53</sup>

What for Hegel unites all these three criticisms, of predication, adoption of objects and determinations from representation, and aversion towards contradiction with emphasis on abstract opposition, is that this philosophy is "the way in which the *mere understanding views* the objects of reason" and this thinking never went beyond this.<sup>54</sup> Understanding, we can say, is the faculty of finite concepts:

Being itself finite, the understanding is cognizant only of the nature of the finite... Finite things behave as 'cause' and 'effect,' as 'force' and 'utterance'; and when they are grasped according to these determinations, they are known in their finitude. But the objects of reason cannot be determined through such finite predicates, and the attempt to do this was the defect of the older metaphysics.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> EL, §§32 & ad. See also LoL, p. 25.

<sup>52</sup> Out of the three criticisms presented here this is not the one Kant would consider as the reason why pre-critical metaphysics is considered to be dogmatism. Kant would be more likely to go for the second part of the first criticism, i.e. the fact that categories and predicates used were not evaluated in themselves regarding their validity.

<sup>53</sup> EL, §32 ad.

<sup>54</sup> EL, §§27 & 28 ad.

<sup>55</sup> EL, §28 ad.

The problem was not only that the objects of reason (God, Soul, World) were determined by the categories of the understanding but that Wolffianism proceeded “from general determinations of the understanding, although linking with them experience and observation of how natural objects present themselves to spirit.”<sup>56</sup>

We might say it is not bad that the findings were supported or linked with observation, but this is not the point being made. If the proper content of the Logic is the infinite then this cannot be reached by simply classifying objects of everyday concrete observations. Such a practice is all well and good in itself, and it is good for finite sciences, but not for metaphysics. Moreover, and in more Kantian terms, if the source of our cognition of pure concepts is everyday experience we cannot know that the categories we employ in metaphysics really are *pure* categories or empirical ones. Alternatively, one may find oneself as an empiricist and consider the so-called metaphysical categories, and the universality they ascribe to phenomena, as mere habits of speaking or, in the case of Hume, of thinking. But this armchair anthropology is not what Wolffianism aimed to be.

It must be pointed out that the way of thinking of the Understanding is not anathema to Hegel. Understanding is a faculty of determinate concepts<sup>57</sup> and as such it is indispensable for thinking in the sphere of determinate, finite objects, such as the ones found in the empirical sphere. The problem occurs if philosophical thinking consists of *mere* understanding, or is, a *philosophy of understanding*.<sup>58</sup> Consider the following quotation:

But [Wolffian] metaphysics did not go beyond the thinking of mere *understanding*. It took up the abstract determinations of thought immediately, and let them count in their immediacy as predicates of what is true. When discussing thinking we must distinguish *finite* thinking from the thinking of the mere

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<sup>56</sup> LoHP, v3 p. 158. See also LoL, p. 28.

<sup>57</sup> SL, p. 600.

<sup>58</sup> LoL, p. 21.

*understanding*, from the *infinite* thinking of *reason*. Taken in isolation, as immediately given, the thought-determinations are *finite* determinations. But what is true is what is infinite within itself; it cannot be expressed and brought to consciousness through what is finite.

What is finite is what comes to an end, what is, but ceases to be where it connects with its other, and is thus restricted by it... [T]hinking, is infinite because it is related in thinking to an ob-ject that is itself...

Thinking is only finite if it stays within restricted determinations, which it holds to be ultimate.<sup>59</sup>

One thing to ask at this point is what this distinction between reason and understanding consists in. What allows Hegel to posit the thinking of reason as the thinking of the infinite and then say that the deficiency of Wolffianism is the lack of this kind of thinking? One clue lies in the nature of what it is to think *logically*: “Logic has for its content the determinations peculiar to the thinking activity itself which have no other ground than the Thinking.”<sup>60</sup> According to the second, above-quoted paragraph, when thought relates to itself it thinks the infinite, since the object of its thinking is not limited in kind. This seems to be a Spinozist insight, but is also related to the starting position of the *Logic*.<sup>61</sup> If a philosophy of understanding is to start from the content of thinking itself, it would be tempted to conceive of it as a system of mutually opposed *thoughts* or thought-determinations, such as finite-infinite, simple-complex, etc. In this sense, it would start, and in the case of Wolff has started, from *finite* thought determinations. As we know from the *Science of Logic*, however, the logic, which is supposed to be conceived as a science of pure thought, is supposed to start completely starved of determinations. So Wolffian categories, or thought-determinations, even if

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<sup>59</sup> EL, §28, ad.

<sup>60</sup> *Propaedeutic*, Logic for Middle class (I810-II), p. 74.

<sup>61</sup> See *Ethics*, ID2 & P8.

they were not simply adopted from *Vorstellung* or tradition, would encounter this problem of being conceived or treated *as finite*. An important thing to note is that Hegel is here not referring to any particular category that might appear in Wolff. Most of the content of Wolff's *Ontologia* reappears in a new form in the *Logic*, especially in the Doctrine of Essence.<sup>62</sup> Further to this point, Hegel is not saying that these previous systems themselves considered their categories to be finite. In fact, exactly the opposite is true. The problem of the naiveté of the pre-critical metaphysics lies in the fact that it did *not* recognise their categories as finite and hence thought of them as applicable univocally to all entities, finite and infinite alike, empirical or transcendent.

This allows us to link this problem of Wolffianism to the second one: the lack of the dialectical element. The concept of *finitude* appears in Hegel's logic relatively early on and is *logically prior* to the concept of infinity. This however, is not what Hegel means by saying that the philosophy of understanding restricted itself to finitude. It is not that Wolffianism starts from *the category* of finite as conceived by Hegel or implicitly understands itself as operating under what Hegel conceives as finitude. In fact it cannot. For Hegel, once the concept of the true infinite is derived: "neither can be posited or grasped without the other, the infinite not without the finite, nor the latter without the infinite."<sup>63</sup> In a sense, one could say, the two could not be grasped without each other in Wolffianism since they compose an exclusory pair; however, they can be *posited* without the other. In fact, they have to be so posited since anything can only be either finite or infinite. Secondly, for Wolff, the opposing predicates are grasped merely *as exclusions*: where there is one, the other is absent, while for Hegel:

Since both the finite and the infinite itself are moments of the progress they are *jointly or in common the finite*, and since they are equally together negated in it and in the result, this result

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<sup>62</sup> But also in the Doctrine of Being; as it should since Hegel tells us *ens* comprises both doctrines.

<sup>63</sup> SL, 143.

as a negation of the finitude of both is called with truth the infinite.<sup>64</sup>

Now it would take too long to give a full exegesis of this quotation, or of Hegel's argument for and explanation of the True Infinite, but the point to note is that in Wolffianism the opposed predicates such as finite and infinite cannot, on the pain of contradiction, be conceived as being 'equally together' in anything. This is because, as we have said before, the way in which the Understanding thinks is by positing predicates in opposition.<sup>65</sup> Due to this it cannot do two things: it cannot think 'through' contradictions, i.e. see something as *both* finite and infinite and it cannot see the necessity within thought that generates contradictions. One could, however, under the system of understanding say that something is finite in one sense and infinite in another, or 'think through a contradiction' by explaining an apparent contradiction in judgment as a misapplication of the genus-species position. For example, saying "an animal is both rational and irrational" can be judged as true if we say "an animal is rational *qua* human, and irrational *qua* duck." These two ways of the treatment of contradiction, however, see contradiction only as *apparent*, as a mistake of judgment or reasoning, and in order to explain its occurrence they shift the discussion from the subject-matter at hand, from the thought of something as it is in-itself, to an external aspect of it, e.g. to a higher genus that is supposed to nullify the contradiction.

And this is indeed what Wolffianism did: "In the perspective of the older metaphysics it is assumed that, where cognition falls into contradictions, this is just an accidental aberration and rests on a subjective error in inferring and arguing."<sup>66</sup> Regarding the second result of non-dialectical thinking, i.e. being ignorant of the necessity of thought itself to generate contradictions, Kant already provided such a critique of previous metaphysics:

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<sup>64</sup> SL, 148.

<sup>65</sup> Remember Lorhard's ontology, expressed through nothing but opposed pairs of predicates.

<sup>66</sup> EL, §48, ad.

For Kant, however, it lies in the very nature of thinking to lapse into contradictions when it aims at cognition of the infinite. To point out antinomies should be regarded as a very important advance for philosophical cognition because in that way the rigid dogmatism of the metaphysics of the understanding is set aside and attention is directed to the dialectical movement of thinking.<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, for Hegel “Kant was the first to emphasise the difference between understanding and reason in a definite way, establishing the finite and conditioned as the subject matter of the former, and infinite and unconditioned of the latter.”<sup>68</sup> Hegel very often refers to Kant as someone who has provided a successful, indeed a crushing critique of previous metaphysics.<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, when explaining how Kant achieved this, Hegel references Kant’s antinomies. It is significant to point out that the Antinomies, indeed the whole of transcendental dialectic that includes them, are intended as a critique of *special* metaphysics. As quoted above, Kant shows that understanding necessarily lapses into contradictions *when it aims at the cognition of the infinite*. Hence, for Hegel, it was Kant who has already proven before him that the way Wolffianism used its categories needed to result in contradictions when applied to objects such as God, Soul, and the World. But this suggests that while Kant provided an important critique of special metaphysics, it is questionable whether he provided a valid critique of dogmatic *general* metaphysics or ontology. The answer to this appears to be the negative. This is because:

The main point that has to be made is that antinomy is found (...) in *all* objects of all kinds, in *all* representations, concepts, and ideas. To know this, and to be cognizant of this property of objects, belongs to what is essential in philosophical study; This is the property that constitutes what will

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> EL, 45, ad.

<sup>69</sup> See SL, pp. 190, 816; EL, §§47 ad, 48, 81 ad. 1.; LoHP, v3, pp. 185-6. LoL, p. 26.

determine itself in due course as the *dialectical* moment of logical thinking...

...the pointing out of the antinomies should be regarded as a very important advance for philosophical cognition, because in that way the rigid dogmatism of the metaphysics of the understanding is set aside and attention is directed to the dialectical movement of thinking. But at the same time, it must be noted that here again Kant again stopped at the merely negative result (that how things are in themselves is unknowable), and did not penetrate to the cognition of the true and positive significance of the antinomies. This true and positive significance (...) is that everything actual consists opposed determinations within it.<sup>70</sup>

Kant has therefore, already pointed out the lack of the dialectical element in Wolffianism. While Kantian criticism is, according to Hegel, important and insightful and applicable to pre-critical metaphysics, it possesses two shortcomings. Firstly, the criticism present in the Dialectic (antinomies and paralogisms), which Hegel sees as the main Kantian critique of Wolffianism, *only applies* to the predication of the concepts of understanding to the so-called Ideas of Reason, or to the content of special metaphysics. The dialectical element in the *categories as such*, absent in Wolff, and partially present in Kant, is fully developed only in Hegel's philosophy. Secondly, and connected to this, in his references to Kantian criticism of Wolffianism Hegel does not refer to the transcendental analytic, to what Kant called the "important result" of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant saw this part, unlike the dialectic, as the criticism of Wolff's *general* metaphysics. By referring only to the dialectic as Kant's proper critique of dogmatism, Hegel can be read as indirectly suggesting that the general part of Wolff's metaphysics is not sufficiently or adequately criticised by Kant. And indeed Hegel says something close to this in the *Encyclopaedia*, §41 when he accuses Kant of not considering

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<sup>70</sup> EL, §48 & ad.



“the content” of the categories used in metaphysics. However, since the general and the special metaphysics stand connected, the Kantian rejection of Wolffianism, even of special metaphysics, will be insufficient and “Objective logic is therefore the genuine critique of [the objects of special metaphysics] – a critique which does not consider them as contrasted under the abstract forms of the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*, but considers the determinations themselves according to their specific content.”<sup>71</sup>

As we have seen previously, objective logic was supposed to be the part of the logic replacing the former ontology and also *comprising* the former special metaphysics. Now we come closer to understanding what this means. By introducing the dialectical element into Wolffian special metaphysics Kant shows the limit of its method and content. Certain objects of thought, i.e. the soul, God, and world, cannot be treated as independent entities of which we can predicate properties guided by the law of contradiction. According to Kant, this is because when the Understanding attempts to prove anything regarding this kind of content of thinking it is able to prove the opposite of it with equal validity (e.g. world is both infinite and finite). Kant’s solution, in that case, is that these traditional objects of thought are not to be treated as separate entities, but as Ideas of Reason. Hegel partially agrees. The negative or dialectical side of Kant’s criticism, i.e. that the traditional objects of special metaphysics generate contradictions if treated by the logic of the understanding, Hegel accepts. He even accepts, with Kant, that we should not judge objects of former special metaphysics to be *entities*, i.e. as things in themselves. The clearest examples of this come from Hegel’s references to rational psychology. Hegel, for example, writes: “One good result of the Kantian critique is that philosophising about the spirit has been freed from the soul-*things* [*Seelendinge*] and their categories; and from questions whether the soul is simple or composite, material, etc.” Also: “In rational psychology, which is an abstract metaphysics, the soul is considered not as spirit but as a merely immediate entity, as a soul-thing.”<sup>72</sup> Speaking of God, Hegel writes: “Existence,

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<sup>71</sup> SL, p. 64.

<sup>72</sup> “...sondern als ein nur unmittelbar *Seiendes*, als *Seelending*” SL, p. 224. Translation modified.

then, is not to be taken here as a *predicate* or as a *determination* of essence...<sup>73</sup> and “any talk of God merely as the ‘*highest essence*’ [*Wesen*] must be called unsatisfactory. For the category of quantity that is applied here has its place only in the domain of the finite. But God is not merely *an* essence, and not even merely the *highest* essence. He is *the* essence.”<sup>74</sup>

This tells us something about the Objective logic comprising both general and specific metaphysics. If we think back to the previous chapter we can remember that I have argued that since transcendental analytic is seen as a replacement for ontology, and transcendental dialectic as a replacement for special metaphysics, the former will inform the way in which the traditional objects of special metaphysics are to be understood. Since cognition and judgment are limited to what can be given in experience, rather than able to reach entities themselves, this will allow us to modify the way in which we understand the traditional objects of special metaphysics. They will no longer be seen as separate entities of which we can predicate properties *a priori*. This is because we, properly speaking, cannot predicate properties *a priori* of *entities* at all. But once we know that synthetic judgments *a priori* refer only to the objects of possible experience, and such things as God, Soul, and World as a whole cannot be given as objects as possible experience, we know they have to be treated in a different manner, i.e. as regulative concepts of reason. When it comes to Hegel, while he accepts the negative aspect of Kant’s criticism, i.e. that if one is to use the concepts and methods of understanding in trying to grasp pure objects one necessarily ends up in contradictions, he does not seem to accept the whole picture:

Kant himself makes cognition in general, and even experience, consist in the fact that our *perceptions* are thought; i.e. that the determinations which first belong to perception are *transformed* into thought-determinations. For Kant the defect of these thoughts is that they are unsatisfactory because they do not match up with what is perceived, or with

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<sup>73</sup> SL, 483.

<sup>74</sup> EL, §112 ad.

a consciousness that restricts itself to the range of perception. The content of thoughts on its own account does not come under discussion...

The fact that, through his polemic against the older metaphysics, Kant removed those predicates from the soul [i.e. substance, simplicity, etc.] and the spirit must be regarded a great result, but the reason that he gives for doing this is quite wrong.<sup>75</sup>

What this quotation suggests is exactly what I have been saying above. Kant is right in two aspects: a) reason generates contradictions when it applies the concepts of understanding to infinite objects (of reason) and b) objects of former special metaphysics have wrongly been treated as independently existing entities of which one is supposed to predicate properties *a priori*. However, something is lacking in Kant's critique of general metaphysics. This something, regardless of his discovery of the dialectical element in thinking, has to do with Kant's system *still* being the system of understanding. Due to this, as mentioned earlier, Kant locates the dialectical element of thought only in those situations in which the understanding applies categories to the infinite. What neither Kant nor Wolff saw, however, is that the dialectical element has to extend beyond this particular employment of thinking:

The absence of thought in sense-knowledge, which takes everything limited and finite for an *Entity* [für ein *Seiendes*], passes over into the stubbornness of the understanding, which grasps everything finite as *something-identical-with-itself*, and *not inwardly contradicting itself*.<sup>76</sup>

To emphasise, for Hegel, Kant fails to discern the dialectical moment in *all* categories taken by themselves (not just in their application to infinite objects). This is because Kant does not examine concepts and categories by or

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<sup>75</sup> EL, §§47 & ad.

<sup>76</sup> EL, §113\*. Translation modified.

in themselves, but is interested only in their role in the cognition (or miscognition) of objects. In this sense, Kant does not undertake a general critique of the form and content of the categories of general metaphysics (that also inform special metaphysics).

### **2. 3. Hegel's Rejection of Ontology**

I have so far spoken of Hegel's critique of ontology as referring to three main problems. These were the problems of the beginning, of understanding, and of dialectic. The problem of the beginning was mainly concerned with the idea that Wolffianism started with an over-determined category (*ens*) and that it adopted its objects and categories from imagination. The problem of the understanding consisted in the fact that it conceived of the philosophical procedure as the one of the application of abstract, oppositional predicates to an abstract subject, guided by the presupposed principles of contradiction and identity. The problem of the dialectic was that it could not see that contradiction is necessary to thought and treated any occurrence of contradiction as an error in reasoning, rather than as a way in which the object of thought, when observed in itself, develops on its own accord.

The three problems that I have here separated do not stand in isolation from each other. The fact that Wolffian philosophy is a philosophy of the understanding means that it sees thinking as a process of enumerating opposing predicates and predicating them of possible entities. Since it can only grasp predicates in isolation from or in abstract opposition to one another it cannot track their development 'through' their contradiction. This is because it a) does not believe that any essence or a proposition is, or should be, internally contradictory; and b) if it finds such a contradiction it has to discard it as an error of reasoning. Finally, such a philosophy, being a non-dialectical system of the understanding, could not begin with a pure thought of Being, as Hegel's *Logic* does. Since it requires opposition to be given to it, and since it cannot think of the truth of something being its negation, it could not conceive the movement of the vanishing of Being into Nothing, or formulate the Hegelian category of Becoming.

Hence when Hegel says that this philosophy has adopted its content from Representation [*Vorstellung*] this is not to be seen as merely an accusation of some form of intellectual laziness or complacency with philosophical tradition or doctrinal authority. In a sense, when the philosophy of mere understanding looks for the content within pure thought it is as if it cannot see anything there. This is because, according to Hegel, if one were to examine the realm of pure, immediate, and indeterminate thought looking for simple oppositions like the ones present in Wolff there are none to be found there. Hence the content of such metaphysics must have been imported from outside of free, pure thought. Of course, there is *also* a problem of uncritically adopting a position that the forms of thought of the understanding are capable of being “determinations of the thing-in-itself”, a position validly put under scrutiny by Kant.<sup>77</sup> This is because the way of thinking of ordinary understanding is the way of thinking of ordinary logic, the validity of which was taken for granted as applicable to both finite and infinite sphere, i.e. to the sphere of the understanding and of reason. “Ordinary logic embraces only the matters that we here encounter as one part of the third part of the whole, together with the so-called laws of thinking that we encountered above.”<sup>78</sup> The ‘third part of the whole’ here refers to the thought-determinations present in the doctrine of the Concept, while the ‘laws of thinking’ refer to laws such as non-contradiction, sufficient reason (or ground), excluded middle, syllogistic inference, etc. In Hegel’s view, Kant is right to say that there is no native *content* to such logic, that it is a purely formal way of thinking. As such it had to adopt its content from something external to it. This is what is behind Hegel’s claim that it takes its content from representation or empirical objects.

Even if pre-critical metaphysics is to stumble upon the discovery of proper dialectical or speculative certainty, a discovery of the kind Hegel is interested in, it cannot retain it. For example, “Descartes’ sublimest thought, that God is that *whose concept includes within itself its being* [was] degraded into

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<sup>77</sup> See SL, p. 64.

<sup>78</sup> EL, §162\*.

the defective form of the formal syllogism.”<sup>79</sup> Similarly to that, as we know from the previous chapters, Wolff conceives all of his proofs in a syllogistic, deductive manner, regulated by the law of contradiction.<sup>80</sup> A philosophy based on such a logic cannot ultimately reach the truth Hegel is after.

It might be important to point out something that can often appear as ‘known’ by people with little interest in Hegel’s philosophy, and that concerns Hegel’s treatment of the principles of classical logic such as syllogistic inference or the law of non-contradiction. Hegel’s treatment of the law of contradiction has raised many an eyebrow and more often than not consigned to his system a status of a mystical philosophy that revels in generating obscure contradictory propositions. And indeed, in Hegel’s works one can find statements such as the ones given above regarding syllogism or against the law of non-contradiction: “in the instinctive thinking of natural logic... [common sense] is in bondage to unclarified and therefore unfree thinking. The simple basic determination or common form of the collection [ ... ] is asserted as the law of identity, as  $A=A$ , and as the principle of contradiction.”<sup>81</sup> While Hegel’s account of contradiction is more complicated than the space available here allows me to go into, by keeping in mind Hegel’s critique of past metaphysics according to the problems of the beginning, understanding, and dialectic, we can see what position Hegel actually takes with regards to contradiction.

For Wolff, the law of contradiction serves as the cornerstone of his system. As discussed in the Wolff chapter, the law of contradiction serves as a basis of every derivation in his *Ontologia* and all the other principles, such as those of ground and excluded middle are supposed to be ultimately reducible

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<sup>79</sup> SL, p. 703. Similar fate has found Anselm’s proof for the existence of God – “The content of the proof is of the highest kind” but it has “the defect of being formulated in the mode of formal logic.” LoHP, v3, p. 44.

<sup>80</sup> See LoHP, v3, p. 158: “The strictness of [Wolff’s] method has certainly become in part very pedantic; the syllogism is the principal form, and it has often degenerated into an outlandish pedantry of unbearable verbosity. The customary examples from individual sciences are treated in the manner of geometrical exercises and solutions.” See also SL, p. 815.

<sup>81</sup> SL, p. 38.

to the law of contradiction. But as such, this law is not derived, or proven by the system in the same way as the predicates of entities are supposed to be. The law of contradiction is not a predicate itself and as such it cannot be a result of a work investigating predicates. Since it is not a product of its system we can say that it is posited ‘externally’, or from the ‘outside’. But through this ‘law’ or ‘principle’, all the predicates are supposed to be derived. It is posited in the system, but not as a hypothesis to be (dis-)proven or as a possibly fruitful model that could generate better testable predictions. It is, in fact, posited as something underpinning the system, as its logic, as something which regulates the system, but it is not demonstrable or refutable by it. As such, it is something posited as not being posited, or a *presupposition*.

To borrow the phrase Hegel intended for Kant, but which also seems pertinent here, this absolute ‘law’ legislating over thinking, if presupposed from the start, might in fact show itself to be the law of a ‘foreign court of justice’.<sup>82</sup> Hegel does, in the Doctrine of Essence, establish the law of contradiction, and other ‘laws’ familiar from Wolff, such as of sufficient reason (or of ground), and even of excluded middle. In the Doctrine of Concept, he derives the form of syllogism and in the *Encyclopaedia* says that “Syllogism is what is *rational*, and it is *everything* that is rational.”<sup>83</sup> But for Hegel, all these have to be, and are, derived by the system rather than employed from the beginning. After all, since the Aristotelian formulation of the law of contradiction it has been recognised that the law cannot be syllogistically derived or empirically proven. The solution was then to simply adopt it.<sup>84</sup> This unproblematic adoption of something super-systemic as a principle of a fundamental philosophy system is what Hegel saw as endemic in pre-critical

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<sup>82</sup> See de Boer, 2012, p. 87.

<sup>83</sup> EL, §181.

<sup>84</sup> Aristotle claims to want a demonstration for the principle of non-contradiction is simply a sign of a lack of education, since an educated person knows when not to ask for a demonstration of what needs not to be demonstrated. In fact, a man who denies the principle is “no better than a mere plant.” See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV, 4.1006 a5-15.

metaphysics. We can see this as Hegel's critique of the law of contradiction regarding the problem of the beginning of a philosophical system.

But there is also the critique of the principle of contradiction as this principle was conceived by the philosophy of understanding. Even though Hegel derives what he considers to be the true law of contradiction in the *Logic*, the historical 'law' was not necessarily formulated properly. In fact, it found itself trapped by the system of understanding, which in its formal emptiness was merciless in its exclusion of any possible contradiction:

All that is necessary to achieve scientific progress is the recognition of the logical principle that the negative is just as much positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its *particular* content. Such a negation is not all and every negation but the negation of a specific subject matter which resolves itself. Because the result, the negation, is a *specific* negation, it has a content. It is a fresh Notion but higher and richer than its predecessor.<sup>85</sup>

What Hegel's *Logic* does, however, is avoids prior ways of handling contradictions, for example the denial of one of the contradictory pairs (e.g. man is finite, rather than infinite), the relegation of contradictions to a higher unity within a shared genus (man is not a horse, and vice versa, but both are mammals), the relegation of the predication to a different time (Aristotle's 'man is bent at  $t_1$ , and straight at  $t_2$ '), or the Kantian resolution of a contradiction by forbidding judgment over certain objects. Instead, the occurring contradictions of the *Logic* are *sublated* [*aufgehoben*], suggesting that they are both put aside and preserved, and as such reach a higher unity, or their *truth*. And this arising in higher truth through immanent contradiction constitutes the dialectical element.

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<sup>85</sup> SL, p. 54.



There are several other more specific ways in which Hegel criticises various aspects of Wolffian ontology. One could speak in more detail of his rejection of the use of mathematical or geometrical method in philosophy,<sup>86</sup> the employment of syllogistic, a priori derivation,<sup>87</sup> etc. However, all of his more detailed criticisms of the general methods and principles of Wolffian ontology can be seen through one or more of the three interconnected problems of the beginning, of understanding, and of dialectic. What we can see from all what has been said so far is that Hegel's replacement of ontology will not be formulated in the form of a new science of the entity *qua* entity that looks for predicates of possible entities guided by the laws of contradiction and sufficient reason. It will in fact be the science of pure thought-determinations on their own terms. And since the fundamental philosophy, formerly conceived as ontology, is no longer to be seen as an investigation into an entity *qua* entity, the objects of *special* metaphysics, which are the objects of reason, rather than of understanding, are not to be seen as certain entities of which the disciplines of special metaphysics are supposed to predicate properties. These objects will be conceived in a different way. They will find their place as reformulated within the system of Logic. When seen in this proper way the Logic "considers these forms [i.e. objects of special metaphysics] free from those substrata, from the subjects of figurate conception. It considers them in their own proper character."<sup>88</sup> Kant has already demonstrated the deficiency of considering these objects in the way they were considered in Wolffianism. However, Kant came short regarding his reconceptualization of these objects since his conception of what is supposed to replace *general* metaphysics is, according to Hegel, deficient. Be that as it may, it seems at this point that, for Hegel, ontology is impossible.

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<sup>86</sup> See SL, pp. 27, 72, 224, 814; LoHP, v3, p. 122 for the critique of Spinoza's use of geometrical method, also applicable to Wolff; SL, p. 53 for the explicit critique of Spinoza and Wolff for applying mathematical method to metaphysics; also PoS, §§40-8.

<sup>87</sup> SL, p. 787, EL §64\*.

<sup>88</sup> SL, p. 64.

### 3. The Possibility of Ontology

In the first section of this chapter I have spoken of Hegel's relation to Wolff's ontology. From what has been said there, it seems that Hegel sees an affinity between his own project and the project of Wolff's ontology, identifying ontology and logic at several instances, or at least seeing his logic as a replacement of Wolffian ontology. In the second section, we have seen that this replacement cannot be seen as a simple reinstatement or repetition of Wolff's ontology, i.e. as a science of an entity *qua* entity in the manner in which that project was envisioned and undertaken by Wolff. Hegel criticises Wolff's system from various sides, and I have categorised Hegel's various criticisms into three kinds that I have called the problems of beginning, understanding, and dialectic. I have also spoken of the fact that Hegel credits Kant's criticism of Wolff, specifically Kant's discussion of the antinomies, with the downfall of that system. However, Hegel also claims that Kant's criticism is limited for two main reasons. Firstly, although the problems that Kant raises in the antinomies, in which he introduces the dialectical element lacking in Wolff, are valid, his criticism is limited since it applies, according to Hegel, only to special metaphysics. It does not reach the dialectical level Hegel considers to be necessary since it sees reason's necessary entanglement in contradiction as limited only to the sphere in which the understanding attempts to judge the unconditioned, rather than extended to thought in general. Secondly, Hegel sees the Kantian criticism of Wolffianism as insufficient since, as I have argued, he is not satisfied with Kant's proposed replacement of Wolffianism, i.e. transcendental analytic, or transcendental idealism.

It is worth remembering that Kant was the first to attempt the substantial replacement of Wolffian ontology: "the proud name of ontology, which presumes to offer synthetic *a priori* cognitions of things in general... must give way to the more modest title of a transcendental analytic."<sup>89</sup> Kant's criticism is a familiar one, even if one is not familiar with Wolff's philosophy. Metaphysics, if it aims to be a legitimate science, cannot be the science of 'things in general', or entities *qua* entities. It has to concern itself with the

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<sup>89</sup> CoPR, A247/B304.

objects of possible experience, with phenomena, or appearances. But once the Copernican turn in metaphysics has been achieved, once beings are replaced with appearances, once God, Soul, and the World have become regulative concepts, Wolff's philosophy comes back into picture. As Karin de Boer rightly points out:

This passage is often cited to argue that Kant considered transcendental philosophy to be something completely different from ontology. However, one discipline can be said to replace another only if they share some common ground. Seen from Kant's vantage point, his analytic of pure understanding and [Wolff's] ontology both investigate our synthetic a priori cognitions, that is, the concepts and principles which allow us to turn something into an object of knowledge at all. Clearly, Kant does not share Wolff's assumption that these concepts can be attributed to all things, whether material or immaterial, finite or infinite. Yet this does not imply that he opposes the modern, epistemological strand of Wolffian ontology.<sup>90</sup>

If we think back to the Kant chapter we will remember that Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* does not constitute Kant's metaphysics proper, but is a propaedeutic to his complete metaphysical system that was never finished. That system, containing ontology as its overarching discipline, is conceived as being very similar in both structure and procedure to Wolffian metaphysics. Unlike Wolffianism, it will be 'oriented' by the *Critique*, which will establish the domain of the legitimate employment of its concepts. In that sense, Kantian system proper would be seen as Wolffianism regarding objects of possible cognition, rather than entities. Yet one would still proceed by an *a priori*, deductive derivation of possible predicates, guided by the principles of thinking, for example the law of non-contradiction. Hegel, on the other hand

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<sup>90</sup> De Boer, 2011b, p. 56.

“radically departed from the demonstrative method advocated by Wolff and Kant.”<sup>91</sup>

But I have so far treated Kant as the one who proclaims the impossibility of ontology while Hegel argues for its possibility. And yet, everything I have so far described seems to suggest that Hegel, unlike Kant, rejects every aspect of Wolffianism. But this is where the idea of ‘replacement’ becomes significant. While Kant’s transcendental analytic replaces what we can call the proud ‘spirit’ of ontology, i.e. the cognition of ‘*things* in general’, while retaining its method and structure for subsequent purposes, Hegel does the opposite. He rejects the structure and method of ontology in order to retain the spirit, at least in a certain shape.

This can be seen from something Hegel says about the first *Stellung* of thought regarding objectivity that I have not discussed yet. The first *Stellung* of thought contains the element that is lacking in the second *Stellung*, and specifically in Kantianism. While Kantianism presents us with the idea of philosophical critique, i.e. the idea that we must investigate our *a priori* categories in themselves, and provides us with an idea of a dialectical element to thinking, it lacks, even negates, the *speculative* element in thinking. When talking about the first *Stellung* Hegel says the following:

The first position is the naïve way of proceeding, which, being still unconscious of the antithesis of thinking within and against itself, contain the *belief* that *truth* is [re]cognized, and what the objects genuinely are is brought before consciousness, through *thinking about* them. In this belief, thinking goes straight to the ob-jects; it reproduces the content of sense-experience and intuition out of itself, as a content of thought, and is satisfied with this as the truth...

Because it is unconscious of the antithesis, this thinking *can* equally well be authentic *speculative* philosophising... But it

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<sup>91</sup> De Boer 2011a, p. 87.

can also dwell within *finite* thought-determinations. In its most determinate development this [finite] way of *philosophising*, this way of thinking, was the *metaphysics of the recent past*, the way it was constituted among us before the Kantian philosophy...

This science [i.e. Wolffian metaphysics] regarded the thought-determinations as the *fundamental determinations of things* [*die Grundbestimmungen der Dinge*]. In virtue of this presupposition [Voraussetzung], that the cognition of things as they are *in-themselves* results from the *thinking* of what is [daß das, was *ist*, damit daß es *gedacht* wird, *an sich* erkannt werde], it stood at a higher level than the later critical philosophising...

The presupposition of the older metaphysics was that of naïve belief that thinking grasps what things are *in-themselves*, that things only are what they genuinely are when they are [captured] in thought... The standpoint of the older [Wolffian] metaphysics is the opposite of the one that resulted from the Critical Philosophy.<sup>92</sup>

Several things have to be said about this. Firstly, the speculative element in Wolffianism, and all pre-critical metaphysics, shows itself in the shared belief that things are in themselves the way they are grasped in thought, that thought determinations are determinations *of things*, not merely of objects of possible cognition. This can be expressed through the often employed phrase ‘unity of thought and being’ or through what I have referred to as the double primacy of metaphysics. But even though the first *Stellung* possessed this speculative element, the conviction that things are the way they are thought to be, it possessed it naively or uncritically:

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<sup>92</sup> EL, §§26-8 ad.

*Naïve thinking* can be true, it can be speculative, but [in classical metaphysics from antiquity on] it has been so uncritically. It has had no consciousness of the thought forms which it has used and by which it has fallen into contradictions, so that it has since been remarked that this is not the way in which we reach the truth.<sup>93</sup>

This thinking is deemed naïve and uncritical for two reasons we have already mentioned. Firstly, as demonstrated by Kant, it fell into contradiction when it attempted to apply its method and categories to the infinite. Secondly, it did not investigate the nature of its thought-determinations themselves and hence posited them as isolated, exclusory opposites.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, while Kant rightfully called for the investigation of these categories in themselves, and pointed towards the contradictions in which the application of categories of the understanding results in certain cases, he himself simply adopts the same set of categories of the understanding from the tradition without providing a proper investigation of them on their own account.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, Kant's replacement of ontology presented in the transcendental analytic was insufficient. It remained the philosophy of the understanding, but one which could not reach beyond the appearances and hence descended into *subjectivism*:

Kant's conception of the antinomies is that they are 'not sophisms but contradictions which reason must necessarily *come up against*' and this is an important view. The Kantian solution through the so-called transcendental ideality of the world of perception has no other result than to make the so-called conflict into something *subjective*, in which it remains unresolved, the same illusion.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> LoL, pp. 20-1.

<sup>94</sup> LoL, p. 22.

<sup>95</sup> See SL, pp. 594-5 & *passim*.

<sup>96</sup> SL, p. 191. See also SL, pp. 51, 237. Karin de Boer has convincingly argued at various points that subjectivism Hegel and some others accuse Kant of is not the most

Strictly speaking, Wolffianism was never a speculative philosophy proper. As a mere philosophy of the understanding it could not be. “Speculative thinking consists solely in the fact that thought holds fast contradiction and in it, its own self, but does not allow itself to be dominated by it as in ordinary thinking, where its determinations are resolved by contradiction only into other determinations or into nothing.”<sup>97</sup> However, Wolffianism does belong to the first *Stellung* of thought, the one which is, in contrast with Kantianism, defined by the presence of speculative elements of thinking through its naïve assumption of the unity of thought and being. According to Hegel, these elements were most directly present in Ancient philosophers and appear, less and less, as the history of this metaphysics approaches Kant.<sup>98</sup> As mentioned earlier, Hegel identifies more precise moments of speculative inspiration in Descartes (Cogito), Spinoza (God as *causa sui*), and others, but these moments are always prevented from receiving their proper speculative expression through the encroachment of the philosophy of the understanding and its aspects. In a sense it seems, that by the time we reach Wolff, nothing speculative is left in philosophy, *except* this naïve belief in the idea that thought describes things as they are, or the desire for truth in metaphysics:

Metaphysics, even the metaphysics that restricted itself to fixed concepts of the understanding and did not rise to speculative thinking, to the nature of the Notion and of the Idea – had for its aim the *cognition of truth*, and investigated its objects to ascertain whether *they were true things or not, substances or phenomena*.

The victory of the Kantian criticism over this metaphysics consists, on the contrary, in doing away with the investigation

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accurate reading of Kant (See de Boer 2011a & 2011b). However, I am here primarily concerned with Hegel’s interpretation of Kant with all its flaws.

<sup>97</sup> SL, p. 440. Cf. EL 32 ad.

<sup>98</sup> SL, p. 45.

that has *truth* for its aim, and this aim itself. But to cling to phenomena and the mere conceptions given in everyday consciousness is to renounce the Notion and philosophy. Anything rising above this is stigmatized in the Kantian criticism as something high-flown to which reason is in no way entitled.<sup>99</sup>

This reading of the relation between Wolff, Kant, and Hegel allows us to understand Hegel's description of Wolffianism as naïve in a not completely negative light. Let us remember that for Kant, Wolffian claims to metaphysical knowledge of things as they are were seen as proud or arrogant. To be naïve can be seen as more of a benevolent state than pride. As Hegel said, this naïve thinking can be true and speculative, but it will be so accidentally. Socrates might argue and prove that all humans essentially aim to do good, doing evil only out of ignorance. A child might not understand the proof of this argument, but still might naively believe in the fundamental goodness of humankind. This, it seems to me, is what Hegel aims to express when he says that pre-Kantian metaphysics naively believed that the thought of things expresses the way they are in their truth. However, philosophy cannot remain in its naïve state. It needs to transition from being the love of knowing to being the actual knowing,<sup>100</sup> and it was Kantian critique that first posited the demand for us to lift ourselves out of this "self-imposed immaturity."<sup>101</sup> It demanded that the naïve use of the categories, which were supposed to describe things as they were in themselves through thinking about them, be justified and legitimised. The problem is that Kantian 'modesty' was not able to achieve this goal.

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<sup>99</sup> SL, pp. 779-80. Cf. also PoS §64 and LoHP v3, p. 139 where Hegel describes the method of Kant and Empiricism, both examples of the second *Stellung*, as *räsonierenden Denken*, which he sees opposed to speculative thinking, but also to the thinking of Wolffianism and Scholasticism.

<sup>100</sup> PoS, §5.

<sup>101</sup> Kant, *Was ist Aufklärung*, p. 55.



What is the subject matter [*Gegenstand*] of our science? The simplest and most intelligible answer is *truth*. But there seems to be a lack of proportion between us men, limited as we are, and the truth as it is in and for itself and the question arises of the bridge between the finite and the infinite. There seems to be a contradiction between any such project and the virtues of humility and modesty. Humility of this sort is not worth very much...

When Aristotle summons us to consider ourselves as worthy of conduct of this sort, then the worthiness that consciousness ascribes to itself consists precisely in the giving up of our particular opinions and beliefs and in allowing the *matter* [*die Sache*] [itself] to hold sway over us...

In accordance with these determinations, thoughts can be called *objective* thoughts. Thus logic coincides with *metaphysics*, with the science of *things* grasped in *thoughts* that used to be taken to express the *essentialities* of the things.<sup>102</sup>

All of this suggests the way in which we can understand Hegel as someone arguing *for* the possibility of ontology after Kant. Even though Hegel rejects most of the structure and presuppositions of Wolffian ontology, he keeps the idea of the possibility of a science of things grasped in thoughts, rather than as science of appearances, or of objects of cognition *only*. In a sense, if Kant retains the epistemic elements of Wolff, i.e. he sees ontology as a science of *a priori* thought-determinations required to make anything into an object of knowledge, Hegel *also* attempts to retain the metaphysical elements, i.e. to find the thought-determinations constituting the way in which the things themselves are. But after Kant, an ambition of this kind cannot be merely adopted or attempted, as Hegel suggests in the previously quoted

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<sup>102</sup> EL, §16, ad 1. & §§23\*-4. The rejection of “self-assurance” which replaced humility in the continuation of the first quoted paragraph refers to, I believe, Jacobi’s philosophy, seen as an inadequate response to Kantianism.

lament for ontology. In fact, due to Kant's criticism, as I said in the beginning, no one would even dare to mention ontology and other metaphysical sciences any more.

In that case, how will Hegel attempt to justify his ambition? One requirement is to show the deficiency of Kant's critique of metaphysics. I have shown at various places how Hegel attempts to do this. Much more could be said about Hegel's exact criticisms of Kant, whether they work, and whether his understanding of Kant is mistaken or not. However, since my project concerns Hegel's relation to *ontology*, I had to suspend the question of whether Hegel succeeds in his project, in order to try to see what his project was supposed to be. And I think that I have managed to show so far that Hegel attempts to reject Kant's replacement of ontology, as presented in the transcendental analytic. However, there also needs to be a positive aspect to Hegel's replacement of Kant's criticism of ontology. This will be undertaken by looking at all the deficiencies Hegel has identified in historical forms of philosophy and constructing a system that contains their strengths and avoids their weaknesses. As such, Hegel's system would need to be the system that is not limited to the way of thinking of the understanding, a system that is speculative, dialectical, and starts from the proper starting place. Hence the start cannot be anything overly determinate, as the Wolffian *ens* was, it cannot be a list of predicates standing in simple opposition, it cannot be an overarching principle of thinking such as the law of non-contradiction, it cannot be anything empirical, it cannot be an entity such as God, it cannot be the form of judgment or syllogism, it cannot be our thinking as subjectively *ours*.

Hence the beginning cannot be made with anything concrete, anything containing a relation *within itself*. That which constitutes the beginning, the beginning itself, is to be taken as something unanalysable, taken in its simple, unfilled immediacy, and therefore as *being*, as the completely empty being.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> SL, p. 75.

And thinking can start from such emptiness. Unlike classical formal logic, it does not require an external content, provided by representation or common sense, in order to derive further determinations. The thinking in this sphere of immediate simplicity will immanently give rise to contradictions. But since we have put aside the restrictions of understanding, Hegel can now see these contradictions as productive, as arising from the sphere of thought itself, from the realm of pure thought, and as determining the way in which things are and are to be known.

#### **4. Hegelianism and its Discontent**

So far I have argued that Hegel intends his philosophy to be a kind of rehabilitation of certain tenets of pre-Kantian metaphysics. If one would give a name to a reading of this kind it could be called a 'metaphysical' reading since I have argued that Hegel is attempting to formulate a scientifically valid way of developing the speculative element which was present in metaphysics before Kant, and which was, according to Hegel, abandoned by Kantianism. On the other hand, if we take into account that my reading focuses on interpreting Hegel's project from the perspective of a particular manifestation of a system of pre-critical metaphysics, i.e. of Wolff's ontology, and argues that both the *Science of Logic* and *Ontologia* are to be seen as foundational parts of a larger system of metaphysics that aims to describe the *a priori* structures of things as they are and as they are known, this reading could be called an ontological one. If we take into account the Wolffian meaning of the term 'ontology' then there is no great difference between an ontological and a metaphysical reading. As a science, ontology is a part of metaphysics, indeed it is its first or most general part, from which other parts are supposed to 'borrow' concepts and apply them to more determinate subject matter. However, if one is to look at the way in which the terms such as 'ontological' and 'metaphysical' reading are used in the Anglophone Hegel scholarship of today one can quickly see that the distinctions regarding the interpretation of the nature of Hegel's text there made do not follow this historical taxonomy of thought.

There are various ways in which the kinds of interpretations of Hegel's philosophy can be classified, but the one that seems to be employed the most in recent times is the one between metaphysical readings and non-metaphysical readings or interpretations. Beiser, for example, distinguishes between three types of non-metaphysical readings and links them to the category theory of Klaus Hartmann (Hegel attempts to develop the most basic concepts by which we think about the world), Pippin's reading (Hegel's idealism is a Kantian theory about the necessary conditions of possible experience), and Brandom's reading (Hegel as fundamentally a theorist about the normative dimension of life, experience, and discourse).<sup>104</sup> One thing we can see here (or from reading these theories) is that the non-metaphysical schools of interpretation, and their opposed metaphysical ones, do not seem to be the classical or historical ways of interpretations of Hegel. They are not seen as a continuation or as a dialogue between current waves of interpretation and, for example, earlier Marxist or Feuerbachian readings, Kierkegaardian readings, British Idealist readings, or American Transcendentalist readings. In fact, the readings, as many commentators claim, seem to stem from the distinction between metaphysical and non-metaphysical reading posited by Hartmann in 1972.<sup>105</sup>

There are also different ways in which these readings are referred to. I have mentioned the distinction Beiser referred to, but there is also, for example, Kreines' distinction between the two into "traditionalist" and "non-traditionalist" readings. The former are supposed to read Hegel as a thinker who "attempts to revive and modify a form of pre-Kantian metaphysics", which Kreines links to Charles Taylor, Horstmann, and Beiser. The latter are linked to Pippin, Brandom, and Pinkard, and are supposed to be reading Hegel's philosophy as "a continuation or extension of Kant's critical project, rather than a revival or modification of *any form* of precritical metaphysics."<sup>106</sup> McCumber describes these two kinds of readings in a very similar way, linking

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<sup>104</sup> Beiser, 2008, p. 4.

<sup>105</sup> See Lumsden, 2008, p. 54; de Boer 2004, p. 788.

<sup>106</sup> Kreines 2006, p. 467. Emphasis mine.

them to mostly the same actors as Kreines, but somewhat confusingly calls them the “older and younger historical interpretation.”<sup>107</sup>

So according to this, my reading should fall under the ‘metaphysical’, or ‘traditionalist’ reading since I am claiming that Hegel’s philosophy is a revival or modification of at least *some* form or aspects of pre-critical metaphysics, or minimally, that it would be wrong to see Hegel’s philosophy as not being a revival of “*any form*” of it, *pace* the non-traditionalist readings as characterised by Kreines. There is, however, a slight complication in the way this taxonomy of interpretations is used and that can be seen when we introduce the concept of ontology into this discussion. The problem arises since there are readings that pronounce Hegel’s work as being *non-metaphysical*, while at the same time saying that it is *ontological*. In fact, they would say that it is non-metaphysical *exactly because* it is ontological. However, if we understand ontology in its Wolffian sense, i.e. as a part of a system of pre-critical *metaphysics*, any reading called ‘ontological’ should also be ‘traditionalist’ or ‘metaphysical’. But this is exactly what these readings claim Hegel’s thought not to be. So what we can say is that this taxonomy of non-metaphysical and metaphysical, and of traditional and non-traditional focuses on two different approaches to questions about the nature of Hegel’s philosophy. The former distinction puts emphasis on what kind of claims Hegel is giving us, the second puts emphasis on which tradition Hegel is continuing. The two approaches are neither mutually exclusive, nor incompatible; however, they start ‘leaking’ when the term ‘ontology’ is introduced. And one reason for this is that the term ‘ontology’ is not understood in the same way by various thinkers who use it in connection with Hegel.

For example, Stekeler-Weithofer, a pragmatist, hence one would assume a non-metaphysical reader of Hegel, identifies Kant’s critical metaphysics with ontology, but also identifies ontology with a discipline asking “what there is.”<sup>108</sup> But this is, as de Boer correctly points out, not a

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<sup>107</sup> McCumber 2014, pp. 15-29.

<sup>108</sup> Stekeler-Weithofer, 2015, pp. 579, 570.

traditional or Wolffian conception of ontology, i.e. not the one with which Hegel would be familiar with, but is instead the Quineian one.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, for example, Houlgate uses the terms ontology and metaphysics interchangeably, however not in a Quinean sense. For Houlgate, Hegel's system presents us with a logic because it provides us with an account of the basic structures of thought. It also provides us with an ontology (or metaphysics) as well, in the sense that it, on top of providing us with basic structures of thought, also provides us with a basic structure of being, or of things themselves.<sup>110</sup> So unlike the case of the Quinean model, Houlgate does not see ontology as a science which is supposed to provide us with a comprehensive catalogue of existing entities, but simply as a science of Being [*Sein*]; not of Being understood only as a category necessary for our cognition of things, but of Being itself. This is closer to what we could call a (post-) Heideggerian conception of ontology, which would see Quinean approach as ontic, rather than the ontological, and which focuses more on 'structures' or 'ways of being' rather than on looking for entities.

So the point to be made here is that while there is a tradition of interpretation that sees ontology and metaphysics as being opposed this does not seem to be the case with all interpreters. The second point to make is that, as is visible from above, when talking about Hegel and ontology, the term 'ontology' is not necessarily used in its Wolffian sense. In that case, where does this dichotomy between metaphysical and ontological reading come from, and what does it mean to be a (non-)metaphysical reader of Hegel?

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<sup>109</sup> De Boer, 2011a, p. 78.

<sup>110</sup> See Houlgate, 2006, pp. 115, 130, 130; 2008, p.118; 2011, p. 139. 'Things themselves' are here not to be as Kantian 'things-in-themselves' since the latter are to be understood as something that stands beyond thought and cannot be reached by thought. Hegel also cannot be seen as reviving pre-critical metaphysics in this sense since such an opposition between thought and reality is fundamentally anti-Hegelian and based on the position of the understanding and because not even pre-critical metaphysics saw itself as engaging with this Kantian chimera. See EL§26: "[Pre-Kantian metaphysics] being unconscious of the antithesis of thinking within [dialectics] and against itself [Kantianism/empricism] contain the *belief* that *truth* is [re]cognized, and what the objects genuinely are is brought before consciousness, through *thinking about* them."

#### 4. 1. *Non-existing Metaphysicians*

As mentioned earlier, the consensus in the literature seems to be that the idea of a non-metaphysical reading of Hegel comes from Hartmann's 1972 paper *Hegel: A non-metaphysical view*. In this paper, Hartmann proposes a distinction between *metaphysical* readings and his own *ontological* reading in response to Findlay's language-oriented reading of Hegel, and Bradley's 'spiritualist' reading of Hegel. For Hartmann, a metaphysical reading, or metaphysical philosophy, is one in which one can find "existence claims" or which posits "a reductionism opting for certain existences to the detriment of others".<sup>111</sup> On the other hand, what he calls an 'ontological view' is devoid of the former claims and is seen as a "categorical theory", or the "rational explanation of categories" required for our thinking.<sup>112</sup>

Hartmann, interestingly, points out that "what Hegel wishes to give is an account of the determinations of the real, or of what is."<sup>113</sup> However, this account seems to be more similar to the Kantian transcendental account, at least in the manner of its proceeding, than to the Wolffian *a priori* deduction of predicates of entities. It seems that Hartmann's 'ontology' is more similar to Kant's transcendental philosophy, than Wolff's ontology. This is because it seems that for Hartmann Hegel's *Logic* does not proceed *a priori*:

How could a presuppositionless beginning lead to anything; how could the absence of determination lead to richness? Thus there must be operative a contrary consideration, pointing from the ordered richness of granted content back to its antecedents. The linear progression cannot be deduction, it can only be reconstruction; what it is heading for is granted.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Hartmann, 1972, p. 110.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, p. 105.

This suggests, as Houlgate puts it, that for Hartmann: “Hegel’s Logic does not prove by itself that anything exists but merely renders what is given intelligible. It simply describes the logical, categorial structure of the world that is *given* to us through ordinary experience; it tells us what that world is in truth.”<sup>115</sup> In this sense, Hartmann’s reading of Hegel makes him more similar to Kant, in the sense that he investigates categories necessary for thinking reality as given to us, while remaining neutral on whether the world necessarily ‘consists’ of these categories, i.e. whether they only describe the world as it has to be *for us*, or as it has to be in itself. This neutrality, if I understand it correctly, is what enables Hartmann to call his position a non-metaphysical ontology. It warrants this name by retaining the epistemic aspect of pre-Kantian ontology, i.e. providing us with the categorial explanation of the world, while avoiding the Kantian requirement that any such enterprise can only give us an account of the objects of the world as appearances rather than as entities, or things themselves. It seems to make the last move by being metaphysically neutral, i.e. refusing to say anything about it.

Now there are various positions from which I could voice my disagreement with Hartmann. For example, if I understand him correctly, Hartmann argues that Hegel must start from what is given in ordinary experience and hence determine the end-point of the logic from the beginning. This, however, goes against certain characteristics of Hegel’s project that I have described earlier. For example, the idea that “the absence of determination cannot lead to richness” relates to what I have discussed regarding the deficiencies of non-dialectical systems of the understanding. The system of the understanding, as purely formal, does not have its native content. It either takes its content from *Vorstellung*, as Wolffianism did, or it takes it from pure reason. If it takes it from *Vorstellung*, then we end up with classical Wolffianism, i.e. the philosophy of abstract predicates in irreconcilable oppositions. If it takes it from pure reason then, as Kant has shown, it ties itself up into contradictions it cannot resolve. However, if we, as Hegel wants us to, do not consider thinking as mere understanding, as

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<sup>115</sup> Houlgate, 2006, p. 126.



reducible to judgment and syllogistic deduction, then this problem is not supposed to arise. So in a sense, Hartmann is correct in saying that “The linear progression [of the categories of the *Logic*] cannot be deduction,” if by deduction we understand an inference through syllogism. But instead of saying that it hence needs to be a “reconstruction” I would say that for Hegel it can only be “sublation.” One of the key points Hegel is trying to make, by comparing Wolffianism and Kantianism, is that thinking *does* have its native content, that (with Kant) thinking must investigate its own structure, but (*pace* Wolff) that it cannot do so in the form of a mere understanding. So if I am correct in saying that one of the fundamental points Hegel wants to make is that the absence of determination, i.e. starting from a sheer immediate indeterminacy, *can* lead to richness, then this position requires more than a rhetorical question in order to be negated.

But what I am more interested in here, instead of the (lack of) merits of Hartmann’s interpretation, is his division of the kinds of readings into metaphysical and non-metaphysical/ontological. What I want to show is that this distinction should be abandoned, since the terms it uses introduce a level of anachronism which hinders any endeavour to read Hegel historically and results in little more than creating straw men that prevent engagement with different interpretations of Hegel, which in my view are more historically proximate to Hegel’s own intentions. To clarify, I do not disagree with Hartmann’s point that Hegel’s philosophy is not metaphysical in Hartmann’s sense. I agree with that. But I would like to point out that it is difficult to find any historical metaphysician who could be sufficiently characterised as such on the basis of Hartmannian characteristics.

For Hartmann, a metaphysical reading of Hegel is the one which in Hegel’s texts finds “existence claims” or posits “a reductionism opting for certain existences to the detriment of others.” The question I want to ask is not whether Hartmannian metaphysics is possible in general. What I am more interested in is the question of whether Hartmann’s characteristics are legitimate descriptions of what was historically considered metaphysics, especially regarding metaphysics that influenced Hegel. For example, the kind

of reductionism Hartmann posits seems to me to be something characteristic of only some philosophical systems or positions, and more often than not, contemporary ones. It seems that this could happily apply to physicalism, reductive materialism, maybe some forms of panpsychism, etc.<sup>116</sup> This, however, is not something the ‘metaphysics’ of Hegel’s time, at least the one which I have shown to be relevant for this project, has concerned itself with. More specifically, while one can find a debate between, for example, Locke and Berkeley regarding the existence or scientific utility of matter, neither Wolff nor Kant seem to argue along these lines. While it is true that Descartes, for example, reduces everything to either thinking or extended substance, or that Spinoza talks about the infinity of attributes of which we can only know two, this is not what made their engagement *metaphysical*. What made a system metaphysical, especially according to Hegel, is that it believed that thought can describe reality as it is in itself, or describe what is universal in both nature and in the thinking of it, regardless of whether this procedure started from *a priori* thoughts or *a posteriori* intuitions: “Locke’s philosophy is, if you like, a metaphysics. In all its formality it deals with *general characteristics* or *universal thoughts*, and this universal aspect is to be derived from experience and observation.”<sup>117</sup> One could now say that this is all very well, but that it is not how Hartmann uses the term metaphysics. To that I would reply, “so why use it in that way, then?” Unless I am mistaken, to understand something as metaphysical because it gives reductionist claims, e.g. says that minds do not exist while brains do, for example, is a much more recent phenomenon. To then distinguish one’s own reading of Hegel by saying that it is different from something that would on its own account be alien to Hegel’s writing seems like a red herring of interpretation. It positions itself as a ‘modest’ or ‘sensible’ interpretation against the reductionist account of its own imagination.

The second problem with Hartmann’s term ‘metaphysical’ regards its first characteristic, i.e. with understanding metaphysics as a philosophy that makes ‘existence claims’. My main problem with this interpretation is, as

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<sup>116</sup> Since reduction can include both sub-atomic particles and mental states.

<sup>117</sup> LoHP, v3, p. 139. Emphasis mine.

Hartmann seems to indirectly admit,<sup>118</sup> that it describes *special* metaphysics rather than general metaphysics. In fact, it seems to describe only one branch of special metaphysics, and that is rational or natural theology. It was only in this part of special metaphysics that the existence of an entity was derived *a priori*.<sup>119</sup> But whatever we think of God, if He was considered to be an entity at all He was always considered a special kind of entity. Traditionally, there was a requirement to describe God as the greatest of and the Creator of all other entities.<sup>120</sup> There was no need to derive the existence of the objects of rational psychology and cosmology, since everyone ‘knew’ that there were souls and the world.<sup>121</sup> The question regarding them was whether they were, respectively, simple or complex, finite or infinite. So if by metaphysics we exclusively understand an ‘*a priori* system providing existence claims’ I do not know who we are talking about, since this would refer *only* to the discipline of Rational Theology, while rational psychology and cosmology, as well as general metaphysics, would be non-metaphysical. This is especially significant when looking at Hegel’s philosophy since, according to Hegel, the *Logic* is supposed to be, first and foremost, a replacement of *general* rather than special metaphysics.

But maybe Hartmann has in mind any system for which an *a priori* existence claims are possible, rather than a system which provides such claims in every of its parts. That means that if a philosophical system does, for example, contain an ontological argument that *a priori* derives an existence of an entity, the whole system is considered metaphysical. It is contaminated by this one part, even if such derivation does not occur in any other part of it. After all, did I not argue for something similar occurring in Kant’s criticism of Wolff, when I argued that Kant uses the impossibility of the ontological

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<sup>118</sup> Hartmann, 1972, p. 118.

<sup>119</sup> I assume that Hartmann refers to *a priori* existence claims, since *a posteriori* existence claims do not seem to be specifically metaphysical phenomena.

<sup>120</sup> Although not necessarily in combination. Aquinas denies that God is an entity, while Spinoza denies God is a Creator, if that is understood at all in a volunaristic way.

<sup>121</sup> The former of which gained their exclusively theological status only later in history.

argument as a synecdoche for the impossibility of Wolffian ontology? Hartmann might have something like this in mind, but it is still problematic to claim that the ability to make any sort of existence claim *a priori* is necessary and sufficient for a system to be considered ‘metaphysical’. For example, except in the case of God, which is, once again, seen as a very exceptional entity, systems that have argued that it is possible to derive *a priori* the existence of particular entities, have usually argued that this is possible *in principle*, but not something which could actually be done. The second reason is that this ability is not something that was seen as constitutive of a system being metaphysical. Spinoza can be seen as a good example of both if we consider his following claim:

[I]t would be impossible for human weakness to grasp the series of singular, changeable things, *not only because there are innumerable many of them, but also because of the infinite circumstances in one and the same thing*, any of which can be the cause of its existence or nonexistence. For their existence has no connection with their essence [as is the case with God], or (as we have already said) is not an eternal truth. But there is also no need for us to understand their series. The essences of singular, changeable things (...) [are] to be sought *only from the fixed and eternal things*, and at the same time from the *laws inscribed in these things* (...) according to which all singular things come to be, and are ordered.<sup>122</sup>

Here we see that the system of Spinoza, which few would hesitate to describe as *metaphysical*, does in principle allow for the possibility of *a priori* derivation of existences, but also claims the practical impossibility of the same endeavour. Indeed, I would argue that what makes Spinoza *metaphysical* has nothing to do with this practice of derivation of existences, but with the idea that we can investigate and describe the nature of everyday particulars through *a priori* laws accessible to our thoughts. In fact, if we remember what we have said regarding the history of metaphysics from the perspective of

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<sup>122</sup> *TdEI*, II/36/21 – II/37/2, emphasis mine.

Aristotelian ambiguity, the idea that one can, or should, derive the existence of particular, simple entities was connected to *theology*, while the idea that what we are looking for are determinations of entities *qua* entities was called *metaphysics*. Attributing certain anachronistically grounded distinctions, such as between ‘metaphysics’ and ‘ontology’ conceived outside of a historical context appropriate to Hegel’s philosophy is more likely to lead to the misunderstanding of both Hegel’s philosophy and of what the science of metaphysics historically was.

Furthermore, it seems to me that Hartmann’s own reading, which he calls ontological, should be called metaphysical. That is, it should be called metaphysical if we keep in mind what this term meant for Hegel. Firstly, Hartmann claims that what the *Logic* “is heading for is granted.” This is basically, if we remember what has been discussed earlier, similar to what Hegel criticises metaphysics and especially special metaphysics for. Wolffian metaphysics took its fundamental categories for granted, from representation, but also it took the objects of its science for granted, i.e. God, Soul, the World. Secondly, if we look at Hartmann’s ‘ontology’ as a discipline which positions itself against what he takes to be metaphysics, and if we note that it starts from what is given to us in everyday experience, and then proceeds to derive the categories necessary for its cognition, we can see that, according to Hegel, Hartmann’s ontology is itself *metaphysical*. More specifically, it is empiricism:

*Empiricism* was the initial result of a double need: 1) need for a *concrete* content as opposed to the abstract theories of the understanding that cannot advance from its universal generalisations to particularisation and determination on its own; 2) need for a *firm hold* against the possibility of proving any claim at all in the field, and with the method, of the finite determinations. Instead of seeking what is true in thought itself, Empiricism proceeds to draw it from *experience* [*Erfahrung*], from what is outwardly or inwardly present...

...Empiricism and metaphysics have a source in common – they both have representations, i.e. the content that comes originally from experience, as the guarantee for the authentication of its definitions (both of presuppositions and of more determinate content). But Empiricism elevates the content that belongs to perception, feeling, and intuition into the *form of universal notions, principles, and laws*, etc.<sup>123</sup>

There is another worry regarding Hartmann's interpretation and taxonomy that readers who do not share my fear of anachronism might find more relevant. The truth is that I share Hartmann's idea, if I understand it, that Hegel is not metaphysical in Hartmann's sense. I do not believe that Hegel engages in reductionism, or that he, strictly speaking, attempts to derive entities *a priori*. Hence according to my reading Hegel's philosophy does not commit itself to 'reductionist statements' such as 'the world is essentially matter' or 'the world is essentially mental states', or 'the mind is made of brainwaves and cheese'. However, unless I am mistaken, Hartmann's claim that Hegel's thought is metaphysically neutral suggests not only that Hegel is not *making* these statements, but also that he is not *denying* them. The consequence would be that Hegel's philosophy cannot, or at least does not, say *anything* about such positions. However, it seems to me that Hegel *does* say something about them, and that is that they are *misguided*. This is because they depend on the logic of understanding and judgment. These kinds of reductivist statements are judgments that attach predicates to subjects as an in-itself, i.e. they are examples of the process of predication of finite categories of entities, or things as they are in themselves. If this is the kind of reductionism Hartmann has in mind then, *pro* Hartmann Hegel does not engage in it, but *pace* Hartmann, Hegel is not neutral towards it. This approach to philosophy is misguided because to say that "the world is mind, and not matter" is to posit a set of pre-given oppositions that are kept separate on pain of contradiction. This is the essence of a reductionist system, but also of the system of understanding that Hegel aims to go beyond. The point of Hegel's

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<sup>123</sup> EL, §§37-8.

philosophy is to show that certain ways of engaging in, or conceiving of, metaphysics, for example those described by Hartmann, need to be overcome.

That being the case there is a way in which Hegel can be seen as being 'metaphysical and ontological' in one sense, while not being metaphysical, ontological, or non-metaphysical in Hartmann's sense. Consider the following quotation:

One approach sees Hegel as offering an account of what really or even absolutely exists; the other sees Hegel as concerned rather with something else – with categories, concepts, or conceptual schemes. Insofar as they see the debate in this way, they tend to describe nontraditionalism as a 'non-metaphysical' interpretation... What is controversial in these formulations is the suggestion about Hegel – namely that he is engaged in an analysis of categories, concepts or their justification which is designed to maintain 'modest' neutrality with respect to metaphysics.

Granted, one might still try to *reconstruct* Hegel's theoretical philosophy in non-metaphysical terms, setting aside those Hegelian aspirations which do not fit the mould. But why? Why prefer a metaphysically-neutral analysis of conceptual schemes to an account of what truly or really exists?<sup>124</sup>

If we adopt the reading of Hegel which is metaphysical and ontological in a Wolffian, rather than an anachronistic sense, we can posit a reading which does not see an opposition between an account of what really or absolutely is, and a concern with categories, concepts, or conceptual schemes. As was the case with Wolff, the reality itself will be described through categories that are logical and metaphysical. But, as was also the case with Wolff, these categories will not themselves be entities. This will not be a Platonic system, or a system that adopts realism regarding the universals. These systems have been

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<sup>124</sup> Kreines, 2006, p. 468.

overcome. But also, in line with Kant's critique, it will not be a system that simply adopts the position that it is possible for reason to describe the things in themselves. Against Kant, however, it will try a) to immanently demonstrate that the categories of thought apply to the nature of reality, and b) it will not start by assuming a qualitative gulf between the way in which things are in themselves and the way in which things are for us. The Real is not rational because we are rational and need to (re-)construct it in this way. Instead, we are rational because the Real is rational. But this also is not to be seen as a reductive idealism of a Berkeleyian kind, or of a kind that is used as a philosophical boogiemán in the teaching of undergraduates. To say that the real is rational, or that our thinking and the way the world is in itself are in unity does not require one to therefore adopt the idea that the world is made of mental states. This is because the *Logic* does not start from *our* thinking and attempt to show why it is valid as a tool for describing the world, but because it starts from thought itself, and then shows that its laws are the basic laws of the world. Secondly, this is so, since to posit an opposition between mental and non-mental content would manifest a reversion to the finite oppositions of the philosophy of understanding.

In that sense, reductionism and the positing of entities, both aspects of Hartmannian metaphysics, can be seen as non-applicable to Hegel. If this is what metaphysics is then Hegel is not a metaphysician. The matter or the idea of naïve materialism or idealism have been integrated into the system of logic as categories of thought. Also, the objects of special metaphysics have been subsumed in this system of general metaphysics as necessary categories of thinking. Whatever we can think of, be that finite or infinite, will be understandable through these categories, but not because we, in our finitude, are bound by them, or because this is the only way to think of them in order for us to remain properly scientific. It will be so because these categories describe the world as it is. However, these categories are merely those that are fundamental, to the being and the cognition of the world as such. Similarly to Wolffian categories, even though they are the basic ones applicable to anything, they do not exhaust all the possible categories in which the thought



can think at different levels of determinacy, or the ways in which things *are* at different levels of determinacy.

There is nothing in heaven or earth which does not contain within itself both being and nothing. Of course, since we are speaking here of a particular *actual something*, those determinations are no longer present in it in the complete untruth in which they are as being and nothing.<sup>125</sup>

The *Logic* is, therefore, Hegel's ontology, or what is the same, his general metaphysics. The special metaphysics is to be found in the philosophy of Nature and of Spirit, and due to what we have learned from the *Logic*, even these parts will not be allowed to be reductionist or make *a priori* existence claims.

## 5. The End of Ontology

Hegel's *Science of Logic* marks the end of our story. In this chapter I have discussed Hegel's relation to the name and to the conception of ontology. I have shown that Hegel understands ontology in its Wolffian sense and argued that, while rejecting almost every aspect of Wolffian ontology, its shape, method, formulation, he retains one important aspect. That is its speculative position, the idea that it is "the science of *things* grasped in *thoughts*."<sup>126</sup> In Hegel's view, in order to go beyond Kant's critique of previous metaphysics, it was necessary to investigate thinking itself, not merely to adopt the traditional categories and assume that their validity applies to thing as they are. But in order to do that properly, to investigate the pure thought itself, it was necessary to go beyond both dogmatism and Kantianism by integrating what was really philosophical in both of them, and letting go of what was deficient. "The earlier philosophical systems are contained sublated into later ones. The 'refuting' of a philosophy only means that its restricting boundary has been overstepped and its determinate principle has been reduced to an ideal

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<sup>125</sup> SL, p. 85.

<sup>126</sup> EL, §24.

moment.”<sup>127</sup> While Kantianism rightfully showed us the boundaries of the previous systems, by pointing out that they cannot, on their own terms, speak of anything but finite categories of understanding, and that they have never properly investigated the categories of thought in themselves, it found itself limited by seeing our thinking, in Hegel’s view, as *merely ours*. As such, it lost an aspect which had been present in thinking since the ancient times:

...the knowledge of things obtained through thinking is alone what is really true in them, that is, things not in their immediacy but as first raised into the form of thought, as things *thought* [*als Gedachte*]. Thus this metaphysics believed that thinking (and its determinations) is not anything alien to the object, but rather is its essential nature, or that things and the thinking of them (...) are explicitly in full agreement, thinking in its immanent determinations and the true nature of things forming one and the same content.<sup>128</sup>

In this way, I have argued that Hegel intended to present us with a case for the possibility of ontology after the Kantian attack on it. Even though Kant preserves more of Wolffian ontology, structurally speaking, Hegel attempts to preserve what was essential to it, that categories of thought can describe the world as it is in itself. But as can be seen, not much remains of that ontology. Although their fundamental ambition remains the same the science will be radically altered, to the point that its name will be replaced. The better name for what ontology tried to do, according to Hegel, is *Logic*, since its beginning should be conceived as starting and dealing with determinations of thought, rather than entities. The old model of predication, of syllogism, and the law of non-contradiction, will all be transformed through this new structure. Due to this, the Wolffian conception of ontology historically ends with Hegel and the name waits to appear once again, describing something other than it once was.

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<sup>127</sup> EL, §86, ad 2.

<sup>128</sup> SL, p. 45.

# Conclusion

In this thesis I have investigated the early history of ontology and argued that Wolff's formulation of the nature and structure of that science should be seen as place where the history of this discipline properly begins. I have also argued that Kant and Hegel shared the conception of ontology that was posited by Wolff and that the development of philosophy from Wolff, through Kant, to Hegel can be seen as a debate regarding the possibility of ontology so conceived. Finally, I have argued that if one is to read Hegel's *Logic* by taking into account this history, a certain interpretation of the nature of Hegel's philosophy, which can be referred to as 'ontological' or 'metaphysical', gains more plausibility than certain traditions of reading Hegel in a so-called non-metaphysical manner were willing to admit.

This thesis, however, is not intended as the final word on these topics, but rather as an invitation to, and clearing of ground for, further research in the areas I have covered. For example, one could rightfully argue that I have not *definitively proven* that the Wolffian conception of ontology existed for exactly 101 years. Schelling, for example, who was Hegel's contemporary, was likely to share the same conception of what ontology was and outlived Hegel for over 20 years. While I cannot confirm or deny whether Schelling shared Hegel's and therefore Wolff's conception of what ontology was, I do not see this as particularly problematic even if he was also a member of the German ontological tradition. Firstly, every investigation needs to limit the object it studies and my investigation has been limited to Wolff, Kant, Hegel, and several other figures. In order to show that the Wolffian conception of ontology spans these 101 years it was necessary to exclude some interesting and important thinkers. Secondly, even if the German ontological tradition survives Hegel through the philosophy of Schelling, or some other subsequent thinker, my thesis shows that while there might not have been *only* 101 years of ontology, there have been *minimally* 101 years of ontology. The century of ontology that I have posited does not need to be correct to the minute. I could,

for example, have limited it to the publication of the first edition of the *Logic* rather than the death of Hegel, but the exact duration until this Wolffian conception reached oblivion is not very significant for the purposes of this thesis.

On the other hand, to see who else can be shown to belong within the German ontological tradition and to see when the Wolffian conception of ontology is definitively lost would be a very interesting further project. Interestingly, the *name* ontology re-appears in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the philosophy of German Neo-Kantianism. At that point, however, instead of being a science of an entity *qua* entity it is treated as a science that investigates the *objects* of various other, non-philosophical sciences. In this mode it is called ‘regional ontology’ and it will investigate, for example, the difference between the object of physics and the object of mathematics. But besides this, 20<sup>th</sup> century Neo-Kantianism also concerns itself with ‘fundamental ontology’, which is not seen as an investigation into objects of various scientific disciplines, but as an investigation into what it means for something to be an object of cognition at all. This separation, between fundamental and regional ontology, reaches Husserl and is through him received by Heidegger, who interprets it in a way particular to his philosophy by understanding it through his conception of the ‘ontological difference’. To see how the name ontology, already not very widely used by the time of Hegel, reaches the Neo-Kantianism of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and why they adopt this name for a kind of scientific discovery which it did not originally stand for, would be a very interesting project in its own right. Some interesting research on the peripheries of this question can already be found in Peter E. Gordon’s 2012 monograph *Continental Divide*, but this part of the history of ontology is beyond the scope of the thesis here presented.

Similarly, it would be interesting to see how the name ‘ontology’ and the practices it stands for enter the analytic tradition. In fact, I believe that in philosophy today we can identify two dominant strands of understanding what ontology is. These are the Heideggerian one and the Quinean one. Within the analytic tradition it is common to answer the question of what

ontology is by reference to Quine and his paper *On What There Is*. In that paper, however, Quine does not provide a definition or a history of ontology, but simply uses it as a term everyone is already familiar with. How ontology reached Quine and how it became the science of *existing* entities after him is another interesting question, and Blatti and Lapointe's 2016 collection, *Ontology after Carnap*, might provide some illuminating answers.

But I doubt that we can go very far in our discussions on what ontology is, or in our investigations of its history, if we do not also focus on Wolff's contribution to this history. This being so, I hope to see more research on Wolff's conception of ontology in the future. At this point, someone might rightfully question the emphasis I put on Wolff regarding the original conception of ontology. After all, it was Clauberg, rather than Wolff, who provided us with the first extant discussion of ontology. Why not focus on Clauberg? There are several reasons to consider Wolff as the founder of ontology rather than Clauberg. One concerns the history of the name. Although Clauberg's texts on ontology predate those of Wolff one should remember that Clauberg prefers to call the discipline *ontosophy* rather than *ontology*. It is due to Wolff's preference for the latter term that *ontology* is the name that survives to this day. Moreover, while it is easy to show that Clauberg influenced Wolff it is not easy to see whether the subsequent German tradition was interested in or aware of his writings. There are no references to Clauberg (or at least none that I was able to find) in either Kant or Hegel, and that is not the case with the philosophy of Wolff. Therefore, focusing specifically on Clauberg's influence on the post-Wolffians might not be as productive as focusing on Wolff's influence, which is itself far from being well understood. Finally, even though Wolff's philosophy is not very widely researched today it is still the case that anyone who works on Kant or Hegel at least knows *of* Wolff and that there *was* some influence on the philosophy of Kant, if on no one else, stemming from Wolff's philosophy. For all of these reasons, I believe it to be better to consider the science of ontology to begin with Wolff rather than Clauberg.

Speaking of the question of Wolff's influence on Kant and Hegel, some might be disappointed that this thesis does not discuss more thinkers that were important and influential for the two. I have not spoken of, for example, Lambert, Crusius, or Leibniz. There is also a jump in the thesis from Kant to Hegel without discussing, for example, Fichte or Schelling. Regarding the interpretations of Kant and Hegel in our own time, some might be wondering about the absence of Pippin from this thesis. Unfortunately, the reason for these gaps was more often than not the lack of time and space. I would have liked to include more minor and major figures in this story of ontology, but since not everyone can be included I had to decide whom to exclude. The choices I have made resulted in the collection of thinkers that appear in this thesis. Regarding contemporary scholarship, specifically Pippin's interpretation of Hegel, I must point out that this is not primarily a thesis on the nature of Hegel's philosophy, but on the history of ontology and Hegel appears in relation to this history. Due to this, I did not find it necessary to engage with Pippin's or other important interpretations of Hegel, since this could be a project in its own right. One specific difficulty regarding the inclusion of Pippin into my thesis is that Pippin seems to have distanced himself from the categorisation of his reading into the non-metaphysical camp of interpretation, where he is often placed. Since he claims never actually to have been where he is often considered to be, it would take too much time and space to give a fair account and response to his interpretation. Focusing on Hartmann seemed more important since his paper on the division between the metaphysical and ontological Hegel tends to be considered as a point from which different schools of Hegel interpretation present today have developed. As such, I found it important to see whether this thesis, which investigates what ontology was for Hegel, can provide us with new material in order to address some claims and arguments on which the tradition of the non-metaphysical interpretation of Hegel's philosophy seems to ground itself. And I believe I was successful in showing that it can.

Taking everything written so far into account, the project of the history of ontology is far from over. There is a lot more to be discovered about its original 101 years, about the period beyond it in which the name survives but

the conception does not, and about the period before it, in which the Wolffian conception of ontology is announced but the name is yet to be developed. It is my hope that one day more will be written on this.

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