

The distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*: Origins, metamorphosis and critique

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Abstract: The distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis* is known in the history of philosophy primarily due to Immanuel Kant's in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. In this study, I aim to highlight the fact that this distinction has a venerable tradition predating Kant, spanning the key moments of the Western metaphysical tradition all the way back to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. The Stagirite's teaching, refined through Neoplatonic and Arabic interpretations, would give rise to this distinction only within the 13th-century Franciscan school. For our research, Immanuel Kant is a *Janus bifrons*, as he looks both toward the roots of this tradition—passing through *Schulmetaphysik* / *scholastic metaphysics* (Wolff and Baumgarten), Suárez, Duns Scotus, and Avicenna, as well as toward its posterity, with the distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis* reappearing in different terms in the texts of Hegel and even those of Husserl. The importance of this distinction stems above all from the fact that, ultimately, it led to the birth of a concept fundamental to the Western tradition: that of *ontology*.

Keywords: Aristotle, *metaphysica generalis*, *metaphysica specialis*, Suárez, ontology, Kant

In the “Introduction to ‘What Is Metaphysics?’”, Martin Heidegger ([1929] 1998, 287) highlights that “Metaphysics states what beings are as beings [...]. But metaphysics represents the beingness of beings in a twofold manner: in the first place, the totality of beings as such with an eye to their most universal traits (ὅν καθόλον, κοινόν); but at the same time also the totality of beings as such in the sense of the highest and therefore divine being (ὅν καθόλον, ἀκρότατον, θεῖον). In the metaphysics of Aristotle, the unconcealedness of beings as such has

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specifically developed in this twofold manner (cf. *Metaphysics*, Γ, E, K) [...]. According to its essence, metaphysics is at the same time both ontology in the narrower sense, and theology. This ontotheological essence of philosophy proper (πρώτη φιλοσοφία) must indeed be grounded”.

The issue at hand (the distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*) appears to stem from a fundamental ambiguity found in Aristotle’s texts, in which, in certain books of his *Metaphysics* - particularly Books A and Γ—he maintains that this science (πρώτη φιλοσοφία) - which later came to be called μετὰ τὰ φύσικα—that studies Being *qua* Being, and the properties inherent in it by virtue of its own nature (1003a), and on the other hand, in the same work, particularly in books E and Λ, maintains that this science (θεολογία) should deal with separate beings, which are eternal, immaterial, and eternal (1064b) (Duba 2014, 450)¹. Martin Heidegger ([1930-1931] 1984, 157-159) himself pays close attention to this issue and speaks, in a lecture dedicated to *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*, of a “dual” concept (*Doppelbegriff*) of philosophy that goes back to Aristotle’s writings, understood sometimes as πρώτη φιλοσοφία, sometimes as θεολογία².

However, in this context, M. Heidegger overlooks a famous dispute that deserves credit for having opened the discussion on the unitary character of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*—the one between Paul Natorp (1888) and Werner Jaeger (1923)³. On Heidegger and his position on the Natorp-Jaeger debate, see J.-F. Courtine (2005, 56-63). Paul Natorp, in his classic study “Thema und Disposition der aristotelischen Metaphysik,” rejects any attempt to propose a unified interpretation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. In his view, Books A, B, and Γ of the

¹ For this topic, see, *inter alia*, Joseph Owens. 1963. *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies; Panayot Butchvarov. 1979. *Being Qua Being: A Theory of Identity, Existence and Predication*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press.

² The question is taken up again in Martin Heidegger. 1949. “Einleitung”, *Was ist Metaphysik?*, p. 18. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann. See also: J.-F. Courtine. 1999. “Métaphysique et ontothéologie”. In J.-L. Narbonne, L. Langlois (Eds.), *La métaphysique, son histoire, sa critique, ses enjeux*, pp. 137-157 (here p. 147). Paris/Laval: Vrin/Presses de l’Université de Laval; Enrico Berti. 1996. *La métaphysique d’Aristote. Onto-théologie ou philosophie première?* *Revue de philosophie ancienne*, 14 (1): 61-85 (here p. 63).

³ See also Bertrand Dumoulin. 1986. *Analyse génétique de la « Métaphysique » d’Aristote*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

The distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*: Origins, metamorphosis and critique

Metaphysics constitute an introduction to the science of substance in general, which is the subject of the “ousiological” books; Books Z, H, and Θ deal specifically with sensible substance, while Books Λ, M, and N address supersensible substance. The result of this tripartite division is that these different directions are incompatible, hence the subsequent, desperate attempt at reconciliation or unification in Chapter 1 of Book E (which the German exegete considers partially apocryphal). *Metaphysics* would in fact consist of two distinct and irreconcilable treatises (see Berti 1996, 72-74). P. Natorp (1888, 49) nevertheless attempts to highlight what he considers an “intolerable contradiction” (*unleidlicher Widerspruch*) between πρώτη φιλοσοφία (*Grundwissenschaft*) and a science of a specific part of being, more precisely that which is immutable and immaterial. It is interesting to note that P. Natorp’s non-uniform interpretation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* is considered to follow in the tradition of F. Suárez (*Disputationes metaphysicae*, 1597), an influence that is reflected above all in the distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*.

However, medieval thinkers were not confronted merely with the pure Aristotelian paradigm; rather, it had been transmitted along with all manner of influences inherited from the Neoplatonic and Arabic traditions. Following in the footsteps of Aristotle, Avicenna, in *Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina* ([c. 1027] 1977, 31-32), argued that the subject (*subjectum*) of metaphysics is *being qua being* (moreover, he argued that *ens*, *res*, and *necesse* are the notions immediately imprinted in the soul)⁴. Avicennian teaching raised the following problem: where could God be situated in this framework bequeathed to the medieval thinkers by the Persian philosopher? If God were made the cause, the principle of the subject of metaphysics, then God would have to be beyond being (that is, in pure Neoplatonism, which is not the case), or we include God within the framework of being; but if we do so, are we not sacrificing God’s

⁴ According to Avicenna, “Dicemus igitur quod res et ens et necesse talia sunt quod statim imprimuntur in anima prima impressione, quae non acquiritur ex aliis notioribus se”. For a pertinent analysis, see Jan A. Aertsen. 2008. “Avicenna’s Doctrine of the Primary Notions and Its Impact on Medieval Philosophy”. In A. Akasoy and W. Raven (Eds.), *Islamic Thought in the Middle Ages: Studies in Text, Transmission and Translation, in Honour of Hans Daiber*, pp. 21-42. Leiden/Boston: Brill. See also Jean Jolivet. 1984. “Aux origines de l’ontologie d’Ibn Sinā”. In J. Jolivet et R. Rashed (Eds.), *Études sur Avicenne*, pp. 11-28. Paris: Belles Lettres.

transcendence?⁵ Among the scholastic authors, Duns Scotus pays close attention to this issue and chooses the second option, supported by the statement: “Avicenna has spoken well, however, and Averroes very badly”⁶.

We find a different position in Thomas Aquinas, who holds that God cannot be known in metaphysics by starting from the first concept of being (*ens*)⁷, since there is no such concept of being that is univocal with that of God⁸. For Thomas, God is absolutely transcendent; he thus opts for the first version in the tradition of Avicenna, following Averroes on this point. Averroes’s conception of metaphysics is very interesting for the present research, since for him “God is perfectly being because He is perfectly actualized; He is being *qua* being insofar as He is being *qua* form. In this way there vanishes any opposition

⁵ Avicenna says, “Each substance is either body or other than body. If [it is] other than body, then it is either part of a body or it is not part of a body but is something altogether separable from bodies. If it is part of a body, then either it is its form or it is its matter. If it is separable [and] not a part of a body, then either it has some administrative relation to bodies in terms of moving [them]—and this is called ‘soul’—or it is free from material things in all respects and is called ‘intellect’” (Avicenna. *The Metaphysics of The Healing*. A parallel English-Arabic text translated, introduced, and annotated by Michael E. Marmura. 2005, p. 48. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University. Some exegetes saw here an outline of what was later called “*metaphysica specialis*”. Therefore, the distinction between “*metaphysica specialis*” and “*metaphysica generalis*” is the logical consequence of the classification of substance into *genus* and *species*).

⁶ See John Duns Scotus. ([1302-1304] 2004). *Reportatio I-A*, Prologue, q. 3, art. 1, 215: “Sed Avicenna bene dicit et Averroes valde male”. In Allan Wolter and Oleg Bychkov (Eds. and Transl.), *The Examined Report of the Paris Lecture*, p. 75. St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute. See also Jan A. Aertsen. 2007. Avicenna and Averroes on the Proof of God’s Existence and the Subject-Matter of Metaphysics. *Medioevo*, 32: 61-97.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia Metaphysicae*, lib. 5, l. 7, n. 1: “Subiectum autem huius scientiae potest accipi, vel sicut communiter in tota scientia considerandum, cuiusmodi est ens et unum: vel sicut id de quo est principalis intentio, ut substantia”. The Marietti Edition, p. 229, n. 842. Idem. *In duodecim libros metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, VI Metaph., lect. 3, n. 1220: “Sicut autem dictum est, ens inquantum ens est, habet causam ipsum Deum”. Edited by M.-R. Cathala, revised by R. M. Spiazzi. 1971. Turin / Rome: Marietti, p. 308.

⁸ Idem, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, Liber I, d. 29, q. 1, a. 2, sol. 1: “Potest autem origo considerari dupliciter: aut secundum communem rationem originis, quae est aliquid ab aliquo esse, et sic una ratio est communis ad originem personarum et originem creaturarum, non quidem communitate univocationis, sed analogiae: et similiter etiam nomen principii”. Edited by Pierre Mandonnet. 1929. Paris: P. Lethielleux, I, p. 691.

The distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*: Origins, metamorphosis and critique

between the *transcendent* and the *transcendental*, as well as any distinction between a *metaphysica specialis* and a *metaphysica generalis*” (di Giovanni 2014, 81).

During the Middle Ages, it appears that the anonymous author (whose Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is preserved in the Mazarine Library, cod. 4390) of Albert Zimmermann (1965, 292), the Dominican Bernard of Trilia (1240–1292), according to O. Boulnois⁹, first used a clear distinction between *scientia communis* and *scientia specialis*: “common metaphysics and special metaphysics do not constitute one and the same science” (Proemium, 2 ra: “quod metaphysica communis et metaphysica specialis non pertinent ad eandem scientiam”) or “a special science is necessary to discuss separate beings” (Ibid.: “requiritur quaedam metaphysica specialis, quae est de entibus separatis”)¹⁰. Thus, for the first time in its history, metaphysics is explicitly divided into two distinct branches. There is no single science bearing that name, as Aristotle's followers sought, but rather two metaphysics (at least in an initial stage).

Subsequently, the term *metaphysica specialis* appears sporadically in the works of Franciscan authors from the Scholastic period. I mention here only the most representative figures, such as Roger Bacon, Henry of Ghent, Augustine of Ancona, Francis of Marchia, and, above all, Duns Scotus, who held that *scientia generalis* studies being as being, while *scientia specialis* studies a particular being: “*metaphysica transcendens erit tota prior scientia divina, et ita erunt quattuor scientiae speculativae: una transcendens, et tres speciales*”¹¹.

⁹ Cf. W. Goris. 1998. Die Kritik des Bernhard von Trilia an der Lehre von Gott als Ersterkanntem. Einleitung und Textausgabe. *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales*, 65 (2): 248-319.

¹⁰ For a discussion on this topic, see J.-F. Courtine. 1990. *Suárez et le système de la métaphysique*, p. 334. Paris: PUF. See also O. Boulnois. 1999. *Être et représentation. Une généalogie de la métaphysique moderne à l'époque de Duns Scot (XIIIe - XIVe siècle)*, p. 466. Paris: PUF. Pius Künzle is the best-known scholar of the preserved writings of Bernard of Trilia. See, *inter alia*, Pius Künzle. 1957. Neu aufgefundene Quaestiones quodlibetales Bernhards von Trilia. *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 4: 52-58. Idem. 1966. Mitteilungen aus Codex Mazarine 3490 zum Schriftum des Franziskaners Petrus Thomae, vorab zu seinen *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam*. *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 59: 3-37. Bernardi de Trilia. 1969. *Quaestiones disputatae de cognitione animae separate. Ad fidem codicum edidit Pius Künzle O. P.* Editiones Francke Bernae.

¹¹ John Duns Scotus ([1298-1300, revised later] 1997-1998). *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis*, I, q. 1, n. 155. *Questions on the Metaphysics of Aristotle by John Duns Scotus*, p. 69. Translated by Girard J. Etzkorn, and Allan B.

In this sense, I find the position adopted by Francis of Marchia exemplary, as he clearly separates the two perspectives of Aristotle, which many commentators have attempted to reconcile: “Vel aliter dico quod duplex est metaphysica. Patet per Philosophum IV *Metaphysicae* capitulo 1: ‘omnia entia in quantum entia speculatur una scientia genere, species autem specierum.’ Ecce plane dicit quod est metaphysica generalis et specialis”¹².

This duality within the same science—which deals with being par excellence and with common being—reached, with the *Schulmetaphysik* of the 17th and 18th centuries, the canonical framework of “metaphysics” divided into *metaphysica generalis* (*sive ontologia*) and *metaphysica specialis* (*theologia rationalis, psychologia rationalis, cosmologia rationalis*). However, even at that stage, in *Disputationes metaphysicae* (D.M.), F. Suárez proposes—albeit in a manner not yet fully developed—the essential elements of the distinction between a *metaphysica generalis* and a *metaphysica specialis*. First, the Jesuit indirectly supports the distinction between what has been called *ontology* and *theology*, clearly affirming the distinction between the adequate object (“ens in quantum ens reale”—D.M., I, sec. 1, § 26) and the principal object (“Deum esse praecipuum huius scientiae obiectum”—Ibid, § 9) of metaphysics. Evidently, Suárez’s definition of the adequate object of metaphysics and the resulting bipartition fundamentally oppose the interpretation given by Thomas Aquinas, to whom F. Suárez remains, to some extent, faithful.

The Jesuit is always quite cautious in his writings, making frequent use of distinctions to describe a particular subject as precisely as possible. For example, at the beginning of *Disputationes metaphysicae*, he states in the *Ad lectorem* that: “It is impossible to be an accomplished theologian without first establishing a firm foundation in metaphysics” (“Quemadmodum fieri nequit ut quis Theologus perfectus evadat, nisi firma prius metaphysicae jecerit fundamenta”). For F. Suárez, God remains the principal object of metaphysics, and not the adequate object. This means that theology no longer functions as a model for metaphysics; on the contrary, God must be understood in accordance with the capacity of the human intellect. However, the distinction proposed by F. Suárez cannot avoid the paradoxical

Wolter, OFM, St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute; Jan A. Aertsen. 2005. *Metaphysics as a Transcendental Science. Quaestio*, 5 (1): 376-389 (here p. 385).

¹² Quoted excerpt from William O. Duba, *op. cit.*, p. 451, n. 84.

The distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*: Origins, metamorphosis and critique

situation that arises from this: universal science (*metaphysics*) comes before first science (*theology*), that is, what is first from an ontological point of view, God, is no longer first from a gnoseological point of view.

By separating the imperatives of metaphysics from those of theology, F. Suárez paved the way for the science that would come to be called ontology (Lorhardus 1606; Goglenius 1613. See Coujou 1999, 1-67). This science would no longer be subservient to theology. In fact, ontology emerged free of any theological presuppositions, quickly becoming “une ontologie sans théologie” (Gilson 1981, 172).

Benedictus Pererius (1535–1610) and Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) are the most representative authors who initiated what would come to be known in the 17th and 18th centuries as *Schulmetaphysik*, represented by Christian Wolff (1679–1754) and Alexander Baumgarten (1714–1762). However, unlike Suárez’s “ontology,” “l’ontologie wolffienne est ainsi une ontologie de la connaissance, une gnoséontologie: une ontologie de l’étant (et non de l’être) en tant qu’être pensé ; plus exactement en tant qu’étant pensable. En effet, si l’ontologie wolffienne est une ontologie de la connaissance, c’est aussi une ontologie du possible” (Arnaud 2002, 42). Indeed, C. Wolff can be considered responsible for a true return to methodological Aristotelianism, to a greater extent than G.W. Leibniz. On the other hand, C. Wolff, following in Leibniz’s footsteps, develops a purely conceptual and a priori metaphysics¹³.

Contrary to popular belief, in his youth Immanuel Kant was very faithful to C. Wolff’s doctrine. It is evident that in his pre-critical works, the philosopher from Königsberg follows C. Wolff’s method. For example, in *New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition* (1755), he begins the lecture with the principles of reason and contradiction, just as Wolff does in *Philosophia prima sive ontologia* (1729).

This context, briefly described above, I believe must be taken into account when analyzing the distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*, known in the philosophical literature primarily due to the critique undertaken by Immanuel Kant, especially

¹³ F.W.J. Schelling criticizes the ontology promoted by *Schulmetaphysik*: within the School, ontology is reduced to “une succession de notions”. See J.-F. Courtine. 1991. “La critique schellingienne de l’onto-théologie”. In T. de Koninck et G. Planty-Bonjour (Eds.), *La question de Dieu selon Aristote et Hegel*, pp. 217-257.

in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), but also in his later work, *What real progress has metaphysics made in Germany since the time of Leibniz and Wolff?*, unfinished, and published posthumously in 1804 by Frederick Theodor Rink (see Ingeborg Schüssler. 2006).

Right at the beginning of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant observes that “the battlefield of the endless controversies is called *metaphysics*. There was a time when metaphysics was called the *queen* of all the science, and if the will be taken for the deed, it deserved this title of honor, on account of the preeminent importance of its object. Now, in accordance with the fashion of the age, the queen proves despised on all sides” (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1998, 99; see also Norbert Hinske (2009), “Ontologie oder Analytik des Verstandes? Kants langer Abschied von der Ontologie”, and Robert Theis (1985), “Le sens de la métaphysique dans la Critique de la Raison Pure”. Moreover, in “Introduction ” of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argues that this science, metaphysics, is „indispensable for human reason, and from which one can chop down every stem that has shot up without ever being able to eradicate its root” (Kant 1998, 148). General metaphysics (*ontology*) has as its object of study being as such—that is, the conditions of possibility of all knowledge—and is found in the section “The Transcendental Analytic.”

Kant opposes any attempt to acquire knowledge “of things in general” through the formal concepts and principles of the understanding, because without the conditions provided by experience, it cannot produce any kind of knowledge (Ibid, 193-194), which is why “the proud name of an ontology, which presumes to offer synthetic a priori cognitions of things in general in a systematic doctrine (e.g., the principle of causality), must give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding” (Ibid, 358-359). Starting from this point, the German philosopher rejects, one by one, the three branches of *metaphysica specialis*: psychology, cosmology, and theology (Ibid, 405-406)¹⁴, and this is most clearly evident in “The Transcendental Dialectic.”

¹⁴ “The thinking subject is the object of *psychology*, the sum total of all appearances (the world) is the object of *cosmology*, and the thing that contains the supreme condition of the possibility of everything that can be thought (the being of all beings) is the object of *theology*. Thus pure reason provides the ideas for a transcendental doctrine of the soul (*psychologia rationalis*), a transcendental science of the word (*cosmologia rationalis*), and finally also a transcendental cognition of God (*theologia transcendentalis*)”.

The distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*: Origins, metamorphosis and critique

The way in which the German philosopher distinguishes his approach from traditional metaphysics leads us to believe that the Kantian distinction between transcendental analytics and transcendental dialectics appears to correspond to the Suarezian distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*. Thus, even though he undertakes a critique of both ontology and the special metaphysics, Kant preserves, at least formally and methodologically, the traditional distinction of metaphysics at the very heart of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Paradoxically, the perspective of scholastic metaphysics—which “popularized” the term “ontology”—endures in Kant’s legacy. For example, by changing the terminology, G.W.F. Hegel ([1812-1816] 2010, 11), in *Science of Logic*, distinguishes between *objective logic* (that of *being* and *essence*) and *subjective logic* (that of the *concept*)¹⁵. According to the German philosopher, “The objective logic thus takes the place rather of the former metaphysics which was supposed to be the scientific edifice of the world as constructed by thoughts alone” (Ibid, 42), that is, the science that “investigates the nature of being in general,” namely *ontology*. “But objective logic comprises within itself also the rest of metaphysics (*die übrige Metaphysik*)” (Ibid.), which tradition calls *metaphysica specialis* (Aubenque 1991, 269).

Pierre Aubenque (1991) draws on Heidegger in his interpretation, as he argues that the structure of the Hegelian system is built upon the structure of *Schulmetaphysik* (see Heidegger, La « Phénoménologie de l’Esprit » de Hegel, cours de 1930-1931 / 1984, GA, t. 32; p. 30;.). Translated into Hegelian terms, *rational cosmology* is transformed into the *philosophy of nature*, and *rational psychology* is nothing other than the *philosophy of spirit*. Here a problem arises: where does *rational theology* fit within the Hegelian system? The German philosopher is not so explicit on this point. However, Aubenque identifies a passage in Hegel’s text that includes rational theology among the special metaphysics encompassed by objective logic: „the metaphysics which sought to comprehend with the pure forms of thought such particular substrata, originally drawn from the imagination, as the soul, the world, and God, and in this type of consideration the determinations of

¹⁵ According to Hegel ([1812-1816] 2010, 11), “This first volume of the *Logic* contains the Doctrine of Being, as Book One; Book Two, the second section of the same volume which contains the Doctrine of Essence is already in the presses; finally, the second volume will contain the Subjective Logic, or the Doctrine of the Concept”. See also P. Aubenque, 1991, *op. cit.*, p. 268 sqq.

thought constituted the essential factor” (Hegel 2010, 42). So, in the words of Aubenque (1991, 270), “la logique objective paraît donc émettre la prétention, au premier abord exorbitante, d’englober à elle seule la totalité de la métaphysique antérieure : l’ontologie d’une part et d’autre part les trois parties constitutives de la métaphysique spéciale”.

The crux of this situation seems to me to be as follows: the identification of *ontology* with *theology* under the umbrella of *logic* constitutes a clear example of onto-theology, which causes the Heideggerian metaphysical tradition to be viewed through the lens of G.W.F. Hegel.

As Pierre Aubenque (1991, 271-272) emphasizes in his study, there are two clear aspects of G.W.F. Hegel’s relationship with tradition:

- i) La première innovation est que la place de l’ontologie est désormais occupée par la logique;
- ii) La deuxième innovation est la disparition au moins apparente de la théologie.

Consequently, according to these two “innovations”, there are no differences between the *ens commune* and the *ens summum* (Ibid, 277), since ontology merges with theology and both belong to Logic. What F. Suárez radically separates, G.W.F. Hegel identifies without reservation, thereby providing the clearest example of an onto-theological paradigm.

In conclusion, what logic was for Aristotle—that is, the *Organon*—became *metaphysics* in Scholasticism. For authors of the scholastic period, metaphysics had become a science (since it was taught in universities), eminent for some, still to be sought by others (Leibniz in particular). Certainly, however, for nearly two millennia, metaphysics amounted to nothing more than a simple commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. At some point, the question arises: is an analysis of metaphysics as an “object” of research possible? To my knowledge, in *Disputationes metaphysicae* (1597), the Jesuit Francisco Suárez speaks for the first time of an analysis of metaphysics as an “object” and no longer approaches this work merely from the perspective of a simple commentator. Consequently, Suárezian metaphysics interrogates its own meaning, thereby becoming an autonomous science (Coujou 1999, 66-67. In this context, for example, Immanuel Kant (who, in my opinion, is here merely a follower of F. Suárez) does not speak of

The distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*: Origins, metamorphosis and critique

meta-metaphysics, but of the “metaphysics of metaphysics” (Kant 1999, 181)¹⁶.

Thus, the distinction we have been considering emerged explicitly during the medieval period within the Franciscan school, which was decisively inspired by the teachings of Avicenna, whose interpretation was grounded in Aristotelian theses. Nor should we overlook Boethius’s translations, especially Aristotle’s *Organon*, for what later came to be called *metaphysica specialis*. What is certain is that, by imposing this distinction, a radical change occurred compared to the tradition up to that point: *God is no longer understood as the cause of metaphysics itself, but as being included within the subject of metaphysics*. God thus becomes a primary object, but is no longer the proper object of metaphysics. Ultimately, with the imposition of ontology, the proper object takes precedence, leading exegetes to speak of an ontologization of theology. Kant’s critique, spectacular and effective in specific instances, does not resolve the fundamental problem, since the distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis* is found not only in the structure of the *Critique of Pure Reason* but also at the core of Hegelian and Husserlian¹⁷ thought, to mention only the most significant authors.

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¹⁶ According to Immanuel Kant, ‘Letter to Marcus Herz’ ([after May 11, 1781] 1999), “This sort of investigation will always remain difficult, for it includes the metaphysics of metaphysics. Yet I have a plan in mind according to which even popularity might be gained for this study, a plan that could not be carried out initially, however, for the foundations needed cleaning up, particularly because the whole system of this sort of knowledge had to be exhibited in all its articulation”.

¹⁷ In *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. First Book: *General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology* ([1913] 1983), Edmund Husserl distinguishes between “formal ontology and the material ontologies”, which is nothing more than the scholastic distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*. “Formal ontology” is defined as a-regional, i.e. general, and “the material ontologies” represents a region of knowledge. For the Husserlian distinction, see: Liliana Albertazzi (1996); Gilbert Null (1997).

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The distinction between *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*: Origins, metamorphosis and critique

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