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The Foundation of the Principle of Non-Contradiction. Some Remarks on the Medieval Transformation of Metaphysics

1. INTRODUCTION

There are various ways to describe the transformation that metaphysics underwent in the Middle Ages. One way is to describe this transformation as the purging of all theological reminiscences from ontology, which took place — whether induced by the presence of a theology of revelation in the Latin West, or not — in the 13th and 14th century. Another way is to describe it as the rise of a transcendental philosophy in the first part of the 13th century, a doctrine of the properties of being as being that transcend the Aristotelian categories; this transcendental philosophy would develop, with Kant, into the system of apriori knowledge of objects. A third way to describe the transformation of metaphysics in the Middle Ages is closely related: as the development of metaphysics into a supertranscendental science.

The difficulty with such descriptions is that they classify a medieval phenomenon in terms that will not play an important role until modern philosophy. This suggests a continuity in the history of philosophy that is belied by undeniable shifts in the meaning of the concepts used. Moreover, such descriptions obstruct our insight into the proper nature of epistemic constellations like that in the 13th/14th century, which (i) introduce new classes of objects; (ii) impose criteria of truth, with which statements about these objects must comply in a self-authenticating way; and (iii) develop self-stabilizing techniques, which guarantee their creativity and their capacity for self-correction¹. The epistemic constellation that underlies the transformation

¹ Cf. I. HACKING, *Historical Ontology*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA - London 2004. By stressing the investigation of the stability of epistemic constellations, Hacking expressly turns against an one-sided emphasis on discontinuities in recent French and Anglo-American epistemology. The list of authors displaying this tendency discretely suppresses the name of Foucault, although his *Archéologie du savoir* must be regarded as the very culmination of this tendency. «Après l'engouement philosophique pour les coupures de Bachelard, les réfutations de Popper, et les révolutions de Kuhn, il faut exiger qu'on réfléchisse sur la stabilité. Je crois que chaque style a des techniques de stabilisation, liées à l'autojustification, qui perdurent au fil des siècles» (I. HACKING, 'Vrai', *les valeurs et les sciences*, «Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales», 2, 2002, pp. 13-20, at p. 19).

of metaphysics in the 13th and 14th century quite overtly displays such a correlation of objects, criteria and stabilizing techniques. In the description, for instance, of the new objects it introduces — the ‘transcendentals’, which are not only utterly general (*communissima*), but also the first known objects (*prima in cognitione*) —, a legitimizing strategy is reproduced that presupposes the genesis of the concept ‘objectum’ in the 13th century, viz. the identification of the subject of first philosophy with the first object of the intellect². In this epistemic constellation, a thought may present itself, and even be judged sensible and acceptable, that had to remain wholly unintelligible for the commentary tradition in late Antiquity: the foundation of Aristotle’s unconditional starting point of thinking, i.e. the principle of non-contradiction, in the first known, transcendental concepts of the mind.

Such a foundation, which was stimulated by the inclusion of both primary concepts or terms and primary propositions under the common denominator ‘principles’, as incomplex and complex principles respectively, may take on various forms. Not only in his commentary to the *Metaphysics*, but also in the treatise on natural law in the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas asserts a relation of foundation between the first indemonstrable principle and being as first known: just as all other propositions are based (*fundantur*) on the principle of non-contradiction, this principle is based (*fundatur*) on the notions of being and non-being — the same term ‘fundare’ indicates both the relation between the later propositions and the first principle, as well as that between the first principle and its constitutive terms³.

Whereas, in the case of Aquinas, this foundation leaves intact the primacy of the principle of non-contradiction in the order of propositions, the same cannot be said in the case of Antonius Andreae. His *Metaphysics* commentary, a synthesis of the respective commentaries of Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus⁴, grants to the principle ‘impossibile est idem simul esse et non esse’

² Cf. my *The Scattered Field. History of Metaphysics in the Post-Metaphysical Era*, Peeters, Louvain 2004.

³ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *In IV Metaph.*, l. 6; *S.th.*, I-II, q. 94, art. 2: « (...) illud quod primo cadit in apprehensione, est ens, cuius intellectus includitur in omnibus quaecumque quis apprehendit. Et ideo primum principium indemonstrabile est, quod non est simul affirmare et negare, quod fundatur supra rationem entis et non entis, et super hoc principio omnia alia fundantur, ut dicit Philosophus ». Cf. J. A. AERTSEN, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals. The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, Brill, Leiden - New York - Köln 1996, pp. 146-151. Note that Aquinas bases the principle of non-contradiction on the concepts of being and non-being, which is itself already a sign of the broader tendency articulated in this contribution: the increasing attention for the offspring of nothingness (cf. sect. 4).

⁴ Cf. ANTONIUS ANDRAEAE, *Quaestiones subtilissimae super duodecim libros Metaphysicae Aristotelis*, ed. Venetiis 1491, without folio-numbers. Cf. G. PINI, *Una lettura scotista della Metaphysica di Aristotele: l'Expositio in libros Metaphysicorum di Antonio Andreae*, « Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale », 2, 1991, pp. 529-586.

the traditional status of a most certain (*firmissimum*) principle⁵, but not that of an absolutely first principle (*non simpliciter primum*)⁶. The argument advanced by Anthony concentrates on the terms of which the principle is composed⁷. If these are not absolutely primary or ultimative, the principle itself is not absolutely primary either. With regard to the subject-term 'idem' in this version of the principle of non-contradiction, its predicate-term 'esse et non-esse', and its modal qualifier 'impossibile est', Anthony claims that each of them is *resolubilis*, i.e. analyzable into more primitive terms, and concludes that, consequently, the principle of non-contradiction is not absolutely primary⁸.

⁵ ANTONIUS ANDREAE, *In IV Metaph.*, q. 4 : « Vtrum istud principium : 'impossibile est idem simul esse et non esse' sit firmissimum et notissimum ».

⁶ *Ibid.*, q. 5 : « Vtrum hoc principium : 'impossibile est idem simul esse et non esse' simpliciter sit primum ». A short look at the *utilia* that precede Anthony's answer may prove helpful. After a distinction between affirmative and negative propositions, in connection with which the affirmative proposition is defined in terms of essential or accidental identity of subject and predicate, Anthony proposes an order of propositions that takes the relative distance from complete identity as its measure and the *praedicabilia* as its grades : « Secundum dictum sit istud quod in propositionibus istis, siue affirmatiue, siue negatiue, est ordo in primitate. Nam quedam est primo prima, et quedam secundo prima, quedam tertio prima, et sic per ordinem et secundum quod plus uel minus accedunt uel recedunt ad propositionem primo primam. Exemplum in affirmatiuis : 'homo est homo' est primo prima, 'homo est animal rationale' est secundo prima, 'homo est animal' est tertio prima, 'homo est risibilis' est in quarto gradu, 'homo est album' est in quinto gradu etc. Patet enim quod iste habent ordinem in primitate si consideretur identitas extremorum. Similiter est dare ordinem in negatiuis, nam prior est ista 'homo non est equus' quam ista 'homo non est hinibilis' ». The third and last remark concludes that a proposition can be prior to other propositions without being absolutely first. Such will be Anthony's strategy to do justice to Aristotle's discussion of the principle of non-contradiction as the first of all axioms : without being absolutely first, the principle is prior to other principles and axioms. We may conclude that Anthony prioritizes the principle of identity over the principle of non-contradiction, which will lead him to present a version of the principle of identity as the absolutely first principle (see n. 9).

⁷ On the acceptance of this argument depends the project of a further foundation of the principle of non-contradiction. Anthony shows his appreciation of the symbolical character of the argument by presenting it as principal objection con : « Et uidetur quod non, quia est resolubile in alia principia priora, scilicet in terminos proprios qui sunt principia incomplexa ; unumquodque enim resoluitur in ea ex quibus componitur ».

⁸ *Ibid.*, q. 5 : « Quantum ad secundum dico quod istud principium 'impossibile etc.' non est primum simpliciter, id est primo primum. Hoc probo sic. Quia illud principium cuius termini non sunt primo primi nec ultimo ultimi non est simpliciter primo primum. Sed hoc principium est huiusmodi. Ergo etc. Maior patet, quia ista duo sunt de ratione principii simpliciter primi, quod sit primo primum in essendo et ultimo ultimum in resoluendo. Minor probatur, et primo de termino subiecto quod est idem. Conceptus enim ille non est primo primus, cum sit resolubilis in duos alios conceptus, quorum unus est absolutus, alter respectiuus. Conceptus autem simul includens absolutum et respectiuum non est eque primus sicut conceptus inclusi in quos resoluitur. Iste autem conceptus idem ens est huiusmodi, quia li idem dicit conceptum respectiuum, li ens dicit conceptum absolutum uel saltem neutrum et indifferentem ad absolutum et respectiuum. Probatur etiam minor de termino predicato qui est esse et non esse. Ille autem conceptus est aggregatus ex affirmativo

In response to the question what, then, the absolutely first principle is, Anthony asserts that this is the identity statement 'ens est ens', an analytical proposition, composed of terms that are irreducible and first known⁹.

The new epistemic constellation that underlies the medieval transformation of metaphysics thus allows for (i) a further resolution of the first complex principle into incomplex principles, viz. its constitutive terms; and (ii.) the primacy of the first principle in the order of propositions to depend upon the primacy of its constitutive terms in the order of concepts. Accordingly, on the one hand, the primacy of the principle of non-contradiction in the order of propositions can be based on the primacy of being as first known in the order of concepts, as Thomas Aquinas did. On the other hand, the primacy of the principle of non-contradiction in the order of propositions can be questioned, as Antonius Andreae did, since propositions can be formed that do not contain, besides the irreducible concept of being, other further analyzable terms, as the principle of non-contradiction does.

The identification of the subject of first philosophy with the first object of the intellect — the legitimizing strategy that governs the transformation of metaphysics in the 13th and 14th century — quasi-automatically turns the foundation of the principle of non-contradiction on being as first known into a foundation on the subject of metaphysics. The relation of the principle of non-contradiction to metaphysics as the science on the subject of which this principle is based, is a key issue in the works of Franciscus de Mayronis, who dedicates a separate treatise to the topic: *De primo principio complexo*¹⁰. Without entering into detail, one may state that Francis bases the universal validity of the principle of non-contradiction on the utterly general character of the concept of being, which features as the subject of this principle¹¹.

et negatiuo. Ergo est resolubilis. Ergo non est primo primus nec ultimo ultimus. Preterea nulla propositio modalis est primo prima, quia est resolubilis in aliam de inesse. Sed istud principium 'impossibile est etc.' est propositio modalis. Ergo non est primo prima ».

⁹ *Ibid.*: « Si ergo queratur quid est primum complexum simpliciter et <corr. non add. ed.> primo primum, dico quod istud ens est ens. Istud enim principium habet terminus primo primos et ultimo ultimos et per consequens qui non sunt resolubiles in aliquos priores, immo omnis resolutio conceptuum stat ad conceptum entis ut ad simpliciter primum inter conceptus quiditationis ».

¹⁰ Cf. A. MAIERÛ, *Le De primo principio complexo de François de Meyronnes. Logique et théologie trinitaire au début du XIV^e siècle*, in D. PERLER, U. RUDOLPH edd., *Logik und Theologie. Das Organon im arabischen und im lateinischen Mittelalter*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2005, pp. 401-28; H. MÖHLE, *Formalitas und modus intrinsecus. Die Entwicklung der scotischen Metaphysik bei Franciscus de Mayronis*, Aschendorff, Münster 2007, pp. 42-73.

¹¹ Cf. FRANCISCUS DE MAYRONIS, *Conflatus*, Prol. q. 1, ed. Venetiis 1520, f. 2va I: « Tertia conclusio quod subiectum primi principii est ens. Hoc probatur quia communissimae complexionis est communissimum subiectum. Sed istud principium est communissimum et ens est subiectum communissimum. Ergo etc. ».

Moreover, Francis defends the discussion of this principle as a universal principle in metaphysics against objections on the part of both logic (which traditionally lays claim itself to this prerogative) and theology (the subject of which is sometimes deemed — in relation to its attributes, not to its omnipotence — to supersede the principle of non-contradiction).

The problematics of the principle of non-contradiction in Franciscus de Mayronis has been studied by various authors. By contrast, innovative simultaneous attempts to found the principle of non-contradiction, like those of the Franciscan Nicolaus Bonetus and the Carmelite John Baconthorpe, are remembered in silence. The discussion of their respective approaches, to which the present article gives but a first impulse, is justified by this innovative character. In their foundation of the principle of non-contradiction, Bonetus and Baconthorpe assign a subject to this principle that is more encompassing than the subject of metaphysics, identify this more encompassing subject with the first adequate object of the intellect, and thus effect a dissociation of the subject of first philosophy and the first object of the intellect. In short, their foundation of the principle of non-contradiction seems to challenge the very legitimizing strategy of the medieval transformation of metaphysics. In our conclusion, we will therefore address the stability of the epistemic constellation that underlies the transformation of metaphysics in the 13th and 14th century.

2. THE FOUNDATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-CONTRADICTION IN THE 'METAPHYSICS' OF NICOLAUS BONETUS

The conception of metaphysics of Nicolaus Bonetus has been rightly labelled by Riesco Terrero as « a systematical metaphysics two-and-a-half centuries before Suarez »¹². Indeed, we find here the doctrinal emancipation of metaphysics as a science from the order and selection of themes in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that was considered by Grabmann and others, even recently by Courtine, to be one of the main achievements of Suarez' *Disputationes Metaphysicae*. Moreover, this systematization corresponds, as we will see, with an emancipation of metaphysics from natural theology. The purging of all theological reminiscences from metaphysics, for which in the early-modern era the word 'ontology' has been coined, coincides finally with the inclusion of 'being of reason' (*ens rationis*) under the subject of metaphysics. In this connection we shall address a discussion in recent scholarly literature, to what extent the science of metaphysics is a supertranscendental science in the conception of Nicolaus Bonetus.

¹² Cf. J. RIESCO TERRERO, *Nicolas Bonet escribe una metafísica sistemática dos siglos y medio antes que Suarez*, « Salmanticensis », 9, 1962, pp. 3-21.

2.1 *The twofold signification of being*

A primary decision in the metaphysics of Nicolaus Bonetus is, without doubt, the distinction of a twofold signification of being, which we present here in connection with a series of dissociations it gives rise to. This series of dissociations builds the context from which we can articulate our proper theme, Bonetus' foundation of the principle of non-contradiction.

In the sixth chapter of the first book of his *Metaphysics*, Bonetus determines the subject of this science. Since being as being is the absolutely first quiddity, of which the intrinsic principles and the essential properties are investigated, Bonetus proclaims being as being the subject of metaphysics¹³. He immediately faces the problem that this interpretation of the subject of metaphysics does not seem to meet the second of the conditions he attached before, in the third chapter, to the subject of science as such, viz. univocity. To explain in how far being is univocally predicated of the ten categories, of real being and being of reason, and of divine and created being, and to what extent it is quidditatively predicated of its essential properties and ultimate differences, Bonetus introduces the following distinction. Being is, on the one hand, a name imposed to signify everything positive that is outside of nothing, whether this is real or merely a being of reason, whether it falls directly under the categories, or can be reduced to the categories, or falls outside the categories. On the other hand, being is a name imposed to signify one distinct aspect (*ratio*) and quiddity (*quiditas*) that is connumerable with other aspects or quiddities¹⁴. With regard to the first member of this distinction, Bonetus shows that being in this sense is not univocal and hence can neither be the subject of metaphysics nor of any other science whatsoever. With regard to the second member, however, Bonetus demonstrates that being in this sense is univocally predicated of the ten categories, of real being and being of reason, and of divine and created being; and it is not univocally predicated of its essential properties and the ultimate differences. Thus, the

¹³ BONETUS, *Metaph.*, I, c. 6, ed. cit., f. 7ra: « Postremo autem in tractatu ultimo huius primi libri metaphysice stabilire oportet subiectum huius metaphysice. Et quia quidditatis omnino primo prime primite predicationis per se principia intrinseca, si que sunt, et per se passionem inquirimus, ideo ens in quantum ens necessarium est stabilire pro subiecto huius artis, et entitas erit ratio formalis subiectiva ».

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: « Ens autem est nomen quod potest esse impositum ad significandum omne positivum quod est extra nihil, siue sit ens reale siue rationis, siue directe sit in predicamento siue per reductionem siue sit extra predicamentum. Alio modo loqui possumus de significato huius nominis ens prout est impositum ad significandum non omne positivum quod est extra nihil, sed ad significandum unam determinatam rationem seu quidditatem connumerabilem contra alias rationes et quidditates ».

way is paved for metaphysics as the science of being as being, as the absolutely first quiddity of which the inner principles and the essential properties are investigated in this science; in this second sense, being as being fulfils the condition of univocity attached to the subject of a science¹⁵.

This distinction of being as an encompassing container concept, which signifies everything positive in any mode whatsoever, but is, as a consequence, not predicated univocally of everything it signifies, and a contracted concept of being, which is univocally predicated and appropriate to serve as the subject of a science, might be interpreted as a strategy to harmonize certain conceptions of John Duns Scotus and Peter Aureoli¹⁶, and is more generally acknowledged at the beginning of the 14th century. Two aspects of Bonetus' distinction are notable. On the one hand, the influence of the theory of the formalities. Together with Franciscus de Mayronis, Bonetus contributes to the doctrinal codification of this originally Scotistic theory. Here, the theory of the formalities enters into the definition of the subject of metaphysics as of a aspect and quiddity that is formally distinct from and, as such, connumerable with all other quiddities. A second notable aspect is the inclusion of 'being of reason' under the subject of metaphysics. Bonetus is the only author in the 14th century who expressly declares that being as the subject of metaphysics is univocally predicated of real being and being of reason. At the end of this section, we will return to this aspect. But first we discuss the series of dissociations related to the distinction of the twofold signification of being, which is the proper context of Bonetus' foundation of the principle of non-contradiction.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, ed. cit., f. 11rb: « Ad propositum igitur redeamus unde uenit sermo. Prius concludamus quod quidditas entis, cum sit dictum quod est uniuoca decem predicamentis, enti etiam reali et enti rationis, prime intelligentie et omnibus aliis, licet non sit uniuoca suis passionibus et differentiis, patet ex his manifeste quod non repugnat sibi ratio subiecti scibilis propter secundam proprietatem negatiuam que erat quod subiectum non debebat esse equiuocum sed uniuocum ».

¹⁶ Still fundamental for the study of the concept of being in Scotus is: L. HONNEFELDER, *Ens in quantum ens. Der Begriff des Seienden als solchen als Gegenstand der Metaphysik nach der Lehre des Johannes Duns Scotus* (BGPhThMA NF 16), Aschendorff, Münster 1979. The point is that, in Scotus, the first known available for man in this life, the abstractive and univocal concept of being, is, as a distinct formality, the most imperfect concept, bare of the perfections of all other quiddities. Bonetus endorses this position by his use of the second signification of being. Against Scotus, Peter of Auriol criticizes the idea that the concept of being has one determinate ratio and quidditas in which everything is comprised, and points to the absolutely indeterminate character of the analogical concept of being instead, which, since it lacks a proper ratio itself, can coincide with all determinate rationes. See my *Implicit Knowledge – Being as First Known in Peter of Oriol*, « Recherches de Theologie et Philosophie Medievale », 69, 2002, pp. 33-65. Bonetus endorses this position by his use of the first signification of being. It may be noted, however, that Auriol assigns the discussion of the *significations* of being to the grammarian, the philosopher's proper task being the discussion of the *concept* of being.

2.2 *The first dissociation*

The first dissociation is the dissociation between the subject of metaphysics and the first adequate object of the intellect, which Bonetus presents in the seventh and final question of the second book of his *Metaphysics*. The phrasing of the question is typical of the legitimizing strategy of the medieval transformation of metaphysics: what is the object of the intellect, the subject of metaphysics, i.e. being as being, or something else? Bonetus directly specifies the question of the first object of the intellect in relation to the threefold order of cognition: adequacy, origin and perfection, which was formulated by Duns Scotus. For each order separately, a decision has to be made whether the first object in this order converges with the subject of metaphysics. For the sake of brevity, we confine ourselves to the first objects in the order of adequacy and in the order of the origin of distinct cognition.

Ordo adaequationis — Bonetus denies that the subject of metaphysics converges with the first object in the order of adequacy, and argues this denial on the basis of his second signification of being: being as one distinct aspect and quiddity that is connumerable with other aspects or quiddities. The point is that being, taken in this sense, prescinds from all other quiddities. As such, being is not able to account for their intelligibility; the other quiddities are intelligible by themselves¹⁷. In response to the objection that, if being does not count as first adequate object of the intellect, there is no first adequate object at all, since being is the most encompassing concept, Bonetus presents the first member of his twofold distinction of being as the first adequate object of the intellect — accordingly, being is the first adequate object of the intellect in the sense in which it is *not* the subject of metaphysics¹⁸.

¹⁷ BONETUS, *Metaph.*, II, c. 7, ed. cit., f. 17rb-va: « (...) subiectum huius metaphysice quod stabilitum est esse ens in quantum ens, non est primum obiectum et adequatum intellectus nostri finiti nec in mouendo nec in terminando actum eius. Et intelligi sic quod quidditas entis in quantum ens que connumerabilis est contra alias quidditates contrahentes ipsum et constitutas partialiter ex quidditate entis et ut prescindit ab omni alia quidditate et ab omni alio positio, non est obiectum adequatum intellectus finiti. Ratio huius dicti sit ista quia non solum quidditas entis mouet intellectum ad sui notitiam, immo plures quidditates alie ut prescindunt a quidditate entis, sicut omnes quidditates posteriores quidditate entis mouent intellectum et terminant notitiam sui, sicut substantia, corpus et alia posteriora quidditate entis. (...) Sic ergo quidditas entis non precise mouet intellectum et nec eius actum terminat, sed plures quidditates alie distincte ex natura rei a quidditate entis et mouent intellectum et eius actum terminant ».

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 17va: « Et si arguas: ergo nihil erit obiectum adequatum intellectus finiti, ex quo ens in quantum ens non ponitur esse illud, respondeo quod ens quod est subiectum huius metaphysice nec in mouendo nec in terminando est obiectum adequatum intellectus (...); accipiendo tamen ens in prima significatione, non in secunda, de qua fuit dictum libro primo huius metaphysice capite sexto prout est nomen impositum ad significandum omne positium quod est extra nihil, tunc est

Ordo originis — At first, Bonetus likewise denies that the first object in the order of the origin of distinct cognition converges with the subject of metaphysics. The Scotistic argument that advocates such convergence asserts that nothing can be known distinctly if being is not known distinctly and that being as an absolutely simple concept can only be distinctly known; hence, being is first known in the order of the origin of distinct cognition¹⁹. Bonetus rejects this argument as not universally valid, resorting to the objection that Scotus formulated himself, i.e. that being is not quidditatively included in its essential properties and the last differences, which are absolutely simple and irreducible and, therefore, can only be distinctly known too — without postulating any distinct knowledge of being²⁰. Accordingly, Bonetus concludes that there is not one first object in the order of the origin of distinct knowledge²¹.

But this conclusion proves to be provisional. In reply to the objection that the place of metaphysics as first science in the order of the origin of cognition requires a starting point in the order of the origin of distinct knowledge that converges with the subject of metaphysics, Bonetus acknowledges that 'our

obiectum adequatum intellectus et in mouendo et in terminando negative, sumendo sic quod nihil mouet intellectum nec eius actum terminat quod non sit ens formaliter, sed ens in tali significatione non est obiectum huius metaphysice, ut fuit dictum eodem loco ».

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 18ra : « Fertur a quodam quod est subiectum metaphysice, scilicet ens in quantum ens, quia ens et res prima impressione ab intellectu apprehenduntur, quod est simpliciter uerum et necessarium in ordine distincte concipiendi. Distincte enim cognoscere est distincte et explicite cognoscere. Cognitio igitur distincta includentis necessario presupponit notitiam distinctam omnium inclusorum, sicut notitia distincta hominis presupponit notitiam animalis et corporis et sic semper resoluendo usque ad ens, quod tantum est distincte cognitum, cum non habeat conceptum resolubilem, sed simpliciter simplicem. Ergo sequitur quod ens, cum sit illud ad quod stat ultimata resolutio cuiuslibet definitionis, quod est primum cognitum distincte et ipso non cognito nihil quod ipsum includat potest cognosci distincte ».

²⁰ *Ibid.* : « Manifestum est autem quod ista demonstratio est particularis, et tamen deberet esse uniuersalis. Particulariter ergo concludit, quia non demonstrat quod ens sit primum cognitum in ordine distincte concipiendi respectu omnium, sed respectu illorum in quibus includitur quiditatie, sed non respectu differentiarum et suarum passionum in quibus non includitur quiditatie, sicut fuit conclusum libro primo, sed habent conceptus simpliciter simplices et irresolubiles sicut ens et per consequens possunt distincte concipi absque hoc quod ens concipiatur distincte ».

²¹ *Ibid.*, f. 18ra-b : « Quid igitur primum erit in ordine distincte concipiendi ? Potest dici pro nunc quod non apparet quod intellectus habeat aliquod primum obiectum primitate originis, sicut nec in ordine confuse concipiendi, sic nec in ordine distincte concipiendi. Sed sunt plura obiecta eque prima tali primitate, sicut illa que sunt simpliciter simplicia. Sicut differentie simpliciter simplices et passionis entis in quantum ens, cum non habeant aliquem essentialem ordinem in mouendo intellectum nec in terminando in ordine distincte concipiendi, nec etiam in ordine confuse concipiendi, quia confuse concipi non possunt, sed tantum distincte, cum sint simpliciter simplicia et omnino irresolubilia ».

metaphysics' (*metaphysica nostra*) is prior in the order of origin to any other science, in so far as the subject of this metaphysics is the first distinctly known object²². Being may be accepted as this first distinctly known object, thus Bonetus specifies his position, insofar as each properly scientific object must be definable and therefore includes being quidditatively²³. Although being is not the first object in the order of the origin of distinct knowledge 'as such' (*simpliciter*), it is the first object in the order of the origin of distinct knowledge in a qualified sense, namely inasmuch as it is quidditatively included in everything that is scientifically knowable. This primacy of being in the order of the origin of distinct knowledge is sufficient to account for the primacy of 'our metaphysics' in the order of sciences.

The specification 'our metaphysics' is crucial in this regard. The objection that, traditionally, metaphysics is the last science in the *ordo docendi*, is met by Bonetus with the critique that the Aristotelian tradition has combined the purely metaphysical with theological matters, which are difficult to understand; on account of the latter, metaphysics is placed last in the order of sciences. But if one confines the science of metaphysics to purely metaphysical matters, as Bonetus does in his metaphysics: *metaphysica nostra*, this science is first in the order of the acquisition of knowledge, since its subject is the easiest of all, for it is firstly imprinted in the intellect²⁴. Accordingly, the dissociation between

²² *Ibid.*, f. 18rb: «Amplius autem habet dubitationem qualem ordinem habet nostra metaphysica ad alias scientias, dico in ordine et inueniendi et docendi. Palam autem quoniam manifestum est quod ordo habituum est secundum ordinem subiectorum. Subiectum autem metaphysice nostre prius ex primate nature et originis omni subiecto scibili cuiuscumque alterius scientie, cum per se sit inclusum in quolibet illorum. Ergo erit necessario primum cognitum in ordine distincte concipiendi, qui modus concipiendi distincte est tantum scientificus et non confuse, quia medium scientificum est definitio subiecti de qua habetur notitia distincta. Concludi igitur potest necessario quod nostra metaphysica prior est primate originis omni alia scientia et in ordine inueniendi et in ordine docendi. (...) nulla scientia potest inueniri nisi metaphysica prius inuenta, cum sit de primo obiecto cognito distincte ».

²³ *Ibid.*: « Si dicas: tu non dicis consequenter, quia in precedenti capitulo posuisti quod ens non est primum obiectum cognitum in ordine distincte concipiendi, sed sunt plura eque primo; nunc dicis oppositum, ut uidetur — respondeo tibi: Dixi quod ens non est primum obiectum cognitum distincte primate originis respectu omnium simpliciter. Et adhuc dico secundo: Dixi quod est primum cognitum distincte respectu omnium illorum in quibus includitur quiditatie. Ex hoc infertur tertium: quod est primo cognitum distincte respectu cuiuscumque obiecti scibilis, cum in ipso includatur quiditatie, ut prius fuit dictum, quia omne subiectum proprie scibile est definibile et omne definibile includit ens quiditatie ».

²⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 18rb-va: « Et si dicas: Aristoteles et alii philosophi multi ordinauerunt et nobis tradiderunt metaphysicam et eam ultimo docuerunt, respondeo tibi quod in metaphysica Aristotelis non sunt pure metaphysicalia tradita, sed sunt ibi multa theologica de substantiis separatis et de intelligentiis que sunt multum alta et difficillima; et ideo ultima est ratione illorum et in ordine inueniendi et in ordine docendi. Sed si non essent ibi nisi purum

the subject of metaphysics and the first adequate object of the intellect is related to another dissociation, namely of metaphysics and natural theology. The divine is dealt with in a separate science, natural theology, which is the last science. And metaphysics, free from the contamination of its object domain by divine matters which are hard to understand, can devote itself to the simple matters that everybody is acquainted with, viz. being as being and the transcendental, purely metaphysical predicates that are convertible with being. It is hard to find a slogan more apt to indicate the transformation that metaphysics experienced in the 13th and 14th centuries, than this characterization of the science that according to Aristotle deals with the *chalepōtata*, the most difficult objects, as *facillima ad addiscendum*.

We may conclude that Bonetus achieves a dissociation between the subject of metaphysics and the first adequate object of the intellect. This dissociation derives from the twofold signification of being, insofar as the first adequate object of the intellect corresponds to the first, and the subject of metaphysics to the second signification of being. This dissociation is accompanied — and that is a second important conclusion — by a qualified sense in which the identification of the subject of metaphysics with the first object of the intellect is nonetheless sustained, i.e. with regard to the first known in the order of the origin of distinct knowledge, exclusively in relation to scientifically knowable objects in a proper sense.

2.3 *The second dissociation*

The second dissociation that Bonetus connects with his distinction of a twofold signification of being, is that of the subject of metaphysics and the first adequate subject of the first complex principle. The theme is introduced in the following way. The subject of metaphysics having been determined, the investigation regards the essential properties that are demonstrated of this subject. Although the discussion of the simple properties that are convertible with being precedes the discussion of the disjunctive properties, one disjunctive property has to be discussed first of all, since it is required in order to demonstrate any property whatsoever of the subject, simple or disjunctive — i.e. the first complex principle. Bonetus discusses the first principle in the

metaphysicālia, sicut in nostra metaphysica in qua non probabuntur nisi pure metaphysicālia predicata cum ente in quantum ens conuertibilia, ipsa esset prima in ordine inueniendi et in ordine docendi, sicut est nostra quam primo inueni, quia eius subiectum primo ante alia subiecta scibilia distincte cognoui. Et ideo primo ante omnes alias scientias istam metaphysicam trado tibi, ut eam primo audias et eam primo studeas, quia inter alias ista est facillima ad addiscendum, cum subiectum eius quod est ens in quantum ens prima impressione imprimatur in intellectu ».

formulation preferred by Franciscus de Mayronis, i.e. as a combination of the principle of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle: « de quolibet affirmatio et negatio et de nullo simul »²⁵.

The search for a first adequate subject of this first complex principle is closely related to the original context of the idea of an order of adequacy in the *Posterior Analytics*: not the isosceles, but the triangle as such is the first adequate subject of the property to have angles equal to two right angles. Bonetus adds that this adequate subject is the sufficient cause of a property²⁶. His discussion of the first adequate subject of the first complex principle opens with five negative statements:

(i) The first adequate subject of the first principle is not something singular, for the first principle is verified in a plurality of things²⁷.

(ii) The subject is not one of the ten categories, since it pervades all categories²⁸.

(iii) It is not real being, since it is equally holds in the realm of beings of reason, as the example of logic makes clear²⁹.

²⁵ *Metaph.*, IV, c. 1, ed. cit., f. 24ra: « Entis in quantum ens per se passiones querimus. Palam autem quod passiones entis in quantum ens quedam sunt simplices et cum ente conuertibiles, quedam uero sicut fertur sunt disiuncte. De simplicibus autem debet prior esse sermo. Est autem inter ceteras entis passiones disiunctas una de qua omnino erit prior sermo. Cuius ratio sit ista: quia illa passio disiuncta est omnino necessaria ad concludendum omnem aliam passionem de subiecto, siue simplicem, siue disiunctam. Ordo igitur erit preposterus sic necessario commutatus. Passio autem illa est primum principium complexum, scilicet de quolibet affirmatio et negatio et de nullo simul ».

²⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 24rb: « Subiectum autem primum uoco subiectum cui passio inest conuertibiliter et uniuersaliter et primo, sicut Aristoteles accipit primum primo Posteriorum, capitulo de uniuersali, quod inest sic primo illi subiecto et per rationem illius inest cuicumque inest. Quod etiam intelligitur sic quod primum subiectum alicuius sit illud, quo posito omni alio circumscripto per possibile uel impossibile talis passio ponitur, et quo non posito omni alio posito talis passio non ponitur; sicut homo est primum subiectum risibilitatis: quia posito homine omni alio circumscripto ponitur risibilitas, et homine circumscripto omni alio posito risibilitas non ponitur ».

²⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 24ra: « Palam autem quod primum subiectum primi principii primitate adaequationis non est singulare alicuius determinati generis. Ratio huius dicti est: quia primum principium non uni singulari, sed pluribus conuenit. Passio autem non reperitur sine suo subiecto adequato, sicut nec habere tres sine triangulo ».

²⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 24ra-b: « Secundum dictum quod eius primum subiectum non est decem generum aliquod unum, quia eadem ratione reperitur in omni genere ».

²⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 24rb: « Tertium dictum est quod non est ens reale eius primum subiectum, quia reperitur in ente rationis ut in logica. Ita enim potest formari principium de ente rationis sicut de ente reali, ut species, que est secunda intentio, aut est idem cum genere, quod est secunda intentio, aut non est idem cum eo — altera pars semper erit necessario uera ».

(iv) The subject, although common to real being and being of reason, is not finite and limited being, for the first principle is equally verified in the first intelligence³⁰.

(v) Finally, the first adequate subject of the first complex principle is not the subject of metaphysics. The argument is that the first principle is predicated of the essential properties of being as being and of the differences that contract being precisely insofar as they prescind from the quiddity of being as being³¹.

This last statement is by far the most important : the subject of metaphysics, being as being, is not the first adequate subject of the first complex principle. The argument that Bonetus advances in support of this claim combines two elements. On the one hand, it resumes the Scotistic objection that being in the second sense, i.e. as a quiddity that is connumerable with other quiddities, is not quidditatively predicated of its essential properties and the ultimate differences. On the other hand, the argument makes use of the earlier finding that each quiddity that is as such formally distinct from the quiddity of being as being, is intelligible in virtue of itself. In fact, this last element is by itself sufficient to make the point. In the continuation of his argument, Bonetus unequivocally states that the first principle inheres in everything by virtue of things themselves and not by virtue of some aspect that is common to many or all things. The first principle is verified in everything positive precisely insofar as it prescind from all other positives, and even in negations and privations, which likewise possess their proper intelligibility³². Bonetus concludes that there is not one first adequate subject of the first principle,

³⁰ *Ibid.* : « Quantum dictum quod ens finitum et limitatum prout est commune enti reali et enti rationis non est subiectum primum primi principii primitate adequationis, quia reperitur primum principium in prima intelligentia sicut et in ente limitato. Prima intelligentia namque uel est infinita in uigore uel non est infinita in uigore — necessario tunc altera pars erit uera ».

³¹ *Ibid.* : « Quantum dictum quod subiectum metaphysice, quod est ens in quantum ens, non est primum principium adequatum primi principii, quia primum principium dicitur de passionibus entis in quantum ens et de eius differentiis contrahentibus ipsum ut prescindunt a quidditate entis in quantum ens. Dato enim per impossibile quod passionibus entis in quantum ens per se possent existere perseitate tertii modi, adhuc fundarent primum principium sicut nunc ; ergo non per rationem entis inest eis, quia illa sublata adhuc fundant. Ergo subiectum huius metaphysice non est subiectum primi principii ».

³² *Ibid.* : « Breuiter igitur est dicendum et omnino tenendum quod primum principium cuilibet inest per rationem propriam et non per rationem aliquam communem pluribus uel omnibus quibus inest. Vnde quidditas entis in quantum ens per rationem propriam fundat primum principium ; similiter entis passionibus, et similiter differentie eius et ultimo ultime que sunt primo diuerse, quia de omni positiuo ut prescindit ab omni alio positiuo necessario tamen est affirmatio uel negatio, et non ambe sub respectu eiusdem predicati. Nec non etiam priuationes et negationes : etiam fundant primum principium, ut tenebra uel est alba uel non alba, et cecitas est oculus uel non oculus, et sic de aliis ».

rather everything positive by virtue of its own aspect is the foundation of (*fundat*) the first principle, whether it be substance or accident, real being or being of reason, finite or infinite³³.

This negative conclusion reminds us of the conclusions that Bonetus drew with regard to the first object of the intellect in the various orders of cognition: the suggestion of a universal essential ordering was rejected each time with an appeal to the intrinsic intelligibility of the formalities. However, just as these negative conclusions admitted of a more positive rendering, so the question of the adequate subject of the first principle receives a revised answer too. The negative conclusion precluded that being in the second sense, in which it is the subject of metaphysics, be at the same time the first adequate subject of the first complex principle. What remains is that being in the first sense, which corresponds to the first adequate object of the intellect, i.e. everything positive that is outside of nothing, is the first and adequate subject of the first principle³⁴.

2.4 *The third dissociation*

The first and second dissociations both prove to derive from Bonetus' distinction of a twofold signification of being, i.e. being as everything positive that is outside of nothing, on the one hand, and being as one formally distinct quiddity that is connumerable with other quiddities, on the other. The distinction between these two significations of being recurs in the dissociation between the subject of metaphysics and the first adequate object of the intellect and in the dissociation between the subject of metaphysics and the first adequate subject of the first complex principle, since the first adequate object of the intellect and the first adequate subject of the first complex principle are each related to the first signification of being, whereas the subject of metaphysics corresponds to the second signification of being. The third and final dissociation follows the same pattern. It is the dissociation of the subject of metaphysics and the adequate subject of the transcendental predicates.

³³ *Ibid.*: « Ex hoc concluditur quod non est dare primum subiectum primi principii primitate adequationis: nec subiectum huius metaphysice, nec aliquid aliud, sed quodlibet positium fundat ipsum per rationem propriam, ut dictum est, siue sit substantia, siue accidens, ens reale siue ens rationis, ens finitum uel infinitum ».

³⁴ *Ibid.*: « (...) ens sumptum pro omni positio bene est subiectum primum et adequatum primi principii, sicut nos superius diximus. Vt sic non est subiectum metaphysice, cum non dicat unam rationem, sed omnes, ut libro primo huius metaphysice fuit dictum. Ens autem sumptum prout est impositum ad significandum unam quiditatem determinatam connumerabilem contra alias, quod est subiectum in hac metaphysica, non est subiectum primum adequatum, quia multe alie quidditates ut prescindunt ab ente fundant ipsum ».

The discussion of this third dissociation presupposes a distinction in the employ of the reduplication, inclusive and exclusive, which Bonetus makes in his answer to a second objection in the discussion of the first adequate subject of the first principle. Against the conclusion that the first principle inheres in everything by virtue of things themselves, the second objection maintains that a property only inheres in a plurality of subjects on account of some common aspect. This common aspect is the first adequate subject, which identifies the precise cause of the inherence of the predicate and is expressed in the form of a reduplication: it belongs to the triangle *as triangle* to have angles equal to two right angles. It is the sufficient cause of the property and convertible with it³⁵. As Bonetus states in his reply to this objection, there is an alternative understanding of the reduplication of the precise cause, not inclusively, as Aristotle had it, but exclusively. In the latter sense, neither is the predicate convertible with the subject, nor is any common aspect needed to account for the inherence of the predicate, but the property inheres in everything *per propriam rationem*³⁶.

From the distinction between inclusive and exclusive reduplication of the precise cause, Bonetus deduces the third dissociation. Insofar as the reduplication is taken inclusively, being as being is not the first subject of the transcendental predicates; hence the transcendental predicates are not convertible with being as being. In his discussion of the transcendental

³⁵ *Ibid.* : « Tum secundo : quia quod inest pluribus cum reduplicatione necessario inest eis per aliquam rationem eius communem. Hoc probatur : quia reduplicatio reddit causam precisam inherentie predicati, et per consequens cuicumque inest tale predicatum inest sibi talis causa precisa. Exemplum : quia triangulus in quantum triangulus habet tres ; necessario cuicumque inest habere tres, illi inest triangulus. Exemplum aliud : si homo in quantum homo esset hic homo ut Sortes, omne quod esset homo esset hic homo quod est Sortes ».

³⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 24va : « Sed reduplicatiue dupliciter, ut reduplicetur causa precisa inherentie predicati ad subiectum, scilicet causa precisa inclusiue, scilicet includendo omnes causas posibles inherentie illius predicati ad subiectum. Et in isto sensu accipitur reduplicatio ab Aristotele primo Posteriorum, capitulo de uniuersali. Et ponitur exemplum de habere tres respectu trianguli : ut cum dicitur 'triangulus in quantum triangulus habet tres', ly 'in quantum' reduplicat ibi causam precisam inclusiue. Et ubicumque est talis reduplicatio, ibi est conuertibilitas predicati et subiecti. Et si predicatum est commune pluribus, oportet necessario quod subiectum sit eis commune et quod passio insit eis per rationem communem. Et tunc in tali reduplicatione secundus modus infert primum. Potest autem fieri reduplicatio cause precise non inclusiue sed exclusiue, sic quod talis causa precise sumpta omni alia circumscripta per possibile uel impossibile esset causa precisa sufficiens inherentie predicati ad subiectum. Et in tali reduplicatione non oportet predicatum esse conuertibile cum subiecto, nec cuicumque inest talis passio quod per rationem communem insit, sed magis inheret cuilibet per rationem propriam, sicut animalitas in quantum animalitas est una et rationalitas in quantum rationalitas est similiter una. Hic autem ly in quantum non reduplicat causam precisam inclusiue, sed tantum exclusiue ».

predicates in the fifth book of his *Metaphysics*, Bonetus concludes that the first adequate subject of the transcendental properties is not the subject of metaphysics, but that everything positive that is outside of nothing is the foundation of its proper unity, truth and goodness³⁷. This dissociation is rephrased as a distinction between two senses of transcendental. 'Absolutely transcendental' (*simpliciter transcendens*), the one, true, and good are not convertible with the subject of metaphysics, since they are predicated of the other quiddities precisely insofar as they prescind from being; their first subject is being in the first sense, i.e. everything positive that is outside of nothing. 'Transcendental in a certain regard' (*aliquaqualiter transcendens*), i.e. provided with a contracting difference, these predicates are the exclusive essential properties of the quiddity of being as being, i.e. being in the second sense, and convertible with it³⁸. We may note that the *Tractatus de transcendentibus* of Franciscus de Mayronis equally evokes a gradation of transcendentality, but with different import³⁹. Although the phrase

³⁷ We take unity as an example : « Unitas transcendens non est per se conuertibilis cum ente in quantum ens. Ens enim in quantum ens non est primum subiectum unitatis transcendentis prout li in quantum accipitur inclusive, quoniam illud quod est sic subiectum primum inclusive ipso posito omni alio circumscripto per possibile uel impossibile talis passio ponitur, et ipso circumscripto omni alio posito talis passio non ponitur. Ens autem in quantum ens quod est subiectum huius metaphysice, licet ipso posito ponatur unitas, ipso tamen non posito immo circumscripto per impossibile ipsa unitas non tollitur, nam bonitas ut prescindit ab ente ipsa est una et fundat propriam rationem. Et similiter differentie contrahentes ens et multa alia fundant etiam unitatem. Et breuiter omne positium quod est extra nihil est in se indiuisum et fundamentum unitatis. (...) Et si ulterius queras quid est subiectum primum unitatis in communi, respondeo : nullum primum subiectum unitatis transcendentis inuenio, sed quodlibet fundat unitatem in communi per rationem propriam in quantum tale exclusive, sicut fuit dictum in quarto de primo principio complexo. Est tamen uerum quod unitas simpliciter transcendens est per se passio cuiuslibet positiui extra nihil positi et eiusdem rationis in quolibet, nec oportet querere primum subiectum amplius unitatis in communi, quia nullum poterit reperiri. (...) Et si adhuc queras si unitas simpliciter transcendens possit dici passio conuertibilis cum ente, respondeo tibi quod sic, accipiendo pro significato entis omne positium quod est extra nihil » (*Metaph.*, V, c. 1, ed. cit., ff. 27b-28a).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, ed. cit., f. 27a : « Amplius autem, dimissa unitate transcendentis cum non conuertatur cum ente quod est subiectum huius metaphysice, de unitate contracte habente conceptum resolubilem in conceptum unitatis transcendentis et aliquam differentiam que est conuertibilis cum subiecto huius metaphysice, quia et ipso posito ponitur et ipso circumscripto tollitur et per se inest enti in quantum ens in secundo modo, est dicendum. Vnitas ergo sic contracta et cum ente conuertibilis potest unitas primi predicati univoci communissimi appellari. Et ideo si placet dicitur aliquaqualiter transcendens sicut et eius subiectum, licet non simpliciter transcendens ».

³⁹ FRANCISCUS DE MAYRONIS, *Tractatus de transcendentibus*, art. 3, ed. H. MÖHLE, p. 117 : « Circa quem articulum est intelligendum quod quattuor sunt gradus transcendentium. Quorum primus est eorum quae sunt minus communia quam singula praedicamenta, sicut scientia et sapientia ponuntur perfectiones transcendentes cum sint in deo formaliter. Et tamen habent minorem communitatem quam genus qualitatis quia pauciora individua. Secundus gradus est eorum quae sunt adaequata uni praedicamento soli, sicut ratio substantiae est transcendens cum sit in deo

'simpliciter transcendens' occurs in his treatise on formalities⁴⁰, the expression 'aliquaqualiter transcendens' seems to be proper to Nicolaus Bonetus.

Finally, the third dissociation and the correlated distinction between two senses of transcendentalism is important for the systematic ordering of the propositions of metaphysics as a science in the fifth book of Bonetus' *Metaphysics*. The first proposition runs as follows: «being is one, or being is b». The predicate 'b' is meant here to prevent the equivocation with unity as a *passio simpliciter transcendens*⁴¹. Likewise, the second proposition is: «being

formaliter. Et tamen ipsa videtur adaequata primo praedicamento. Tertius gradus est eorum quae sunt communia pluribus praedicamentis et non omnibus, sicut ratio absoluti est communis duobus vel tribus praedicamentis vel ratio respectivi septem aut octo. Et tamen neutra istarum convenit omnibus praedicamentis. Quartus gradus est eorum quae sunt communia omnibus praedicamentis, sicut ens et illa quae convertuntur cum ente quia illa inveniuntur in omni praedicamento, ut patet inductive ».

⁴⁰ FRANCISCUS DE MAYRONIS, *Tractatus de formalitatibus*, ed. Venetiis 1520, f. 267va: « (Ad predicationem identice identicam puta duo sunt necessaria. Et primum est quod predicatum et subiectum sunt idem essentialiter... Secundum est quod utrumque extremorum, scilicet subiectum et predicatum uel alterum eorum, sit infinitum uel formaliter sint in diuinis uel permissiue sicut in transcendentibus simpliciter.) Dico autem simpliciter quia est gradus in transcendentibus, nam quedam sunt magis et quedam minus transcendentia. Illud autem est transcendens simpliciter quod reperitur in omnibus uel in omni ente tam creato quam increato, sicut sunt ista, scilicet ens, uerum et bonum ». Interestingly enough, this passage is verbally identical with a passage in the treatise *De distinctione predicamentorum* of Peter Thomae (ed. E. P. BOS, in M. KARDAUN, J. SPRUYT eds., *The Winged Chariot. Collected Essays in Honour of L.M. de Rijk*, Brill, Leiden-Boston-Köln 2000, p. 301): « Ad predicationem ydempticam duo necessario requiruntur: Primum est quod predicatum et subiectum sint idem essentialiter (...). Secundum est quod utrumque extremorum sit infinitum formaliter, sicut in diuinis, vel permissive sicut in transcendentibus simpliciter. (...) Illud autem est transcendens simpliciter quod reperitur in omni ente tam creato quam increato, sicut 'ens', 'unum', 'bonum' ». I owe this reference to the courtesy of Jan A. Aertsen.

⁴¹ BONETUS, *Metaphys.*, V, c. 1, ed. cit., ff. 27b-28a: « Et si dicas quod ens in quantum ens fundat propriam unitatem et indiuisiorem et ipso posito talis unitas ponitur et ipso circumscripto omnia alio posito talis unitas tollitur, respondeo tibi quod hoc concesso nihil habes contra predicta, quia talis unitas entis in quantum ens est sibi propria, non simpliciter transcendens, nec primo contrahibilis ad quamlibet unitatem nec per se inclusa. Et primo modo de qualibet unitate predicabilis, immo talis unitas contracta per se includens unitatem in communi, si talis unitas entis debeat unitas appellari, quod dico pro tanto quia quidditati contrahibili et quidditati constitute ex contrahibili et contrahente non debet idem (ideo ed.) nomen imponi. Et si imponatur tale nomen est equiuocum magis quam uniuocum ut animalitati et humanitati non debet idem nomen imponi. Et si prima uocatur unitas, secunda non. (...) Vnitas ergo sic contracta et cum ente conuertibilis potest unitas primi predicati univoci communissimi appellari. Et ideo si placet dicitur aliquaqualiter transcendens sicut et eius subiectum, licet non simpliciter transcendens. Vel si placet uocetur b, quia eius proprium nomen ignoro. Sit ergo una et prima propositio huius metaphysice: "ens est unum, uel ens est b". Hec propositio est immediata, nec potest a priori subiecto et predicato probari cum subiecto huius propositionis nihil sit prius cum sit ens omnino irresolubile et habeat conceptum simpliciter simplicem. Ergo nec propositio "ens est unum et indiuisum" per syllogismum demonstratiuum concludi potest, sed est propositio immediata ».

is true, or being is c »⁴², the third: « being is good, or being is d »⁴³. One could interpret Bonetus' first proposition in continuity with the conception of Antonius Andreae, who ranked the proposition « being is being », his alternative to the principle of non-contradiction, as the first metaphysical proposition.

2.5 *The metaphysics of Bonetus, a supertranscendental science ?*

We return to the inclusion of 'being of reason' under the subject of metaphysics, to which we drew attention at the end of section 2.1. Bonetus maintains that being in the second sense, a distinct quiddity that is connumerable with other quiddities, is univocally predicated of real being and being of reason⁴⁴. Since being in this sense is the subject of metaphysics, the subject of metaphysics is univocally predicated of real being and being of reason. This conception is quite unique and is presented around 1500 by Peter Tartaretus in his *Quaestio de subiecto metaphysicae* as a deviation from the *via Scoti*⁴⁵.

The importance of this position, scholars frequently maintain, lies in its connection with the later notion of a 'supertranscendental' concept. Theo

⁴² *Ibid.*, c. 2, f. 30b: « Ex his omnibus manifeste concluditur quod ueritas simpliciter transcendens non est passio conuertibilis cum subiecto huius metaphysice, cum per se insit aliis quiditatibus ut prescindunt ab ente. Veritas tamen contracta per aliquam differentiam potest esse passio conuertibilis cum ente, sicut fuit dictum superius de unitate. Nam sicut entitas est quedam propria quiditas distincta ab aliis, ita habet propriam conformitatem et intelligibilitatem nature, et per consequens ueritatem. Et talis ueritas sic contracta sic est passio entis in quantum ens quod nullius alterius quiditatis est passio, quia sic habet propriam ueritatem. Et talis ueritas est passio conuertibilis cum ente, et talem passionem inquirimus. Sit igitur secunda propositio huius metaphysice talis: "ens est uerum, uel ens est c". Haec propositio est immediata sicut prima, que fuit "ens est unum", nec potest demonstrari a priori, cum nihil sit prius subiecto huius propositionis, cum habeat conceptum simpliciter simplicem ».

⁴³ *Ibid.*, c. 3, f. 31a: « Entis in quantum ens quod est subiectum huius metaphysice bonitas per se passio eius ponitur, sed non passio conuertibilis, cum non habeat ens in quantum ens pro primo subiecto adequato. Hoc probatur quia alie quiditates ab ente ut substantia etc. et differentie contrahentes ens ut prescindunt ab ente fundant bonitatem, et si sit aliqua bonitas que habeat ens in quantum ens pro subiecto adequato et insit sibi in quantum ens, hec non erit bonitas in communi, conformiter dicendo sicut dictum est de unitate et ueritate transcendente simpliciter et contracta, sic de bonitate. Talem igitur bonitatem contractam per se passionem entis in quantum ens inquirimus. Sit ergo tertio propositio huius metaphysice ista: "Ens est bonum, uel ens est d". Hec propositio est immediata nec est demonstrabilis a priori, sicut nec unum et uerum ».

⁴⁴ Cf. *Metaph.*, I, c. 6, ed. cit., f. 8vb: « Ens autem in quantum ens est quiditas uniuoca enti reali et entis rationis ».

⁴⁵ Cf. PETRUS TARTARETUS, *Quaestio de subiecto metaphysicae*, Venetiis 1614, f. 390 C): « (...) sciendum est, dum quaerimus an ens sit subiectum, non quaerimus de ente communi enti reali et enti rationis, quia tale in via Scoti, ut communiter tenetur (quicquid dicat Nicolaus Bonetus) est aequiuocum ».

Kobusch has shown that, in the Scotistic school tradition, two radically divergent interpretations of the signification of being present themselves: being as a transcendental or supertranscendental concept. Rooted in the ambivalent character of the Scotistic conception of metaphysics itself, these controversial interpretations have determined modern historical scholarship on Scotus. Kobusch fixes the supertranscendental conceptually as the univocation with regard to real being and being of reason, and shows that the signification of being that Nicolaus Bonetus identifies with the subject of metaphysics is univocally predicated of real being and being of reason. As a consequence, the emergence of the supertranscendental is part of the direct *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the works of Duns Scotus⁴⁶.

This presentation of Bonetus as the first defender of the supertranscendental character of the concept of being has been criticized by Hannes Möhle. He focusses his critique on a passage that Kobusch adduces as evidence for the claim that the supertranscendental is the subject of metaphysics. In this passage Bonetus argues that, since the first principle is univocally verified in the realms of real being and being of reason, this univocation equally holds for the subject of this principle⁴⁷. Möhle has an easy task pointing out that Bonetus, as we saw in the preceding section, expressly denies that the subject of the first complex principle is identical with the subject of metaphysics. Möhle concludes that there is not sufficient evidence to proclaim the supertranscendental the subject of metaphysics in Nicolaus Bonetus⁴⁸.

Möhle certainly has a point: the argument that Kobusch presents in favor of his position is an unfortunate choice. Bonetus remarks in the continuation of this passage that the assumption that the subject of metaphysics is identical with the subject of the first complex principle will be negated in the chapter on the first adequate subject of the first complex principle in the fourth book of his

⁴⁶ T. KOBUSCH, *Das Seiende als transzendentaler oder supertranszendentaler Begriff. Deutungen der Univocität des Begriffs bei Scotus und den Scotisten*, in L. HONNEFELDER ET AL. eds., *John Duns Scotus. Metaphysics and Ethics*, Brill, Leiden 1996, pp. 345-366.

⁴⁷ BONETUS, *Metaph.* I, c. 6, ed. cit., f. 8vb: « Hoc probatur quia primum principium ita uerificatur sub disiunctione de ente rationis sicut de ente reali; ergo subiectum primi principii quod est ens in quantum ens, uniformiter reperitur in ente reali et rationis, quia non reperitur propria passio sine suo subiecto. Esse autem uel non esse est per se passio disiuncta entis in quantum ens ».

⁴⁸ Cf. MÖHLE, *Formalitas und modus intrinsecus* cit., pp. 252-254. The argument in Möhle is more complex: he also refers to the passage in *Metaph.*, I, c. 6, in which Bonetus denies that the science of metaphysics discusses the entia rationis under their proper aspect. But this argument is equally insufficient to compromise Kobusch's conclusion: metaphysics has at the same time a quiditas uniuoca enti reali et entis rationis as its subject and leaves the investigation of the propriae passionis of ens rationis to logic.

*Metaphysics*⁴⁹. Immediately, however, Bonetus advances an alternative argument⁵⁰. Kobusch' conclusion, therefore, is not compromised: in the conception of Nicolaus Bonetus, being as the subject of metaphysics is univocally predicated of real being and being of reason. The question is precisely whether, as a consequence, metaphysics has become a supertranscendental science.

Any reply to this question has to take into account that the concept of being that serves as the subject of metaphysics and that is univocally predicated of real being and being of reason, is escorted by a more encompassing signification of being, viz. everything positive that is outside of nothing. With reference to this more encompassing signification of being, Isabelle Mandrella, who expressly acknowledges that according to Bonetus being as being, the subject of metaphysics, is univocally predicated of real being and being of reason, criticizes Kobusch' conceptual fixation of the supertranscendental in exactly this sense. The more encompassing signification of being unites all the properties of the supertranscendental in itself, but since it is not univocally predicated of real being and being of reason, it is rejected as the subject of metaphysics⁵¹.

Whereas Mandrella turns the distinction of a twofold signification of being into an argument against the interpretation of the metaphysics of Bonetus as a supertranscendental science, we propose two alternative conclusions. (i) In this rejection of the interpretation of the metaphysics of Bonetus as a supertranscendental science, the author appeals to a signification of being that satisfies the supertranscendental's aspirations to be the most

⁴⁹ *Metaph.*, I, c. 6, ed. cit., f. 8vb: « Vtrum autem ista passio disiuncta esse uel non esse habeat pro subiecto adequato quiditatem entis in quantum ens, ut prescindit ab omni alia quiditate et ab omni posteriori et ab omni positiuo, an non, dubium est. Sed huiusmodi dubium dissoluere non est presentis speculationis, sed differatur usque ad tractatum de passionibus entis disiunctis, quarto scilicet libro, capite primo. Forsitan enim ibi dicetur quod subiectum adequatum primi principii et aliarum passionum disiunctarum non est quiditas entis in quantum ens, ut prescindit ab omni posteriori. Quia sicut ibi dicetur passiones entis et alie passiones posteriores entis fundant propriam unitatem et bonitatem et ueritatem, sic fundant hanc passionem disiunctam: affirmatio uel negatio in esse uel non esse. Ergo ista ratio de uniucatione primi principii non concludit sufficienter uniucatione primi subiecti ».

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: « Probatur igitur aliter ens esse uniucum ent reali et enti rationis, scilicet per illas tres rationes per quas fuit probatum quod ens est uniucum decem predicamentis: per illam de conceptu certo et dubio, per uiam contradictionis et per uiam cognitionis. Quia quodlibet obiectum reale extra potest causare aliquem conceptum de ente rationis, ergo oportet quod contineat aliquid per se inclusum in ente rationis uel uirtualiter — quod est falsum — uel formaliter, quod est propositum ».

⁵¹ Cf. I. MANDRELLA, *Metaphysik als Supertranszendentalwissenschaft? Zum Scotistischen Metaphysik-Entwurf des Nicolaus Bonetus*, « Recherches de Theologie et Philosophie Medievale », 75, 2008, pp. 161-193; EAD., *La controverse sur l'univocation de l'étant et le surtranscendental. La métaphysique de Nicolas Bonet*, « Quaestio », 8, 2008, pp. 159-176.

encompassive concept, which she plays off against the supertranscendental's aspirations to be univocally predicated of real being and being of reason. We may therefore conclude that, although the interpretation of the metaphysics of Bonetus as a supertranscendental science remains a question of terminology, the various rival interpretations of the supertranscendental are all verified in Nicolaus Bonetus' conception of metaphysics. (ii) Following a constant and regular pattern, Bonetus identifies the first adequate object of the intellect, the first adequate subject of the first complex principle, and the subject of the *passiones simpliciter transcendentis* with a signification of being that surpasses the subject of metaphysics in generality. Apparently, the most universal science of metaphysics requires an even more encompassing space within which its subject is distinguished. The broader bearing of this conclusion is verified by the case of John Baconthorpe.

3. THE FOUNDATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-CONTRADICTION IN THE *SENTENCES* COMMENTARY OF JOHN BACENTHORPE

In the discussion of the first object of the intellect in his commentary on the first book of the *Sentences*, distinction three, Baconthorpe distinguishes on the levels of both incomplex and complex natural cognition a first object in the orders of adequacy, origin and perfection⁵². From the outset, the innovative character of this transposition is to be emphasized: to grant a first object to complex cognition that is as such different from the first object of incomplex cognition, and to specify this first object also on the level of complex natural cognition according to the orders of adequacy, origin and perfection. We will discuss mainly the first adequate object on the levels of incomplex and complex natural cognition respectively.

3.1 *The first adequate object in incomplex natural cognition*

The discussion of the first adequate object of the intellect in incomplex natural cognition presents various traditional candidates, ordered along a scale of increasing generality. The last but one candidate is the concept of

⁵² JOHN BACENTHORPE, *In I Sent.*, d. 3, q. 1, art. 1, Cremonae 1618, p. 83a: « Hic quinque: Primo quodnam sit primum obiectum adaequatum intellectus nostri in cognitione naturali simplici. Secundo quodnam sit primum obiectum primitate generationis, et hoc praecise stando intra cognitionem rerum materialium. Tertio quodnam sit primum obiectum primitate generationis, et hoc intra totum ambitum entis. Quarto quodnam sit primum obiectum primitate perfectionis. Quinto quodnam sit primum obiectum adaequationis, generationis, perfectionis in cognitione naturali complexa ».

being. Baconthorpe presents the distinction of a twofold commonness, virtual and essential, as Scotus' solution to the problem that being is not quidditatively predicated of the essential properties and differences⁵³, and criticizes this solution with the argument that this distinction presupposes an even more abstract concept of being that actually prescinds from these different modes of commonness or priority: *ens ut praescindens*⁵⁴. This concept of being already fulfills the condition of absolute generality attached to the first adequate object. Nevertheless, Baconthorpe introduces a fifth position: 'something' that is more common and presents itself prior to the intellect than transcendental being⁵⁵.

Important for the understanding of this fifth position is the recognition that the transcendental being it surpasses, already qualifies as common to both real being and being of reason. What can be conceived to transcend in generality even the concept of being that is common to real being and being of reason? Baconthorpe presents an argument that is highly contestable at

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 84a-b : « Ideo est alia opinio quae dicit quod ens est primum obiectum. Quia nulla potentia cognoscit obiectum sub universaliori ratione quam sit eius ratio obiectiva. Sed intellectus cognoscit ens inquantum ens, quae est ratio universalior quam sit ratio veri aut ratio quidditatis materialis et etiam quam quaecumque alia. Ergo solum ens est obiectum intellectus. (...) Hic tamen dicit Scotus d. 3 q. 3 art. 2 quod, licet primum obiectum sit ipsum ens, tamen non est primum obiectum adaequatum secundum absolutam suam communitatem essentialem. Quod probat quia obiectum commune communitate essentiali primum et adaequatum debet praedicari in quid de omnibus contentis. Hoc non potest dici de ente, ut probat ibidem et habetur d. 25 art. 1 et hoc maxime respectu ultimarum differentiarum et passionum; igitur <etc.>. Superius etiam in eodem loco ante responsionem ad quaestionem dicit quod nec etiam est primum obiectum adaequatum propter communitatem virtualem quia tunc Deus vel substantia esset primum obiectum. Dicit ergo quod ens est primum obiectum quia in ipso concurrit duplex primitas, essentialis scilicet et virtualitatis. Essentialem enim communitatem habet ens ad genera et species et individua et ad omnes partes essentielles, virtualem enim communitatem habet ad passiones quae virtualiter continentur in suis inferioribus. Istud reprobatur d. 25 ar. 1 et respondetur ad argumenta ibidem ».

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84b : « Ideo aliter arguo contra Scotum. Concesso enim ei quod ens non praedicetur quidditative de differentiis et passionibus, adhuc male dicit quod est obiectum ut concernit communitatem essentialem et virtualem, immo hoc erit ut praescindit ab utroque. Probo, quia ens dicitur esse obiectum sub communissima ratione entis. Sed, ut probatum est, ens abstractum praescindens a communitate seu primitate virtuali et essentiali est magis commune, quia sic est penitus incontractum ».

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 85a : « Et quia dictum est quod ens debet esse obiectum sub communissima ratione, ideo est quinta opinio quae ponit quod primum obiectum adaequatum est aliquid communius et prius obicibile intellectui ente transcendente. Quia ea ratione ponitur ens transcendens primum obiectum adaequatum quia ens est commune ad ens <determinatum secundum rem et ens determinatum> secundum rationem et ad universale et singulare et ad quicquid quod possit inueniri vel cogitari. Igitur si sit aliquid communius ente illud erit primum obiectum adaequatum. Sed hoc contingit invenire. Ergo etc. ».

first sight: the disjunction 'being or non-being' complies with the definition of 'prior' in *Categories*, 12, 14a 30-35, as what does not reciprocate with regard to implication of existence. Since the disjunction 'being or non-being' follows the positing of 'being', but not vice versa, the disjunction 'being or non-being' is prior in this sense to transcendental being⁵⁶. A second argument testifies to the seriousness of the case: the disjunction 'being or non-being' is required to provide a foundation to the principle of non-contradiction⁵⁷.

Baconthorpe expressly declares that he defends the fourth position⁵⁸. In the denial of the fifth position, however, he is compelled to concede a proper right to the realm of the accidentally intelligible (*intelligibile per accidens*), within which the disjunction 'being or non-being' falls. Baconthorpe formulates a fourfold division of the first object of the intellect, which combines the Aristotelian *modi dicendi per se primo*, *per se non primo*, and *per accidens* with a container notion that aggregates everything intelligible⁵⁹. Subsequently, he gives the *ens praescindens*, the *ens reale*, and the *ens aggregans omnia intelligibilia* each a place as a first adequate object in this scheme⁶⁰. Baconthorpe's determination of the first adequate object in incomplex cognition honours the claims of its diverse candidates in a multiplication of first adequate objects.

In his justification of the proper place conceded to real being and being that aggregates everything intelligible in the division of first adequate objects,

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*: « Minor patet quia illud est communius et prius a quo non conuertitur consequentia. Sed si dicas 'ens vel non ens' non conuertitur 'ergo est ens' quia a disiunctiua ad alteram partem est fallacia consequentis. Igitur 'ens vel non ens' est communius et prius ente transcendente ».

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: « Item. Prima principia primae scientiae sunt de primo obiecto. Sed haec propositio secundum Philosophum 4. Metaph. "impossibile est idem esse et non esse" est primum principium in Metaphysica. Igitur 'ens vel non ens' est primum obiectum intelligibile ».

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85b: « Sed quia teneo quartam opinionem respondeo ad ista argumenta ».

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: « Propter quod dico quod obiectum primum intellectus potest accipi quadrupliciter: uno modo obiectum per se et primum; alio modo per se non primum; tertio modo pro obiecto praecise per accidens, cuiusmodi sunt negationes, privationes et talia vaga quae consequuntur et praedicantur de privationibus et negationibus et talia quae solum habent esse secundum quid nominis et quaecumque per accidens intelliguntur; quarto modo accipitur obiectum ut obiectum aggregans omnia intelligibilia quocumque modo, sive per se, sive per accidens, sive per reductionem ».

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 85b-86a: « Primo modo dico quod ens ut est penitus praescindens et abstractum est obiectum primum intellectus adaequatum. Secundo modo primum obiectum adaequatum est ens concernens entia realia per se, scilicet substantiam et novem genera accidentium. Tertio modo non correspondet aliquod obiectum adaequatum primum quia entia per accidens non habent ordinem vel primum intra suos limites, sed omne per accidens reducitur ad aliquid per se. Quarto modo primum obiectum adaequatum intellectus est ens aggregans omnia intelligibilia, sive sint intelligibilia per se et primo, sive per se non primo, sive per accidens, sive quocumque modo imaginabili ».

Baconthorpe reflects on the possibility of metaphysics as a science. The first part is traditional: if real being were not a first adequate object, metaphysics would not be a science⁶¹. The second part is less conventional: being insofar as it aggregates everything intelligible is equally a first adequate object⁶², since the science of metaphysics frequently makes use of accidental being, negations, and privations, which Aristotle excludes from the subject of this science in the sixth book of his *Metaphysics*⁶³. « But that would not be the case, unless the subject of metaphysics and the metaphysical habit would extend itself in what way soever to fictional objects, negations, and accidental beings » — in order that metaphysics as a science be established, it requires a more encompassing space within which it distinguishes itself.

In the answer to the objections, Baconthorpe concludes the discussion of the first adequate object in incomplex cognition with a partition of the estate between the fourth and fifth positions. Since the intellect has both an incomplex and a complex act of understanding, each requires a first object. The first object of complex cognition must itself be a complex principle, i.e. a proposition. Therefore, being is the first object in incomplex cognition, whereas the disjunction 'being or non-being' is part of the first object in

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86a: « Quod etiam ens ut concernens substantiam et novem accidentia sit per se obiectum patet, quia aliter metaphysica non esset scientia ».

⁶² *Ibid.*: « Quod etiam ens aggregans entia per se et per accidens sive quod ens quod est commune ad quid rei et ad quid nominis aliquo modo possit concedi primum obiectum adaequatum intellectus, probo quia obiectum primum adaequatum non solum potest accipi pro adaequato continente per se et essentialiter intelligibilia, sed pro adaequato continente totam multitudinem intelligibilium suis modis, puta essentialiter continent essentialiter et quae accidentaliter, accidentaliter, et quae per reductionem, per reductionem. Sed ens commune ad quid rei et ad quid nominis continet totam multitudinem intelligibilium istis diversis modis. Igitur etc. ».

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 86a-b: « Et hoc patet manifeste quia licet metaphysica primo et principaliter sit de ente reali et Philosophus 6 Metaphysicae t. com. ult. bene praescindit ista a sua consideratione, tamen de negationibus et fictitiis est eius consideratio aliqualis, videlicet ut habent combinationem vel comparisonem ad entia realia. Et eadem ratione potest hoc concedi de entibus per accidens. Sed hoc non esset nisi ens quod est subiectum in metaphysica et habitus metaphysicus extenderet se quoquo modo ad fictitia, negationes et ad entia per accidens. Igitur <etc.>. Item. Hoc patet verum, quia cum Philosophus 6 Metaph. excludit entia per accidens et entia in anima a sua consideratione, in 9 Metaph. versus finem introducit entia in anima et negationes sicut non ens et falsum in consideratione sua. Sed hoc est in quadam combinatione et reductione ad sua positiva. Unde dicit sic: "Quoniam aut ens dicitur et non ens hoc quidem secundum figuras categoriarum"; et infra: "hoc autem proprie aut verum aut falsum"; et infra: "quare quod verum dicitur aut falsum hoc perscrutandum"; et bene infra versus finem: "esse vero ut verum et non esse falsum unumquodque est etc.". Nota expresse quod negationes hic introducuntur in considerationem Metaph. quod non esset nisi etc. Igitur ens utroque modo est obiectum primum adaequatum ».

complex cognition, i.e. the first principle. The discussion of this first principle itself is postponed to the fifth article⁶⁴.

3.2 *The first adequate object in complex natural cognition*

In the fifth article, Baconthorpe presents the principle of non-contradiction as the first adequate object of complex cognition in discussion with a major objection concerning the latter's proper definition. An adequate object is something that is formally predicated of everything contained in it, like color is predicated of brown and white. But the principle of non-contradiction does not meet this requirement: the principle « impossibile est idem simul esse et non esse » is not formally predicated of every proposition. In order to sustain the principle of non-contradiction as the first adequate object of complex cognition, therefore, Baconthorpe must adopt a different strategy. The argument that he used to introduce the fifth position in the discussion on the first adequate object in incomplex cognition now comes to hand. Just as the disjunction 'being or non-being' was said to follow the positing of 'being' and consequently qualified as a first adequate object, so the principle of non-contradiction equally follows each proposition. For 'being or non-being' is said of everything that occurs in a proposition, such that the consequence « Socrates runs, hence Socrates is or is not » is valid. In this sense, the principle of non-contradiction qualifies as the first adequate object of complex cognition⁶⁵. It

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 86b-87a: « Pro solutione in aliorum argumentorum est primo notandum quod cum intellectus habeat duplicem actum, et simplicem, et complexum, oportet quod habeat duplex obiectum correspondens. Dico ergo quod ens est primum obiectum intellectus simplicis intelligentiae, (...) et ens vel non ens est primum obiectum vel pars obiecti primi intelligentiae complexae. Et palam est de primo quia sicut actus simplicis intelligentiae praecedit actum complexae intelligentiae, ita oportet quod incomplexum et simplex praecedat obiectum complexum, et ita ens erit simpliciter primum obiectum intellectus. Secundum probatur sic. Sicut simplex intelligentia incipit a confusissimo incomplexo, ita oportet quod intelligentia complexa incipiat a confusissimo complexo. Sed confusissimum complexum est propositio cuius termini sunt ens vel non ens, puta Sortes est vel non est. Igitur etc. Probo minorem quia ista complexio est de terminis confusissimis, qui sunt esse et non esse, et est modo confusissimo, quia disiunctio, disiunctiva vero locutio est confusissima quia neutram partem determinat; igitur etc. Ad secundum igitur argumentum quando dicitur quod primum principium non excedit primum obiectum etc., verum est. Et cum dicitur quod primum principium est de quolibet esse etc., dico quod illud quod est principium demonstrationis est propositio complexa. Et ideo ibi concedo quod ens vel non ens, qui sunt termini primi principii, est pars primi obiecti complexi intellectus, ut videbitur in fine quaestionis; ens tamen est obiectum primum intellectus incomplexi ».

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, art. 5, ed. cit., p. 97a: « Vbi videretur posse dici quod si quaeratur de primo obiecto complexo adaequato quod nullum tale est requirendum. Quia obiectum adaequatum dicitur formali praedicatione de omnibus contentis sicut color de coloribus. Sed sive praedicatum complexum ponatur 'Deus est', sive '<ens> est ens', sive 'impossibile est idem simul esse et non

may be called to mind that the second argument in favor of the fifth position in the discussion on the first adequate object in incomplex cognition regarded the foundation of the principle of non-contradiction.

Baconthorpe gives the principle of non-contradiction a place as a first object in the orders of generation and perfection 'from the part of our intellect' (*ex parte intellectus nostri*), and claims that this is the sense in which Aristotle proclaimed the principle of non-contradiction to be the first axiom⁶⁶. Interestingly enough, the position of Antonius Andreae is presented in a series of counter-arguments. The principle «ens est ens» is a pure affirmation, an identical predication, and its negation is more untrue than the negation of the principle of non-contradiction; therefore, the principle «ens est ens» is better known to us than the principle of non-contradiction. Especially the second argument is significant in this regard, since it plays off the principles of identity and non-contradiction⁶⁷. Baconthorpe answers with a distinction between categorical predication, in which identical predication is best known, and hypothetical predication, which is not in the same sense tied up with

esse', nulla istarum praedicatur formaliter de omnibus complexis. Ad hanc enim 'Sortes currit' vel 'homo est animal' nulla istarum sequitur formali praedicatione. Igitur hic non est requirendum obiectum adaequatum. Respondeo quod haec 'de quolibet dicitur esse vel non esse' sequitur ad quamlibet propositionem. Sequitur enim 'Sortes currit, ergo Sortes est vel non est', et sequitur 'Sortes est animal, ergo Sortes est vel non est', et sic de aliis. Et ita salvatur quod haec propositio 'impossibile est simul idem esse et non esse' est obiectum adaequatum intellectus complexi ».

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97b : « Si vero loquamur de primitate ex parte intellectus, sive de primitate generationis, sive de primitate perfectionis, dico quod ista complexa est notissima "impossibile est idem simul esse et non esse". Ab ipsa enim natus est intellectus noster primo moveri cum sit universalissima. Et huic intellectus noster firmitus adhaeret et perfectius quia per pauciora media. Et isto modo oportet in proposito accipi primum perfectione, scilicet cui intellectus firmitus adhaeret et immediatius. Et isto modo loquitur Philosophus per totum quartum Metaphysicae quia haec est prima notissima. Quod probo. Sunt enim ibi condiciones primi principii, scilicet quod circa ipsum non contingit mentiri, idest decipi vel errare secundum Commentatorem, et quod necesse est illud cognoscere quodcunque aliud cognoscentem et quod ex se veniat ad intellectum ex parte terminorum. Et assumit quod omnia ista conveniunt huic «impossibile est idem simul esse et non esse» et concludit quod est prima dignitatum et quod omnes aliae reducunt sua principia in hanc etc. Sed planum est quod omnes istae condiciones primi principii accipiuntur in comparatione ad intellectum, scilicet quod non contingit mentiri et aliae duae. Ergo hic ponitur a Philosopho primum principium accipiendo primitatem non ex parte obiecti. Nec obstat quod Philosophus ibidem dicit : "natura namque principium est omnium aliarum dignitatum" quia non dicit natura distinguendo prius natura contra prius nobis, sed distinguendo prius naturali intelligentia contra posterius naturali intelligentia ut sit sensus quod sit prima in intelligendo et aliae posteriores ».

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98a : « Item. Nulla propositio est nobis notior illa in qua idem de se praedicatur. Sed huic 'ens est ens' hoc convenit et huic 'impossibile est idem etc.' hoc non convenit. Ergo etc. Minor patet quia in negativa idem nunquam de se praedicatur ».

existence. Hence, the distinctive feature of the principle of non-contradiction, that it extends to being and non-being, is employed to counter the primacy of the principle of identity in the realm of categorical predication⁶⁸.

We may conclude that the interwovenness of incomplex and complex cognition, which inspires the medieval foundation of the principle of non-contradiction in the first known objects of the mind, is used by Baconthorpe to (i) transfer the distinction of the orders of adequacy, origin and perfection from the realm of incomplex cognition to the realm of complex cognition, and (ii) to differentiate within the first adequate object of incomplex cognition in order to give a foundation to the first adequate object of complex cognition. As a result, the *intelligibile per accidens* acquires an unprecedented significance within the realm of cognition. According to Baconthorpe, the close relation between being that aggregates everything intelligible, i.e. one of the first adequate objects of incomplex cognition, and the disjunction 'being or non-being', which is part of the first adequate object of complex cognition, explains why the first proposition must be a disjunction⁶⁹.

4. CONCLUSION

In this contribution, we discussed a project that is typical of the new epistemic constellation of medieval metaphysics: the foundation of Aristotle's unhypothetical starting point of thinking, the principle of non-contradiction, on the first, transcendental concepts of the intellect. We have witnessed Nicolaus Bonetus ascribe an adequate subject to the first complex principle

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98b: « Ad secundum cum dicitur 'nulla est notior ea, in qua idem de se etc.' dico quod nulla cathégorica est notior illa in qua idem de se praedicatur, sed hipothetica bene est, quia haec 'homo est' negatur a multis homine non existente, sed haec 'impossibile est hominem simul esse et non esse' a nullo negatur sive homo sit, sive non ».

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*: « Aliter tamen sic potest reddi declaratio, quare Aristoteles in Metaphysica et Logica ponit propositionem primam per se notam de praedicato disiuncto, quia, ut dictum est, primum obiectum adaequatum intellectus ex parte intellectus est ens commune ad quid nominis et ad quid rei quod continet omnia intelligibilia quocunque modo. Et clarum est quod ab obiecto, ut cadit in apprehensione simplici, intellectus debet incipere actus complexos. Ideo sequitur quod actus intellectus complexi debet incipere terminos suos, scilicet subiectum et praedicatum, ut continentur in obiecto quod apprehenditur ab intellectu simplici, scilicet ab ente communi, quod aggregat totam multitudinem intelligibilium. Et tunc ultra sic: Qua ratione intellectus simplex incipit ab indeterminatissimo simplici, eadem ratione intellectus complexus in prima complexione debet enuntiare aliquid esse de aliquo modo indeterminato. Sed modus indeterminatissimus enuntiandi est quando primum enuntiatur de subiecto secundum praedicatum disiunctum, quia tunc nullam partem sibi determinat. Ergo prima propositio complexa est de praedicato disiuncto, puta ista 'de quolibet esse vel non esse' vel ista 'impossibile est idem esse et non esse', quae tantum valet ».

that exceeds the subject of metaphysics, i.e. the first adequate object of the intellect. The same phenomenon could be observed in the works of John Baconthorpe. The principle of non-contradiction, the first adequate object of complex cognition, requires a first adequate object in incomplex cognition that is not identical with but surpasses the subject of metaphysics in generality. However, it should be noted that, whereas Baconthorpe introduces the disjunction 'being or non-being' as even more general than the transcendental being that is common to real being and being of reason, he nevertheless adheres to real being as the subject of metaphysics. Bonetus' conception of metaphysics is less traditional.

What significance should we accord to our observation that, in a regular pattern, the principle of non-contradiction is provided with a foundation, viz. the first adequate object of the intellect, that surpasses the subject of metaphysics in generality? By way of conclusion, two remarks.

(i) We repeatedly pointed out that medieval metaphysics presents a characteristic legitimizing strategy, namely the identification of the subject of first philosophy with the first object of the intellect. At the level of the investigation of epistemic constellations as a whole, this strategy reveals itself as a technique of stabilization: by means of the identification with the first object of the intellect, the subject of metaphysics is fixed. Medieval texts, following the vocabulary of the Latin translation of the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifa*, even resort to the notion of stability itself: *stabilisatur subiectum metaphysicae*⁷⁰.

At first sight, however, this strategy seems to be everything but stable. Starting with the third quodlibetal question of Duns Scotus⁷¹, the dissociation of the subject of metaphysics and the first adequate object of the intellect becomes a topos in the early 14th century⁷². Instead of stressing how productive this instability has proven to be in the history of metaphysics — it leads to the Kantian conception of metaphysics as a transcendental science of the *Gegenstand überhaupt* —, I want to underline the relative success of this strategy of stabilization.

The discourse that breaches the identification of the subject of metaphysics with the first object of the intellect, tacitly reproduces it by means of a division of first objects of the intellect. If Bonetus distinguishes between the subject of metaphysics and the first adequate object of the intellect, he can

⁷⁰ Cf. AVICENNA, *Metaphys.*, tract. 1, c. 2 : « De stabiliendo subiectum huius scientiae » (*Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina*, ed. S. VAN RIET, Peeters - Brill, Louvain - Leiden 1977, pp. 9 sqq.) and *supra*, notes 13 and 17.

⁷¹ See D. DEMANGE, *Jean Duns Scot. La théorie du savoir*, Vrin, Paris 2007, esp. pp. 413 sqq.

⁷² See my *After Scotus. Dispersions of Metaphysics, of the Scope of Intelligibility, and of the Transcendental in the Early 14th Century*, « Quaestio », 8, 2008, pp. 139-158.

only do so by declaring an alternative first object, viz. the first known in the order of the genesis of distinct knowledge, the subject of metaphysics. And Baconthorpe too presupposes in his dissociation of the subject of metaphysics and the first adequate object of the intellect a division of first adequate objects that guarantees that there is a first object of the intellect that coincides with the subject of metaphysics.

Contrary, therefore, to the initial impression of flagrant instability made by the identification of the subject of first philosophy with the first object of the intellect, there is reason to consider this strategy a rather successful technique of stabilization.

(ii) In his study *Suarez et le système de la Métaphysique*, J.-F. Courtine combines three developments in which the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* of Francisco Suarez (first published in 1597) play an important role: (i) the emancipation of metaphysics from the commentary tradition and its reorganization into a system; (ii) the emancipation of ontology as a general metaphysics from natural theology as a particular metaphysics; and (iii) the development of metaphysics into a science of the supertranscendental, of the thinkable as such, which is common to real being and being of reason and transcends in generality even the transcendentals⁷³. As we witnessed in the course of this paper, there is reason to date these developments considerably earlier, a predating to which Olivier Boulnois has already given an impulse⁷⁴.

In his study, Courtine draws attention to Suarez' conception of nothingness: *la thèse suarézienne du néant*. Although the *Disputationes Metaphysicae* define real being as the subject of metaphysics and exclude being of reason from it, the final disputation nevertheless entails a discussion of beings of reason, dictated by the ontological project itself, which understands being taken in its utter commonness (*ens in tota sua latitudine sumptum*) as object, as what presents itself to the intellect. The exclusion of being of reason from metaphysics in Suarez pairs off with the recognition of its constitutive role in settling the subject of this science. The tradition of ontology, which Courtine takes to begin with Suarez, is tacitly upheld by an onto-logics of the object in general⁷⁵.

⁷³ J.-F. COURTINE, *Suarez et le système de la métaphysique*, PUF, Paris 1990. For a critique of Courtine's interpretation of Suarez on these three topics, cf. R. DARGE, *Suarez' transzendente Seinsauslegung und die Metaphysiktradition*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2004.

⁷⁴ O. BOULNOIS, *Être et représentation. Une généalogie de la métaphysique moderne à l'époque de Duns Scot (XIII^e-XIV^e siècle)*, PUF, Paris 1999.

⁷⁵ COURTINE, *Suarez cit.*, p. 257 : « La métaphysique générale des modernes, i.e. l'ontologie, est assurément et formellement l'étude de l'étant comme tel, mais cette même métaphysique ne peut se définir et s'élaborer thématiquement comme ontologie qu'à partir d'une présupposition fondamentale non élucidée : la thèse du néant comme nihil negativum. Ou encore : la métaphysique comme ontologie ne peut définir strictement son objet qu'à travers la figure prégnante de l'objet

The principal stages of this history, inaugurated in the Middle Ages with a new conception of objectivity⁷⁶, are: (i) the problematical presence of an appendix in Suarez' *Disputationes Metaphysicae*: disp. 54 de entibus rationis, a theme that was formally excluded from the consideration of the disputations; (ii) the so-called 'Table of the Concept of Nothing', which concludes the section of the amphibology of reflexive concepts and thus the transcendental analytics in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and (iii) nothingness as the opening up of the question of being and of the realm of metaphysics in Heidegger's *What is Metaphysics?* We may conclude that the medieval transformation of metaphysics calls increasing attention to the modes of being excluded from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: the *entia per accidens*, the *entia rationis*, the *fictitia*, negations and privations, in short the offspring of nothingness.

ou de l'objectivité, telle qu'elle se dédouble immédiatement en un aliquid (res) et un nihil, l'objet lui-même étant rien, nulla res, puisqu'il est aussi bien non-ens, antérieur à la disjunction de l'être et du non-être. Si la métaphysique générale ne se laisse pas déduire du rien, elle n'en renvoie pas moins, architectoniquement parlant, comme à son point aveugle, à une thèse sur le néant ».

⁷⁶ Cf. COURTINE, *Suarez cit.*, pp. 157 sqq. : « Un nouveau concept de l'objectivité ».

ABSTRACT

The epistemic constellation that underlies the transformation of metaphysics in the 13th and 14th century is legitimized by the identification of the subject of first philosophy with the first object of the intellect. In this epistemic constellation, a new thought presents itself: the foundation of Aristotle's unconditional starting point of thinking, i.e. the principle of non-contradiction, in the first known, transcendental concepts of the mind. The present article argues that, on the one hand, innovative attempts to found the principle of non-contradiction of the Franciscan Nicolaus Bonetus and the Carmelite John Baconthorpe demonstrate the stability of this epistemic constellation. It is true that, in their foundation of the principle of non-contradiction, Bonetus and Baconthorpe effect a dissociation of the subject of first philosophy and the first object of the intellect, which seems to challenge the very legitimizing strategy of the medieval transformation of metaphysics. But the very discourse that breaches the identification of the subject of metaphysics with the first object of the intellect, tacitly reproduces it by means of a division of first objects of the intellect. Its articulation of a first object of the intellect that surpasses the subject of first philosophy in generality, on the other hand, preludes tendencies in modern philosophy that, in presenting the thinkable as such as what grants access to reality, give full attention to the modes of being excluded from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

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