

Metaphysics E1 and the Unity of First Philosophy



Alexander Stooshinoff

Supervisor: Prof. Lindsay Judson

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Abstract:

In this thesis I discuss *Metaphysics* E1 and the problem of the unity of theology and ontology in the *Metaphysics*. I argue for a unitarian reading of the text, one which largely accepts the transmitted order of the books. I first discuss the programme of E1, which I read in light of a continuously developing project in ABΓΔ. I then discuss Aristotle's counterfactual argument for a 'first philosophy'. I discuss Aristotle's justification for the universality of theology, namely that it is "universal because first" E1 1026a29-32. I take this to mean that its objects, the highest beings and highest causes, are causes of the maximal number of effects – all beings – and thus are causes universally. In this way theology is prior to physics and mathematics as established in E1 1026a8-23. I then discuss various objections to the authenticity of E, or to the programme of identifying theology with the universal science of being, notably the view of Natorp that E was both spurious and interpolated, and the view of Jaeger that the theological and ontological 'parts' of the *Metaphysics* belong to different periods of Aristotle's life. I then return to the unity of theology and ontology, first discussing and objecting to Frede-Patzig's solution to the problem through *pros hen* vocality between god and other substances, then discussing and objecting to Judson's solution to make theology only a part of first philosophy. Finally, I discuss my solution to the problem taking A2 as a guide, while also differentiating my view from Menn's, arguing that theology is the ultimate aim of wisdom, and that the ontology of the *Metaphysics* is preparatory for an ultimate theology, but is nonetheless integral to the investigation. And that if there is a disunity between theology and ontology it is only in name, because it is for the theologian or first philosopher to undertake both investigations.

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Introduction:

In this thesis I discuss *Metaphysics* E1, and the problem of the unity of theological and ontological understandings of first philosophy.¹ It has long been debated whether Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is a unified work, and whether Aristotle had a single unified conception of first philosophy, or several differing conceptions. To frame the problem in the simplest of terms, book A outlines a project of *sophia*, or wisdom, about the principles and causes of being, that appears to have many parts and to concern many things. Then, book Γ outlines an 'ontological' version of the project: a science of "being *qua* being"² – a *universal* science of being, one which investigates the principles and causes of *all* beings. The universality of this project is apparently guaranteed by its generality – that it studies all beings is what appears to make it universal. However, in book E, Aristotle finally gives this project a name: "first" or "primary" philosophy. And he calls his first philosophy 'theology'. He heralds it as the *highest* of the theoretical sciences. It is explicitly set over and above physics and mathematics, which are ruled out in E as candidates for our project of wisdom. Aristotle then identifies theology with the universal science of being we found in Γ, and with the project of wisdom in A2. His justification for the universality of theology is extremely brief and highly enigmatic, he simply says that theology, is "universal because first", and that it belongs to the first philosopher (or metaphysician) to investigate being *qua* being and the things that belong to it *qua* being (i.e. the per se attributes of being).

The problem with this admittedly crude picture, is that the project Aristotle envisages is *prima facie*, a departmental enquiry – it is concerned with a *single genos* of being: eternal

¹ This universal science of being is sometimes called 'ontology' by scholars, or 'general metaphysics'. The *theologike* that Aristotle identifies in E1 and elsewhere is often called simply 'theology', or 'special metaphysics'. I will use all of the above terminology.

² On translating '*to on*' as 'being' vs. 'what is', see Shields 'Being qua Being' (2012).

unchanging *ousiai*. Whereas in Γ , we are told that the science is universal because it is not concerned with a single genus of being like the other departmental enquiries, for it covers *all* beings. This conception in Γ builds on the highly idealized model of science we find in the Posterior Analytics, particularly I.2, 6, and 10. There we find that a science is unified by the unity of the genus it investigates. But there is a problem: being is not a genus.³ And moreover, being is “said in many ways”, all of which must be distinguished if we are to proceed toward wisdom. But the objects of theology are a single *genos*: eternally unchanging *ousiai*.⁴ So how are we to make sense of Aristotle’s claim that theology can be universal? And is it really the same project as the science of being *qua* being in Γ , and the project of wisdom in A? The problem of the unity of these seemingly different and perhaps incompatible projects has scandalized scholars ever since.

The passage at E1 1026a29-32, which explicitly links theology to the universal science of being and the things that belong to it *qua* being has been especially problematic for some scholars. So much so that Natorp wants to do away with E altogether, Leszl wants to remove or ignore any theological descriptions of first philosophy, Stevens wants to remove any identification between theology and the universal science of being, Jaeger thinks theology and ontology belong to two utterly distinct periods of Aristotle’s writing, Aubenque thinks Aristotle abandoned any hope of unifying the projects of theology and the universal science of being. Some others ventured answers as to how to solve the apparent disunity: Frede-Patzig want to explain the unity of ontology and theology through *pros hen* predication, Menn wants to do away with ontology as a mere “false path” to the true *archai* of divine immaterial beings, Judson’s

³ C.f. *APo* II 7 92b14.

⁴ Some try to solve the problem of the unity of the general science of being through *pros hen* predication. Still others try to apply this solution to the problem of the unity of theology and ontology I will discuss this later when I address the view of Frede-Patzig.

Aristotle would have to rewrite E to include four things: physics, mathematics, theology, and this extra thing - “first philosophy” - over and above theology such that theology is only a part of it.

Each of these solutions faces various difficulties which I will discuss throughout this paper.

To put my cards on the table as it were, I believe we should strive for a more unitarian reading of the text, rather than a less unitarian one. I do not now have the space to give a full account of the architecture of the *Metaphysics*, or a full argument for a unitarian reading. It must suffice that this thesis as a whole is an exercise in such a reading. However, the following considerations briefly show why I favour unitarianism.⁵ For one thing I take it that arguments in favour of the unity of the treatise are also thereby arguments in favour of the unity of the project[s]. And I take for granted that Aristotle has a single conception of first philosophy. If for nothing else than because E1 *tells us so*, and there is no explicit remark in the text that says otherwise. And if we accept the transmitted ordering of the books of the *Metaphysics*, as I think we should,⁶ then E is the final of the programmatical books. It seems reasonable to take it then as the most developed or refined envisioning of the project. Similarly, Aristotle doesn't seem to have any trouble switching from Λ 2-5 (the “ontological” part) over to Λ 6-10 (the “theological” part), and the two halves certainly know about each other. For those who think otherwise - it used to be fashionable, especially on the continent to think that one could work out what Aristotle's conception of first philosophy was as a whole from any given text at a time, by looking at what was in or out of a given text. And so on this view, if E makes no mention of the per se attributes of being (other than to say that the first philosopher investigates them) then the per se attributes wasn't part of Aristotle's conception of first philosophy at the time of writing.

⁵ While Stephen Menn's interpretation in *The Aim* might be the most unitarian reading, I do not take it as the optimal blend of unity and plausibility for reasons I will discuss in the concluding section.

⁶ Except the authorship of K is still problematic. Although I relies heavily on material from Δ , I'm not sure where we should place it.

To me, this approach is an obvious non-starter. The puzzles of B alone clearly look forward to real solutions Aristotle will discuss, and B refers to A at least 3 times.⁷ The lines of $\Gamma 1$ 1003a26-7 link it explicitly to the investigation of principles and causes of being we encountered in A. $AB\Gamma$ is then picked up by E1, as E1 1026a29-32 unite E to $\Gamma 1-2$. E2-4 presuppose the distinctions of $\Delta 7$. Further on in the text, H1 summarizes much of Z, $\Lambda 6$ remembers $\Lambda 2-5$, etc. If we accept only that E presupposes $AB\Gamma\Delta$, and we think E is a bridge or introduction to $ZH\Theta$, then we already have a tremendous amount of the *Metaphysics* united as a single treatise. For my part, if E1 makes no mention of the per-se attributes of being, it's not because Aristotle doesn't envisage those as part of the project, but rather because he has addressed them *already* in $\Gamma 3-8$, and in Δ , and he will go on to do so in I. I believe a good account of the *Metaphysics* should be maximally consistent with the text, should pay attention to the context of each book, and should strive to unify any apparent tensions, wherever that is possible. If my interpretation comes at the cost of anything, it will be that $ZH\Theta$ and $\Lambda 2-5$ are preparatory for a later theology, but the principles of natural substance discussed there are many of the same principles which are used to explain the objects of theology.

To begin, I discuss the programme of E1 in the context of the development of the earlier books. I then discuss Aristotle's argument for first philosophy in E1. I then introduce and discuss the "universal because first" passage, before turning to the objections against it raised by Natorp and others. I then discuss and criticize two positive accounts to solve the difficulty through *proshen* predication in Frede-Patzig, and Judson's solution of keeping theology departmental, while allowing it to be universal only in the limited sense that it contributes a part to the universal science of being. Finally, I discuss my own solution to the problem while also differentiating my

⁷ C.f. B 995b4-6, 996b8-10, 997b3-5

view from Menn's, by taking A2 as a guide and arguing that theology is the ultimate aim of wisdom for it concerns the highest most estimable causes, and that the ontology of the *Metaphysics* is preparatory for an ultimate theology. I argue that this reading is consistent with the programmatic remarks in A Γ E and passages in Z.11 and Z.17 that indicate that the study of natural substances is preparatory for an investigation into higher substance. Finally, I argue that if there is a disunity between theology and ontology it is only in name, because it is for the theologian (or first philosopher) to undertake both investigations.

The programme of E1:

Metaphysics book A outlines a project of "wisdom" as a science of principles and causes.

Wisdom is the pursuit of the *archai*, the first of all things and the first causes. We learn that the *archai* are eternal, that they must exist separately, and that they are divine. But we also learn in A that the *archai* aren't given to us in perception. Thus, we must reason 'up' to them from their effects. Book Γ tells us that we must look for a science of being *qua* being, and what Aristotle calls the "per se attributes" of being – these include concepts like 'contrariety', 'unity', 'sameness' etc. as well as principles such as the principle of non-contradiction and of the excluded middle. It is reasonable to identify the science of being *qua* being in Γ with the project of wisdom outlined in books A and B. This is made explicitly clear in Γ.1 1003a26-7:

“ἐπεὶ δὲ τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ἀκροτάτας αἰτίας ζητοῦμεν...”

“Now since we are seeking the first principles and the highest causes, ...”⁸,

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, translations of the *Metaphysics* will be those of Reeve (2016)

and Γ.1 1003a31-32:

“διὸ καὶ ἡμῖν τοῦ ὄντος ἧ ὄν τὰς πρώτας αἰτίας ληπτέον”

“That is why it is of being qua being that we too must grasp the primary causes.”

But we don’t yet know from Γ1-2 whether this science will be physics, mathematics, or something else beyond these such as dialectic. And moreover, it is not yet clear in Γ how to proceed toward wisdom. We know that we need to look for principles and causes of being, and the per se attributes like unity, contrariety, etc., but each of these things is “said in many ways” and the necessary distinctions have not yet been drawn.⁹

The first sentence of E1 reads “the starting-points and causes of beings are what we are inquiring into, and clearly qua beings”¹⁰. This is meant to situate E within the project already outlined in ABΓ. E thus refines, or further specifies the project of wisdom. It is a crucially important text, because it is the first time we find a proper *argument* for a “first philosophy”, and it is the first time we learn that this first philosophy is *not* mathematics or physics¹¹ (except for aporetic claims in A8-9, and B).

Although E1 offers an argument for first philosophy, the first time the notion of a ‘first philosophy’ is introduced in the *Metaphysics* (for it also occurs in the physical works) is at Γ2 1004a2-4:

⁹ Not until Δ.

¹⁰ 1025b2-3.

¹¹ There is a passage in Γ3 , which appears to refer to a science higher than physics at 1005a33-5:

“ἐπεὶ δ’ ἔστιν ἔτι τοῦ φυσικοῦ τις ἀνωτέρω (ἐν γάρ τι γένος τοῦ ὄντος ἢ φύσις), τοῦ καθόλου καὶ τοῦ περὶ τὴν πρώτην οὐσίαν θεωρητικοῦ καὶ ἢ περὶ τούτων ἂν εἶη σκέψις). (continuing passage to 1005b1-2) ἔστι δὲ σοφία τις καὶ ἡ φυσική, ἀλλ’ οὐ πρώτη.”

“but since there is someone who is higher than the physicist (for nature is one particular kind of what is), the enquiry into [the common axioms] will also belong to the one whose investigation is universal and deals with first substance. Physics is a form of wisdom, but not the first’ (My translation).

“καὶ τοσαῦτα μέρη φιλοσοφίας ἔστιν ὅσα περ αἱ οὐσίαι· ὥστε ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τινα πρώτην καὶ ἐχομένην αὐτῶν.”

“And there are as many parts of philosophy as there are [sub-kinds] of substances, and so it is necessary for there to be a *primary philosophy* among them and one that follows this.”

The comparison with substance calls for an investigation into the first kind of substance. But note that just from reading Γ alone, there is no reason yet to believe that this ‘primary philosophy’ will be the same as the science of being qua being. Rather, it just seems to be one special science among many other such special sciences. In E1 however, Aristotle takes up *three* special sciences: physics, mathematics, and theology, and he argues that *if* there is some separately existing eternally unmoved substance, then the science of that, which he will call ‘first philosophy’, and *not* physics or mathematics will be the science of the *archai*, the causes of being qua being.¹²

E1 is the shortest of the treatises in the *Metaphysics* (except for α), coming in at only 2 and half Bekker pages. According to Menn, E is too short to be a book of the *Metaphysics* in its own right, and so must not be anything other than introduction to ZH Θ .¹³ But part of his justification for this claim is that E is the first place in the *Metaphysics* where it appears that certain lines of investigation will lead to negative results, or dead ends. And he is in the minority in thinking that ZH (or certainly Z) largely lead to negative results. Other than the rejection of physics and mathematics, I don’t see how this is possible. While I agree that it seems likely E is an introduction to the stretch ZH Θ , I disagree that Z is a dead end. Rather on my reading, they are part of the project of working toward wisdom by reasoning up from the effects toward the

¹² But NB Γ .2 1003b219-23: “Therefore to investigate all the species of being *qua* being, is the work of a science which is generically one, and to investigate the several species is the work of the specific parts of the science.”

¹³ This paragraph refers to Menn’s claims in *The Aim*, Iyl.

archai which are their causes. Insofar as they are part of *that* project, their results are very much positive.¹⁴

In Γ2, the science of being qua being is meant to be done alongside an investigation of the per se attributes of being.¹⁵ However, E has curiously little to say about the per se attributes. E1 1026a31-2, “And it will belong to [first philosophy] to get a theoretical grasp on being qua being, both what it is and the things that belong to it qua being” is the only explicit mention in E that the project of first philosophy, now identified as ‘*theology*’ will include an investigation of the per se attributes of being.¹⁶ Although E1 seems to suggest that the science outlined in this book will indeed investigate the per-se attributes of being, the rest of E doesn’t make any efforts toward this aim, and doesn’t mention it elsewhere beyond this one line of text. This is not problematic on my interpretation of the text. Since I take the stretch ABΓΔE to be a unified treatise, the Aristotle of E doesn’t need to make mention of the per se attributes of being because he has already dealt with them in Γ3-8 and in Δ. Indeed, one branch of the investigation outlined in Γ is pursued in (the science of being qua being) EZHΘ, and another (the per-se attributes of being) in I. Δ draws distinctions that enable the first investigation, while also making progress toward the latter investigation.

I will now turn to Aristotle’s argument for there being a *first* philosophy.

The Argument for First Philosophy:

Aristotle’s argument for a first philosophy takes the form of a counterfactual:

“ἀλλ’ εἰ ἀκινήτων καὶ χωριστῶν ἐστὶ, νῦν ἄδηλον, ὅτι μέντοι ἕνα μαθήματα ἢ ἀκίνητα καὶ ἢ χωριστὰ θεωρεῖ, δῆλον. εἰ δὲ τί ἐστὶν αἰδῖον καὶ ἀκίνητον καὶ χωριστόν, φανερόν ὅτι θεωρητικῆς

¹⁴ We should not be puzzled the thought that E is an introduction into a series which don’t deal with the objects of theology, since I take them to be preparatory for a later theology. I argue for this later.

¹⁵ Or this latter investigation is *part of* the former.

¹⁶ I take the phrase “and the things that belong to it qua being” to refer to these per se attributes.

τὸ γινῶναι, οὐ μέντοι φυσικῆς γε [περὶ κινητῶν γὰρ τινῶν ἢ φυσικῆ] οὐδὲ μαθηματικῆς, ἀλλὰ προτέρας ἀμφοῖν. ἢ μὲν γὰρ φυσικὴ περὶ χωριστὰ μὲν ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀκίνητα, τῆς δὲ μαθηματικῆς ἔνια περὶ ἀκίνητα μὲν οὐ χωριστὰ δὲ ἴσως ἀλλ' ὡς ἐν ὕλῃ· ἢ δὲ πρώτη καὶ περὶ χωριστὰ καὶ ἀκίνητα. ἀνάγκη δὲ πάντα μὲν τὰ αἷτια ἀίδια εἶναι, μάλιστα δὲ ταῦτα· ταῦτα γὰρ αἷτια τοῖς φανεροῖς τῶν θεῶν. ὥστε τρεῖς ἂν εἶεν φιλοσοφίαι θεωρητικαί, μαθηματικὴ, φυσικὴ, θεολογικὴ· οὐ γὰρ ἄδηλον ὅτι εἴ που τὸ θεῖον ὑπάρχει, ἐν τῇ τοιαύτῃ φύσει ὑπάρχει, καὶ τὴν τιμιωτάτην δεῖ περὶ τὸ τιμιώτατον γένος εἶναι. αἱ μὲν οὖν θεωρητικαὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν αἰρετώτεραι, αὕτη δὲ τῶν θεωρητικῶν” (1026a8-23).

“But if there is something that is eternal and immovable and separable, it is evident that knowledge of it belongs to a theoretical science—not, however, to natural science (for natural science is concerned with certain movable things) nor to mathematics, but to something prior to both. For natural science is concerned with things that are inseparable but not immovable, while certain parts of mathematics are concerned with things that are immovable and not separable but as in matter. The primary science, by contrast, is concerned with things that are both separable and immovable. Now all causes are necessarily eternal, and these most of all. For they are the causes of the divine beings that are perceptible. There must, then, be three theoretical philosophies, mathematical, natural, and theological, since it is quite clear that if the divine belongs anywhere, it belongs in a nature of this sort. And of these, the most estimable must be concerned with the most estimable genus. Thus, the theoretical are the more choice worthy of the various sciences, and this of the theoretical.”

We can see that there must be a hidden premiss here, namely that Aristotle thinks that the object of this primary science, unmoved *ousiai*, will be prior to natural substance. Presumably he takes it as obvious, on the grounds that natural substance will causally depend on the unmoved *ousiai*, and thus these will have to be prior.

Physics and mathematics appear to be rejected as candidates for wisdom on two different grounds: physics is rejected not because its objects are inseparable (inseparable ontologically, not inseparable from matter. Whereas the objects of mathematics are inseparable not ontologically, but from having any real existence *without* matter) but because its objects are *moved*. Mathematics is rejected on the grounds that its objects are inseparable (from matter), while the objects of first philosophy are both separate (from matter) and immovable.

The final lines recall some things we already know from A1-2,¹⁷ namely that the theoretical sciences are more ‘choice worthy’ than the other sciences, and that the most estimable science will be concerned with the most estimable genus. Given that theology is to be of divine things, or moreover, of *gods* we know that it is (or minimally, is a part of) the most estimable science.

I will have more to say on Aristotle’s claim that first philosophy is “universal because first”. For now, I will make some expository comments. ‘Firstness’ appears to denote some kind of specialness. This isn’t just implicit in the ordinal ‘first’. Rather, this is patently explicit in Aristotle’s statements about first philosophy, as the most estimable, the most choiceworthy, the highest of the theoretical sciences (and the theoretical sciences are the highest among the sciences), and a divine science that is both of god, and that god would possess. However, one thing that should be absolutely clear from Aristotle’s statements above, is that regardless of the composition of the cosmos, *there will always be a first philosophy*. Aristotle is explicitly clear that were it not for immaterial, unchanging, eternal, *haplos* separate substance, then physics would be first philosophy. Or put differently, in this hypothetical world without prime movers, physics would be the highest science. First philosophy is about the highest principles and causes of being as such. What this means is that in a world without prime movers, then physics would study the highest principles and causes of being because it would study whatever else was left. In a different cosmos than Aristotle’s, these might be, say, Democritean atoms. And in *this* world, physics would be *first* since it would study such atoms.

However, it’s not entirely clear how the counterfactual would work on Aristotle’s own view of the cosmos. In a world without prime movers, the highest science would be about the

¹⁷ c.f. esp. 983a3-10.

principles and causes of the things composed by nature, but it's not obvious to me whether this science would study natural substances in the manner of the *Physics* and the other physical works, *or* the principles of natural substance *qua* matter, form, and privation, etc., *or* whether it would be some part of physics which studies the highest *beings* of the physical realm – the eternal heavenly bodies, which Aristotle does call “divine”, thus satisfying A2's divine criterion of wisdom.

What may make this latter option particularly tempting, is that it appears to satisfy the lines: “The primary science, by contrast, is concerned with things that are both separable and immovable. Now all causes are necessarily eternal, and these most of all. For they are the causes of the divine beings that are perceptible.” This allusion to the “divine beings that are perceptible” is obviously a reference to the heavenly bodies. It may therefore be tempting to take the final option, since we would still get a kind of *pseudo-theology* - one which studies the highest beings in this hypothetical cosmos. But while plausible, this answer may ultimately prove unsatisfying. For there is a long tradition before Aristotle of the pre-Socratics ascribing divinity to whatever was the most fundamental entity. Anaximander gives it to ‘*to apeiron*’, Anaximenes to air, etc. The presocratic conception of divinity doesn't necessarily ascribe any consciousness, or will, or anything of that sort to the highest entities. Empedocles just gives his roots the names of gods. What all of these people are saying is just that of course the most important or fundamental thing is going to be ‘divine’. And so, Aristotle ascribing divinity to the heavenly bodies may be very much in this tradition, and thus we should not give too much importance to the word. To be clear – even if first philosophy were to be ‘astrophysics’, or ‘cosmology’ (or whatever we want to call what is going on in the *De Caelo*), Aristotle is clear that the heavenly bodies are still *natural substances*. So, in that sense it doesn't really matter if he calls them divine – this new pseudo-

theology would be exactly that: pseudo. We know that theology is concerned with the primary movers who move the heavenly bodies, but without them, it's not obviously true that the highest science would then study the heavenly bodies. The heavenly bodies aren't *causes* in the way that the prime movers are¹⁸, and in that sense wisdom may not be primarily about the heavenly bodies were it not for their movers. And moreover, the real force of Aristotle's calling the science 'divine' is that it is supposed to be the most befitting knowledge for a god to have because it is the highest knowledge: knowledge of itself. It's not obviously clear that this would apply to divine natural substances as well.

There is another more interesting question here, namely whether there would still be an enquiry into the kinds of things we find in ZHΘ if there were no prime movers? For instance, would Aristotle still feel the need to investigate whether forms have parts, what the relation is between forms and definitions, the priority of form over matter, etc.? I think were it not for the objects of theology, there may still be something like general metaphysics, it just wouldn't be there *for the sake of* some further investigation into higher substances. And moreover, it would belong to the *physicist* to do it, since there would be no *theologian* (or metaphysician) there to undertake it. This may be true, however, all Aristotle says in our above passage is that physics would be first. He doesn't specify which of the above options would be first. Of course, it's entirely possible that the disjunction I set out would *not* hold, if Aristotle thought that this new physics would study all of the above. He would not be of necessity committed to the view that *either* physics studies the heavenly bodies, *or* it studies general metaphysics because the answer might be both. Just as first philosophy seems to study both general metaphysics and theology, and Aristotle seems to have no problem with this in E1. Nevertheless, we need not decide on this

¹⁸ They also aren't separate, but that's another matter.

issue, since Aristotle obviously thinks that *there is* some immaterial, eternally unchanging separate substance. The point I want to stress is simply that regardless of the composition of the cosmos, there will always be a *first science*, regardless of how this ultimately shakes out. Still, Aristotle's brevity here is unfortunate. For, had he specified what the investigation would look like absent the prime movers, we would have an enticing clue as to what first philosophy is supposed to look like. We might have a better clue as to whether it is just about the highest causes and highest beings and divine things, or whether it's about principles like matter form, and privation.

Universal Because First:

I will now turn to my discussion of the universal because first passage, quoted in full below:

“ἀπορήσειε γὰρ ἂν τις πότερόν ποθ' ἢ πρώτη φιλοσοφία καθόλου ἐστὶν ἢ περὶ τι γένος καὶ φύσιν τινὰ μίαν (οὐ γὰρ ὁ αὐτὸς τρόπος οὐδ' ἐν ταῖς μαθηματικαῖς, ἀλλ' ἢ μὲν γεωμετρία καὶ ἀστρολογία περὶ τινὰ φύσιν εἰσὶν, ἢ δὲ καθόλου πασῶν κοινή)· εἰ μὲν οὖν μὴ ἔστι τις ἕτερα οὐσία παρὰ τὰς φύσει συνεστηκυίας, ἢ φυσικὴ ἂν εἴη πρώτη ἐπιστήμη· εἰ δ' ἔστι τις οὐσία ἀκίνητος, αὕτη προτέρα καὶ φιλοσοφία πρώτη, καὶ καθόλου οὕτως ὅτι πρώτη· καὶ περὶ τοῦ ὄντος ἢ ὄν ταύτης ἂν εἴη θεωρῆσαι, καὶ τί ἐστὶ καὶ τὰ ὑπάρχοντα ἢ ὄν” (1026a23-32).

“We might raise a puzzle indeed as to whether the primary philosophy is universal or concerned with a particular genus and one particular nature. For it is not the same way even in the mathematical sciences, but rather geometry and astronomy are concerned with particular nature, whereas universal mathematics is common to all. If, then, there is no other substance beyond those composed by nature, natural science will be the primary science. But if there is some immovable substance, this [that is, theological philosophy] will be prior and will be primary philosophy, and it will be universal in this way, namely, because it is primary. And it will belong to it to get a theoretical grasp on being qua being, both what it is and the things that belong to it qua being.”

Stephen Menn has rightly argued that this passage is part of A2's project of progressively defining wisdom more and more precisely.¹⁹ Further to this, Menn has shown that first philosophy is called wisdom in 'ethical' context, such as NE VI 7, to contrast it with less valuable characters, while in theoretical contexts it is called 'first philosophy' to contrast it with the other theoretical sciences such as physics, which is second.

Just prior to this passage Aristotle had asserted that theology, our most "choice worthy" of the sciences, is concerned with the most "estimable" genus: eternal unchanging *ousiai*. We also learn that first philosophy will be prior to both physics and mathematics. The comparison with "universal mathematics" is supposed to show that although geometry is prior to astronomy, universal mathematics is prior to both, since it is concerned with universal propositions that apply equally across genus-domains. It is unclear just what exactly the analogy to universal mathematics is supposed to show. It could be that universal mathematics is prior to physics and astronomy because it investigates using universal theorems or axioms that apply across genus domains, and hence to both. Or simply that universal mathematics is prior to both physics and astronomy. In either case it seems an analogy is supposed to hold between universal mathematics and first philosophy. Minimally we can glean that first philosophy will be prior to physics and mathematics. This is presumably because the causes that first philosophy investigates are the first causes.

Earlier in E1, at 1025b7-13 it is made clear that all sciences are concerned in some sense with causes and starting-points, but that all sciences are concerned merely with the causes and starting points of some *particular genus* of which they investigate. And not, by contrast, with being qua being, or the causes and starting points of being *universally* considered. Here we learn

¹⁹ c.f. Menn, *The Aim*, Iyl

that our science is to be universal in that it investigates the principles and causes of all being. The problem with this is that we were just told that first philosophy *does* have its own genus, namely eternal unchanging substance. This recalls a similar passage in Γ3 1005a33-1005b2:

ἐπεὶ δ' ἔστιν ἔτι τοῦ φυσικοῦ τις ἀνωτέρω (ἐν γάρ τι γένος τοῦ ὄντος ἢ φύσις), τοῦ καθόλου καὶ τοῦ περὶ τὴν πρώτην οὐσίαν θεωρητικοῦ καὶ ἡ περὶ τούτων ἄν εἴη σκέψις). ἔστι δὲ σοφία τις καὶ ἡ φυσικὴ, ἀλλ' οὐ πρώτη” (Γ3 1005a33 – 1005b2)

“But since there is someone who is higher than the physicist (for nature is one particular kind (genos) of being), the enquiry into the [common axioms] will also belong to the one whose investigation is universal and concerned with first substance. Physics, however, is a sort of wisdom too, but not the first” (My translation).

This passage from Γ may shed some light on the comparison with universal mathematics, for we learn here that this same person who investigates first substance (presumably eternal unchanging *ousiai*), will also investigate the “common axioms” – which I take to be the per se attributes of being. This same task for the first philosopher is confirmed in E1 1026a29-32, quoted above. But regardless of how we take the comparison with universal mathematics,²⁰ Aristotle offers an explicit justification for how first philosophy can be universal:²¹ that it is “universal in this way, because it is first”. There are at least three questions that we must address: in what way is it ‘universal’? In what way is it ‘first’? And how does its ‘firstness’ justify its universality.²²

²⁰ Menn thinks Aristotle rejects the analogy with universal mathematics, c.f. Menn, *The Aim*, Ia5, 3, however Aristotle never says so. Admittedly the rejection could be implicit, but Menn doesn’t explain why he thinks Aristotle does so.

²¹ I don’t think Γ.2 1003b21-23 is a real objection to the universality of theology or to the unity of first philosophy because I don’t think Aristotle’s science of first philosophy has only a generic unity.

²² Walter Leszl suggests that the phrase ‘universal because first’ is misleading and that it would make more sense formulated the other way: ‘first because universal’ (Leszl, “The Science...”, pg 32, note 33.) Of course, formulating it this way would favour ontological interpretation of first philosophy, which we already know from Γ is supposed to be universal since it is general and covers all being. This formulation misses that this phrase is designed to justify theology’s universality, and to link it to our universal science in Γ. The point of the passage is to say that even though theology is concerned with one particular *genos* of being, eternal unchanging *ousiai*, it is still universal – and in this way, because *first*, in the same way that universal mathematics is *prior* to geometry and astronomy.

Answering these questions, and relatedly, understanding the unity of first philosophy, will occupy me for the remainder of this thesis.

One obvious non-starter to how first philosophy is ‘first’, is that it is the first subject studied. Even if one argued that the ordering of the Aristotelian corpus is a Stoic hangover, it wouldn’t make any sense to start one’s study at the Lyceum with the texts on first philosophy. Likewise, it would be non-sensical to somehow shift Λ to the start of the *Metaphysics* itself. The argument of the *Metaphysics* proceeds in a very careful, considered way, and it takes patience and a considerable amount of time to work up to, and work out, wisdom or first philosophy. Myles Burnyeat ventures just the opposite formulation of the above. He thinks first philosophy is first in the order of understanding, but last in the order of learning.²³ While this is almost trivially true, it needed to be pointed out. Unfortunately, Burnyeat does not develop his thoughts on the “universal because first” passage any further.²⁴

Before continuing my discussion of Aristotle’s unification of first philosophy, I remarked in my introduction that it was precisely E1’s link between theology and the universal science of being that caused certain scholars to reject either the whole of E or just certain offending passages. It is to these objections to E, and the project of unifying theological and ontological interpretations of the *Metaphysics*, that I will now turn.

Objections to E1:

The ostensible or apparent tensions between the programmatic remarks Aristotle makes between books A, B, Γ , and E has given rise to some scholarly debate about which of the works

²³ Burnyeat, *Map (2001)*, chapter 6.

²⁴ Similarly, Christopher Kirwan has surprisingly little to say about this crucial passage in his commentary on $\Gamma\Delta E$ for the Clarendon Aristotle series.

are genuine and which are spurious. This has been especially the case for book E. Indeed, some scholars, especially Natorp,²⁵ think that E is entirely spurious.²⁶ This was because Natorp thought that E's programme for a theological science of first philosophy didn't seem to square with Γ's project of a general science of being. But not only this, Natorp thought that E was doubly problematic. He held both that E was spurious, *and* that 1026a23-32 - the remark at the end of E which links the science of theology *explicitly* to a general science of being and one which includes the per-se attributes of being – was an interpolation made by some later editor. This conclusion about E is clearly problematic. One does not have to think that E1 is the most developed account of the project of metaphysics in order to believe that the work was genuine. For one thing, if we accept Natorp's proposal, we would have to believe that some later editor wrote E, and included it in the work. But then we would also have to believe that this same editor, or someone following them, also wrote the theology of Λ, as well as the passages in Z 11 and Z 17 that our investigation of perceptible substance is working toward a later investigation of a higher kind of substance, and so on.²⁷

So, to answer the rather modest question of whether scholars have been too quick in assuming E is a genuine work of the *Metaphysics*, my answer will be a resounding “no,” they have not been too quick. Nevertheless, in the interests of fairness I will try to sketch a strong man

²⁵ The texts of Natorp are "Thema und Disposition der aristotelischen Metaphysik," in *Philosophische Monatshefte* XXIV, 1888, especially pages. 37-65 and 540-574; and "Aristoteles' Metaphysik K 1-8, 1065a26," in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* v.1, 188.

²⁶ Attempts to remove any identification between theology and the science of being qua being go back at least to 1581 in Francesco Patrizi's *Discussiones Peripateticae*. A recent defender of this view is Annick Stevens. Walter Leszl wants to do away with theological descriptions of first philosophy. The view that E is problematic seems to hold more ground on the continent. For citations see Leszl, "On the science of being qua being and its platonic background in Aristote « Métaphysique » Gamma. Édition, Traduction, Études. Introduction, texte grec et traduction par M.Hecquet-Devienne. Onze études réunies par A. Stevens. Louvain-la-Neuve, Éditions Peeters 2008, pp. 217-265. And, Leszl, Walter (1975). *Aristotle's Conception of Ontology*. Antenore. Esp. Chapter VIII. And, Stevens, Annick: *L'ontologie d'Aristote au carrefour du logique et du reel*, Vrin, Paris 2000, esp. pp. 229-32,

²⁷ Menn makes this objection in Iγ1.

of the Natorp-style argument. It might go something like this: E outlines a thoroughly departmental first philosophy - it's theology; it's about a single genus or subset of special beings, and it's *not universal* because it investigates only one genus of being and not all beings. Now one arguing for this view might say that Λ has theology, but it's general because its job is to look at all substances. On the face of it, what Aristotle says is that the enquiry is about substance, conceived of as all substances. Substances that are changeable and perishable, changeable and imperishable, and immaterial separate substance. Aristotle then says something about the changeable ones, then the immaterial separate ones. So Λ , taken as a whole, is not theology – at least not as characterized by E1.²⁸ The view that E is an interpolation by later editors *could be* consistent with Λ still being a genuine treatise if we took it that Λ is a general enquiry into all substances. Sure, it divides into parts, but they are all part of one enquiry. Indeed, $\Lambda 6$ remembers this division and says since we investigated the first two kinds of substance it remains to investigate the third, and a similar move could be made about book Z. So, this is how one could say that A2, etc. don't need to be written by a later editor even if we suppose that E1 had been, because they have this character of *embedding* theology into what could be taken as a general enquiry into substance. And this is *not* how E characterizes first philosophy.

Of course, E1's account of first philosophy is not divorced from universality, or from a general kind of enquiry, or from answering the puzzle of B#3 of whether it belongs to one science to investigate all being, explicitly because of the "universal because first" passage. But this interpretation of E doesn't have to be consistent with the text of E since we are to toss it out. This is a highly unlikely story, but moreover, it would favour the ontological reading of the *Metaphysics* to the total exclusion of the theological. It would harm the unity of the treatise even

²⁸ Of course one could object that the first half of Λ is preparatory, or that it actually belongs to physics.

outside of E, since A2 would not be related then to Γ , since we would no longer be after eternal, divine, or even highest causes. In any case, the view that *either* you're doing theology or something general, you can't possibly be doing both, that view is simply untenable. This is not just a problem for a holistic and fair reading of the *Metaphysics* itself, but it also fails to account of the *consistently theological* descriptions of first philosophy that Aristotle gives in the works outside of the *Metaphysics*.²⁹

Some others have more reasonable approaches to the problem of E and theology. Jaeger agrees with Natorp that the tension between the theological and ontological descriptions of first philosophy is irreconcilable. And he proposes instead that the differing conceptions of first philosophy belong to different periods of Aristotle's life – that the theological descriptions belong to an earlier period, and the ontological descriptions to a later one – and that our transmitted *Metaphysics* contains passages from both periods.³⁰ The temptation of holding a view like this is to say well theology sounds a bit Platonic so it must be early, ontology sounds a bit secular so it must be late. This proposal is much more difficult to defend against, but it is likewise unprovable. For my part, I think it fails to account for the fact that Aristotle clearly thought the projects were compatible, again made explicit in the Natorp-offending passage of 1026a23-32. But even if Jaeger's proposal were right, it would at best be the kind of *eikos muthos* that Myles Burnyeat proposed in *Map* chapter 6, where he argues that Λ is a genuine Aristotelian treatise, but that it is rushed, cramped, and treads through the same ground as Z, then works its way quickly up to theology, because Aristotle wrote it on his death bed in 323BC.

²⁹C.f. in the physical works alone: *Physics* I,9 192a34-b2, *Physics* II,2 194b9-15, *Physics* II,7 198a27-31, *De Caelo* 298b19-20 (referencing Λ 8's argument for one heaven), *On Generation and Corruption* 318a5-6, *De Motu Animalium* 700b8-9 (refencing Λ 6-9). However, there is some controversy here. For instance, the remark in *Physics* I about the homonymy of being, that it doesn't belong to physics but to some other science to investigate. It is controversial whether this is a reference to first philosophy or to dialectic. So, there could be remarks outside the *Metaphysics* to first philosophy that appear to be about something other than theology.

³⁰ Jaeger, *Aristoteles*, 1923, pg. 226.

According to Burnyeat, it wasn't the theology he *intended* it write, but it was the one that he wrote.³¹ And if this is anything close to right, then contra Jaeger, Aristotle's 'theological' period would not have belonged to his earlier life, but rather to his later.

What's at stake here is the unity of the treatise of the *Metaphysics*. More specifically whether we think A envisages a project that is different from what we get in Γ , and whether we think the general study of being is distinct from the study of the principles and causes of being. Some people think Γ , and the project of metaphysics generally, is about what features beings have in virtue of (or insofar as) they are beings. This would be Irwin's view.³² On this view, Γ will be radically different than what A envisages. A2 envisages a science that will include God. There is of course our reference in Γ 1 1003a26-7, that we are looking for first principles and highest causes. Why is this an argument against Jaeger? Well, if we think that A is theological, and that Γ studies the principles and causes of being as part of the project A envisages, then this distinction into different 'periods' of writing in Aristotle's life will be harder to make. There will be no 'ontological period', and no 'theological period'.

Briefly, one positive argument for including E in any arrangement of the books of the *Metaphysics* and for accepting it as a genuine work, is that that A2 explicitly looks forward toward a science of 'divine' things. It is exactly this reference that is picked up in E1. And A describes a science that god would have. What better knowledge for god to have than knowledge of itself? So again, if we follow Natorp's proposal and suppose that E1 was spurious, must we then think that the divine aspect of wisdom of A2 is never picked up later in the *Metaphysics*, or that the *aporia* of B#3 addressed in E were never explained by Aristotle himself? What should be

³¹ For what it's worth, Frede and Patzig accept the conclusion that Λ was not the theology that Aristotle intended, Menn thinks it was. I will remain agnostic on this issue, and nothing in my argument hinges on it.

³² Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles*, 1988. A later defender is Shields, c.f. Shields, "Being qua Being".

clear from all of this is that any decision to delete E or claim it is an interpolation by later scholars, is not based on any textual evidence, or any report from the ancient sources, but is based instead in bias and favouritism about which version of the *Metaphysics* a particular scholar wishes to read. If one day Aristotle scholars get together and decide that the project of unifying theological with ontological readings of the texts is indeed impossible, then that is Aristotle's failure, not ours, because it was Aristotle's project to do so. But we cannot simply delete an essential part of the transmitted text just to artificially disarm the tensions between two readings, and we can't bastardize the text just to make sense of our bias. And, I believe any account of the *Metaphysics* should strive to be maximally consistent with the text, and going the way of Natorp and excising whatever doesn't suit us is not good philosophical work.

Pros Hen Vocality and Universal Because First:

Returning now to my main discussion of the universal because first passage and the unity of theology and general metaphysics, I will now discuss Frede-Patzig's solution to the problem using *pros hen* vocality. In "The Unity of General and Special Metaphysics" Michael Frede seeks to explain Aristotle's statement that first philosophy is "universal because first", and to solve the problem of the unity of theology and ontology, in terms of *pros hen* predication. Frede's starting point is a defense of what Patzig set out to do in "Theology and Ontology".³³ Frede wants Patzig to be right, but he thinks Patzig is wrong, and he is right to think Patzig is wrong. What Patzig did was to take the *pros hen* vocality identified in $\Gamma 2$ between substances and accidents, and to try to apply it one 'level' up, metaphysically speaking, between god and other substances. The way *pros hen* vocality was supposed to work in Γ was to say that attributes

³³ Patzig, "Theology and Ontology", (1979).

like qualities and so on *depend* on substances for their being.³⁴ This means that what it is for white to be a ‘quality’, is for a substance to be disposed in a certain way. Patzig then thought that because everything *depends* on the prime mover for its existence, the same *pros hen* relation could apply between the prime mover and all other substances. Using this, Patzig then argued that ontology should be subsumed under theology, since god was the real-deal full-strength substance on which everything depend. Patzig went so far as to say that ZHΘ were a later addition to the *Metaphysics* from a time when Aristotle had abandoned the project of trying to unify theology and ontology.

The problem Frede wants to address is that Patzig’s theory could not work since the dependence between god and all other substances was the *wrong kind* of dependence. The *pros hen* relation between substance and attributes is a metaphysical or ontological relation, but the relation between god and other substance is a *causal* relation, not metaphysical one. Thus, there are human beings because of the sun, and there is the sun because of the prime movers. There is no reason to read any metaphysical or ontological dependence into what is essentially a causal story. This was the problem with Patzig’s view. So, what Frede tries to do instead is to look for a way that there *could be* a metaphysical *pros hen* relationship between immaterial substance and material substances. He wants to get the advantages of Patzig’s view, without the downsides.

In Γ2, the unity of the science of being is apparently somehow guaranteed by the *pros hen* relation between substance and accident. Or so thought Patzig, Owen, etc. So, if you confront this other relationship between general and special metaphysics, you just make the *pros*

³⁴ Broadly speaking there are two ways people take Γ. On the stronger reading, the homonymy of being in Γ solves the problem of how there can be a unified science of being, given that being is not a single genus. On that account the mere fact of what it is to be a quality - the account of *that* has to refer to substance and not the other way around - is enough to secure the unity of science. If that’s right, then somehow understanding way of being of substances in general gives you enough to understand the way of being of quantities and the attributes of being. Or minimally that understanding the principles and causes of substances is enough to understand the attributes,

hen move again, and get unity between general and special metaphysics. This is Frede's move. To do so, Frede introduces something he calls the "way of being" of an entity, although what exactly "the way of being" means he never succeeds in explaining. Frede then argues that the way of being of god is so radically different *in kind* from the way of being of everything else, that in order to *understand* the way of being of natural substances, we have to understand the true, ideal way of being of god, which he takes to be the *primary* way of being. And so, the move then becomes epistemological: it's about our *understanding*. And in this way ZHΘ, Λ2-5 effectively become "ladders"³⁵ up to god, and once we get there, we realize that our previous understanding of natural substance in terms of matter, form, privation, essence, activity, etc. must be revised in light of what we now know about the *true nature* of these principles as exemplified in god. That is to say, for Frede, god's activity is different *in kind* from human activity, since it is activity *without* capacity.³⁶ And so for Frede as for Patzig, ZHΘ & Λ2-5 aren't first philosophy – not because they are *physics*, but because they are merely preparatory for an ultimate theology.³⁷ His basic idea can be seen in the following passage:

"The explanation I want to offer for the final remark of E 1 is the following: (i) theology deals with beings of a certain kind, namely, separate substances. But in doing so, it also deals with a particular kind or way of being, a way of being peculiar to divine substances, (ii) It turns out that this way of being is the one in terms of which all other ways of being have to be explained, i.e., it turns out that a study of being as such resolves itself in three steps into a study of how all the different ways of being that characterize the different kinds of beings ultimately have to be explained in terms of the way of being that is characteristic of divine substances, (iii) Since theology studies this focal way or sense of being, it also provides the natural point to discuss how all other ways of being depend on this primary way of being, especially since this primacy would seem to reflect the very nature of divine substances. In developing this explanation, theology does carry out at least the substantial core of the program of general metaphysics and to that extent can be identified with general metaphysics. This is one way in which theology, because of the

³⁵ Frede doesn't use this language, but I think it's an image he may accept.

³⁶ It's easy to say that the actuality of god is perfect in the way that no other activity is perfect. Because human beings are mortal, subject to chance, etc. But making a metaphysical or ontological point such that your *understanding* of the activity of the human is a 'falling away' from the perfect activity of god – that is unsupported by the text.

³⁷ Although Frede thinks Λ isn't that theology.

primacy of its objects, will be universal. For, in taking into account the primacy of the being of its objects, it will also deal with the ways of being that are dependent on it...”³⁸

The takeaway from the above passage is Frede thinks that the way of being for divine separate substance is in some sense ‘primary’ and that the other lesser kinds of beings ‘*depend*’ on this substance for their way of being. Or in other words, they are ‘beings’ only *derivatively* from this primary way of being, i.e. the way of being of god.

Frede’s view faces several problems. The most obvious objection is the fact that there isn’t any explicit textual evidence to support the claim that Aristotle thought *pros hen* predication holds between god and other substances. Nowhere does Aristotle say that the ‘way of being’ of god is somehow ‘primary’, and that the way of being of other substances is somehow *derivative* from this primary sense. To be fair, Aristotle doesn’t say that the relationship *does not* hold, but that may be because Aristotle didn’t see it as important to address since he didn’t believe it held in the first place.³⁹ Indeed, perhaps Frede struggles to explain what he means by the respective ‘ways of being’ between the different classes of substances because there isn’t any textual support for the view. Indeed, he offers little, if any explanation for the supposed “way of being” of any of the entities he discusses. The furthest his explanation gets is to explain that natural substances are enmattered, changing, and not separate, and that the objects of mathematics are separate (but not really separate from matter), and that the objects of theology are wholly separate, and unchanging. Perhaps Frede could say that to know the way of being of an entity is simply to know the principles and causes of that entity. But then, there would be no difference between wisdom and understanding the *way of being*, and the ‘way of being’ would cease to do

³⁸ Frede, “The Unity...” pg. 84.

³⁹ Menn makes these two points in *The Aim*, Ia1, though he does criticize *pros hen* predication as a solution to the problem.

any new or additional philosophical work. To be sure, Frede rightly recognizes that accidents depend upon substances for their being, and so *pros hen* predication applies in cases of substance and accident, but the same does not *obviously* hold between god and natural substances.

Frede goes on to say that the way of being of the objects of physics (i.e. natural substances) is different from the way of being of the objects of mathematics, which in turn are both different from the way of being of the objects of theology. As I have already said, Frede repeatedly emphasizes this apparent difference in the ways of being, but he fails to flesh it out. It may be true that there is a difference in the way of being between natural substances and the objects of mathematics, if we take the objects of mathematics to be quantities. For then a *pros hen* relationship *would* apply between the objects of mathematics and substances, since Aristotle thinks quantities depend upon substances for their being. However, quantities depend upon substances for their being *in general*, and not on any one particular kind of being. So even then, the *pros hen* relation between quantities and the prime movers would be no different between the relation between quantities and natural substances. In addition, Frede thinks the way of being of natural substances are different from each other. That is, he thinks the way of being of a camel is different from that of a horse. If that's true, then this isn't a philosophically interesting distinction. And certainly, you can't get metaphysical dependence out of the story. It's very implausible to say anything *pros hen* about the animal kingdom. For while Aristotle may think that humans are perfect and animals aren't, he doesn't think that animals are somehow a 'falling away' from the perfect human.

What's at stake here is whether the ways of being of natural substances and divine substances have nothing in common with each other, and that doesn't seem to be right. Both god and natural substances are *still* substances, and they are still explained using *the same* principles

and methods. The attraction of Frede's view is that it could serve to explain why we might want to study the objects of theology. And why understanding these eternal unchanging substances could help us understand other substances. What Frede needs to show is that the way of being between god and natural substances is *derivative*, that the way of being of god is in some sense *primary*, and that *understanding* of the way of being of god is necessary for, or prior, to understanding natural substance. And he hasn't shown this.⁴⁰

Finally, *pros hen* predication fails to be satisfactory on another point: the *Metaphysics* – or the science of first philosophy, or wisdom – is not (at least) primarily about *being*, it is primarily about the highest *principles* and *causes* of beings. It is not about some *special* way of god's being, which is never addressed in the text. The fourfold division of being in $\Delta 7$ and the subsequent investigation of being in $ZH\Theta$, is meant to be part of the argument working our way up toward the highest principles and causes of being.⁴¹ It is not in-itself the *end* of the investigation. Aristotle thinks we have to draw distinctions about things like 'being', because it is said "in many ways", and clarifying this will help us work our way up the causal chain. This is the way the argument of the *Metaphysics* actually proceeds. And so, it is to really miss the point to say that $ZH\Theta$ belong to some later part of the investigation. Even if they are preparatory for a final theology, they are still necessary parts of the investigation. $\Lambda 2$ is not to be tossed out simply because it is preparatory or programmatical. It's an integral part of the investigation, and it sets the stage for what is to come, just in the way $ZH\Theta$ and $\Lambda 2-5$ prepare us for $\Lambda 6-10$.

⁴⁰ Another very difficult question for the Fredean account is whether the way of being of the capital 'P' capital 'M' Prime Mover is different from the way of being of the other movers of the heavenly bodies, and therefore whether the other movers *depend* upon the first unmoved mover for their being. I don't at present know Frede's thoughts on $\Lambda 9$.

⁴¹ And Patzig wanted to throw out Δ .

Lindsay Judson's Solution:

Lindsay Judson offers a different solution to 'universal because first' in his 2018 article, "First Philosophy in *Metaphysics* Λ", one that is explicitly set against the solutions by Frede, Menn, and others. While his discussion of the problem appears explicitly in an article about the unity of first philosophy in *Metaphysics* Λ, Judson believes that the disjuncture between the two halves of Λ is basically equivalent to the apparent disjuncture between the respective programmes of *Metaphysics* Γ and E. Indeed, so much so that he believes his solution to the unity of Λ will hold for Γ and E as well.

Judson distinguishes his position from that of Frede-Patzig by trying to maintain a clear separation between the general metaphysics or ontology of Γ and the strictly departmental enquiry of E's theology. For, he believes Frede-Patzig subsume general metaphysics into theology. Judson holds essentially the reverse of Frede's position: he argues contra Frede that the study of immaterial substance *does not* provide us with the resources to understand the general character of perceptible substance – rather the *reverse*. This means that the principles of substance discussed in Λ2-5 *aren't preliminary* to a discussion of the highest substance in Λ6-10, a substance which is altogether different in kind and the best iteration (as Frede would have it) of substance:

“General metaphysics as Aristotle pursues it in all of these books is an enquiry in its own right: although perceptible substances are not the only substances, examining their principles as natural substances yields the resources—the framework of form/matter, essence/accident, actuality/potentiality, etc.—for a metaphysical understanding of all substances, including separable ones. Thus the science of natural substances forms the core of our understanding of the 'higher' substance(s)”

Thus, Judson thinks the principles of substance outlined in Λ2-5 don't merely explain natural substances, they help explain *all* substances, including the prime movers.⁴² The picture Judson

⁴² I am in agreement with Judson on this point. However, as I will discuss below, Judson asserts in note 105 that the principles and causes of substances are *prior* to the prime movers, both epistemologically and ontologically. While I

sketches is one in which Aristotelian ‘first philosophy’ is an overarching enterprise. It is a science. One which has general metaphysics part – this investigates the principles and causes of being, done centrally though not exclusively through an investigation into natural substance. That is, it is a science of the principles and causes of *all* beings – not the features beings have *in virtue* of being beings (like Irwin), but the principles and causes of all beings, without focus on any particular genus. But first philosophy also has a theology part – a departmental enquiry into a special kind of beings. Theology is unequivocally departmental for Judson because it focuses on a particular part of being: the gods. And that this is merely a part of the broader enterprise of first philosophy. Departmental theology constitutes the study of the gods, what they are like, what their activity is, how many there are, but this is part of a wider science which constitutes first philosophy. But this is such that Judson maintains an interdependence between the theology part and the general metaphysics part. This is because departmental theology requires the principles and causes of beings, which is the job of general metaphysics to do, in order to carry out its task. On the other hand, general metaphysics depends on theology in this way: general metaphysics makes claims about the priority of some principles over others - the priority of form over matter, and the end over matter, that actuality is prior to potentiality, etc. Judson thinks that these principles will turn out to be undermined if the world doesn’t depend on an unmoved mover, conceived of as pure activity that is not itself an exercise of a capacity. General metaphysics will come to naught if it turns out there isn’t an unmoved mover. Judson recognizes that this is a messy picture. However, he thinks that E1 hasn’t envisaged the whole project. In particular, he thinks while Aristotle claims that theology is “universal because first” he doesn’t

can see the reason one might take this view, I think in Aristotle’s mind the *archai* we are looking for are the highest *efficient* causes. I think for him it makes more sense to say that the gods are the highest causes, rather than certain abstract principles. So even if the movers are nothing but pure activity, the relevant *archai* are the gods, not the principle of activity.

know how this can be true until Λ . It's fine for Judson if E is incompatible with Λ since his starting point is the unity of Λ . Following from this, Judson interprets the universal because first passage in this way: he thinks theology is 'universal' not principally because god is the cause of everything, and not in the Fredean way, that the 'way of being' of god is the proper way to understand the way of being of everything else, but in the way that it makes an essential contribution to the project of the universal science of being which is itself universal. It tells you that actuality is prior to potentiality, in a key way, not necessarily all the ways, that general metaphysics wants to claim. Put ambitiously, Judson thinks it is a key ingredient in telling us that we're in a world in which Aristotelian general metaphysics is true, and not for instance, in the Democritean world. In particular, the prime mover is needed to solve the chicken or egg problem in Λ , that is to show that actuality is in fact *prior* to potentiality. So, the universality of theology in E1 is explained merely by theology's participation in another enquiry – general metaphysics – which is itself universal.

Just thinks strictly speaking 'first philosophy' (understood as this broader enterprise) is *first*, and it is first in that it is the primary science. Theology then, has a kind of weaker firstness, which is that it is about the primary beings. But it is because it is about the primary beings that it has a role to play in the universal science, namely by underwriting the priority of factuality to potentiality in the manner explained above. Judson writes:

"Can this answer to the problem of Λ also explain the claim in E1 that theology is 'universal because it is first'? As we have seen, one interpretation is that Aristotle means that theology constitutes the universal science of being because it is first. It should be clear that this answer will not work for Λ . If it were correct, the study of the principles of sensible substances in Λ 2-5 could be at best a mere preliminary, since first philosophy, on this view, is constituted by the study of divine substances. I suggest that the claim is rather that theology is universal in the sense of contributing a part of the universal science. It is universal because it is first in the sense that the priority it is concerned with is the priority of the primary beings over

everything else: as I have said, to establish this priority requires a departmental enquiry [i.e. departmental theology] into the nature of unchanging substances and their relation to the rest of the world. In the case of the general study of natural substances, by contrast, no such departmental enquiry by second philosophy is needed: only a very general appeal to their being subject to change is required”⁴³

To be clear, Judson thinks the view that theology constitutes the universal science of being because it is first cannot be correct. His justification in the above passage is that this would make $\Lambda 2-5$ preliminary to theology. Of course, I have argued earlier and I will go on to argue that it is not problematic and indeed it is consistent with the text if the enquiry into the principles of natural substances is preliminary to an ultimate theology. Judson criticizes Menn’s view (something like the view just criticized) as deflationary, but then argues for a position himself on which theology is *only* universal because it makes a contribution to or is part of another enquiry: the universal science of being.

My primary criticism of Judson’s view is that it is in tension with the text, certainly the text of E1. For one thing, nowhere does Aristotle explicitly say that “the science of being *qua* being,” understood as *general metaphysics*, is *first*, rather he says that ‘first philosophy’, understood as *theologike*, *that* thing is first. The easiest way to justify that claim would be to accept that the science of being *qua* being and the theology called ‘first philosophy’ in E1 are the *same science*. This is view that Aristotle appears to have held in E. The problem is that Judson can’t firmly hold this position because he is *committed* to the view that the two projects are truly different, and this was one of the ways that he distinguished himself from Frede-Patzig in the first place. Indeed, an explicit goal of Judson’s was to maintain a separation between general metaphysics and the departmental enquiry of theology. Indeed, Judson’s solution takes the ‘firstness’ out of theology, where Aristotle explicitly puts it in our passage in E1, and places it in

⁴³ Judson, “First Philosophy,” pg. 264.

general metaphysics or some broader enterprise. Judson even says in note 105 that the principles of substance are *prior* to the prime mover, both epistemically and ontologically. Does that not make the general science of the principles and causes of being is prior to theolog? Yet Judson wants to preserve the claim that theology is ‘universal because first’ by claiming that it is still first because it is concerned with a particular kind of priority – the priority of the primary beings, and only theology can explain this. It appears that he wants to eat his cake and have it too. A more charitable formulation of the above criticism would be to say that if Judson’s Aristotle were writing E1, he’d have to be clearer about the *non-identity* of first philosophy and theology. Since on Judson’s view, they’re not identical. This is because theology is a proper *part* of first philosophy. There’s no hint in E1 that in addition to mathematics, physics, and theology, there is also *first philosophy* – distinct from all of the other theoretical sciences. The text clearly states that theology is identical to first philosophy.

A Positive Sketch:

Throughout this thesis I have been arguing for a view, since discussing these nearly inscrutable passages of Aristotle in a way involves a great deal of interpretation. Nevertheless, it remains for me to give my positive account in more detail. I will first discuss E1 1026a29-32, the “universal because first passage”. Two *nearly* correct answers for how to interpret the passage are offered by Sarah Broadie and Stephen Menn. Broadie writes:

“...a discipline has the status of first philosophy (sophia unqualified) if and only if its subject is the primary cause; the primary cause is cause of everything else; hence the corresponding discipline in a way includes everything in its subject matter; hence the discipline is universal, and maximally so”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Broadie, “A Science...”, pg. 16.

Menn offers two versions of essentially the same answer. The first is in Menn's summary of each book of the *Metaphysics* in Ia5:

“[first philosophy] will be a science of a particular object or domain of objects, and will be universal only in the sense that this object is a cause of being universally.”⁴⁵

While the second appears in his more considered study of the aims of ΔE in Iγ1:

“But here Aristotle's answer is that first philosophy is indeed universal, but "in this way, by being first": that is, because it is concerned with the ἀρχαί, the first things, and because the ἀρχαί are causes, to all things, of the fact that they are and of the attributes that belong to them because they are, the first philosopher will also have scientific knowledge of being and its universal attributes. Of course the first philosopher will start from the effects, being and its attributes, but he will have scientific knowledge of them (or, anyway, his knowledge of them will be first philosophy) only when he has traced them back to the ἀρχαί as their causes.”⁴⁶

The takeaway from these passages is a picture of first philosophy that is concerned with a single domain of objects, namely the eternal unchanging *ousiai* which are the first movers of the heavens. In this way the first and indeed, highest, *causes* also turn out to be the first and highest *beings*.

I said earlier that an explanation of this passage will have to answer three questions: how is it ‘universal’? How is it ‘first’? And how does its ‘firstness’ justify its universality? Here’s how I answer them. I will first restate the problem: A science is supposed to be unified based upon the unity of the genus it investigates. But being is not a genus, so how can the science of being be unified? Aristotle’s answer is that, although theology, our first philosophy, is concerned primarily with a *single genos*, or domain of objects, namely unchanging eternal *ousiai*, it will be universal because it is first. That is, its objects, the first beings, are the first and highest causes of all motion. Since they are the first causes, they are causes of *all* beings universally. Indeed, the highest causes are causes of the *widest* range of effects: *all* being. And since first philosophy is

⁴⁵ Menn, *The Aim*, Ia5, 3.

⁴⁶ Menn, *The Aim*, Iγ1, 13-14.

concerned with the first and highest causes, it is *prior* to both physics and mathematics, which, taken together exhaust the gamut of causality. And because theology is prior to physics and mathematics, the theologian's grasp is therefore universal, and so it belongs to the theologian to explain "being qua being, and the things that belong to it qua being [i.e. the per se attributes]."

Menn's view is deflationary, insofar as he thinks first philosophy will be universal only in a deflated, limited way, however he is right to grasp that because the highest causes are causes to all being, the first philosopher will also "have scientific knowledge of being and its universal attributes". Theology is not universal because it concerns a universal genus, but instead because it is first, and because it is prior to the other theoretical disciplines, over which it rules.

Having dealt with the "universal because first," passage, I will now discuss the unity of theology with the universal science of being. Much of what the disagreement between scholars on this issue comes down to, is how to understand the highest principles and causes, and what counts as a 'highest' cause. We can use the metaphor of a mountain to explain this. For some, the highest causes are like the highest mountains – a collection of the tallest mountains on Earth, or perhaps better, the tallest on each continent. Lindsay Judson might fall into this camp. For others, the highest causes are like the highest mountain on Earth, simpliciter. Stephen Menn, and Sarah Broadie might fall into this one. For them, if they ascend K2, and find out that Everest is still a few hundred meters higher, well they haven't reached the highest mountain and must climb even higher. What this means is that for Judson, matter, form, privation, essence, activity, *and* the prime mover are all the *highest* principles and causes. They are the highest principles of their respective *kinds*, like the tallest mountains of each continent. Whereas Menn might think form is like Annapurna, activity like K2, and the prime movers like Everest. We haven't gotten to the real heights until we reach Everest. My view is somewhere in between the two. I accept that

wisdom is about the highest principles and causes, and at the end of the day this means *the* highest principles and causes, but along the way we have to reach activity, form, etc. My worry is that on Judson's view, the prime movers are simply *a* highest principle, but so too is matter. The movers aren't 'higher' than matter - in the most scandalizing words of Plotinus "*archai gar ampho*"⁴⁷ for Judson. My worry with Menn's view, is that he wants to toss out everything encountered on the way. Or, to belabour the analogy, he ignores just how tall K2 really is. In his insistence on the highest principles and causes, the prime movers, Menn tosses out everything on the way that enables the investigation and understanding of the primary beings in the first place. He ignores the fact that some of the principles of natural substance discussed in $\Lambda 2-5$, i.e. form, essence, activity, are the very same principles which explain the being of the prime movers. This is my principal source of disagreement with Menn – instead of allowing the parts of first philosophy concerning natural substance to be preparatory for a final theology, he rejects them as so-called "false paths" or dead ends on our way to the true *archai*.

For all of Menn's genius, and for his ability to closely read the text, trace the argument through the *Metaphysics* as a whole, and understand the context not only of each book, but of the entire treatise, he seems to let the theory take over from the data when it comes to his work on $ZH\Theta$ and $\Lambda 2-5$. Nowhere in *Z* does Aristotle say the arguments of this text are misleading, untrue, or come up as dead-ends. Menn doesn't let the texts speak for themselves when it comes to these books. He just seems to think that they've got to be dead ends on his view, therefore they are. What he needs to show is a text that actually says this. I readily grant that there *are* dead ends in the *Metaphysics*, the criticism of the Platonic forms in *M* and *A* being one of them, but there Aristotle is arguing against an opponent, not a view he puts forth in his own voice.

⁴⁷ *Enn.*I.8.6, 33-34

Averroes recognized these dead ends. Likewise Menn points out that two of the four ways being is said turn out to be false paths, namely “being as truth” and “coincidental being”, but there Aristotle is explicit that there is no scientific knowledge of these. But Z does not say the investigation into the priority of form over matter, or about essence, or definition, that those things are false paths.

Similarly, Menn thinks E is an introduction to ZHΘ in part because it enables the existence of false paths to the *archai*. Other than the rejection of physics and mathematics as candidates for wisdom, I don’t see how this is possible. And moreover, I don’t think the investigations in ZHΘ are false paths. Rather they are consistent with the project outlined in A2 that we are to reason ‘upward’ from the *effects*, and from what is given *to sense perception*, toward the highest causes. This is why we start with sensible substance in Z. And this reading is consistent with Aristotle’s remarks in Z.11 1037a10-16 and Z.17 1041a6-10 that our investigations here are “for the sake of” another kind of substance, “that substance which is separate from sensible substance”. Indeed, we can accept that E is an introduction to ZHΘ, and not be bothered by the fact that these books don’t investigate the objects of theology. On the view I am advancing, it would be rather surprising if they did. This is because, as just noted about A2, we are to reason upward from the effects toward the *archai* which are their causes. Thus, it would make no sense to place an investigation into the objects of theology right after E. We first need to understand sensible substance, and the principles and causes which enable us to understand the prime movers, which are themselves causes universally.⁴⁸ Against Menn, I think at the very least you can’t argue from the fact that we haven’t gotten to the unmoved mover in Z and H that they are therefore a dead end.

⁴⁸ My view is similar to Frede’s, in that I think the investigation into perceptible substances is a kind of “ladder” toward eternal unchanging substance. I just don’t think we need to throw out the ladder once we get there.

As I said in the introduction, a good reading of the *Metaphysics* will have to be maximally consistent with the text, while also ensuring plausibility. To that end, any account of the unity of theology with general metaphysics will have to account for the per se attributes of being. On the old-fashioned way of reading the text, it would be problematic for E if it didn't make any progress toward the per-se attributes of being. Indeed, the stretch EZHΘ make no progress toward the per se attributes of being. Scholars may claim that it wasn't part of Aristotle's conception of first philosophy at the time of writing these texts to include the per se attributes. But just as the fact that ZHΘ don't discuss the objects of theology is not problematic on my account, neither is the absence of the per-se attributes. This is because the Aristotle of E has *already* investigated the principle of non-contradiction and the excluded middle in Γ, and drawn the necessary distinctions about being, sameness, part, whole, coincident, etc. in Δ. And in I Aristotle will go on to discuss oneness, being many, contrariety, equality, etc. Admittedly I do find I's position in the treatise to be puzzling, but it is not necessarily problematic. For instance, the first lines of I pick up Δ6. I don't see why I isn't shifted to between Δ and E in our transmitted text. That would make the investigation into the attributes the stretch ΓΔI, and the investigation into natural, mathematical, and eternal unchanging *ousia* could proceed from there. In any case E1 1026a29-32 clearly recognizes the per se attributes as part of the project, even if EZHΘ make no progress toward them.

To tie it all together, on my reading, we may take A2 as a blueprint. We are looking for the highest principles and the highest causes, which turn out to be the highest beings. But we know that wisdom is difficult. Thus, we must reason up from the things that are more easily known. That is, we must start from sense perception – from natural substances – and work our way up from the effects toward the *archai* of which they are the causes. After discussing a series

of puzzles which will help explain or guide our investigation into wisdom, we turn to Γ , to a general enquiry into being *qua* being, for we don't yet know how to reach the *archai*. We then draw distinctions about the things which are said in many ways, among them 'being' in $\Delta 7$. These enable us to progress on our journey to the *archai*. Along the way we develop certain kinds of conceptual understanding: what a principle is, the principle of non-contradiction, what being is, what unity is, etc.⁴⁹ We start our investigation into the effects of the causes we are looking for, with an investigation into natural substances in ZH.⁵⁰ We find that categorial substance is prior to non-substantial kinds of being. We then look to a higher kind of principle, activity, in Θ . Rehashing these principles of natural substance in $\Lambda 2-5$, and indeed *using* them, we look for our final, highest kind of substance: eternal, unchanging, wholly separate *ousiai*, which are the first beings and the first causes. We find that our project was consistent with A's search for the highest principles and highest causes (we've found them), and that our science was concerned with the most estimable genus, namely gods, and this knowledge is first among the theoretical sciences because it is concerned with the most estimable subject matter and because the causes it investigates are prior to all others. The general metaphysics of ZH Θ and $\Lambda 2-5$ thus becomes preparatory to an ultimate theology. But these were necessary steps along the way, since we were to reason upward from sensible effects, and since many of the principles we needed to describe natural substances, i.e. form, essence, activity, were also necessary to describe the highest beings. That these texts are preparatory is not problematic since they are consistent with the grammatical remarks at Z.11 1037a10-16 and Z.17 1041a6-10 that our investigations have been "for the sake of" another kind of substance, "that substance which is

⁴⁹ Although the categorial framework is presupposed by the *Metaphysics*, not developed.

⁵⁰ Or here's a formulation for the project that the ontologist might accept: we also find that there is a special, privileged kind of substance, namely eternal, unchanging, separate substance, and this is where/when the ontologist becomes a theologian to complete the investigation.

separate from sensible substance”. Therefore, if there is a disunity between general metaphysics and theology, it is only nominal. They are essentially the same project since the former was required for and in service of the latter. The principles of general metaphysics were required to explain parts of theology, since it was too difficult to get there without some preparatory work. But once we’ve gotten there, we see that the principles of the theology are indeed the highest, and in fact prior to those of general metaphysics: first in the order of understanding, last in the order of learning. Moreover, even if they are *two sciences*, there is only *one scientist*. The theologian doesn’t enter the picture only once we’ve gotten to Λ6. They’ve been there from the very start of A. And theology was never merely departmental. Its grasp was universal such that the theologian undertakes the investigation of the whole *Metaphysics*. But on my reading, knowledge of the prime movers is absolutely the highest aim of wisdom and the *Metaphysics*, and the end of first philosophy. After all, A2 tells us that the wisdom we are seeking is the most divine science:⁵¹

“οὔτε τῆς τοιαύτης ἄλλην χρῆ νομίζειν τιμωτέραν. ἡ γὰρ θειοτάτη καὶ τιμωτάτη· τοιαύτη δὲ διχῶς ἂν εἴη μόνη· ἢν τε γὰρ μάλιστ’ ἂν θεὸς ἔχοι, θεία τῶν ἐπιστημῶν ἐστί, κἂν εἴ τις τῶν θείων εἴη. μόνη δ’ αὕτη τούτων ἀμφοτέρων τετύχηκεν· ὅ τε γὰρ θεὸς δοκεῖ τῶν αἰτίων πᾶσιν εἶναι καὶ ἀρχὴ τις, καὶ τὴν τοιαύτην ἢ μόνος ἢ μάλιστ’ ἂν ἔχοι θεός. ἀναγκαίωτεροι μὲν οὖν πᾶσαι ταύτης, ἀμείνων δ’ οὐδεμία” (983a4-11).

“Moreover, no science should be regarded as more estimable than this. For the most divine science is also the most estimable. And a science would be most divine in only two ways: if the [primary] god most of all would have it, or if it were a science of divine things. And this science alone is divine in both these ways. For the [primary] god seems to be among the causes of all things and to be a sort of starting-point, and this is the sort of science that the [primary] god alone, or that he most of all, would have. All the sciences are more necessary than this one, then, but none is better.”

⁵¹ For what it’s worth, Judson thinks A2 is an unreliable guide, at least when it comes to taking wisdom to be about the highest principles and causes, i.e. the gods. C.f. Judson, “First Philosophy” pg. 266.

What better science could there be for a god to have than knowledge of itself.⁵²

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