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**INTRODUCTION  
TO PHILOSOPHY**

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## CHAPTER 1

# METAPHYSICS

### 1. WHAT METAPHYSICS IS

Metaphysics is philosophy, understood in its strictest meaning, since it studies reality, seeking its ultimate causes in an absolute sense. It seeks the most intimate aspect of every reality, that is, its *being*; it studies the causes that in the final analysis account for the *being* and the diverse *manners of being* of things.

The term "metaphysics," which in Greek means "beyond physics," is used to denote what Aristotle called "first philosophy." While drawing up a list of Aristotle's works around the year 70 A.D., Andronicus of Rhodes named some of his books "metaphysics," since they came after his "physics." The name, however, perfectly fits this field of study: since it seeks the ultimate cause of the being of things, it has to rise above what is material and sensible and reach out to spiritual realities.

Metaphysics studies all reality, since everything real has *being*. It is not limited to some type of beings, unlike the other branches of philosophy and the particular sciences. Thus, *the material object of metaphysics is all reality*. Only something that would have no being would lie outside the scope of metaphysics; obviously, that would be nothing.

Since metaphysics studies reality from the point of view of its being, *the formal object of metaphysics is the being of reality, that is, the being of things.*

The term "being" (*ens* in Latin) denotes everything "that is." It is something that *has* (*habet*) an *act of being* (*esse*), and has a specific *manner of being*. Strictly speaking, God is not a "being," since He is his own *esse* or act of being, and he is not limited to any particular or finite manner of being. Metaphysics studies God as the First Cause of the act of being of all things.

As we describe what metaphysics is, two different aspects will come to the fore. One is the *metaphysical perspective*, which is common to all philosophical disciplines; the other is the *subject matter proper to metaphysics*, which only metaphysics studies.

*The metaphysical perspective consists in the study of reality in the light of its ultimate causes.* This perspective can be applied to all reality: all beings, material as well as immaterial, can be the object of metaphysical study. The sciences which share this perspective are philosophical disciplines, while those which adopt a more partial perspective, limited to immediate causes, are particular sciences.

Every science that is truly philosophical seeks the being of its object, and therefore has a direct relation to metaphysics which studies being in all its aspects.

For instance, philosophy of nature studies the being of bodies, and discovers in them a composition of act and potency which metaphysics studies in a general way, since this composition exists not only in corporeal beings, but also in spiritual substances.

*The subject matter proper to metaphysics includes realities that do not depend on matter for their being, either because they*

are spiritual—such as God, or the human soul—or because they are aspects of reality that can be found in material as well as spiritual beings—such as substance and accidents, act and potency, and causality. When we speak of metaphysics as a philosophical discipline distinct from other philosophical fields of study, we specifically refer to the study of these matters.

The study of the human soul as a spiritual being pertains to metaphysics, but it is included in philosophy of nature in so far as the soul is the form of the body.

Aspects of reality that are found both in material and spiritual beings are studied from a specific point of view by philosophy of nature, and then in a general way and in depth by metaphysics. Philosophy of nature studies them in so far as they are found in material beings.

## 2. METAPHYSICS AND THE UNITY OF PHILOSOPHY

*Metaphysics is the nucleus of philosophy.* It gives unity to philosophy. The other branches of philosophy study their subject matter from the point of view or perspective of metaphysics, which Aristotle rightly called "First Philosophy." Thus, the division of philosophy does not give rise to merely juxtaposed philosophical disciplines related to one another only externally.

This does not mean that the rest of the philosophical disciplines are a mere application of metaphysics in the study of specific types of beings. Metaphysics, in its study of the being of things in a general way, discovers "laws of being" which are universally valid for all reality (the so-called *first principles*), obtains conclusions applicable to all beings (although they apply to them in varying ways and degrees), studies in a direct manner the spiritual beings which bear a reference to being in all its aspects, due to

their intellect and will, and ultimately reaches God as the First Cause of the being of all things. The other philosophical disciplines coincide with metaphysics in their search for ultimate causes of reality. However, they limit their study to some type of beings which have a specific manner of being, for instance, bodies, as well as living things. Thus, they do not arrive at the universal conclusions reached by metaphysics. Neither do they tackle strictly metaphysical topics, even though they provide the foundation for many metaphysical considerations and discover general laws applied to the scope of beings that they study<sup>1</sup>.

### 3. METAPHYSICS, THE SCIENCE OF BEING AS SUCH

Particular sciences study different sectors of reality (such is the case of geology, astronomy, botany, and other sciences), or certain aspects common to various sectors (such is the case of mathematics, physics, and other related sciences). In contrast, metaphysics seeks the ultimate and most radical component of reality. The most fundamental characteristic of all things is the fact that they *are*, since without the perfection of being, they would not be anything at all. Now, what does "being" mean? What makes things "to be?" What are the principal manners or ways of being? These are some of the questions that, in one way or another, all philosophers have asked through the centuries. They constitute the object of metaphysics.

Parmenides is considered the first philosopher who raised directly metaphysical questions, although he failed to give adequate answers to them.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. G. FRAILE, *Historia de la filosofía*, I, BAC, Madrid, 1956, section on "Noción de filosofía", pp. 3-49. It seems better to avoid using the term "special metaphysics," utilized by many authors after Wolff, to denote the branches of philosophy, like philosophy of nature and psychology, because this can be misleading and because it reflects the rationalist approach: they are not strictly speaking parts of metaphysics, nor are they deduced logically from it, since they study some specific aspects of reality and exclude the rest.

He observed that every change implies a passage from *non-being* to *being*, and that entails a problem: How can *being* arise from *non-being*?

Plato left behind significant metaphysical considerations, but it was his disciple, Aristotle, who passed on to posterity a systematic and substantially valid study of the nature of metaphysics, substance, accidents, essence, act and potency, causes, and other metaphysical topics.

Aristotle's fourteen books of "First Philosophy" are still required reference material in metaphysics. St. Thomas Aquinas assimilated his ideas in a superior synthesis, in the light of the doctrine of the *act of being* (*esse* or *actus essendi*). According to this doctrine, the essence, or the basic manner of being, limits the act of being of each thing. This act of being is received from the Being that subsists by itself (God). Thus, the *act of being*, the ultimate component of every thing, becomes the central point of metaphysics, since it is the principle that allows us to understand all things in terms of their structure, their perfection, their activity, and their finiteness and dependence on God as the First Cause of their being<sup>2</sup>.

The human being cannot remain satisfied with an ever more detailed and complete description of reality by the particular sciences, because they leave inevitable questions unanswered. Why does the universe exist? What is its meaning and purpose? Is there a First Cause? All these questions revolve around a central nucleus, which is the *being* of things. For this reason, metaphysics can be defined as the science which studies not just any type of beings but rather the being, as such, of all things.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. T. ALVIRA, L. CLAVELL, AND T. MELENDO, *Metafísica*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 1982, pp. 116-117.

Hence, *metaphysics is the most universal science*, since all reality is its object of study. For everything is real in so far as it "is," that is, in so far as it has "being." Above all, *metaphysics is the most fundamental science*, since it considers the most basic or most radical perfection—being itself. In comparison to it, all other perfections are nothing else but particular ways or manners of being.

For instance, the essence is the fundamental mode or manner of *being* of a thing (of a man, or a plant, or iron). Any accident (like size, color, or being in a place) is a non-essential mode of *being*. A thing has some specific actual perfections (such and such a thing *is* in act) and it may also have other perfections in potency (it may become, that is, come to *be* what presently it is not). That is why St. Thomas Aquinas affirms that "the act of being is the most perfect of all, since it plays the role of act with respect to all things. Indeed, a thing possesses a certain actuality only in so far as it is. Hence, being is the actuality of all things and of all forms"<sup>3</sup>.

If the term "being" (*ens*) is used to refer to everything "that is," *metaphysics is the science of being as being, or of being as such*. In contrast, particular sciences deal only with some specific type of beings. Besides, they study their objects not in the light of their being, but in so far as they possess some specific ways of being<sup>4</sup>.

#### 4. PARTS OF METAPHYSICS

Summing up what has been previously explained, we can say that metaphysics studies reality in its deepest aspect, that is, by looking at its "being" closely. This study leads to the knowledge of the properties of being as such, the basic modes of being, the structure of limited beings, the First

<sup>3</sup>ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.*, I, q.4, a.1, ad 3.

<sup>4</sup>CF. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Metaphys.*, IV, 5 (593); III, 4 (384).

Cause of being, and the relations of being with the powers of knowing or possessing it.

In practice, the different aspects mentioned are usually the topics of various disciplines, which are like *parts of metaphysics*.

a) *General metaphysics*. It deals with being as being, and the modes and structure of being of things.

For instance, metaphysics studies the basic aspects of the being of things, that is, "the act of being" and the "essence"; the general modes of being, that is, the "substance" and the "accidents"; the composition of "act" and "potency" found in all limited beings; the structure of corporeal substances, composed of "matter" and "form"; causality, that is, the influence exerted by some things on the being of other things.

As we have earlier seen, some of these topics are studied in a *particular way* in philosophy of nature, and then, in a *general way* in metaphysics. Thus, a complete view of problems and their solutions can only be obtained by putting together both approaches, that is, by studying them in the light of metaphysics. This is a consequence of the nature of philosophical knowledge, which considers reality in a global manner—it studies its real being in an absolute manner, and not only in its partial aspects. That is why metaphysics is intertwined with the other branches of philosophy, which are mutually dependent disciplines.

Metaphysics also studies being in so far as it relates to knowledge ("truth"), to the will ("goodness"), and to the aesthetic sense ("beauty").

*Truth* and *goodness*, together with *unity* and "being something" ("aliquid"), are properties of being as such, and are therefore found in every

thing. By virtue of the being that every thing has, it is "something"; it has an internal "unity"; it is called "true" in so far as it can be the object of knowledge; it has certain specific perfections that make it desirable, hence "good"; and it is "beautiful" in so far as considering it is pleasurable.

These perfections are called *transcendental properties* of being, precisely to indicate that they are found in every thing (though in different degrees, according to each thing's perfection). They are thus distinguished from those perfections that are found only in some specific type of beings. The name indicates that they "transcend" the specific ways of being, since they extend to all beings.

These properties are found in God in an eminent way, since God is his own Being. God is the Truth and the source of all created truth. He is Goodness itself, and is the cause of all participated good. His Being is supremely One, since in him there is no composition whatsoever.

b) *Natural Theology*. This branch of philosophy studies God as Subsistent Being -- First Cause of all things.

Starting from the being of limited beings, we arrive at the knowledge of God, the infinite fullness of Being, and the First Cause of the being of creatures.

Human reason can get to know God's existence and his attributes (like infinity and omnipotence), and acknowledge him as the ultimate purpose or end of man. This knowledge, which can be attained by anyone, is rigorously examined by metaphysics. Starting from the being of things as it is grasped through experience, the human mind reaches God as the Being that subsists by itself, and the Cause of the being of things. Hence, metaphysics is also called "theology" or study of God. It is "natural

theology," and thus different from "supernatural theology" which starts from supernatural divine revelation.

c) *Gnoseology*. It is a reflexive study of the scope of metaphysical knowledge itself and its relation to being.

Thus, gnoseology studies how being arises in knowledge, focusing its attention on *truth*: it evaluates sense and intellectual knowledge, the different degrees of certainty, and other matters. For this, it has to rely on philosophical psychology, which deals with the knowing process.

In a way, gnoseology passes judgment on the validity of metaphysics, since it examines the foundations of knowledge. Actually, metaphysics itself, as the primary and universal science, passes judgment on its own foundations. That is why gnoseology is a part of metaphysics, not a science distinct and previous to it. It cannot be otherwise, since metaphysics is the most basic science and without it, all philosophy would lack the necessary foundation.

Since Descartes' time, problems of gnoseology have hugged the limelight in modern philosophy. This turn of events is usually accompanied by an erroneous attitude. Some philosophers—Descartes in some way, Kant in a rather explicit manner, and many others after them—viewed the "critique of knowledge" as a study that has to be carried out before going into any philosophical inquiry. But since that study requires metaphysical considerations, leaving the latter aside inevitably leads to distorting metaphysics or ruling out its possibility<sup>5</sup>.

Thomistic authors of our time have also been greatly preoccupied with these gnoseological problems. Some of them think that the so-called *critical problem* (a term derived from the "critique" of

<sup>5</sup>See C. CARDONA, *Metafísica de la opción intelectual*, op. cit.

knowledge) is a solid feature of modern philosophy, and they have been trying to make the metaphysics of being compatible with Cartesian or Kantian approaches<sup>6</sup>. This endeavor has proven to be extremely problematic, since from the start, those philosophical approaches are characterized by a perspective that is hardly compatible with the metaphysics of being<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup>One of the most influential attempts was launched by J. MARECHAL (cf. *El punto de partida de la metafísica*, Gredos, Madrid, 1957), who tried to make Kantian principles compatible with the metaphysics of being.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. E. GILSON, *El realismo metódico*, Rialp, Madrid, 1974; *Réalisme thomiste et critique de la connaissance*, Vrin, Paris, 1947.

## CHAPTER 2

### PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE

#### 1. WHAT PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE IS

When we speak of philosophy of nature, the term "nature" can take on two meanings:

a) First, the term may refer to *nature* itself, that is, the sum total of corporeal beings. In this sense, philosophy of nature is the philosophical study of corporeal or material beings.

b) Second, the term may refer to *natural beings*, as distinct from artificial ones. A natural being is that which possesses an internal principle of its being and activity<sup>1</sup>, while an artificial being is one which has a man-made structure, produced through the use of natural beings.

The human being, as a corporeal being, is an object of study of philosophy of nature, notwithstanding the fact that the spiritual soul is an object of study of metaphysics and philosophical psychology.

<sup>1</sup>Aristotle defined nature as the "principle and cause enabling that which it primarily constitutes to move and to attain rest, by itself and not by an accidental form" (*Physics*, II, 1, 192b 20).



though it can already be perceived even in inanimate nature<sup>1</sup>; the *sense knowledge* of animals, which is a basic element for the understanding of man; those topics related to *evolution theories*, which are frequently used to promote ideologies that distort scientific data and conclusions<sup>2</sup>.

As we have already seen, even though *the philosophy of living beings forms part of the philosophy of nature*, it is highly preferable to make it the object of study of a specific discipline.

Hence, we will limit ourselves to saying that *the observations and affirmations we have considered in the section on philosophy of nature also apply to the philosophy of living beings*. The distinctive characteristic of the philosophy of living beings stems from the fact that *living beings comprise its material object*.

Thus, it has usually been called *psychology* (or treatise on the soul as principle of life). There is nothing wrong in the continued use of that term. The term *philosophical psychology* is oftentimes used in order to distinguish it from experimental psychology. "Psychology" is also used many times to designate the study of man, which is also called *philosophical anthropology*.

Obviously, the conclusions reached by the philosophy of inanimate nature will also be applied to living beings, taking into account the particular characteristics derived from their special condition.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Phys.*, II, 13 (259).

<sup>2</sup>This happens in the case of *materialist* ideologies which have nothing to do with true science, as well as in *socio-biology* of "aristocratic" and racist tendencies.

## 2. THE METAPHYSICAL STUDY OF MAN

Aside from those characteristics common to inanimate bodies, as well as those common to living beings endowed with vegetative and sense life, man also possesses the traits of a *rational being*, enabling him to rise beyond the level of purely corporeal beings.

The *philosophy of man* studies the strictly human operations of man, that is, acts of intellectual knowledge and free will. Through them, it demonstrates that the human soul is spiritual, since it is the root of operations that transcend the scope and possibilities of matter.

The human soul is the substantial form of man, who in turn is a single substance in which the spiritual and the material constitute a single being (nevertheless, since the human soul is spiritual, it subsists even after death; besides, it has to be created directly by God). Hence, the study of man requires taking into account what is proper to corporeal beings and to lower living beings.

Thus, the object of the philosophy of man is partly common to the philosophy of nature, and partly common to metaphysics. It understandably provides a great deal of indispensable knowledge for the study of ethics. Besides, it serves as a basis for natural theology, since what we are able to know about God through reason is necessarily dependent on our knowledge of the human spirit—through analogy, we can know some characteristics of the divine Being which is purely spiritual.

## 3. THE STUDY OF MAN AND PARTICULAR SCIENCES

The *experimental sciences* study man in his material dimension, as a corporeal being. Even though they cannot properly focus their attention on the human soul, as a consequence of their methodology, they nonetheless provide



studies the nature of *moral habits* (virtues and vices) and their relation with morality.

b) The second part is *social ethics*. It applies the previously mentioned principles to the life of man as member of society.

Among the various topics it studies are: the *common good* of society; the relation between *individuals* and *society*; the role of *social authority*; the binding character and morality of *civil laws*; the *principle of subsidiarity*, which obliges authorities to respect and foster what individuals and intermediate groups are capable of doing, and intervene in matters where its direct activity is required; the nature, role and fundamental rights of the *family* as the basic cell of society; the ends of purposes of *marriage* and the obstacles that hinder their fulfillment.

#### 4. ETHICS AND METAPHYSICS

*Ethics finds its foundation in metaphysics*. In order to determine the conformity of human acts to man's end, one has to consider basic truths about God, creation, the spiritual nature of man and his freedom, and these are topics studied by metaphysics. Without this necessary foundation, one cannot get to know the moral order that ought to be observed, and ethics would be emptied of any real content.

Ethics begin its scientific study by acquiring a valid notion of the *good*, and this requires a directly metaphysical perspective. If one does not perceive the good as an objective aspect of reality, he will inevitably turn to subjective motives which can never vouch for the objective moral order that can and should be observed.

There have been modern attempts to construct ethical systems on inadequate foundations. Kant, for instance, tried to do so. In his work, *Critique of Pure Reason*, he denied the possibility of knowing God

through human reason, and in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, he drew up a moral system based on dictates of conscience without any objective basis<sup>3</sup>. Max Scheler affirmed the objective reality of values and the spirituality of the human person, but he placed these valid aspects within an inadequate metaphysical framework<sup>4</sup>. Marxism rejected the metaphysical foundation necessary to make ethics meaningful.

These and other varied attempts to elaborate an ethical system without God may at times contain some partial truths. However, they will necessarily lack an adequate foundation, for they cannot account for the genuine meaning of human life<sup>5</sup>.

Ethics has close links with psychology (understood as "philosophy of man") which in turn, as we have previously seen, pertains in some way to metaphysics.

*Ethics is a science distinct from psychology*. Although psychology also studies human acts, it nonetheless considers them as such, specifying their nature and characteristics. Ethics, on the other hand, considers them in the light of their morality, which is a different perspective. Of course, in its study of numerous topics, ethics will make use of the knowledge supplied by psychology as a starting point. From there, it will move on to questions of morality.

For instance, ethics has to rely on the studies of the philosophy of man about the spirituality of the human soul, intellectual and sense knowledge, the will and human freedom.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. A. RODRIQUEZ, *Immanuel Kant: Fundamentación de la metafísica de las costumbres*, Emesa, Madrid, 1977.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. O.N. DERISI, *Max Scheler: Ética material de los valores*, Emesa, Madrid, 1979. Derisi shows how to make acceptable use of Scheler's valid observations.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. O.N. DERISI, *Los fundamentos metafísicos del orden moral*, CSIC, Madrid, 1969.