

Philosophy as Knowledge of Things: Michel Bastit and the Necessity of Realism

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Abstract

Excluding the media's misuse of the word "philosopher" to describe almost any book writer, aside from novelists and historians, the prevailing perception of "French philosophy" continues to focus on Foucault, Derrida, and the "deconstruction school." This persistent image, partly due to widespread distortion, nonetheless bears witness to the difficulty that France faces in revising its conceptions of man and human relations to the world, beyond a purely critical approach. The importance of the work of Michel Bastit, who is an active voice in contemporary philosophy, appears then to lie in this effort to restore philosophy as a branch of knowledge, which is the first condition for re-engaging with natural wisdom. In the article, I have only given some glimpses of his work and have not discussed the full strength of all his arguments. However, what I have exposed seems sufficient to realize that the main thing Michel Bastit teaches us is that if we want to restore wisdom and establish a respectful relation to nature as well as plainly peaceful and fruitful relations between men in society, the first condition is to turn back to things, both natural and human. The technical manipulation of nature, and even of man himself, is preceded by an intellectual manipulation that leads us to think that, after all, things are nothing. "Things are not things" – this may summarize modern thinking if we are willing to give the proposition the various senses it can endorse. On the contrary, Michel Bastit tells us that things are indispensable, and that in both a practical and a theoretical approach, we cannot do without them. This is true because, at the very root of things, there is always an act, and the act, if one may say so, is the more real part of reality, without which there simply would be no existence.

Keywords: contemporary philosophy, French philosophy, ontology, metaphysics, theology, theory of knowledge, Aristotelianism, Thomism.

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Философия как познание вещей: Мишель Бастит и необходимость реализма

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Аннотация

Оставив в стороне неправильное использование слова «философ» в средствах массовой информации для обозначения почти любого автора, исключая писателей и историков, до сих пор в представлении большинства современная французская философия сформирована Фуко, Деррида и традицией деконструктивизма. Опять же отчасти из-за широко распространенного искажения, это устойчивое представление тем не менее свидетельствует о трудностях, с которыми сталкивается французская философия в попытке пересмотреть подходы к пониманию человека и его положения в мире, выходя за рамки чисто критического подхода. Таким образом, важность исследований Мишеля Бастита заключается в работе над тем, чтобы восстановить философию как отрасль знания, что является первым условием возобновления нашей связи с философской мудростью. В настоящей статье в общих чертах изложены его идеи и работы, продемонстрирована сила лишь части его аргументов. Но того, что изложено, кажется достаточным, чтобы понять, что главное, чему учит Мишель Бастит, состоит в том, что если мы хотим восстановить мудрость и уважительное отношение к природе, а также просто мирные и плодотворные отношения между людьми в обществе, то первое условие, которого следует придерживаться, – это вернуться к вещам, естественным и человеческим. Техническому манипулированию природой и даже самим человеком предшествует интеллектуальное манипулирование, которое приводит нас к мысли, что, в конце концов, вещи – ничто. «Вещи – это не вещи»: именно так можно резюмировать современное мышление, если мы

согласимся ограничить философствование произвольным приданием концептам различных смыслов, которые только можно им приписать. Напротив, Мишель Бастит утверждает, что вещи необходимы и что как в практическом, так и в теоретическом подходе мы не можем обойтись без них. Это так, ибо в самой основе вещей всегда лежит действие, а действие, если можно так выразиться, является той реальной частью действительности, без которой просто не было бы бытия.

Ключевые слова: современная философия, французская философия, онтология, метафизика, теология, теория познания, аристотелизм, томизм.

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There is only one ideal which has ever been common to all true French people and still can remain so: humanism. Saying so, I do not only refer to the art of writing in the manner of Xenophon and of Cicero, but above all to some precise conception of nature and man. As long as this conception is maintained, the word “France” will have the same meaning; if one day, it is to disappear and to be replaced by another, people may still talk about France, but all that we love in her today will have ceased to be.

What this humanism implies first and foremost is realism.

Étienne Gilson. *Pour un ordre catholique*¹

Introduction

If we leave out misuse of the word “philosopher” in the media to designate almost any book writer, excluding novelists and historians, when one thinks about “French philosophy,” one usually still thinks

¹ See: [Gilson 1934, 83–84].

about Foucault, Derrida and the “deconstruction school.” Again partly due to a widespread distortion, this persistent image nonetheless bears witness to the difficulty that France faces in revising its modes of conception of man and of human relation to the world, beyond a pure critical approach.

Obviously, other ways of thinking, and more constructive ones, do exist in France. They are either traditional, like phenomenology, or more recent, like increasingly ongoing adoption of Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy, over recent decades. These are the two schools which form the mainstream of the present-day French philosophical landscape.

With recent or currently active authors such as Jean-Luc Marion or Michel Henry, or, in a different way Paul Ricœur, contemporary French phenomenology obviously keeps on writing a long history. Its origins can be found, beyond the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger, in the French spiritualist tradition of the 19th century, and, among others, in the thought of Maine de Biran. It often leads these authors to examine metaphysics, usually in relation to religious questioning, and always in a perspective of subjectivism and of some kind of idealism.

Analytical philosophy shows a great diversity in its themes, covering almost all the fields of philosophical investigation. Its main characteristic is indeed its realistic approach, at least from the point of view of methods. Problems are discussed *per se*, without any *a priori* proscription, even in metaphysics, where the Kantian interdict upon reality in itself is ignored.

This is the case, for instance, with Frédéric Nef’s work, *What is Metaphysics?* which belongs to the growing set of metaphysical writings within this current². This evolution of recent analytical philosophy, however, cannot remove its original commitment to the pure empirical-logical approach and its inability to overrule this approach. As a result, dynamic as it may be, its method has almost nothing to do with things in themselves. Indeed, Empiricism tends to reduce them to pure superficial facts without depth, only

² For a glance on this aspect of analytical philosophy, and against its traditional view as anti-metaphysical [Pouivet 2006].

endowed with linguistic expression. Although they may yield some results, such philosophical methods fail to restore philosophy into its real knowledge dimension, and then to deal again with rational wisdom. For they are above all concerned with mental processes, or, in the last analysis, with some kind of logic, rather than with things existing in the real world.

Apart from all these, however, a more effective philosophical realism, rooted in the Aristotelian tradition, has never ceased to exist in France and is still actual, although for the time being, in our universities it still does not have the dynamics it has gained for several decades now in the Anglo-Saxon world. The philosopher Michel Bastit is today undoubtedly its main representative in France, and his work deserves greater attention, both for the range of the field it covers and for its aim: to show the way to solve our present aporias by turning back to being and to consideration of nature.

Michel Bastit was born in 1951. He studied law and ancient philosophy simultaneously. Having received a doctorate degree in the philosophy of law, he first taught history of law at university. His critical analysis of different juridical positivisms helped him to realize that the problems of the modern notion of law, based on strict voluntarism, can only be solved philosophically as well as in a practical way, if we face the question of nature and of things in themselves. Then he was motivated to study philosophy as such, from logic to natural philosophy, metaphysics and natural theology, in order to justify by general inquiry, what his practical analysis had revealed. In his five main books and a large collection of articles, his work presents then a complete review of realistic philosophy, founded on precise critical analysis of Aristotelian, Thomist, and juridical texts of the tradition, as well as on the confrontation of both experience and actual main trends in philosophy, and even in natural science³. That is why this work is unique in the current French philosophic landscape. It is in itself an important work, for it discards all ideological approaches to philosophical problems and proves that realism is still a living philosophy, capable of solving

³ See the bibliography of M. Bastit (<https://poincare.univ-lorraine.fr/fr/publications-detaillees-michel-bastit>).

many present-day aporias, theoretical as well as practical ones. The purpose of what follows is to expose the main features and stages of the thought process that led Michel Bastit from questioning the nature of law to natural theology.

1. Solving the aporias of modern law

At first, Michel Bastit studied the issue of law and the nature of law. The enquiry that he developed in *The Birth of Modern Law* [Bastit 1990] can be seen as continuing and deepening the work of the French jurist Michel Villey, who exposed how the nominalist turn in late medieval thought, and specifically in the philosophy of Occam, influenced the juridical attitudes and the way jurists conceived law. The English language usage here can be misleading, as it tends to use a single word, whereas French and Latin have two: Villey focused on law in the sense of the French word *droit* (or the Latin *jus*); and Bastit centred his study on law as *loi* (*lex*)⁴. Villey established that the nominalist philosophy made the notion of *jus* evolve in the direction of *power*, of individual power [Bastit 1990, 21; Bastit 2007, 771–773]. This evolution constitutes a complete disruption in approaching juridical phenomena. Based on this determination, and having first singled out all the problems set out by *lex* in the present and recent past context, Bastit searched for the relation between this conception of *jus* and the modern conception of *lex* as a command, *i.e.*, as a pure act of will – by contrast with the Greek, Latin, and classical medieval understanding of the same as an act of reason. In modern logic, *lex*, giving individuals their rights, and the command-conception of *lex* precedes logically the power-concept of *jus*. Therefore, the hypothesis of Bastit was that this must also have preceded it historically. Philosophically, it means that the evolution induced by nominalism made the concept of *lex* obscure.

Actually, the problems set out by modern *lex* are numerous. There is the problem of its authority, in comparison with other sources of *jus*, such as the custom. There is the difficulty of interpreting *lex* in itself, either in a general way or of specific laws. There is also the problem

⁴ We will use in what follows the Latin words *jus* and *lex*, in order to avoid any ambiguity.

of the genesis of *lex*, and consequently of its evolution, either by some general will or the will of a legislator, with all the fictitious imageries that surround such considerations – such as the mythical social contract.

The result of such a situation is a weakening of *lex*. As a consequence, there is an excessive increase of norms, in order first for them to gain strength by systematic coherence, and secondly, because of the great number of interpretations and refinement that the uncertainty about the *lex* makes necessary. Another consequence is the juridical instability, which is a sign of the amorality of *lex* when that is reduced to a pure technical rule and is in complete dependence on the will of the legislator, whoever this one should be.

The point of view of philosophy in its concern to set up the foundation of law is no better, and is mostly parallel to the juridical thought. Two main conceptions must be drawn: legalist positivism and sociologism. For the first one, *lex* is founded on sovereign will, either of the legislator or of the citizens. It develops itself in a systematic way, which can be purely rationalistic (Kelsen) or moral (Fuller). The sociological approach conceives *lex* as the expression, or as some juridical transcription, of the evolutionary customs of the people. This is a pure relativist concept of law.

The two notions are opposed, since in the first one the *lex* is primary and conceived as a pure act of will, whereas in the second one it is a simple consequence of the social habits, and treated as a fact. But they share the feature that the *lex* has no foundation in real order, but only in some kind of will, though in the latter this will should be anonymous. The two are juridical positivisms, and in both cases, “*jus* and *lex* must be observed as facts which exist, without any reference to the order of the world” [Bastit 1990, 17–18]. They are also “philosophical positivisms, for which reality is devoid of order, and consequently unable to give information on the *lex*” [Bastit 1990]. Hence, there must be a common source for both of these conceptions of *lex*. And here, Bastit joins the thesis of Villey on the fundamental role of Occam’s nominalism for the manner of considering law in its two aspects, from the end of the so-called medieval era and the dawn of modernity. However, because of the pre-eminence of the command-conception of *lex* over the power-conception of *jus*, one

just needs to go back beyond Occam, to the thesis of Duns Scotus, who first put forth the role of will.

At the same time, this historical and doxographical thesis gives a clue to understanding the cause of the confusion around *lex*. For the nominalist philosophy was born against another one, whose definition may give some information on “the features that should be taken into account by reality so that it be at the source of the *lex* without reducing it to an act of will or to a fact” [Bastit 1990, 18]. Now, it is clear that this opposing philosophy is mainly Thomist Aristotelianism. From a historical point of view, then, the problem is to determine how the thought of Occam was transmitted to Hobbes⁵ and to German jurists, who are the primary sources of modern practical philosophy. And for this, the name of Francisco Suarez is the first one, as it was him who gave birth to classical metaphysics (so far as Kantian criticism) as well as to modern natural law. But from a philosophical point of view, the problem is to “extract the principles that would enable us to think of the *lex* within an order that can tie the *lex* to reality and put it ‘at its place’” [Bastit 1990, 22]. In other words, the aim is to “delimit the ground element which has disappeared in modern thoughts and which constitutes for them some original sin, common to all descenders of nominalism” [Bastit 1990].

Now, as full analysis of the birth of modern *lex* shows, this basic element is nothing else but *res*: “Beyond any shadow of doubt, the giving up of any reference to a *res*, that is to a reality outside of us, is what explains the history’s development that we have just followed” [Bastit 1990, 362]. Actually, one consequence of the emphasis that Duns Scotus laid on will is the thesis that the essence of individual things is beyond the grasp of human intelligence, at least in his present status of *viator*⁶. Occam enhanced that by reducing the term of essence to a simple name, and the thing in itself to a pure empirical fact, void of any proper intelligibility. The *res*, and therefore being

⁵ The role played by Hobbes is fundamental, for he is the one who is most conscious of departing from Aristotelianism, and who in the same time claims to be nominalist.

⁶ *I.e.*, in the present life, where man sees his intelligence weakened by the original sin.

having been cast away, “as long as we stay in the structure set up by nominalism’s development, the *lex* can only be an immanent production of a legislator’s work” [Bastit 1990, 362]. But the problem is that the juridical science, as well as philosophy of law, cannot do without this relation to reality, as it is not a pure empirical term, sensitive to all attempts of will. For then it faces insuperable contradictions, first between the general will which one supposes to be a form of law, and the innumerable particular cases, which appear to be either exceptions, or even contradictions to the former: only the reference to a *real* case, to a public *res* which is simultaneously one and diverse, united by the aim all citizens aspire to, can provide the legislator with an analogical principle that can adapt to cases that are partly familiar and partly new. Another group of contradictions arises between the faculties that the legislator makes use of, *i.e.*, intelligence and will. Without any *res* indeed, either intelligence is free to cast the net of its concepts on society and social relations, or the will can freely express itself, without any rational regulation. In the first case, will is forced to submit to a chain of prescriptions, and in the logic of positivism, to act will mean to obey strictly to the letter of the *lex*. In the second case, the action is without any wisdom, and looks very much like pure intuition. In both cases, the action is arbitrary (for, without outside reference, the rational forms that the intelligence puts forth do not have any justification but the will to imprison reality in its conception), and therefore ideological. The law is then not to deliver justice, but to remodel the social and human reality according to some preconception. This is totally subverted.

2. Ontology

Having thus underlined the necessity of taking into account things as a real term for juridical thought, Bastit was logically led to study the constitution of things as such, in a theoretical approach, and beyond, in a general way, to study metaphysics. This is the aim of a series of his three books, devoted respectively to ontology [Bastit 1997], to the causes of being [Bastit 2002], and to substance [Bastit 2012]. These three studies are complementary and offer an almost complete view of nature, *i.e.*, of the composition and government of things.

In *The Principles of Things in Medieval Ontology* (Thomas Aquinas, Scotus, Occam), Bastit reasserts that the only way to escape voluntarism and rationalism is to go back to things, which is true in practical matters as well as in theoretical ones. In both cases, knowledge “gives way to the emergence of things”, the opposite of what Heidegger called *enframing* (*Gestell*), that is to say some kind of reduction of reality to something understandable by reason and open to human manipulation. On the contrary, things, either natural or human, exist by themselves, as stuff that human intelligence can explore but that it cannot reduce to its proper schemes of thought. Which is just shown by the relational nature of knowledge.

But here another question arises. Is such a way of thinking, the one of the ancient Greeks, not pulled off by the thesis of *creation*? Indeed, creation implies an essential dependence of things on a primary cause. Does this dependence not imply, by consequence, a lack of proper consistency for the things? As another philosopher wrote, “how is it possible, without losing its being or without contradiction, to have a reality *per se* and to be entirely related to another?” [Courtès 1998, 30]. In other words, is it possible to be at the same time a real consistent *being* and a *creature*? Are these two notions not contradictory? The risk is, to conceive things as entirely open to manipulation, either divine or (consequently) human, as if they were some plastic matters void of any characteristic properties. The problem appeared as soon as a creative primary cause was said to have given origin to the world; hence, from the strictly philosophical point of view, in the context of Arabic philosophy, first and foremost in the radical doctrine of the Ash’arites, as well as in the Christian medieval context⁷. Theologically, Christian thought was equal to facing such a problem: the biblical concept of the Creation declares that the world is good, and the incarnation of the Word in Christ comes to confirm this view in a most radical manner. This concept rejects the idea that the creation can be inconsistent. But on the purely philosophical level, the solution came from a renewal of the Aristotelian doctrine. Indeed, “to turn toward the Stagirite

⁷ The thought of the Fathers of the Church was above all centred on religious theological questions and did not treat such a problem in itself.

means at once to find in the things their proper nature, a movement and an end which make them protected against manipulation” [Bastit 1997, 13]. Therefore, it is necessary to go back to medieval ontology in order to understand first how to unify the two aspects of things, that of *being* and that of a *creature*. Secondly, this focus may help to understand the shift toward an ontological devaluation of things which occurred in the late medieval era, and grew on and on during the modern times, the cause of which is entangled in religious theological questions and, at the same time, in natural theology, or metaphysics. This shift is what produced Duns Scotus’ teaching and the nominalist reaction against it, where the Thomist metaphysics reaches a balance more in accordance with Christian thought and natural experience. Bastit shows that by systematic comparative study of the theses of these three great theologians and philosophers on the natural theological science, on the constitution of things, and on their government both by God and man. In this way, Bastit displays why Scotus’ voluntarism leads to a noticeable distortion of practical judgment, freed from the order of things, a position that Occam radicalises in conceiving the wills as antagonist absolutes. That would become Hobbes’ principle of practical reasoning.

From a historical point of view, as well as from a strict philosophical one, medieval ontology is therefore the main key for the one who wants to realise what is what we usually call modernity. The intelligibility of this lies in the theological and metaphysical discussions, which at least opened the possibility of this purely technical view of things that is typical of modern times.

But the analysis is also of course plainly philosophical. Its result here is first to assert that a realistic ontology is not only fully available, even in a theological context in which it is actually the one that best fits the theological data, but beyond this, it is to reaffirm that philosophical realism is necessary because the very process of cognition implies turning back to things. Such an attitude is the only way to avoid falling into the aporias of voluntarism or rationalism.

Now, realism is defined as affirmation of the plain reality of concrete beings, and then of the reality of movement and change,

which requires dynamic principles, not only to be explained, but above all to be produced. Such dynamic principles are what we call causes, and realism is inseparably linked to a philosophy of causes. That implies giving its correct interpretation, which means first understanding the causes of being. This is the purpose of *The Four Causes of Being According to Aristotle's Primary Philosophy*.

Bastit begins this book by mentioning the contempt that contemporary philosophy shows toward the origins of causes, and he explains why philosophical realism is necessary for reliable evaluation of human experience.

The same problematic topic as *supra* can globally be found at the root of the actual configuration, between rationalism and pure empirical philosophy. On the one hand, classical phenomenology tries to unveil the transcendental structure of the *ego*, and it is engaged in continuous analysis of the spiritual inner forms of consciousness. But with these preoccupations, it overlooks the very issue of being. Heidegger protested against this, but he confused forgetting of the being with rational analysis as such, and thus came to condemn all consideration of causes as if it were a point of departure of the so-called forgetting of being. Then, he took refuge in poetry. On the other hand, analytical philosophy focuses first and foremost on analysis of language and of the sensible universe.

Nevertheless, this analytical tradition displays some interest for causality, beyond its focus on language and on empirical data, so analytical philosophers have studied logical, physical, and ethical aspects of causality for a long time. But their empirical bias prevents them from developing a plain concept of causes. They truly remain prisoners of the arguments developed by Hume and cannot help reducing such causes to efficiency or to matter. Finally, if they reach the notion of form and formal cause, they usually reduce it to a purely external disposition. This is again unsatisfactory.

Actually, there have always been followers of Aristotle, but this intellectual climate has prevented most of these modern scholastic thinkers from interpreting the Aristotelian doctrine correctly. Partly because of their admiration of Heidegger, who is supposed to be the only philosopher who gives the right to talk about metaphysics, partly because of the

development of modern science, and especially of mathematical physics that may be interpreted as having refuted the Aristotelian physics once for all, as well as realistic natural philosophy, and then devalued the physical roots of the doctrine of causes, they tend to be silent on this point. Usually, they talk about the four causes in order to reduce them as quickly as possible to a single form, and then to understand causality as a pure analytical and *a priori* causality, and to equalize that with the principle of sufficient reason⁸ [Laverdière 1969]. Again, this is misleading. As these modern scholastics are also theologians (at least philosophical theologians), they take the risk to misunderstand the natural causality, to the benefit of the unique divine causality. The scheme followed may then almost be one of *participation* and not one of *causality*. A shift toward Platonism tends to occur.

Therefore, it is necessary to go back to the original Aristotelian teaching, and at the same time, to experience. For experience shows that there is movement in nature, movement which is not chaotic, and which, in order to happen, needs some real principles of action, what we call *causes*. Aristotle's main concern was to give an account of that, and one of his most important teaching points is that for doing so, there is necessity to conceive causes in action.

Once again, then, realism as turning back to things, is unavoidable, and the only way to understand what that really means is to go back to the Aristotelian texts and to give them closer scrutiny, with the idea that the teaching of Stagirite is still quite valuable for us today. Beyond this book on the four causes of being, the interpretation of the Aristotelian work (as well as the one of St. Thomas Aquinas) is a complete display of the work of Michel Bastit, expressed in numerous articles⁹.

Such a perspective nevertheless leads us to face the question of *substance*. Actually, one can say that, while modern philosophy and science are in a general way founded on what can be called analytics of relations, Aristotelian philosophy is analytics of substance. That

⁸ One can go to the work of Raymond Laverdière on the same theme, about such thomists as Garrigou-Lagrange, Fabro, Geiger, etc. (the work is rather an old one but still instructive) [Laverdière 1969].

⁹ See again the bibliography of M. Bastit (<https://poincare.univ-lorraine.fr/fr/publications-detaillees-michel-bastit>).

is to say, the permanent element on which all science is necessarily founded is in the first case the relation¹⁰, when it is in the second case what the philosophical tradition has called *substance* – Latin translation of the πρώτη οὐσία of the *Categories*¹¹. The substance, as it is understood in Aristotelian thought, is “an immanent principle of intelligibility that [is] also an ontologically constitutive principle” [Bastit 2012, 14] and at the same time a principle of action. But actually, modern thought seems to disprove this very notion of substance as a concrete and almost autonomous being, permanent with time passage and capable of activity. The defender of philosophical realism must then confront this challenge. Again, it is the very relevance of realism that is in question. This is the purpose of the book *The Substance*. Philosophically, it is only in the analytical school that the notion came to be again studied in our time, *i.e.*, in the countries that suffered least from the “Kantian epidemic” [Bastit 2012, 13], *i.e.*, in the Anglo-Saxon and Central European countries. There can be found a real concern for substance, void of all kinds of German idealism, with a true opening to metaphysics. All this makes the discussion of the thesis fruitful, but once more, the inability to transcend nominalism and the tendency to fall back on Platonism weaken a position that lacks metaphysical radicalism and does not proceed from analysis of language and logic to analysis of things. The problem is essentially the same as before: lack of consideration of actuality, of this dynamical core of things which in a single movement brings them to existence, endows them with properties and acts. Whether it be due to confusion between reality and thought, to concentration on analysis of language and the manner we talk about things, or to a loss of the metaphysical sense, that is to say to the inability to see in the empirical what is

¹⁰ The classical notion of *the laws of nature*, that is at the core of modern science, is such a permanent relational element: it is expressed by a mathematical function which is nothing else but an ideal dynamical relation. – For an analysis of this point, one may see [Golfin 2018], especially chapters 5 and 6.

¹¹ See *Categories* chap. 5. – The accent put on the substance does not mean, of course, that the category of relation has no importance, all on the contrary. But it means that the relation cannot be analysed and understood if we do not refer it to the category of substance, on which it depends. And this is also true of all the larger field of qualities, or accidents.

not sensible, the insufficiency is the very same one as that which Aristotle criticised: in each case, the principles that are put forth *are not acts, i.e.*, principles that at the same and unique movement are principles of intelligibility and of action.

Now, what Bastit shows with force is that the only reality capable of assuring the existential unity of the thing, *and* its capacity to receive and support diverse qualifications, *and* its capacity to act – in other words, the only reality capable of embodying the cause of such being in all its aspects, is the substantial form. Form is the very core of the concrete being, inseparably united to matter and in this way transcending it on account of its actual definition, without nevertheless being entirely actual on account of its unity with matter. Only the form is able to do justice both to casual experience and to scientific analysis of beings.

Having demonstrated once again that Aristotle's analysis of substantial form is still valuable, and moreover is the only way to give a rational account of the world that we experience, Michel Bastit turned to natural theology. For, if actuality precedes potentiality, then the existence of forms that are not pure acts demands existence of at least one form that is such a pure act, and that, for this reason, is the cause of the former ones. This ontology may require theology to assist it.

3. Theology

Continuing his way in accordance with infallible logic, then Michel Bastit came to confront the theological question, and to travel the ultimate part of metaphysics, or natural theology. And this is the purpose of *The Principle of the World – the God of the Philosopher* [Bastit 2016].

Now, in a realistic perspective, the departure of natural theological reflexion is necessarily of a physical order. Actually, the general reflexion on this point, as we have just seen, is that we find at the core of the real world an act exerted by the form, and that this act, being incomplete, that is not a pure act, presupposes one perfect actual being that should be its cause. However, the experience of an incomplete act is nothing else for man but an experience of move-

ment and change. Consequently, the physical reality here assumes a first order importance, and it lies at the heart of reasoning.

Nevertheless, Bastit first examines a series of what we can call the preambles of scientific reasoning. The universality of religious belief, whose origin is first and foremost to be seen in contemplation of nature, gives some primary indication of the first principle, but some people get confused in its knowledge, which needs to be elaborated in a rigorous manner.

That is why it is necessary to come to examine different kinds of proof of the existence of the primary principle. Bastit begins by the confirmation theory of Swinburne, which reveals to be only probable, and the logical proof, through the examples of Saint Anselm, Gödel, and Plantinga, all examples that show weakness of such endeavours: the illegitimacy of switching from the thought of essence and of existence to the real existence of an essential being.

The field is then cleared for physical proofs, which come from examination of the hypothesis of temporal beginning to inquiry of cosmology and the cosmological application of the proof by movement. This implies prior study of the relation between modern physics and both natural philosophy and metaphysics. The core of the problem that philosophical realism faces is actually the following: the physical doctrine of movement as a state is in opposition to the Aristotelian doctrine of movement as a process¹². Bastit concludes his study with an affirmation of a “moderate scientific realism”, which allows him to consider the physical data of mathematical physics from a realistic point of view, and to affirm the reality of movement of bodies, the reality of the cosmological time, the unity and limits of the universe considered as a whole body. Then it becomes possible to conceive causal relations between bodies.

Being then “provided with real movement and time, although potentially infinite, of a substantialist conception of field objects, of a non-temporal and realistic causality, it will be possible to induce from the movement of bodies, caused and testified by geodesics as well as by their deformation under impact of other material bodies,

¹² Some clarification of this problem can be found in my article [Golfin 2020, 233-264].

a causality concerning the field in itself. Then it will be time to confront these ideas with experimental cosmology. The necessity of a primary motionless reality which causes movement in itself that is potentially infinite and continuous will then appear clearly, and the reasoning to get to it by an ascent from specific causes to a primary cause will be logically and epistemologically controlled. It will then be possible to identify such a cause with the primary principle of metaphysics and with the God of religions” [Bastit 2016, 11]. After that, what will remain will be the study of the properties of this God.

The ontology is thus complete, and the activity which is in its very core is founded on a pure act. Philosophical realism finds its ultimate justification in the intellectual contemplation of this primary cause, the necessity of which appears clearly to the intelligence that has previously acknowledged the effectiveness of the act as a source of action.

Conclusion

One of the main tragic features of modern thought is the separation of philosophy and science. This was in preparation from the beginning of modern times, and at least since the Cartesian view of a new practical – *i.e.*, technical – science, an opposite of the speculative science that was taught in universities, but it became plainly effective when this new science began to accumulate such successes that it came to fascinate minds and to impose itself on them. Then science became separated from all kinds of wisdom. And philosophy lost its knowledge dimension, to become discursive reasoning between opinions and logic, in all cases marked by its inability to provide any kind of actual necessity. But without the grasping of actual necessity, there is no hope of escaping the arbitrary, that is to say, the reign of will, and finally the reign of ideology. The separation between philosophy – or what we still keep naming so – and knowledge is a tragedy because it always means a fall into some sort of violence. Intellectual violence first, which in the end cannot but express itself in practical and political life. The first condition of morality is to think in the right manner.

The influence of this evolution on what we call science is not insignificant, for at least the result is the uncertainty about what

natural sciences help us to know of nature. Wisdom of any kind is always a capacity to judge: without wisdom science cannot in fact really realize itself.

The importance of the work of Michel Bastit appears then to be this effort to restore philosophy as a branch of knowledge, which is the first condition for renewing with natural wisdom. In what precedes, I have just given some glimpses of his work, and I have not discussed the strength of all his arguments. But what I have exposed seems sufficient to realize that the main thing Michel Bastit teaches us is that if we want to restore wisdom, and a respectful relation to nature, as well as plainly peaceful and fruitful relations between men in society, the first condition is to turn back to things, natural as well as human. The principle of a purely technical relation to the world, which increasingly kills us more and more, is the wrong idea that the nature of things does not matter, if it is not purely inconsistent. The technical manipulation of nature, and even of man himself, is preceded by an intellectual manipulation that leads us to think that after all, things are *nothing*. *Things are not things*: this is what may summarise modern thinking, if we just accept to give the proposition the various senses that it can endorse. On the contrary, Michel Bastit tells us that things are indispensable, and that in a practical approach as well as in a theoretical one, we cannot do without them. It is so, for at the very root of things, there is always an act, and the act, if one may say so, is the more real part of reality, without which there simply would be no existence.

Realism – the affirmation of the consistency of *res* – is not an option. It is a necessity.

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