Sometimes one can tell a book from its cover: On the principles and properties common to all natural things (De Communibus omnium rerum naturalium Principiis et Affectionibus). The title of the best known book by the Jesuit Benedictus Pererius (1535–1610)\(^1\) tells the reader of the late 16th century that the author was determined to compete with Renaissance natural philosophers, because the title echoes recent books in natural philosophy, such as Bernardino Telesio’s anti-Aristotelian De rerum natura iuxta propria principia (started to be published in 1565) or that of Pietro Pomponazzi: De naturalium effectuum causis sive de incantationibus (written in 1520, printed a.o. in 1567) or that of his follower Simon Portius (Porzio, Porta): De rerum naturalium principiis (1553). Those books claimed to account for universal principles of everything within nature, maintaining that such principles were causal to their properties. Pererius thus promises a naturalist theory and report about observable reality.

His book is commonly perceived as an important step towards modern—or, rather, enlightenment—metaphysics, as he redesigns the role of physics in the whole of philosophy and expressly states, for the first time, that there is a metaphysics that precedes all particular regions of philosophy. This overarching, ‘general’ metaphysics, later termed ‘ontology’, would lay the foundations for the ontological discussions of any particular being, starting with the intelligences (later including natural theology) down to physics.\(^2\) However, Pererius’ book can also be read in the context of the Jesuits’ strive for a unified philosophy teaching and as a response to the philosophy of the Renaissance, including non-Aristotelian philosophy of nature.

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\(^1\) Also known as Benedetto Pererio; the original name might have been the Catalan version: Benet Perera; in this paper that discusses his works published in Latin the name as it appears in his printed books seems to be appropriate. The edition used in this paper is Pererius 1588. I am indebted to the Vatican Film Library of St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri, for a Mellon Fellowship that allowed me to do research on Pererius manuscripts.

\(^2\) Vollrath, “Die Gliederung der Metaphysik, 267 sq.; Feiereis, Die Umprägung der natürlichen Theologie, 15–16; Leinsle, Das Ding und die Methode, 87–97; Blum Philosophenphilosophie, 157–158.
The *De principiis* came out first in 1576. And it seems that the author’s teaching had provoked controversies in connection with Averroism, as transpires from the document of approval for printing. The censors made special reference to the unity of learning: “idem dicamus, idem sapiamus”, according to the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus. However, it was also stated that in some treatments of philosophy there is no danger of presenting varying opinions, given that “one cannot force the human mind with strict laws in matters that allow for dispute, being only probable matters, anyway”. So, expecting the addition of a “pious preface”, printing was permitted.

Pererius gave philosophy lectures at the Collegium Romanum, where he taught Physics in 1558/1559, Metaphysics in 1559/1560 and 1560/1561, and two times the entire circle of three years, namely, Logic in 1561/1562, Physics in 1562/1563, Metaphysics in 1563/1564; again Logic in 1564/1565, Physics in 1565/1566, Metaphysics in 1566/1567. His *De principiis* draws in large part on these lectures as one can see by comparing it with extant manuscripts of these lectures. Many chapters of book 7 through 15 are to

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3 De Backer and Sommervogel, *Bibliothèque*, vol. 6, cols. 409–507, and vol. 12, cols. 644, 1184; Lohr, *Latin Aristotle Commentaries II*, 313–320. Ever since de Backer/Sommervogel’s bibliography of the Jesuits, other bibliographies and studies have mentioned a 1562 edition of this book; however, so far no scholar has been able to trace and see it; even Lohr, *Latin Aristotle Commentaries II*, n. 23, refers only to Sommervogel. Risse, *Bibliographia Philosophica Vetus*, part 6, who records 14 printings from 1576 through 1618, mentions the 1562 edition (111), but leaves the field blank that would indicate existing copies. Ribadeneira, *Bibliotheca Scriptorum S.I.*, 112 sq., indicates: *Physicorum seu de Principiis rerum naturalium libros 15*. Rome 1572.

4 MPSI 4, no. 150, p. 664: Among the censors was the philosopher Petrus Fonseca; p. 665: “Primum, quod Averroes, quem ille Pater [Pererius] aliquando nimis sequi videbatur, non ita bene audiret. (…) 2° Si qua in re videbatur aut Averroin aut Aristotelii vel sententiae aliquorum esse nimis addictus, eundem Patrem Benedictum ex censura examinato omnia emendasse. 3° Nihil esse timendum ab eo quod Constitutiones monerent, cum philosophica haec multis in rebus sine periculo tractari diversis rationibus et sententiae possint; nec vero queat omnino auctoriibus legibus astringi mens humana in iis quae probabilia sunt et in disceptationem cadunt.”
