On Aristotle’s Metaphysics K 7, 1064a29:

τόν ὄντος ἢ ὃν καὶ χωριστὸν

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In the traditional Metaphysics of Aristotle there is a passage where the philosopher distinguishes three branches of theoretical science. The text runs as follows:

1064 a28 ἔπει δ’ ἔστι τις ἑπιστήμη.
1064 a30 τοῦ ὄντος ἢ ὃν καὶ χωριστὸν, σκεπτέον πότερόν ποτε τῇ φυσικῇ τῇ αὐτῇ θετέον εἶναι ταυτήν ἢ μᾶλλον ἐτέραν. ἢ μὲν οὖν φυσικῇ περί τὰ κινήσεως ἔχοντ’ ἀρχὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐστὶν; ἢ δὲ μαθηματικῇ θεωρητικῇ μὲν καὶ περὶ μένοντά τις αὐτῇ, ἀλλ’ οὐ χωριστά. περὶ τὸ χωρίστων ἄρα ἐν καὶ ἀκίνητων ἑτέρα τούτων ἀμφοτέρων τῶν ἑπιστημῶν ἐστὶν, εἰπερ ὑπάρχει τις υἱόσια τοιαύτη, λέγω δὲ χωριστῇ καὶ ἀκίνητος, ὅπερ πειρασόμεθα δεικνύειν καὶ εἰπέρ ἔστι τις τοιαύτη φύσις ἐν τοῖς οὐσίαις, ἐνταῦθ’ ἐν εἴῃ που καὶ τὸ θεόν, καὶ αὐτῇ.

1064 b1 ἐν εἴῃ ἡ πρώτῃ καὶ χωριστάτῃ ἀρχῇ. δῆλον τοίνυν ὅτι τρία γένη τῶν θεωρητικῶν ἑπιστημῶν ἐστὶ, φυσικῆ, μαθηματικῆ, θεολογικῆ. (K 7, 1064a28 - b 3)

From the last sentence of the passage it is clear that by the first clause, with which our quotation begins, namely, ἔπει δ’ ἔστι τις ἑπιστήμη τοῦ ὄντος ἢ ὃν καὶ χωριστὸν Aristotle means theology. Accordingly, τὸ ὃν ἢ ὃν καὶ χωριστὸν — a queer combination — must refer to God. As early as 1888 Natorp already found this phrase difficult. For him not only the second part of Book K (8.1065a26 – end), but also the first part of it was spurious. Among other reasons, for which he rejected the authenticity of the work, was the identification of “θεολογικὴ 1064b3 mit der ersten und allgemeinen Wissenschaft... (1064b11). “Hier”, Natorp says, “haben wir also in bunterter Verwirrung und Verwechslung beider Auffassungen miteinander, die richtige und die falsche.” For the identification is Neo-Platonic, but not Aristotelian.

The same identification made Miss S. Mansion, who found” l’exposé de

1 Thema und Disposition der aristotelischen Metaphysik, Philosophische Monatshefte, Bd. 24.
3 Thema usw. p. 64-65, especially note 48.
K... extrêmement confus," reject the seventh chapter of Book K and assign it to a pupil of Aristotle who did not understand the doctrine of the analogy of being.¹

But, on the other hand, just because of this combination of ὧν ἂν ὧν with χωρίστων Merlan found "keine Stelle besser als Met. K 7, 1064a28-b3" to answer Mgr. A. Mansion's criticism of his Neo-Platonic interpretation of Aristotle.² This passage was stressed by Muskens before Merlan in the former's attempt to establish the chronological priority of K to E i on the ground of this very combination.³ Merlan did not emphasize this passage in his book From Platonism to Neo-Platonism, but in a paper written later, when he had to face Mansion's criticism, he discovered a helpful ally in Muskens. According to Merlan, Muskens had treated the passage "in einem Sinne, der den 'Neo-Platonischen' Charakter des ὧν ἂν ὧν völlig bestätigt." ⁴

From this short account of the opinions of the Aristotelian scholars concerning our K passage, it is obvious that the answer to the question: what is the object of Aristotle's Metaphysics? is inseparably connected with the interpretation of this phrase: ὧν ἂν ὧν καὶ χωρίστων, and how a clarification of this expression is needed. Merlan is right when he complains "dass diese Stelle von Schwegler, Bonitz und Ross (we should now add, Tricot, also) so gut wie gar nicht kommentiert wird." ⁵ The need to explain this expression was felt by most of these commentators when they wrote their works not as pressing as we feel it to-day, for the divergence of opinions referred to above had not been there. But it is just this divergence of opinions, which has brought us into the following dilemma: If one accepts Muskens and Merlan's interpretation of the phrase in question, one has to accept a Neo-Platonized Aristotelianism. Are we ready to follow our Neo-platonizer, who himself acknowledges frankly that his result is got from Met. Γ and E i as he interprets them, and that there are many other passages besides these two upon which a different interpretation may be based? ⁶ On the other side, if one accepts Natorp and S. Mansion's position, one has to disregard the arguments for the

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⁴ Op cit. p. 89.
⁶ Merlan, From Platonism to Neo-Platonism (1953) p. 144.