Late Hellenistic « Textbook Definitions » of Philosophy
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URING the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., in Alexandria, Athens and in other places, a large number of “Introductions to Philosophy” — Isagogai, Prolegomena, Disdascalicoi or, as we would say today, “textbooks” or “hornbooks” — were compiled and edited by Neo-Platonic authors and commentators, frequently in the form of commentaries or special treatises. They were primarily addressed to novices or “students” in order to introduce the latter to, and acquaint them with, certain basic or traditional problems and definitions of philosophy. In the main, these “textbooks” list six major (and some minor) or authoritative definitions of philosophy, namely, “the science (γνώσις) of being qua being,” “the knowledge, understanding or comprehension (γνώσις) of things divine and human,” “the concern (μέλητη) with death,” “the becoming like (ομοίωσις) God as far as this is possible [for man],” “the art of arts and the science of sciences (or, of all forms of special knowledge),” and “the love of wisdom.” The first two definitions are derived from the object of philosophy (¿ν¿ρο του υποχιιμίνον), the third and fourth from its purpose (ex του τέλους), the fifth from its exaltedness (ex της υπεροχής), and the sixth from its etymology.

It is also interesting to note that some authors or commentators credit the first, second and sixth definition to Pythagoras, the third and fourth to Plato, and the fifth to Aristotle. These six definitions as they have been “canonized” by the Neo-Platonic School of Alexandria in particular, not only return with the regularity of stereotypes in the writings of Late Hellenistic authors, scholiasts and

1 See, for instance, Ammonius, Comment. in Porphyrii Isagogen sive Quinque Voces, CIAG IV. 3, p. 2, 22 ff.; David, Prolegomena et in Porphyrii Isagogen Comment., CIAG XVIII. 2, p. 3 ff., and ibid., p. 23, 11 ff.; p. 26, 10 ff.; Elias (olim David), Comment in Porphyrii Isagogen et in Aristotelis Categorias, CIAG XVIII. 1, p. 7, 25 ff., and ibid., p. 8, 8 ff. See also some of the notes, infra.

2 It is reasonable to surmise that the trend to produce “textbooks” in philosophy might go back to the Peripatetic School of Theophrastus or, perhaps, to such Early Academicians as Speusippus and Xenocrates.
commentators. They were also transmitted to the Middle Ages where they
enjoyed great popularity and authority among theologians and philosophers.

Probably the first author to list all six authoritative definitions of philosophy
is Ammonius, the scholarch of the Neo-Platonic School at Alexandria during the
fifth century A.D. Ammonius, in turn, had a lasting and far-reaching influence
not only on the Neo-Platonists of the sixth century — Damascius, Simplicius,
Olympiodorus, Ioannes Philoponus, Asclepius and Theodoretus — but also on
Elias and David as well as on Byzantine, Syriac, Arabic and Christian authors.
In his Commentary to Porphyry's Isagoge, Ammonius enumerates these six
definitions, a list which subsequently was accepted by almost all scholars, com-
mentators or scholiasts. According to Ammonius, these six definitions are sub-
divided into three major groups, namely, as regards the object of philosophy,
as regards the purpose of philosophy, and as regards the "complex meaning"
(συναμφοτέρον) of philosophy. Although Ammonius also mentions several other
definitions of philosophy, he does not include them among his authoritative
definitions.  

Ammonius six definitions of philosophy reappear in Elias' In Porphyrii
Isagogen et in Aristotelis Categories Commentaria. It is quite possible that
Elias is here under the influence of Olympiodorus' lost Isagoge. Like Ammonius
before him, Elias subdivides his definitions of philosophy "analytically" into three
groups. Moreover, he attempts to assign the authorship of these six definitions
to different philosophers, claiming for Pythagoras no less than three definitions,
namely, the "love and pursuit of wisdom," the "science of being qua being," and
the "understanding and comprehension of things divine and human" — that is,
those definitions which follow from the etymology as well as from the exalted
position of philosophy. To Plato he assigns two definitions, namely, the "medi-
tation about death" and the "becoming like God as far as this is possible [for
man]" — that is, those definitions which deal with the purpose of philosophy.
And finally, he credits Aristotle with the definition which calls philosophy the
"art of all arts and the science of all sciences." The same definitions and the
same reasons for listing them can also be found in David's Prolegomena et in
Prophyrii Isagogen Commentaria. 

The first definition of philosophy recorded by the Neo-Platonic commentators
calls it the γνώσις τῶν ὄντων ὡς ὄντα, the "science or knowledge of being qua
being." Curiously enough, this definition, which is concerned with the object of

3 Ammonius, loc. cit. supra, note 1. See also Elias, loc. cit. supra, note 1.
4 Ammonius, op. cit., p. 2, 16 ff. See also David, op. cit. supra, note 1, p. 25, 25 ff.
5 CIAG XVIII. 1, p. 7, 25 ff, and ibid., p. 8, 8 ff.
6 David, op. cit. supra, note 1, p. 16, 3 ff., and ibid., p. 31, 34 ; p. 64, 32 ff., actually quotes
Olympiodorus. Olympiodorus was the disciple of Ammonius and the teacher of Elias.
7 CIAG XVIII. 2, p. 20, 25 ff. In his In Porphyrii Isagogen et Aristotelis Categories, CIAG.
1, p. 7, 26, Elias justifies his view that there are six authoritative definitions of philo-
sophy by ascribing magic qualities to the number six. See here also Porphyry, De Vita
Plotini 24 ; Theon of Smyrna, Expositio Rerum Mathematicarum ad Legendum Platonem
Utilium (ed. Hiller) 45.
philosophy, is also ascribed to Pythagoras, although it appears to be a sort of “summary statement” of Aristotle’s basic concept of philosophy. According to Aristotle, the “first philosophy” or the “philosopher’s philosophy” deals exclusively with being qua being: “The science of the philosopher — the ‘philosopher’s philosophy’ — is concerned with being qua being universally and not merely with a part of it.” It alone has for its true object everything that is. But in everything that is, it investigates only the first principles or causes. Accordingly, this first philosophy, which among all the branches of human knowledge is the most sublime form of knowledge, is also wisdom in the strictest and highest sense of the term. In brief, “there is a science of being qua being which is capable of existing apart [from all other sciences].” As such it “deals with things that both exist and are immovable” and, hence, “investigates the first principles and causes.” This being so, “there actually exists a science which inquires into the nature of being . . . and . . . this is not the same as any of the other so-called special sciences. For none of these other sciences treats universally of being qua being.” And it is above all the philosopher who studies these fundamental issues. In brief, the science which concentrates on being qua being, that is, the most universal science, is indeed the “philosopher’s philosophy.”

The second “canonical” definition of philosophy is that of γνώσις (or, κατάληψις) θείων καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων προσγεμάτων — the “knowledge, understanding or comprehension of things divine and human.” Undoubtedly, this definition, which is concerned with the purpose of philosophy, is of Stoic origin. The Stoics, especially the Later Stoics, considered philosophy to be the cultivation or practice

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8 See, for instance, Ammonius, op. cit., p. 9, 7 ff.; David, op. cit., p. 46, 6, and ibid., p. 8, 19; p. 25, 26; Elias, op. cit., p. 8, 15.

9 See, for instance, Aristotles, Metaphysics 1003 a 20 ff., and ibid., 1026 a 24 ff.; 1060 b 31 ff.; etc.

10 Ibid., 1004 a 31; 1005 a 21; 1060 b 32.

11 Ibid., 1003 a 20; 1005 a 15; 1026 a 31; 1060 b 32; 1061 b 26; etc.

12 Ibid., 1060 a 32. See also notes 9–11, supra.

13 See also ibid., 982 a 24, where we are told that “the most exact of all the sciences are those which deal with first principles. Those sciences which use fewer principles are more exact than those which use additional principles.”

14 Ibid., 1064 a 28.

15 Ibid., 1026 a 15.

16 Ibid., 982 b 9.

17 Ibid., 1003 a 20; 1061 b 32; 1026 a 27.

18 Ibid., 1061 b 11.

19 Ibid., 1064 b 7.

20 Ibid., 1061 b 5; 1025 b 1; 1003 b 14 ff.; 1003 b 21.

21 Sextus Empiricus Adversus Mathematicos IX. 13; Aetius, Placita Philosophorum I, proem 2; Pseudo-Galen, Hist. Philos. 5. It will be noted that this definition of philosophy found a prominent place in Justinian’s Corpus Juris, Digest (Pandects) I. 1. 1. 1. 10. 2, and Institutes (Gaius) I. 1. 1: “Jurisprudentia est divinarum et humanarum rerum notitia.”
of wisdom, and wisdom the understanding of things divine and human — the “rerum . . . divinarum et humanarum scientia.” 22 This understanding, in turn, constitutes the ultimate and, as a matter of fact, the sole foundation of all intellectual and intelligent endeavors to attain to the “good life” and become a “good man.” Accordingly, Seneca points out that the ancient philosophers “[s]apientiam quidam ita finierunt ut dicerent eam divinarum et humanarum rerum scientiam esse. Quidam ita: Sapientia est nosse divina et humana et horum causas.” 23

Aristobulus 24 and Albinus 25 likewise call philosophy the “knowledge and understanding of things divine and human.” This definition, it will be noted, also implies the universalistic meaning of philosophy. With the Neo-Platonists and their essentially religious or mystic inclinations, the ultimate significance of philosophy consists in man’s intellectual and spiritual communion with God. To them the highest object of philosophy consists in showing us the way to the spiritual visualization of the Ineffable One. This attitude towards, or interpretation of, philosophy in all likelihood is the Neo-Platonic version and application of the Stoic definition of philosophy which is also listed by Ammonius, David and Elias. For some unknown reason the latter credit this definition to Pythagoras.26

The third definition calls philosophy the μελέτη θανάτου or μελέτη τοῦ ἀποθνήσκειν — the “concern with death.” This definition, which focuses on the object or purpose of philosophy, in all likelihood is Platonic. 27 The affinity of the true philosopher with God 28 — a theme which permeates the whole of Plato’s philosophy — compels Plato to proclaim that only in “the world beyond” can the philosopher “find philosophic wisdom in its purest form.” 20 For this very reason the philosopher is always concerned with death. “Any man who possesses the spirit of philosophy is willing to die.” 20 Hence, “we should fly away from this earth as quickly as we can.” 21 This flight holds out to the philosopher the greatest of rewards: Philosophy is really the purification and release from evil and painful “banishment.” 22 For “only in the world beyond can man worthily enjoy philosophic wisdom . . . and there, and there alone, can he find wisdom in its purest and most exalted form.” 23 This being so, the true philosopher must be deeply

22 Cicero, De Officiis I. 43. 153.
23 Seneca, Epistola LXXXIX. 5.
24 See Eusebius, Praeparatio Evangelica XIII. 12. 12.
26 See note 6, supra.
27 See, for instance, Plato, Phaedo 64A ff., and ibid., 61B ; 64E ; 67E ff., 80E ; 81A ; et passim.
28 See infra.
29 Plato, Phaedo 68A.
30 Ibid., 61B ; 64E ff. ; Plato, Republic 486A.
31 Plato, Theaetetus 176B.
32 Plato, Phaedo 82D.
33 Ibid., 68A.
concerned with the problem of death, and “any man who possesses the spirit of philosophy is willing to die.” In other words — and this is perhaps the dominant message of the Platonic Phaedo and Crito — death is really liberation from “earthly incarceration,” and philosophy, by its contempt for all earthly things, is in fact the road or flight back to man’s original and heavenly abode from which he has been banished for some grave failings. In this sense philosophy is also concerned with death.

The definition of philosophy as the concern with death, among other philosophers, was also used by Plutarch. With some authors it was elaborated to mean the “release of the soul from its incarceration in the body” — a thoroughly Platonic notion. In this latter sense, philosophy would also be concerned with the salvation of the soul. To the Late Stoics, for instance, one of the basic tasks of philosophy is to give intellectual and spiritual strength to all those who seek lasting peace and mental comfort. As a matter of fact, this definition, especially the notion that philosophy is the release of the soul from its incarceration, was readily used by the Stoics in general who relied on it in order to justify their views on suicide. Cicero, it appears, introduced it into the Latin world when he maintains that “tota enim philosophorum vita . . . commentatio mortis est.” Apuleius likewise calls philosophy the “mortis affectum consuetudinemque moriendi,” while Albinus defines it as the “soul’s liberation from, and rising above, the body.” Seneca states that “egregia res est mortem condiscere . . . hoc est ipsum quare meditari debemus.”

The fourth definition of philosophy is that of ομοίωσις θίω (χ α τα το δυνατόν) — the “becoming like God (as far as this is possible [to man]).” This definition, which is concerned with the purpose or end of philosophy, probably goes back to Plato. Plato insists that “the eye of the philosopher is

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34 Ibid., 67C.
35 Ibid., 61B.
36 This notion, for instance, also underlies the statement of Marcus Aurelius that philosophy consists in “accepting death with a cheerful mind.” See Marcus Aurelius, Thoughts II, 17.
37 Plutarch, De Sera Numinis Vindicta 18 ff. (Moralia 560F ff.)
38 See, for instance, Albinus, Isagoge 1 (p. 152, ed. Hermann); Marcus Aurelius, Thoughts IX. 3, and ibid., III. 3.
39 Cicero, Tusculanae Disputationes I. 30. 74. See also ibid., I. 31. 75: “...secernere autem a corpore animum ecquid aliiquid est quam mori discere ?”
40 Apuleius, De Platone et Eius Dogmate 277.
41 Albinus, Isagoge 1 (p. 152, ed. Hermann).
42 Seneca, Epistola XII. 25.
43 Plato, Theaetetus 176B. See also Plato, Paedo 62B, and ibid., 66B; 67A; Plato, Republic 613B, and ibid., 500C, et passim; Plato, Laws 716CD; Diogenes Laertius III. 78 ff. According to Eudorus of Alexandria (in: Stobaeus, Eclogues II. 49. 8 ff.), this definition allegedly goes back to both Plato and Pythagoras. Diogenes Laertius VI. 72, and ibid., VI. 37; VI. 51, reports that Diogenes of Sinope had insisted that “the wise man is . . . a friend of his like”; that “the gods are the friends of the wise”; that “the wise are friends of the gods”; and that “good men are images of the gods.”
forever directed towards things immutable and eternal . . . These he imitates and 
to these he will conform as far as this is possible." 44 In other words, the philos­
opher attempts to “make the ways of man agreeable to the ways of God as far 
as this is possible.” 45 Philosophy, then, is really purification and release from 
evil or imperfection; 46 and the philosopher, by “holding conversation with the 
divine or divine order becomes himself . . . divine as far as the nature of man 
permits.” 47 For only the philosopher “is most like God.” 48 Obviously, philosophy 
to Plato is a “flight” from this world of deception and misery and, hence, the 
“road to God” — a notion which permeates the Platonic Republic, the Theaetetus 
and, especially, the Phaedo.

Theon of Smyrna, we know, recommended the study of philosophy because 
the latter makes us like God as far as this is possible,49 a position which was also 
taken by Eudorus of Alexandria,60 Gaius,61 Plutarch,62 Albinus,63 Juncus,64 
Plotinus,65 Philo of Alexandria,66 Julian the Apostate,67 Themistius 68 and others. 
Traces of this definition might also be detected in St. Paul,69 as well as in a 
number of early Christian authors. It will be noted that Ammonius,70 and after 
him David 71 and Elias 72 added to the original Platonic definition (Theaetetus 
176B) the “as far as this is possible to man.”73 It is reasonable to assume that 
this particular addition is fully in keeping with the ultimate effort of the Neo-

44 PLATO, Republic 500C.
46 PLATO, Phaedo 82D. See also SENECA, Ad Helviam Matrem de Consolatione XI. 7; 
SENECA, Epistola CII. 26.
47 PLATO, Republic 500C ff., and ibid., 613A. See also PLATO, Laws 716CD.
48 PLATO, Theaetetus 176B.
49 THEON OF SMYRNA, Philosophici Platonici Expositio Rerum Mathematicarum ad Legendum 
Platonem Utilium (ed. Hiller) XIV. 8, and ibid., XIV. 18 ff.; XVI. 16.
50 See STOBAEUS, Eclogues II. 49. 8 ff.
51 ALBINUS, Isagoge 28 (p. 181, ed. Hermann).
52 PLUTARCH, De Sera Numinis Vindicta 5 (Moralia 550D). Plutarch also offers several 
different interpretations of this definition.
53 ALBINUS, Isagoge 28. See also ALBINUS, Prologue 6.
54 In STOBAEUS, Eclogues CXVII. 95.
55 PLOTINUS, Enneads I. 2. 1 ff., and ibid., V. 8. 11; I. 2. 3, et passim.
56 PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, De Opificio Mundi 50. 144; De Caritate (or. De Humanitate) 
XXIII. 168.
57 JULIAN THE APOSTATE, Oratio VI. 184 (p. 238, ed. Hertlein).
58 THEMISTIUS, Oratio II. 32 (p. 39, ed. Dindorf); Oratio XXXIV (p. 471, ed. Dindorf).
59 ST. PAUL, Romans VIII : 29 : “. . . to be conformed to the image of the Son . . . ” See also 
ibid., VI : 5; Ephesians IV : 24.
60 AMMONIUS, Comment. in Porphyrii Isagogen sive Quinque Voces, CIAG IV. 3, p. 3, 
14-15, and ibid., p. 4, 5-6.
61 DAVID, Prolegomena et in Porphyrii Isagogen Comment. CIAG XVIII. 2, p. 20; 29 ff.
62 ELIAS, Comment. in Porphyrii Isagogen et in Aristotelis Categorias, CIAG XVIII. 1, p. 16, 
10, and ibid., p. 18, 3.
63 See, however, PLATO, Republic 613A.
Platonists to pronounce and, at the same time, to bridge, “as far as this is possible to man,” the infinite chasm which separates man from God. Hence, the ομοίωσις can be achieved only on the level of religious exstasy or mystic contemplation. For only by renouncing this world, by purification and by reverting to spiritual and mystic contemplation can man communicate with the Ineffable One.

The fifth definition of philosophy calls it the τέχνη τεχνών καὶ ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστημῶν — the “art of arts (or the system of systems) and the knowledge of all forms of knowledge.” 64 This definition, which stresses the “matrix position” or exaltedness of philosophy, 65 and which enjoyed much popularity among the Neo-Platonic authors and commentators, has generally been credited to Aristotle. It might be interesting to speculate whether it is indeed by Aristotle and, if so, where it might have been stated by the Stagirite. Ammonius maintains that “there is also a definition of philosophy devised by Aristotle — a definition, that is, which is derived from the pre-eminence which philosophy holds as regards the other arts and sciences.” 66 Elias, the disciple of Ammonius and Olympiodorus, insists that “according to Aristotle, the fifth definition of philosophy . . . [is] that of τέχνη τεχνών καὶ ἐπιστήμη ἐπιστημῶν. For in the Metaphysics, which is also called Theology, 67 he defines it as such on account of its pre-eminence.” 68 Assuming, then, that this definition or, at least, a statement to this effect was actually contained in some “editions” (or commentaries) of Aristotle’s Metaphysics, 69 it might be reasonable to conjecture that it was part of Book I, chapter 2 of the Metaphysics, and that at about 982 b 7ff. of this work it followed the statement that “the science which knows to what end each thing must be done, is the most authoritative or sovereign science among all sciences . . .” This particular section of the Aristotelian Metaphysics has frequently been cited, or relied upon, by Aristotle’s commentators and by scholiasts to explain, justify and confirm the pre-eminence (υπέροχη) of philosophy in general.

64 In his Prolegomena et in Porphyrii Isagogen Comment., CIAG XVIII. 2, p. 21, 12 ff., David calls philosophy “the mother (μητέρα) of all arts and of all forms of knowledge . . . with the help of which we are able to derive the first principles and the methods and the various forms of knowledge.” See here also Elias, Comment. in Porphyrii Isagogen et Aristotelis Categorias, CIAG XVIII. 1, p. 20, 31 ff.; CICERO, Tusculanae Disputationes I. 26, 64; Ammonius (loc. cit., p. 2, 12 ff.) and David (loc. cit. and ibid., p. 40, 13 ff.) also make an attempt to set off philosophy against all other forms of intellectual pursuits with the help of this definition. See also PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, De Congressu Eruditionis Gratia XXVI, 146 (vol. III, p. 102, ed. Cohn-Wendland).

65 CICERO, loc. cit. supra, note 64. The same was taught by Posidonius (see SENECA, Epistola LXXXVIII. 21 ff., and ibid., 28 ff.; Epistola XC. 7). Chicago calls philosophy the “mother of all arts and sciences.”

66 AMMONIUS, Comment. in Porphyrii Isagogen sive Quinque Voces, CIAG IV. 3, p. 6, 25 ff. See also PORPHYRY, Isagoge III. 6. 25.

67 See also Elias, Comment. in Porphyrii Isagogen et Aristotelis Categorias, CIAG XVIII. 1, p. 20, 19; ASCLEPIUS, Comment. in Aristotelis Metaphysicorum Libros, CIAG VI. 2, p. 1, 18, and ibid., p. 4, 1 ; p. 56, 23 ff.; p. 136, 22 ff.

68 Elias, Comment. in Porphyrii Isagogen et in Aristotelis Categorias, CIAG XVIII. 1, p. 20, 18 ff. See also Asclepius, loc. cit. infra, note 67.

69 This might also be inferred from Elias, loc. cit. supra, note 68, p. 23, 10 ff.

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While Elias specifically assigns this definition of philosophy to Aristotle, Ammonius, Simplicius, Asclepius, and Eustratius regard this definition as part of a more general and more widely accepted philosophic tradition. Isidore of Pelusium, for instance, relates that “other philosophers are of the opinion that philosophy is the art of all arts and the science of all sciences . . .” David, again, calls philosophy the “mother (μητηρ) of all arts and of all sciences . . . from which we may derive a true understanding of first principles (ἀρχαι) and of the ‘basic methods’ (ῥητορικά), as well as an understanding of all the special forms of knowledge (επιστήμαι).” By this very formulation David emphasizes the pre-eminence (προηγείται) of philosophy among all other “particular,” “detailed” or “specialized” sciences. For “the art of arts must be above and beyond [ordinary] art . . . [Hence,] philosophy, which instructs all other arts, should be referred to as the art of all arts.”

It might be pointed out that the definition calling philosophy the mother or matrix of all arts and sciences can, among others, also be found in Posidonius, whose great learning as well as many writings had a lasting influence on subsequent authors. Posidonius, in turn, might have been under the direct influence of Aristotle. Cicero probably follows Posidonius when he insists that philosophy is “the mother of all arts”; and Marcus Aurelius might possibly echo the same notion when he admonishes his readers to “let philosophy be thy foster-mother and mother.” The Stoics, as a matter of fact, point out that philosophy ranks above all other human endeavors. The remark of Philo of Alexandria (that it is impossible to discover within the several special sciences as such “first principles” or the “roots of things”, and that only philosophy can supply us with such “first principles,”) seems to be Aristotelian in spirit. So too is probably the observation made by Ammonius that “philosophy [as the science of all

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70 AMMONIUS, Comment. in Aristotelis Analyticorum Librorum Liber I, CIAG IV. 6, p. 10, 18-19.
71 See, for instance, SIMPLICIUS, Comment. in Aristotelis Physicorum Libros I–IV, CIAG IX, p. 47, 31.
72 ASCLEPIUS, Comment. in Aristotelis Metaphysicorum Libros A–Z, CIAG VI. 2, p. 74, 5 ff.
73 EUSTRATIUS, Comment. in Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea, CIAG XX, p. 322, 12.
74 MIGNE, PG LXXVIII. 1637.
75 DAVID, Prolegomena et in Porphyrii Isagogen Comment., CIAG XVIII. 2, p. 2, 12 ff.
76 Ibid. See also ibid., p. 40, 13 ff.; AMMONIUS, Comment. in Porphyrii Isagogen sive Quinque Voces, CIAG IV. 3, p. 6, 25 ff.
77 ELIAS, op. cit. supra, note 68, p. 23, 10 ff.
78 See, for instance, SENECA, Epistola LXXXVIII. 21 ff., and ibid., 28 ff.; Epistola XC. 7, and ibid., 23; Epistola XXXIX. 5. See note 65, supra.
79 CICERO, Tusculanae Disputationes I. 26. 64.
80 MARCUS AURELIUS, Thoughts VI. 12.
81 AEITUS, Placita Philosophorum I, prooem. 2; Sextus Empiricus, Adversus Mathematicos IX. 13.
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sciences] alone is concerned with everything that is or exists," 83 thus combining the definition which calls philosophy the "art of all arts and the science of all sciences" with the definition which defines it as the "science of being qua being." 84 In accordance with what appears to have been Aristotle's definition of the πρῶτη

φιλοσοφία, 85 Ammonius seems merely to restate the notion that philosophy, properly understood, is the "knowledge of being qua being." 86

The sixth definition of philosophy, which is an etymological explanation of the term, calls it the φιλία τής πρῶτης σοφίας — the "love and pursuit of wisdom." This definition, which has also been credited to Pythagoras, 87 in all likelihood goes back to Plato. 88 Aelius Aristides, we know, refers to philosophy as the "love or pursuit of the beautiful and the dedicated study of what is rational — a love or pursuit which is not just a passing fancy or fashionable hobby, but rather an all-encompassing erudition." 89 In the course of the late fifth or early fourth century B.C., philosophy came to mean the inquiry into the nature of truth as well as into the essence of things — the reasoning about, or pondering over, a definite problem. In this sense it came to mean the love of factual knowledge and the pursuit of real wisdom on the basis of rational argument and consistent methodology. 90 Accordingly, philosophy is also the road to true wisdom. "The true philosopher," Plato maintains, "is a lover, not of a part of wisdom only, but of the whole"; 91 and the purpose of philosophy is to submit to the dictates of reason (properly employed) by engaging in pure and unadulterated contemplation or visualization of what is objectively true: "The minds of the philosophers always have a knowledge of a sort which shows them the eternal nature not varying from generation or corruption." 92 Those who love the truth in each thing

84 See notes 8–20, supra, and the corresponding text.
85 See, for instance, Aristotle, Metaphysics 1003 a 21 – 1005 a 17, and ibid., 1026 a 24 ff.; 1026 a 30 ff.; 1060 b 31 – 1061 b 34; etc.; Aristotle, Physics 194 b 15; Aristotle, De Caelo 277 b 10.
86 Ammonius, loc. cit. supra, note 83.
87 See, for instance, Ammonius, op. cit., p. 9, 7 ff.; David, op. cit., p. 8, 19, and ibid., p. 25, 26 ff.; Elias, op. cit., p. 8, 15. See also Cicero, Tusculanae Disputationes V. 3, 8–10; Iamblichus, Vita Pythagorae XII. 58 (31, 20–32, 22, ed. Deubner); Aristotle, Protrepticus, frag. 11, Walzer; frag. 11, Ross; frag. 18, Düring; frag. 16, Chroust (Iamblichus, Protrepticus 51–10, ed. Pistelli); Hermias of Alexandria, In Platonis Phaedrum Scholia (ed. Couvreur) 264, 10 ff.; Diogenes Laertius VII. 8, and ibid., I, proem. See also note 8, supra.
88 See, for instance, Plato, Republic 475 B, and ibid., 480 A; 484 D; 485 B; 490 A; 494 B; 502 C ff.; 521 A; etc.; Plato, Sophist 268 D; Plato, Symposium 218 A; Plato, Phaedo 64 D; Plato, Gorgias 526; etc., etc.
90 See, for instance, Plato, Gorgias 526 D; Plato, Euthydemus 307 B.
91 Plato, Republic 475 C.
92 Ibid., 485 AB. See also ibid., 484 A ff.; 486 E; 490 A ff.; 500 C; et passim; Plato, Phaedrus 249 A ff.; Plato, Phaedo 65 C; Plato, Theaetetus 173 E; Plato, Sophist 249 D, and ibid., 254 A.
“are to be called philosophers, that is, lovers of wisdom.” 93 In other words, philosophy is a kind of “madness or passion in man’s longing for wisdom and understanding.” 94 According to Plato, true, that is, flawless and objective wisdom (σοφία) is reserved to God, and to Him alone. Man, on the other hand, must be content with yearning for and loving truth and wisdom. It is yearning for love of wisdom and objective knowledge which constitutes for Plato the stepping stone from earthliness to the heavenly beatitude of absolute truth and absolute beauty. The philosopher can attain to his ultimate aim and achieve his exalted position by gradually and longingly ascending the several levels of specialized scientific or philosophic learning. 95 This ascendency starts with a feeling of love and wonder. For “wonder is the feeling of the philosopher, and philosophy starts in wonder.” 96

Seneca maintains that some Stoics considered philosophy the pursuit of wisdom — the “sapientiae amor et affectatio.” 97 Chrysippus, again, saw in philosophy the pursuit and practice of wisdom, 98 the only sure road leading to wisdom and virtue, philosophy. 99 Albinus, in turn, calls philosophy the “longing (σπέκτο) after wisdom,” 100 while the Neo-Plthagoreans consider it not merely a striving after wisdom, knowledge and understanding, but also the “road to God as well as a communion with God.” 101 And finally, Boethius defines philosophy as the “amor et studium et amicitia quodammodo sapientiae.” 102

These six basic “textbook definitions” of philosophy, it must be conceded, already had become authoritative definitions some time before they were restated and “canonized” by Late Hellenistic commentators or authors of “Introductions” to philosophy or the study of philosophy. Thanks to the efforts of Cassiodorus, 103

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93 PLATO, Republic 480A.
94 PLATO, Symposium 218A.
95 PLATO, Republic 498A ff.
96 Ibid., 475C; PLATO, Theaetetus 155D. ARISTOTLE, in Metaphysics 982 b 12 ff., likewise insists that philosophy starts in wonder.
97 SENECA, Epistola LXXIX. 5, and ibid., 7-8.
98 Sextus Empiricus, Adversus Mathematicos IX. 13; AETIUS, Placita Philosophorum I, prooem. 2.
99 Musonius, in: STOBAEUS, Eclogues II. 13. 123. Similar notion can be found in MARCUS AURELIUS, Thoughts V. 9.
100 ALBINUS, Isagoge 1 (p. 152, ed. Hermann).
101 See STOBÆUS, Eclogues XLIX. 20.
102 BOETHIUS, In Isagogen Prophryii Comment., PL LXI, 10.
103 CASSIODORUS, De Artibus ac Disciplinis Liberalium Litterarum (PL LXX). Cassiodorus quotes only four authoritative definitions of philosophy: Divinarum humanarumque rerum inquanta est possibilis scientia; ars artium et disciplina disciplinarum; meditatio mortis; and assimilatio Deo secundum quod possible est homini.
Isidore of Seville, Dominicus Gundissalinus and other writers of philosophic compendia, they were transmitted to medieval theologians and philosophers. In this manner they became an essential part or aspect of Christian intellectual and spiritual life. Thus, the fifth definition, for instance, which calls philosophy "the art of arts and the science of sciences," among other matters, was also referred to in order to explain, justify and exalt the pastoral functions of priesthood. Moreover, they gradually replaced the traditional system of early medieval instruction, which was essentially based on the trivium and quatrivium, and thus brought about far-reaching innovations in theological and philosophical studies.

104 Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae II. 24. 1, and ibid., II. 24. 2; II. 24. 9. Isidore quoted five definitions of philosophy, namely, the rerum humanarum divinarumque cognitio cum studio bene vivendi coniuncta; the amor sapientiae; the divinarum humanarumque rerum inquantum homini possibile est probabilis scientia; the ars artium et disciplina disciplinarum; and the meditatio mortis. Isidore's first definition, which can also be found in Gundissalinus (see note 105, infra), is a combination of borrowings from the Old Stoa, from Cicero and from Seneca. In Etymologiae II. 23. 2, Isidore (who quoted here Cassiodorus) relates that "consuetudo itaque est doctoribus philosophiae antequam ad Isagogen veniant expoundam divisionem philosophiae paucis." This remark would indicate that Cassiodorus was familiar with some of the writings of the Alexandrian Neo-Platonic commentators or Prolegomena Philosophiae.