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A pursuit of ontological truth in Aristotle's philosophy

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Chapter Two

Being in the Strictest Sense in *Metaphysics* Θ.10

In addition to his view of truth as the truth-value of assertions in *Metaphysics* Γ.7, *Metaphysics* Δ.7 and *Metaphysics* E.4, Aristotle also provides us with another way to interpret the term ‘truth’: “being or non-being in the strictest sense are truth or falsity.”⁸⁷ (*Met.* Θ.10, 1051b1-2). In order to further explain truth in this ontological sense, it is necessary for us to investigate *Metaphysics* Θ.10 as a whole. This chapter focuses on combinations and separations in things. I shall first analyze the content and the structure of *Metaphysics* Θ.10 line by line.

T9: The terms ‘being’ and ‘non-being’ are employed firstly with reference to the categories, and secondly with reference to the potentiality or actuality of these or their opposites, while being and non-being in the strictest sense⁸⁸ are truth and falsity. In the objects (*pragmata*) this is being combined or separated, so that he who thinks the separated to be separated and the combined to be combined has the truth (*aletheia*), while he whose thought is in a state contrary to that of the things is in error. This being so, when is what is called truth or falsity present, and when is it not? We must consider what we mean by these terms. It is not because we think that you are white, that you are white, but because you are white we who say this have the truth. (*Met.* Θ.10, 1051a34-1051b10)

Here Aristotle discusses how to deal with “being”, whereby he states that the term “being” could be discussed from three different perspectives: in reference to the categories, actualization and potentiality, as well as in the strictest sense as truth or falsity.⁸⁹ While there is more than one way to interpret this passage, it clearly concentrates on the topic of being, not on truth and falsity in assertions. In order to further clarify truth and falsity in this sense, Aristotle states it is in objects being combined or separated. Combinations and separations are in things, and Aristotle considers combinations and separations as a way to explain what is “being or non-being in the strictest sense as truth or falsity”. The next sentences make clear that the truth-values of assertions depend on prior combinations and separations in things. As the last sentence of this text states, “It is not because we think that you are white, that you are white, but because you are white, we who say this have the truth.” The consequence of this sentence is the priority of the things involved in combinations and separations. As we shall see, it follows that this truth in some cases experiences change over time. What is called true

⁸⁷ Stephen Makin 2006, 14-15 has translated “in the strictest sense” as “in the most proper way”, which he considers a strange and awkward way to refer to the Standard Account of *Metaph.* E.4, *ibid.* 247-248 Cf. above p. 22. However, in my dissertation, I have chosen to translate “in the strictest sense”.

⁸⁸ Jaeger suggest either to delete ‘in the strictest sense’ (κυριώτατα ὄν) or transpose it to the start of the sentence where it would underline the categories. Such emendations aim at reducing the mention of truth and falsity to assertions on the basis of E.4. As I will show, there is more evidence that for Aristotle truth and falsity are fundamental ways to refer to a particular mode of being. Reeve, 2016, 476n1032 *ad loc* agrees.

⁸⁹ The relation between ontological truth and actualities and potentialities as ways of being will be further discussed in chapter Four.

at this moment may be considered false at another moment, since the actual state of being combined or separated determines what is called truth or falsity. In *Θ.10* Aristotle continues to discuss three specific modes of being in terms of combinations and separations, in order to further analyse “being or non-being in the strictest sense are truth or falsity.” These include incomposites, composites, and the mode of being that cannot be divided.⁹⁰

In this chapter I shall first discuss a number of modern interpretations to set the stage (section 1). Then I give three parallel texts that prepare the way for an ontological reading of *Θ.10* (section 2). Then I look at the discussions of combination and separation in more detail in section 3, followed by a discussion of truth and falsity in incomposites (section 4). In section 5, I state my conclusions.

1. *Metaphysics* *Θ.10* in modern scholarship

My interpretation goes against the traditional interpretation of this passage, which uses the reference to the truth of statements to reduce this notion of truth and falsity to truth values of assertions. We have discussed Stephen Makin’s interpretation to this effect in chapter One. It is affirmations and negations which are truth-bearers, the first affirming something of something, the second denying something of something. Furthermore, he uses the terms “truth-makers” and “truth-bearers” to describe the relationship between being and truth in Aristotle.⁹¹ As we saw, Makin is not the only commentator to take this standpoint: we may include David Ross,⁹² C.D.C. Reeve,⁹³ David Charles and Michael Peramatzis,⁹⁴ and Mark Wheeler.⁹⁵

Aristotle’s view on “being or non-being in the strictest sense are truth or falsity” is still open to interpretation and discussion. Ultimately, how to interpret the view of truth in *Θ.10* will be determined by how one understands the phrase that ‘being or non-being in the strictest sense are truth or falsity.’ I shall first introduce three modern interpretations that make room for ontological truth.

For instance, Paolo Crivelli (2004) points out that “being and non-being in the strictest sense are truth and falsity” is problematic. He argues that there Aristotle has expressed his view of truth in more than one way, including “being true”, “truth in thoughts”, “truth in things” and “being and non-being in the strictest sense as truth and falsity.” Even though Aristotle is distinguishing among various senses of “being” in the passage, the adjective “in the strictest sense” may well be taken as modifying “being true or false.”⁹⁶ As far as I am concerned, at least in the literal sense, the phrase, “the sense of being” differs from “the strictest sense of being” at *Metaphysics* *Θ.10*, and the sense of ‘being true’ differs from “the strict sense of ‘being.’”

⁹⁰ Thorp, 2013. Thorp has discussed this passage to clarify his point that what Aristotle means by the truth of things is what we might call their reality. And his research involves other scholars’ relevant discussions of this cited passage T9, including Brentano’s turning the table, Aquinas’ veritas ontological causalis, and Heidegger’s unconcealedness.

⁹¹ Makin, 2006.

⁹² Ross, 1924.

⁹³ Reeve, 2016.

⁹⁴ Charles and Peramatzis, 2016.

⁹⁵ Wheeler, 2019a, 39.

⁹⁶ Crivelli, 2004, 65-66.

Crivelli also claims that the phrase, “the strictest sense of being true or false” at *Metaphysics* Θ.10, should be interpreted as a more primary expression of “being true”, translating “being true or false in the strictest sense.” “Being true in the strictest sense” is the most fundamental sense of “being true” in Aristotle’s theory of truth. Crivelli thus argues that “being in the strictest sense true or false” at *Metaphysics* Θ.10 is an attribute of objects, whereas the sense of “being true or false” at T6 is an attribute of thoughts. It is obvious that the remarks in *Metaphysics* Θ.10 would appear to commit Aristotle to the truth and falsehood of objects.⁹⁷ Based on this interpretation, Crivelli believes there is a clash between Aristotle’s views of truth in *Metaphysics* E.4 and *Metaphysics* Θ.10.⁹⁸

Crivelli’s reading is very helpful. At the very least, he points out the various readings of the term truth in Aristotle. I agree with his opinion that there is more than one way that Aristotle expresses his view of truth. However, I disagree with his translation of the main phrase in question. His translation of this phrase emphasizes the scope of truth by means of “being true or false”, rather than the scope of being by means of “being in the strictest sense” offered by my reading. From my perspective, “being in the strictest sense as truth” is a certain mode of being, rather than an attribute of objects. What is more, according to different translations and readings of this phrase, interpreters hold different opinions concerning the relationships between the view of truth in *Metaphysics* E.4 and *Metaphysics* Θ.10.

Based on his reading, Crivelli argues that there is a clash between Aristotle’s view of truth in *Metaphysics* E.4 and *Metaphysics* Θ.10. On the contrary, from my point of view, I do not see a clash: the ontological reading of truth in *Metaphysics* Θ.10 is the ontological foundation of the traditional view of truth in *Metaphysics* E.4.

What is more, the way of interpreting the phrase “being or non-being in the strictest sense are truth or falsity” has been discussed within the framework of the division between “truth in thoughts” and “truth in things.” For instance, Kurt Pritzl (1998) clearly states that Aristotle offers two explicit cross-referenced accounts of truth in the *Metaphysics* E.4 and *Metaphysics* Θ.10.⁹⁹ He suggests there are two choices that articulate “being true” with “in the strictest sense”. The first of them is a more primary expression of “being true” for assertions, while the second is that “being in the strictest sense as truth” is a more decisive way of explaining being among these three ways of saying being offered in the beginning of *Metaphysics* Θ.10. Kurt Pritzl has understood the phrase “being or non-being in the strictest sense are truth or falsity” as a more primary expression of “being true” or an expression of a kind of being. However, while Pritzl still takes the traditional interpretation of the view of truth in Aristotle, at least he admits that a possible meaning of “being or non-being in the strictest sense are truth or falsity” could be ontological truth, i.e. truth as a kind of being. However, Pritzl does not say anything more about this kind of being.

Edward Halper (2005) has suggested that the content of this passage should be investigated in terms of “ousia.”¹⁰⁰ Differing from Pritzl’s opinion, Halper states that the opening sentence

⁹⁷ Crivelli, 2004, 72.

⁹⁸ Crivelli, 2004, 72.

⁹⁹ Pritzl, 1998, 177–201.

¹⁰⁰ Halper, 2005, 218.

does not mean that truth is more primary than the other ways of being, categorical being, and actuality, but that the truth under discussion here is more primary than the truth that *Metaphysics* E.4 dismissed, which is “truth in thought.” In the case of *Metaphysics* E.4, truth in terms is seen as a correspondence of unity or separation between belief and thing, but here, in *Metaphysics* Θ.10 Aristotle emphasizes the causal role of the thing. Therefore, there are two sorts of truth. The first one is truth in thought, the other is “truth in things” as the mode of being that should be the object of metaphysics.¹⁰¹ Based on this interpretation, Aristotle would appear to argue that “truth in *Metaphysics* Θ.10” is more primary than “truth in *Metaphysics* E.4.” Thus we can infer that Aristotle reveals a kind of truth in things that is fixed by the phrase that “being or non-being in the strictest sense are truth or falsity” in *Metaphysics* Θ.10.

2. Texts supporting the ontological reading of truth in *Metaphysics* Θ.10

In my opinion this text proposes an ontological reading of the concept of truth. Truth or falsity constitute a further approach to being or non-being. There are several reasons for me to interpret “being or non-being in the strictest sense are truth or falsity” as ontological truth. Firstly, in the literal sense, it is obvious that Aristotle describes beings to be true or false in the strictest sense in *Metaphysics* Θ.10. It is not the first time for Aristotle to develop this line of reasoning to explain being by truth or falsity. In *Metaphysics* Δ.7, at 1017a8-1017b9, Aristotle already resorts to truth or falsity to explain being, together with the other three ways to speak of being, including accidental being, categories, and potentiality and actualization.

T10: Things are said to be (1) in an accidental sense, (2) by their own nature. [...] (3) ‘Being ’ and ‘is’ mean that a statement is true, ‘not being’ that it is not true but false [...] (4) Again, ‘being’ and ‘that which is’, in these cases we have mentioned, sometimes mean being potentially, and sometimes being actually. ¹⁰² (*Met.* Δ.7,1017a8; 1017a31-1017a32; 1017b1-1017b2)

As we can see in T10, Aristotle states that things can be said to be in three ways, including being said in terms of truth in statements. In each of these three cases, being can be used as potential or actual being. However, only in *Metaphysics* Θ.10, Aristotle specifies how to understand being with reference to truth by means of the phrase “being or non-being in the strictest sense as truth or falsity.”

In addition, Aristotle paves the way to this ontological reading of truth by means of the interpretation of falsity in things discussed in *Metaphysics* Δ.29, based on what Aristotle literally says about falsity in things, falsity in accounts.

T11: We call false (1) that which is false as a thing, and that (a) because it is not put together or cannot be put together, e.g. ‘that the diagonal of a square is commensurate with the side’ or ‘that you are sitting’; for one of these is false always, and the other sometimes; it is in these two senses that they are non-existent. (b) There are things which exist, but whose nature it is to appear either not to be such as

¹⁰¹ Halper, 2005, 218, 220.

¹⁰² This textual passage has been quoted and discussed as T6 in chapter One.

they are or to be things that do not exist, e.g. a sketch or a dream; for these are something, but are not the things the appearance of which they produce in us. We call things false in this way, then,—either because they themselves do not exist, or because the appearance which results from them is that of something that does not exist. (2) A false formula (*logos*) is the formula of non-existent objects, in so far as it is false. Hence every formula is false when applied to something other than that of which it is true, e.g. the formula of a circle is false when applied to a triangle. In a sense there is one formula of each thing, i.e. the formula of its essence, but in a sense there are many, since the thing itself and the thing itself modified in a certain way are somehow the same, e.g. Socrates and musical Socrates. The false formula is not the formula of anything, except in a qualified sense. (*Met.* Δ.29, 1024b18-1025b33)

Here Aristotle distinguishes two kinds of “falsity in things”, including: (1) a use of “false thing” that denotes predicative combinations that do not, in fact, exist; and (2) a use of “false thing” that denotes actual things that are usually taken to be something other than what they are.¹⁰³ For example, that the diagonal of a square is commensurate with the side is always false, and that you are sitting is false at some time. Here, Aristotle stresses the meaning of falsity as a thing in two different ways. As suggested by Mark Wheeler “It is plausible to suppose that for each use, Aristotle acknowledged a correlated use of ‘combination’ that would denote either (1) predicative combinations of real things that, in fact, exist or (2) actual things that are usually taken to be what they are.”¹⁰⁴ It is clear that these combinations in things as truth in things fit the framework of false in things in *Metaphysics* Δ.29.¹⁰⁵

Based on the discussions above, I would like to argue here that Aristotle introduces the phrase “being or non-being in the strictest sense are truth or falsity” to constrain the applied range of truth and falsity in things. Of course, Aristotle still has to define it by means of combinations or separations. It is reasonable to infer then that what Aristotle wishes to discuss is “things as things are,” which are not modes of being that make statements true, but also a kind of “truth in things.”¹⁰⁶ Using Aristotle’s words, these statements about truths as truth-values of assertions are known to us, while “truth in things” is instead known by nature.

As it stands, the expression “being or non-being in the strictest sense are truth or falsity” clearly gives us a limitation to combinations and separations relative to the range of ontological truth. With reference to being and non-being in the strictest sense as truth or falsity, for every statement with truth-value, an affirmative predicative sentence is true or false if and only if the objects it concerns are true or false in the strictest sense, while a negative predicative sentence is true or false if and only if the object it concerns is false or true as non-being or being in the strictest sense.

3. Combinations and separations in *Metaphysics* Θ.10

After introducing three ways to describe being, including categories, actuality or potential, as well as “being” or “non-being” in the strictest sense as truth or falsity, Aristotle discusses how

¹⁰³ The second case can be considered truth in appearance.

¹⁰⁴ Wheeler, 2019a, 128.

¹⁰⁵ Wheeler, 2019a, 206.

¹⁰⁶ Halper, 2005, 218,228.

to explain “being or non-being in the strictest sense as truth or false” by means of combinations and separations.

3.1 Combinations and separations in things

T12: If, then, some things are always combined and cannot be separated, and others are always separated and cannot be combined, while others are capable either of combination or of separation, being is being combined and one, and not being is being not combined but more than one. (*Met.* Θ.10, 1051b10-1051b13)

It is clear that there is an intrinsic relationship between “being or non-being in the strictest sense” and “truth or falsity” by means of combinations or separations in things. Specifically, within the expression of being and non-being in the strictest sense as truth or false, we can glean more than one mode of being in terms of combinations or separations. Hence, we get a list of things. The first is the kind that is always combined and cannot be divided, while the second one can be combined and divided. The third one is that thing which will always be divided and cannot be combined. Moreover, being is being combined and one, while not being more than one. Here, it is apparent that Aristotle uses the term of combinations and separations in the ontological sense or in the world level for being. Because of this, three modes of being with reference to combinations or separations are visible. Just like the example of “you are white” offered by Aristotle before, “being” and “non-being” in the strictest sense as truth and falsity has been further explained as combinations or separations of *pragmata* that are things in certain conditions.¹⁰⁷

If we go with the example of ‘Socrates is or is not musical’ we can see this from two angles. Firstly, we are combining or separating mental things, such as the thoughts of Socrates and musicality. If such combinations in statements and in thoughts are true, then it has to be captured by certain modes of being, such as the individual, for Socrates is ultimately musical in reality. I do not deny from this standpoint that combinations and separations can be explained in terms of both logic and metaphysics. The text informs us of the priority of “being” and “non-being” in the strictest sense over combinations or separations in opinions or statements.

There are three kinds of combinations, which are: combinations captured in assertions, combinations captured in opinions, as well as combinations captured in things. With reference to the definition of truth in terms of combinations, I shall argue that combinations can be of words taken from the categories showing a structure of assertions with truth-values, but also of things showing a relation between substances and other qualities. Within the framework of “truth in thoughts” or “truth in things”, these three kinds of combinations can be divided into two groups of truths. The truth in combinations captured in assertions and opinions is “truth in

¹⁰⁷ The interpretation of combinations and separations at the world level has already been observed by Jan Szaif. Szaif argues that Aristotle very carefully distinguishes between the states of combinations and separations, which belong to the world level, and the linguistic or mental acts of combining and separating. (Szaif, 2018, 9-19.)

thought”,¹⁰⁸ while combinations or separations of objects as things are “truth in things” serve as ontological truth.

Here, we can see that my interpretation reveals a kind of combinations or separations in things in an ontological sense, and this distinction between two groups of combinations and separations can pave the way towards ontological truth, which is ‘being’ or ‘non-being’ in the strictest sense as truth or falsity. On this basic ontological level, ‘being or non-being in the strictest sense as truth or falsity’ could be measured by certain conditions of combinations or separations of things.

In conclusion of this section, if it is reasonable to translate “being or non-being in the strictest sense as truth or falsity” with reference to combinations or separations in things, it is clear that the concept of truth not only applies to assertions. Truth is also found in things. This interpretation of combinations and separations in reality has connected the two seemingly separate routes, the route of investigation of being and the route of inquiring into the traditional view of truth in Aristotle discussed earlier. In this way, I can demonstrate that the traditional view of truth in Aristotle and the ontological reading of truth in *Metaphysics* Θ.10 are not in opposition, but are in fact supporting one another.

4. Ontological truth in *Metaphysics* Θ.10

In virtue of combinations and separations in things and in order to defend the internal relationship of “being or non-being in the strictest sense as truth or false,” certain modes of being with reference to combinations and separations should be further observed. Our next step of the inquiry is therefore to decipher how Aristotle considered the various modes of being with reference to “being or non-being in the strictest sense as truth or falsity.” *Metaphysics* Θ.10 may provide us certain guidelines to answer this question by means of objects as modes of being with reference to combinations or separations, including in-composites and complex things based on the classification of things.

T13: Regarding contingent facts, then, the same opinion or the same statement comes to be false and true, and it is possible at one time to have the truth and at another to be in error; but regarding things that cannot be otherwise opinions are not at one time true and at another false, but the same opinions are always true or always false. (*Met.* Θ.10, 1051b13-1051b17)

Aristotle makes a further distinction between contingent facts and things that cannot be otherwise. Contingent things are changeable over time, corresponding statements about these contingent things are capable of changing their truth-values as changes of contingent things. However, for things that cannot be otherwise, the corresponding statements do not need to change their truth-values; things that cannot be otherwise are always true, which is necessary:

T14: That which cannot be otherwise is said to be necessary. And it is in virtue of this necessity that all the others, too, are somehow said to be necessary; [...] Hence, the necessary in the primary and main

¹⁰⁸ This will be discussed in chapter Three.

sense is the simple, for this cannot be in many ways so as to be now in one way and now in another, but if the latter were the case it would have been in many ways. (*Met.* Δ.5, 1015a32-1015a33; 1015b11-1015b14).

As the passage shows, in the primary and main sense, things that cannot be otherwise are the simple things, or in-composites, to which Aristotle turns next.

4.1 In-composites are always true in terms of actualization

In the following part of *Metaphysics* Θ.10, Aristotle firstly pays attention to truth or falsity in in-composites¹⁰⁹ and then composites.

T15: Then in connection with the in-composites, what is it to be or not to be and what is truth and falsity? For it is not composite in this case, so that they would be when put together and not be when separated, as it is in the case of the wood being white or the diagonal being incommensurable; nor will truth and falsity still obtain in the same way as in those cases. Rather just as truth is not the same as regards these, so too neither is to be [the same as regards in-composites]; for it is not possible to be mistaken in connection with the what-it-is, except accidentally; and similarly too in connection with the substances which are not composite, for it is not possible to be mistaken; and all these substances are actually, not potentially, for if they were potentially they would have come to be and perished, but as it is being-itself neither comes into being nor perishes, for if it did it would come into being from something. So then, for those things which are just what it is to be something and actualities, in connection with these it is not possible to be mistaken but all that is possible is either to think them or not; but the what-it-is is investigated in connection with them, whether they are such like or not.¹¹⁰ (*Met.* Θ.10, 1051b18–1051b33)

There are some points we can take away from the passage. The main topic is the application of ‘true’ to in-composite items. Firstly, Aristotle suggests that truth and falsity as being or non-being in the strictest sense do not apply in the same way to in-composites, because truth in the case of in-composites is contact and assertion, not affirmation or negation that has been explained by the traditional account of truth concerning a relation between linguistic/cognitive items and worldly items. Thus, for in-composites, there is no falsity, only ignorance.

Secondly, at least some substances are conceived to be in-composites, what it is to be something, and actuality. These in-composites cannot change. Then, as we discussed above, the thing that cannot be otherwise is what is necessary, so in-composites are what is necessary.

Referring to T13, T14 and T15, we are gradually getting a list of examples of composites as well as in-composites. We have (a) items that cannot be otherwise and are therefore necessary, i.e. (i) they are always combined and cannot be divided, or (ii) they are always divided and cannot be combined. In addition, we have (b) items that can be sometimes combined, sometimes divided. . Moreover, we have (c) in-composites, which comprise (i) essences, i.e. the what it is, and (ii) substances in actuality, i.e. immaterial forms.

¹⁰⁹ Since there is disagreement about what Aristotle means by in-composites, the precise structure of the argument is extremely unclear. (Makin, 2006, 248.)

¹¹⁰ Makin, 2006, 14-15.

The relation between these two explanations has been discussed by Stephen Makin who suggests that the phrase ‘and similarly too’ at 1051b26 - 1051b27 leaves the relation between (c-i) and (c-ii) open.¹¹¹ In this case, we are faced with two options. The first one is that (c-i) is the wider set of defined essences, including those which involve material elements, for instance human beings defined with reference to flesh and bone; (c-ii) will then focus on a narrower set of purely formal essences which involve no reference to matter, such as circles.

The second option is that (c-i) and (c-ii) coincide. In this case, no definitions would involve reference to matter, and all defined essences would be purely formal; mention of (c-ii) would then make explicit the point that (c-i) essences, which are the worldly correlate to definitions, are purely formal and actual.

Although the first option agrees with Aristotle’s discussion of definition of composite substances in *Metaphysics* Z,¹¹² the discussion of ontological truth will turn out to focus on the point that all essences have priority in virtue of their necessity and actuality. First we need to discuss the specific candidates of incomposites by turning to other relevant passages provided by Aristotle himself. As we investigated above, incomposites have first been explained as things that cannot be divided and are always combined. They cannot be otherwise, so they are necessary. Since incomposites cannot suffer any changes they cannot come into being nor perish.¹¹³ Then, we can get a list of candidates of incomposites in Aristotle.

A) Eternal substances

Eternal incomposites in this sense are discussed by Aristotle in e.g. *Metaphysics* Λ. Substance is the subject of his inquiry, and he is seeking the principles and the causes of substances. Meanwhile, the substances can be divided into three kinds, viz. the sensible eternal things, the sensible perishable things and the eternal immovable things.

T16: There must, then, be such a principle, whose very substance is actuality. Further, then, these substances must be without matter; for they must be eternal, at least if anything else is eternal. Therefore they must be actuality. [...] There is, then, something which is always moved with an unceasing motion, which is motion in a circle; and this is plain not in theory only but in fact. Therefore the first heavens must be eternal. There is therefore also something which moves them. And since that which is moved and moves is intermediate, there is a mover which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance, and actuality. [...] And in this [side of the list of opposites that is the object of thought], substance is first, and in substance, that which is simple and exists actually. (The one and the simple are not the same; for ‘one’ means a measure, but ‘simple’ means that the thing itself has a certain nature.) [...] It is clear then from what has been said that there is a substance which is eternal and unmovable and separate from sensible things. It has been shown also that this substance cannot have any magnitude, but is without parts and indivisible. (*Met.* Λ.6, 1071b19-22; Λ.7, 1072a21-1072a26; 1072a31-34, 1073a3-7)

¹¹¹ See his discussion in Makin, 2006, 260-263.

¹¹² See below p. 42ff.

¹¹³ These may be called substances in ordinary language, but they certainly come to be and perish.

According to the passages collected in T16, there are at least two eternal substances, viz. the first heavens that move in a circle, and the first unmoved mover which is simple and exists in actuality. Aristotle claims that the first mover is the first principle of all things, does not suffer any changes, and is always in actuality.

Here we may begin to suspect that for Aristotle, his unmovable first mover—God—always actualizes truth by virtue of its very nature. Aristotle considers his God to be the most important first principle and substance, and his God is thus the proper object of philosophical wisdom. Since Aristotle argues that the essence of his God is the perfect actuality of thought thinking thought, then, Aristotle's God is the perfect realization of contemplative activity which essentially involves truth. This line of thought will be further developed in chapter Four.

B:) Essences

Besides eternal beings as one of candidates of incomposites, Aristotle further discusses essences in *Met. Z.*

T17: Since at the start we distinguished the various marks by which we determine substance, and one of these was thought to be the essence, we must investigate this. And first let us say something about it in the abstract. The essence of each thing is what it is said to be in virtue of itself. For being you is not being musical; for you are not musical in virtue of yourself. What, then, you are in virtue of yourself is your essence. (*Met. Z.4*, 1029b10-1029b16)

T17 clearly suggests that substances have a certain nature that is in virtue of itself. According to T15, essences can be considered as incomposites. What is more, the formula of the essence is the definition, and essences serve as the primary substance.

T18: Clearly, then, definition is the formula of the essence, and essence must belong to substances either alone or chiefly and primarily and in the unqualified sense. (*Met. Z.4*, 1031a11-1031a14)

Essences belong to substances primarily and most of all. The essence of a substance and its definition, being the account of its essence, shall be one.¹¹⁴

T19: But not only are a thing and its essence one, but the formula of them is also the same, as is clear even from what has been said; [...] Clearly, then, each primary and self-subsistent thing is one and the same as its essence. (*Met. Z.6*, 1031b32-1032a1; 1032a4-1032a6)

C) Forms

Simple things as denoted by the categories are incomposites, which, as we have seen, are objects that exist without falsity and without matter. In *De An.* III.6, Aristotle claims that:

¹¹⁴ Aristotle has distinguished four kinds of unity in *Met. I.1*, 1052a15-1052b1.

T20: The thinking of indivisibles is found in those cases where falsehood is impossible: where the alternative of true or false applies, there we always find a sort of combining of objects of thought in a quasi-unity. [...] That which cognizes must be its objects potentially, and they must be in it.¹¹⁵ But if there is anything that has no contrary, then it knows itself and is actually and possesses independent existence. Assertion is the saying of something concerning something, as too is denial, and is in every case either true or false: this is not always the case with thought: the thinking of the definition in the sense of what it is for something to be is never in error nor is it the assertion of something concerning something; but, just as while the seeing of the special object of sight can never be in error, seeing whether the white object is a man or not may be mistaken, so too in the case of objects which are without matter. (*De An.* III.6, 430a26-430a28; 430b23-430b30)

In T20 Aristotle explains how our ability to know relates to the object of knowledge, whether incomposite or composite: our mind (*nous*) is its objects potentially. Composites have contraries, and assertions and denials concerning them are therefore always ‘something of something’, and may be sometimes true, sometimes not. In the case of incomposites which have no contraries, such as the definition, there is no potentiality for being otherwise. Thought of them is always true, and cannot be in error—just like seeing the special object of sight is (in principle) reliable and true. If a mind knows an object that has no contrary, i.e. no matter or potentiality, it identifies with it and knows itself and is actually and possesses independent existence: a reference to the thinking of thinking of the unmoved mover of *Metaphysics* Λ.7, 1072b18-24 and Λ.9, 1074b33-35.¹¹⁶

The character of incomposites is that they are always what they are, which excludes coming to be and perishing. This character clearly applies to forms:

T21: For if we make the form, we must make it out of something else; for this was assumed. E.g. we make a bronze sphere; and that in the sense that out of this, which is bronze, we make this other, which is a sphere. If, then, we make the sphere itself, clearly we must make it in the same way, and the processes of making will regress to infinity. Obviously then the form also, or whatever we ought to call the shape of the sensible thing, is not produced, nor does production relate to it,—i.e. the essence is not produced; for this is that which is made to be in something else by art or by nature or by some capacity. (*Met.* Z.8, 1033a33–1033b7)

Thus, forms are neither made nor produced. That means either that forms are eternal, or at least that they do not undergo any process of coming into being.

Summarily, based on these textual evidence, incomposites, such as A) eternal substances, B) essences as well as C) forms without matter, are always what-it is. Essences are an important kind of incomposites, and function as a fundamental unit in Aristotle’s philosophy. Thinking of such incomposites is always true. We have seen that primary substances are identical to their essences or forms. Essences without matter are always in actualization; they do not have

¹¹⁵ For different readings of the corrupted Greek text see Reeve, 2017, 168.

¹¹⁶ Reeve, 2017, 168-169.

potentiality. In this way, the essence is both form and actuality. In further chapters we shall return to the role of essences in Aristotle's philosophy.

4.2 Ignorance in *Metaphysics* Θ.10

In *Metaphysics* Θ.10 Aristotle introduces a new aspect to his view of falsity in relation to incomposites. He argues:

T22: As regards being in the sense of truth and not being in the sense of falsity, in one case there is truth if [the subject and the attribute] are really combined, and falsity if [they] are not combined; in the other case, if the object is existent it exists in a particular way, and if it does not exist in this way it does not exist at all; and truth means thinking these objects, and falsity does not exist, nor error, but only ignorance,—and not an ignorance which is like blindness; for blindness is akin to a total absence of the faculty of thinking.¹¹⁷ (*Met.* Θ.10, 1051b34–1052a3)

In line with earlier texts, Aristotle affirms once again that knowledge of composites involves both truth and falsity. Knowledge of incomposites as beings of such and such kind is always true, never false. In this case the opposite of truth is ignorance, lack of contact (*Met.* Θ.10, 1051b24–25 in T15). Hence the difference in being between composites and incomposites is reflected in the modes of our thinking them in terms of truth and falsity, or truth and ignorance respectively.¹¹⁸

For example, when we make contact with or correctly pick out the essence of “man”, we are getting the definition of man that is being-a-two-footed land-animal, which is always true and in actuality. That is the truth in incomposites. If we do not correctly pick out the essence of “man”, we simply grasp nothing about “man”, so our mode of thought would be complete ignorance, rather than falsity concerning incomposites.

4.3 Composites changing over time

Apart from the investigation concerning incomposites, there are still other modes of being constituting ontological truth that needs to be explored—that is truth in composites. If the subject and the attribute are combined and divided over time, how can truth in composites be forthcoming? Before answering this question, we need to discuss what composites are.

In *Metaphysics* Θ.10, some composites have been clarified as things that can be sometimes combined and sometimes divided. For these composites that change over time, Aristotle clearly argues:

T23: For it is not because they themselves receive anything that statements and beliefs are said to be able to receive contraries, but because of what has happened to something else. For it is because the actual thing exists or does not exist that the statement is said to be true or false, not because it is able itself to receive contraries. No statement, in fact, or belief is changed at all by anything. So, since nothing happens in them,

¹¹⁷ I here prefer the clarity of the translation by W.D. Ross in Barnes (1984) over that of Makin.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Hestir, 2013.

they are not able to receive contraries. (*Cat. 5*, 4b8-4b14)

It would appear that it is things rather than statements which receive contraries, since statements cannot change over time, while various modes of being do change over time. In terms of changes, the contradiction in statements is determined by the contradiction in modes of being. Therefore, the content of statements does not change but the modes of being change over time.

Considering the fact that statements with truth-values are not capable of capturing composites with changes, the people who make judgements with truth-values have to change their statements in order to capture the reality fixed by modes of being – while these modes of being are able to receive contraries over time in their own right. The question would be what is the standard or measure with which to change our statements so as to guarantee the truth of composites that change over time. Aristotle suggests:

T24: But since there are compounds of substance with the other categories (for there is a substrate for each category, e.g. for quality, quantity, time, place, and motion), we must inquire whether there is a formula of the essence of each of them, i.e. whether to these compounds also there belongs an essence, e.g. to white man. (*Met. Z.4*, 1029b23-1029b26)

Similar to the investigation on truth in incomposites, we need to explore what is the primary substance that makes composites what they are? Aristotle points out that the inquiry into the essence of composites could be the answer to this question. For composites, the first substances play the role of essences in composites, and thus contribute to truth in composites.

T25: All things that come to be either by nature or by art have matter; for each of them is capable both of being and of not being, and this capacity is the matter in each. And, in general, both that from which they are produced is nature, and the type according to which they are produced is nature (for that which is produced, e.g. a plant or an animal, has a nature), and so is that by which they are produced—the so-called ‘formal’ nature, which is specifically the same as the nature of the thing produced (though it is in another individual); for man begets man. (*Met. Z.7*, 1032a20-1032a26)

Here, it is clear that composites that come to be are constituted by matter and form. And the capacity of matter is both of being and of not being, which means that matter of composites suffers changes. While the form is neither produced nor perishes.

T26: But not only regarding substance does our argument prove that its form does not come to be, but the argument applies to all the primary classes alike, i.e. quantity, quality, and the other categories. For as the bronze sphere comes to be, but not the sphere nor the bronze, and so too in the case of bronze itself, if it comes to be, (for the matter and the form must always exist before), so is it as regards both ‘what’ and quality and quantity and the other categories likewise; for the quality does not come to be, but the wood of that quality, and the quantity does not come to be, but the wood or the animal of that size. But we may

learn from these instances a peculiarity of substance, that there must exist beforehand another actual substance which produces it, e.g. an animal if an animal is produced; but it is not necessary that a quality or quantity should pre-exist otherwise than potentially. (*Met. Z.9*, 1034b8-1034b19)

As we can see, in order to deal with changeable modes of being, Aristotle introduces other terms, such as “matter” and “form”, as well as “actualization” and “potency” to measure various changes of composites. For all coming to be is ‘from’ something, i.e. from matter, and matter persists through the process of coming to be i.e. remains present in what has come to be. Thus, only material entities can be the result of coming to be. It is true for forms in all categories that they do not themselves come to be and perish. Only in the case of substances the form needs to exist in actuality in another substances (human begets human). Based on the form of composites that is always in actuality, the matter of the composites is capable of being or non-being constitutes the ontological ground to suffer changes and to be whatever it is over time. In this sense, the form of composite things in actuality is responsible for the truth of statements about composites. For as we have seen, a statement about composites is true if and only if the combination or division of composites in fact obtains.

4.4 Always divided and never combined

The third and final point offered by *Metaphysics* Θ.10, that some things are always divided, and cannot be combined, is related to falsity in things. This has already been discussed by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* Δ.29, 1024b17–21 (= T11). The examples ‘the diagonal of a square is commensurable with the side’ is always false, because being a diagonal and being commensurable are never combined.

There Aristotle introduced the notion of ‘falsity in things.’ The phrase “false in things” includes either: (1) a combination of real things that, in fact, do not exist; or, (2) an actual thing that is taken to be something other than what it is. The latter point could be considered as “falsity in appearances of things.” And so, there is at least falsity in things, in that they are not as they appear, or else, they do not exist.

5. Conclusion: “being” in the strictest sense as truth is ontological truth

I have interpreted the phrase of “being and non-being in the strictest sense are truth and falsity” as an expression of ontological truth in virtue of combinations or separations in things. Our reading of *Metaphysics* Θ.10 has shown that various modes of being in terms of combinations and separations in reality can be considered being in the sense of truth and falsity. This ontological reading can provide the ontological foundation for the traditional account of truth in Aristotle. In *Metaphysics* Θ.10, we can recognize truth-bearers and truth-makers, and more importantly, we can specify what truth-makers are.

Within the framework of being in the strictest sense as truth, three types of being have come up for discussion: eternal substances, essences and forms. Eternality, actuality, and necessity are the key characteristics of these items in Aristotle’s ontology.

Ontological truth is truth or falsity as being or non-being in the strictest sense in

Metaphysics Θ.10. This notion has been used to explain being, just as the categories and potentiality or actualization do. Incomposites do not experience any changes, so the truth in incomposites identifies with essences and forms that are always in actuality. Composites that suffer change, and it is the forms of composites which are responsible for what composites are. What is more, we touch different types of things by our abilities for knowing them, although our abilities have limitations. Thus, the notion of ontological truth can be applied to explain why there are no errors but only ignorance regarding incomposites.

Lastly, returning to our starting-point, we are beginning to see how this ontological reading of truth can actually provide an ontological foundation for the traditional view of truth in Aristotle. With the understanding of the basic framework of *Metaphysics* Θ.10, these three different ways of speaking of being, and these three types of being in the strictest sense will be further discussed separately in the following chapters.