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A pursuit of ontological truth in Aristotle's philosophy

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Chapter Three

Relations Between Words, Thoughts, and Things

After our detailed discussions on the two major interpretations of Aristotle's view on truth, we now move to explore what truth and falsity as being in the strictest sense can contribute to our understanding of the correspondence relation between thoughts, statements and things that played a role in both *Metaphysics* E.4 and *Metaphysics* Θ.10. In this chapter, I will defend the interpretation of ontological truth in terms of the ontological priority of things, as well as demonstrate how 'truth in things' is directly prior to 'truth in thoughts' and indirectly prior to 'truth in assertions.' Consequently, the result of these investigations will be that the truth or falsity of the assertions and the beliefs depend completely on the truth or falsity in things.

I shall first demonstrate that Aristotle points out a direction for our inquiries by underlining the importance of the question about beings in so far as they are spoken of by language, which could in turn reflect his basic attitude to the question about what being is. Next, based on the structure of a predication that is used to investigate the question of what it is, Aristotle further introduces how words are signs which refer to affections of the soul, which are in turn likenesses of actual things in the world. Whatever the scholarly disagreement concerning the interpretation of Aristotle on this score, in this chapter I seek to confirm that Aristotle always insists on the ontological priority of actual things and their causal relation to thoughts and words.

Within the framework of the concept of truth offered by Aristotle, the first of its applications is statement truth, or truth-bearers with the truth-values. For instance, "If we define truth and falsity, it is clear what they are. To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true."¹¹⁹ Next, it is applied to mental items including mental states or acts of believing, knowing, grasping by souls. For example, Aristotle argues that "we must consider later what has to be discussed with regard to that which is or is not in this sense; but since the combination and the separation are in thought and not in the things, and that which is in this sense is a different sort of being from the things that are in the full sense."¹²⁰ Moreover, from Aristotle's point of view, truth in thoughts is a product of functions of the soul, which are intellect, perception, and imagination.¹²¹ Finally, truth has been applied to various modes of being, not least in Θ.10: "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 sense are truth and falsity."¹²²

1. How modes of being are traditionally spoken by language

¹¹⁹ *Met.* Γ.7, 1011b25-1012b27 (T4 above).

¹²⁰ *Met.* E.4, 1027b27-1028b31 (T7 above).

¹²¹ *De An.* III.3, 428a5-428b16.

¹²² *Met.* Θ.10, 1051a34-1051b4 (T8 above).

With reference to truth, Aristotle mentions that “Truth is like the proverbial door that no one can miss”¹²³ and “the fact that we can have a whole truth and not the particular part we aim at shows the difficulty of it.”¹²⁴ Aristotle is much more positive about the ability of humans to have some knowledge of truth. Still, it is necessary to keep in mind that nobody can adequately capture truth.¹²⁵

Humanity’s limited ability to capture truth has been further restricted by the limitations of language to talk about things, and specifically using words to show how things are. Aristotle is in fact rather optimistic about the ability of language to capture the truth. The importance of the inquiry into the relationship between language and things as modes of being can be observed by the claim that “the unqualified term ‘being’ has several meanings.”¹²⁶ Following this line of argument in *Metaphysics* E.2, it is reasonable to admit that there is more than one traditional way to say something about being before Aristotle. For example, dialecticians and sophists have their own ways to discuss things.¹²⁷ After criticizing these traditional approaches,¹²⁸ Aristotle introduced a new way of how things are spoken of, so as to demonstrate his views on the relationship between words and things.

Referring to the question of how to say things, Aristotle initially points out the obvious difference between dialecticians and philosophers by mentioning that:

T27: And it is the function of the philosopher to be able to investigate all things. For if it is not the function of the philosopher, who is it who will inquire whether Socrates and Socrates seated are the same thing, or whether one thing has one contrary, or what contrariety is, or how many meanings it has? And similarly with all other such questions. Since, then, these are essential modifications of unity qua unity and of being qua being, not qua numbers or lines or fire, it is clear that it belongs to this science to investigate both the essence of these concepts and their properties. And those who study these properties err not by leaving the sphere of philosophy, but by forgetting that substance, of which they have no correct idea, is prior to these other things. [...] So too certain properties are peculiar to being as such, and it is about these that the philosopher has to investigate the truth.—An indication of this may be mentioned:—dialecticians and sophists assume the same guise as the philosopher, for sophistic is philosophy which exists only in semblance, and dialecticians embrace all things in their dialectic, and being is common to all things; but evidently their dialectic embraces these subjects because these are proper to philosophy.—For sophistic and dialectic turn on the same class of things as philosophy, but this differs from dialectic in the nature of the faculty required and from sophistic in respect of the purpose of the philosophic life. Dialectic is merely critical where philosophy claims to know and sophistic is what appears to be philosophy but is not. (*Met.* Γ.2, 1004a35-1004b12; 1004b16-1004b26)

Here, Aristotle aims to introduce a philosophical way to approach being as such by firstly referring to and criticizing other approaches – including those from dialecticians and sophists.

¹²³ *Met.* α.1, 993b5-993b6.

¹²⁴ *Met.* α.1, 993b7-993b8.

¹²⁵ Lear, 1988, 5.

¹²⁶ *Met.* E.2, 1026a 34.

¹²⁷ Brogan, 2005, 164-165.

¹²⁸ *Met.* Γ. 2, 1004b6-1004b25.

By making a comparison with dialecticians and sophists, Aristotle establishes a relationship between philosophers and truth and he explains an inherent task or function of philosophers. One way of putting it is that the task of philosophy is also the characteristic property that philosophers should have.¹²⁹ The task or the function of philosophers is to investigate all things by studying being qua being, which initially begins with asking how one can be certain that Socrates and Socrates seated are the same thing. In this sense, the philosopher is the one who is able to see what truly reveals itself as itself, and to do so, he or she must separate being from non-being – or from that which only appears to be. Aristotle thus sets up a direction for how to say things in accordance with how things are.

Moreover, the scope of questions available for philosophers to research is essential to the modification of being qua being, which belongs to the science of investigating the essences of concepts and properties in terms of causes or principles.¹³⁰ For Aristotle, the question of being is the question of what makes a particular being the being that it is. “Therefore what we seek is the cause, i.e. the form, by reason of which the matter is some definite thing; and this is the substance of the thing.”¹³¹ The substance, or form (*eidos*), is here said to be responsible for the matter attributed to a particular being in such a way that the being presents itself as the being it is. In this sense, Aristotle suggests that philosophers have to investigate the truth based on what things are.¹³² Given this point, Aristotle sets forth the task of philosophers who should speak about things as things are – an action which Aristotle refers to as truth seeking.

Due to philosophers being tasked to investigate the truth, an internal relation between philosophers and truth has been established by Aristotle. In this sense, sophists and dialecticians appear like philosophers,¹³³ but in reality are *not* philosophers. In contrast to the priority of *words* stressed by dialecticians, philosophers always underline the priority of *things*. Similarly, sophists and dialecticians never study the substance of things as being qua being. And so, by contrast, while dialecticians only pay their attention to words, philosophers are always caring for things by emphasizing the priority of things in the ontological sense. Therefore, Aristotle understands that the task of the philosopher is ultimately about truth, while dialecticians and sophists only say something in terms of their relation to truth, rather than truth itself.

The internal relationship between truth and philosophy provided by Aristotle invites further questions to be investigated. For instance, why does Aristotle hold that philosophers have to investigate truth in the first place? Does it mean that only philosophers are capable of saying things in accordance with how things are? What does it mean to say ‘on the basis of what it actually holds’? With the development of investigations into the role of words, thoughts and things, these questions could each be answered separately. Therefore we shall examine the relationship between words, thoughts, and things as such in Aristotle’s works.

¹²⁹ This situation of philosophers can also be described in terms of wonder. (Lear, 1988, 6.)

¹³⁰ *Met.* α.1, 993b20-993b30.

¹³¹ *Met.* Z.17, 1041 b7–1041b9.

¹³² *Met.* E.2, 1004b16-1005a1.

¹³³ *Met.* E.2, 1004b1-1004b26, 1061b7-1061b10.

2. Truth in words

Aristotle argues that words must be intelligible and signify things in the world. The following passage explains why words are necessary to execute the task of philosophers.

T28: Those, then, who are to join in argument with one another must to some extent understand one another; for if this does not happen how can they join in argument with one another? Therefore every word must be intelligible and signify something, and not many things but only one; and if it signifies more than one thing, it must be made plain to which of these the word is being applied. (*Met.* K.5, 1062b3-1062b8)

Here, some necessary characteristics of words are provided. Based on the possibility of communication and the necessity of understanding, Aristotle suggests that the role of words is to signify one thing. In this way, words will be intelligible and signify something in the world. Due to these reasons, the relationship between words and the reality that words hold demonstrates that words are capable of capturing the nature of things in reality.

2.1 The role of words without combinations: names and verbs

2.1.1 Names

With reference to words, Aristotle begins his investigation with “simple” words as basic elements of predication.¹³⁴ Simple words are categories without combinations, and include names and verbs separately.¹³⁵

T29: A name is a spoken sound significant by convention, without time, none of whose parts is significant in separation. (*Int.* 2, 16a19-16a20)

T30: Of things said without combination, each signifies either substance or quality or quantification or a relative or where or when or being-in-a-position or having or doing or being-affected. (*Cat.* 4, 1b25-1b27)

These two passages inform us how Aristotle argues that words can refer directly to the world by means of sounds. The exact ways in which one can understand the relationship of sounds with significations has been vigorously debated. Despite the lack of consensus on the topic, one point has been fixed in that different sounds imply different significations. In this case, words with sounds signify various modes of being, including substance, quality or quantity, and so on. So the things said without combination signify some subject or property falling within one of the real world predications. In addition, Aristotle further argues that the definition of the name contains four points: First, it is defined as being a significant sound; secondly, the name is conventional; third, names are without time; and finally, a name is a whole, since no part of the name signifies separately.

¹³⁴ Ackrill, 1965, 115. Ackrill puts forward that 'name' (*onoma*) gives the original and central meaning to a thing, and has been used everywhere in the present translation. In certain contexts, it is tempting to write 'word' or 'noun', but only 'name' can do duty in all contexts. Moreover, the use of 'name' in the translation will serve to remind the reader of the rather primitive nature of Aristotle's view of meaning, namely that 'Philo' and 'man' are names of different sorts of thing but are both just names.

¹³⁵ Bäck, 2000, 137.

2.1.2 Verbs

For the categories without combinations, besides names, verbs also play the role of significations. In the *De Interpretatione*, Aristotle claims that a verb is “always a sign of what holds, that is, holds of a subject.”¹³⁶

T31: A verb is what additionally signifies time, no part of it being significant separately; and it is a sign of things said of something else. It additionally signifies time: ‘recovery’ is a name, but ‘recovers’ is a verb, because it additionally signifies something’s holding now. And it is always a sign of what holds, that is, holds of a subject. When uttered just by itself a verb is a name and signifies something—the speaker arrests his thought and the hearer pauses—but it does not yet signify whether it is or not. For not even ‘to be’ or ‘not to be’ is a sign of the actual thing (nor if you say simply ‘that which is’); for by itself it is nothing, but it additionally signifies some combination, which cannot be thought of without the components. (*Int.* 3,16b6-16b25)

Here, some functions of verb are introduced. Notably, verbs can signify time and no part of it signifies separately. In other words, the verb can carry an additional signification of time. Moreover, a functional role of verbs is a sign of things said of something else for without verbs, it is impossible to signify that something it is or not. Therefore, verbs are directly signifying something about which holds of real-world subjects.¹³⁷ In addition, names or nouns and verbs are both acts of naming.¹³⁸ This behaviour of naming ultimately signifies specified modes of being. As we can see, although names and verbs are both signs of something, they are still different from each other in certain aspects. The definition names and verbs have in common is that they are conventional significant utterances, which cannot be divided into smaller significant parts. However, the verb is distinguished by having an additional signification of time, and by signifying something which holds of something else. If words are capable of signifying things, then the relationship between words and things should be spoken by words as clearly much as possible.

Nevertheless, there is another common characteristic shared by names and verbs that both of them are fundamental elements of truth-bearers with truth-values. Aristotle argues that for those categories without combinations, there is no truth or falsity as truth-value of them for true or false as truth-values have to do with combinations and separations. Considering the situation that there are no truth-values without combinations of names and verbs, then, truth or falsity are related to words in combinations forming statements with truth-values.

2.2 Combinations of words in thoughts with truth-values

When Aristotle argues for truth in assertions serving as truth-bearers, what exactly he wants to argue for is that the truth as truth-values of assertions is in the combinations of names or verbs. Given the situation that assertions are divided into affirmations and negations, it is important for us to clarify how Aristotle uses the concept of combinations to describe the formulation of

¹³⁶ *Int.* 3, 16b9-16b10.

¹³⁷ *Int.* 5, 17a17-17a24.

¹³⁸ Brogan, 2005, 185.

assertions with truth-values as truth-bearers.

T32: Every sentence is significant (not as a tool but, as we said, by convention), but not every sentence is an assertion, but only those in which there is truth or falsity. There is not truth or falsity in all sentences: a prayer is a sentence but is neither true nor false. The present investigation deals with assertion; the others we can dismiss, since consideration of them belongs rather to the study of rhetoric or poetry. The first single statement-making sentence is the affirmation, next is the negation. The others are single in virtue of a connective. Every statement-making sentence must contain a verb or an inflexion of a verb. (*Int.* 4, 17a1-17a11)

T33: An affirmation is a statement affirming something of something, negation is a statement denying something of something. Now it is possible to state of what does hold that it does not hold, of what does not hold that it does hold, of what does hold that it does hold, and of what does not hold that it does not hold. (*Int.* 6, 17a25-17a29)

From those two passages, at least, some points about assertions with truth and falsity as truth-values can be deduced. Firstly, affirmations and denials are given here as different versions of the single assertive sentence. It is obvious that for statements with truth, combinations are necessary structures, in the form of stating that something holds of something. In this case, the structure of “something of something” is the internal structure of statement truth. Corresponding to the definition of truth in combinations, the definition of falsity can also be seen in the structure of the denial of “something of something”. A further point is that the existence of objects predicated by categories also affects truth-values of truth-bearers. Due to this, Aristotle repeats the corresponding relationship between truth with combinations and falsity with separations.

Here Aristotle obviously regards true and false as truth-values of statements. So far, according to this view on truth as the truth-values of statements, Aristotle holds that the similarities in structure between combinations of assertions with truth-values can be observed in thoughts.

T34: Just as some thoughts in the soul are neither true nor false while some are necessarily one or the other, so also with spoken sounds. For falsity and truth have to do with combination and separation. Thus names and verbs by themselves—for instance ‘man’ or ‘white’ when nothing further is added—are like the thoughts that are without combination and separation; for so far they are neither true nor false. A sign of this is that even ‘goat-stag’ signifies something but not, as yet, anything true or false—unless ‘is’ or ‘is not’ is added either simply or with reference to time. (*Int.* 1, 16a10-16a18)

Here, similar combinations mentioned previously in assertions can be observed in thoughts. Such thoughts are concepts which correspond to single terms or expressions in a language. In order to have a truth-value, a thought, and an assertion as its linguistic expression, require the addition of ‘is’ or ‘is not’ to be truth-bearers. It is reasonable for us to infer that assertions

are the main tools for conveying our thoughts about things as such. In this case, names and verbs are examples of simple utterances, and resemble “thoughts” without combinations or divisions.¹³⁹ For instance, examples are ‘man’ and ‘white’, which are neither true nor false. ‘If nothing is added’ a further example is given, even ‘goat-stag’ signifies something. But that is neither true nor false unless ‘to be’ or ‘not to be’ is added.¹⁴⁰ In other words, there can be no truth-values of statements without a verb, and the most basic statement consists of a name with ‘is’ or ‘is not’ added.

Aristotle claims that being true or false involves some sort of combinations or separations. He does not specify what he means by ‘combinations’ and ‘separations’ here, but, in the case of speech, what we combine and separate are typically names and verbs. In this case, the aim of this part, as Terence Irwin (1982) mentioned, is to discover various modes of being in reality by revealing the real relationships between things and properties expressed by assertions as truth-bearers. That is the reason why he multiplies assertions to demonstrate the relationship between the subject and the properties being talked about. In Terence Irwin’s words, “His ontology determines his account of the structure and nature of assertions. This does not mean he has a strange view of the structure and meaning of sentences. His criteria for counting assertions are guided by the real natures that are signified.”¹⁴¹

2.3 Signification:¹⁴² the relationship between words and things in virtue of thoughts

After discussing the roles of names and verbs as categories, as well as their combinations with truth-values in assertions or thoughts as truth-bearers, we need to further clarify the content of significations expressed by words. If we want to know what Aristotle means when he says that the categories signify things, or what the meaning is of combinations having a truth-value in thoughts, then, we need to consider what Aristotle means by saying that words are signs. In the *Analytica Priora* Aristotle himself gives an answer to this question.

T35: A sign is meant to be a demonstrative proposition either necessary or reputable; for anything such that when it is another thing is, or when it has come into being the other has come into being before or after, is a sign of the other’s being or having come into being. (*A. Pr.* II.27, 70a6-70a9)

It is obvious that, for Aristotle, a sign is defined as something from which the existence of something else may be inferred, which serves as the role of truth-makers in the traditional interpretation of truth in Aristotle. Terence Irwin (1982) has analyzed the conception of signification by noting that there are two requirements for significations. The first requirement is the presence of objects of conversation exerted by speaking and thinking of something,¹⁴³ since speaking and thinking of something is necessary for having any discourse with oneself

¹³⁹ *Int.* 1, 16a12-16a14.

¹⁴⁰ *Int.* 3, 16b16-16b18.

¹⁴¹ Irwin, 1982, 253.

¹⁴² Aristotle’s account of signification has been understood by some to constitute a theory of meaning. For instance, this opinion is supported by Charles, 2002 and Dancy, 1975, 83.

¹⁴³ *Met.* E.4, 1006a21-1006a22, 1006b10-1006b11.

or with another.¹⁴⁴ It follows therefore that signifying something is taken to be necessary for all thought and discourse. The second requirement is that signifying something requires the existence of essences.¹⁴⁵ For instance, signifying something by ‘F’ is signifying one thing,¹⁴⁶ whereby signifying something by ‘man’ is signifying what it is to be man¹⁴⁷ – and so, because what it is to be man is the essence of man,¹⁴⁸ signifying requires the signifying of essences.¹⁴⁹

In addition, Terence Irwin has distinguished between two kinds of significations based on different stages of inquiry by contrasting what is ‘known to us’ with what is ‘known by nature.’¹⁵⁰ In his case, there are two sorts of definition to reflect different aspects of signification. The first sort of definition, mentioning what is known to us, will tell us what the name signifies to us; the second sort of definition, however, will tell us what the name signifies by nature because it will mention the real essence that is known only by nature. The evidence for these two claims reflecting two aspects of signification can be observed in the passage offered by Aristotle in T36 quoted above.

With reference to signs, C.W.A. Whitaker (1996) suggests that the definition of sign suits Aristotle’s view of words quite well. He argues that, according to *Metaphysics* Θ.10, a thought is a likeness of a thing, and it is the utterance of a word which makes a rational being aware of the thing which the word signifies in his mind.¹⁵¹ As he remarks: “If an utterance is significant then there must be a thought which it arouses, and since that thought must be a thought of something, there must be a thing for which the word stands.”¹⁵² Whitaker thus comments that for a word to be significant it must stand for a thing, or point to the existence of a thing,¹⁵³ and that these things will include items of every sort. Therefore, to say that a word is a sign of a thought and a sign of a thing simply means that there is some thought and something corresponding to the word.¹⁵⁴ Based on this view of signification, he argues that there is a consistency between signs of thoughts and likenesses of things.

Words that signify things always point to a relationship that exists between beings and thoughts. As such, our discussion of significations of words is not only concerned with sense, communication, translation or linguistic competence, but also with the discovery of the real properties beings have, and their relation to words.¹⁵⁵ In this case, the relationship between things and thoughts of human beings are expressed by the utterance of the word.¹⁵⁶

According to Aristotle’s general picture of the relationship between words and things, it is clear that, firstly, names and verbs are examples of intelligible words. In this vein, Aristotle sets forth a structure of predication in which things are expressed by words – including,

¹⁴⁴ *Met.* E.4, 1006a32–1006a34, where he uses the example of being human.

¹⁴⁵ *Met.* E.4, 1006a22–1006a24.

¹⁴⁶ *Met.* E.4, 1006b.

¹⁴⁷ *Met.* E.4, 1006a31–1006a34.

¹⁴⁸ *Met.* E.4, 1007a25–1007a27.

¹⁴⁹ Irwin, 1982, 262.265.

¹⁵⁰ *Cat.* 14a14–19. And Irwin, 1982, 251.

¹⁵¹ Whitaker, 1996, 23.

¹⁵² Whitaker, 1996, 23.

¹⁵³ It will be useful to consider what Aristotle means by ‘thing.’ The scope of the term is clearly very broad and we are told that we use words instead of things, and that there is a boundless number of things, all of which may be signified by words.

¹⁵⁴ Whitaker, 1996, 23.

¹⁵⁵ Irwin, 1982, 265.

¹⁵⁶ Wheeler, 2019, 61.

names and verbs. Second, by understanding the significations of words—including names and verbs—we can understand how assertions actually work. With reference to the fundamental structure of assertions with truth-values, things are regarded as fundamental ingredients in making assertions true. Now, after exploring the significations of words in thoughts, the next step of our inquiry should be to further discuss the content of thoughts especially when Aristotle applies the term of “truth in thoughts” in his investigations.

3. Truth in thoughts: a representational realism or a direct realism?

Having investigated the relationship between words and things in virtue of significations, the following question relates to how words as signs of things are related to thoughts. In order to address this question, Aristotle picks up the concept “affections in the soul” to explain it. In this case, words are signs of affections of the soul that are likenesses of actual things in the world.

Before proceeding further, it is necessary for us to investigate how Aristotle himself deals with the theory of soul. Aristotle explicitly underlines the importance of an inquiry into the soul in light of his pursuit of truth by stating that “The knowledge of the soul admittedly contributes greatly to the advance of truth in general, and, above all, to our understanding of Nature, for the soul is in some sense the principle of animal life.”¹⁵⁷

3.1 Representational realism:¹⁵⁸ “affections of the soul” between words and thoughts

In a general sense, the relationship between words and thoughts can be observed by the very expression that is affection of the soul. Words or letters are symbols of a certain situation of souls that is the likeness of a mode of being:

T36: Now spoken sounds are symbols of affections in the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of—affections of the soul—are the same for all; and what these affections are likenesses of—actual things—are also the same. (*Int.* 1, 16a4–16a8)

There are a few basic premises in this passage. In the first place, there are four basic elements that we need to discuss: significant vocalized sounds, written marks, affections of the soul, and actual things. Second, apart from there being some analogies between speech and thoughts, as well as between writing and speech,¹⁵⁹ another point is that spoken sound is a “symbol” of affections in the soul.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, these affections in the soul are likenesses of actual things. In addition, while written marks and spoken sounds differ among groups of men, the affections and the likenesses of actual things are the same for all.¹⁶¹ Even though words and sounds may be different for different languages, the affections in the soul are the same for

¹⁵⁷ *De An.* I.1, 402a5–402a7.

¹⁵⁸ This view also can be called representational-ism.

¹⁵⁹ Shields, 1999, 86.

¹⁶⁰ Nuchelmans, 1973, 127.

¹⁶¹ Polansky; Kuczewski, 1990, 52.

everyone. It is not the sounds or letters that *affect* us, or the soul, only the things. For instance, the written word ‘dog’ is a symbol of the spoken word ‘dog,’ and this in turn is a symbol of the content of the thought dog, which is the same for anyone who thinks about dogs, because it is an affection of the soul that is a likeness of the form of a dog in reality.¹⁶² Within the framework of the traditional interpretation of truth in Aristotle, the form in representation is the truth-maker that is true, and this same form in the mind shall be expressed by language, which shows the same form in different levels or different modes.

This reading of *De interpretatione* 1 is confirmed by modern scholarship. Based on the same passage, Gabriel Nuchelmans (1973) suggests that Aristotle indicates the three principle dimensions in which acts and attitudes of holding something true should be studied: the affections of the soul or the mental sphere, the sounds and marks of spoken and written language, as well as the world of things of which the affections of the soul are likenesses.¹⁶³ Similarly, that is why Deborah Modrak (2009) explains this context from the perspective of signification, ontology, and psychological processes.¹⁶⁴ However, the matter of interpreting objects of thoughts and “objects of reality as parts of the world” is still in dispute. For instance, Gabriel Nuchelmans (1973) has pointed out there are at least two ways to interpret objects or “states of affairs”. According to his explanation, objects or states of affairs of thoughts do not only stand for that which is believed or asserted to be the case but can also be used to designate that which actually is the case in the world.¹⁶⁵ He has cited more than one example from Aristotle’s works to support his interpretation. For instance, “it is not because we think truly that you are white, that you are white, but because of the fact that you are white, we who say this have the truth.”¹⁶⁶ This might also be expressed by saying that the *logos* is true because the states of affairs *that you are white* is in fact part of the world. In brief, there are two levels to states of affairs: a state of affairs as asserted and a state of affairs as it exists independently of any utterances concerning it.

¹⁶² Modrak explain this kind of “likeness” as the psychological state that is an effect or a *pathema*—a likeness of an external object. (Modrak, 2009, 235, 267.)

¹⁶³ Nuchelmans, 1973, 23.

¹⁶⁴ Modrak, 2009, 266.

¹⁶⁵ Interpreting objects or states of affairs is seemingly the same question. Nuchelmans has discussed these questions and provided us with at least four interpretations. He mentions that:

“A I. If they are taken to designate cases in which one intends to think of something or to refer to something by means of a linguistic expression, there is always at least an internal object: the thought one thinks and the referring expression one uses.

A II. If they are taken to designate cases in which one succeeds in thinking of something or in referring to something by means of a linguistic expression, there will also be an external object, the thing thought of or referred to.

B I. If they are taken to designate cases in which one thinks or says that something is the case, there is always at least an internal object: the thought that something is the case (doxa) or the assertion that something is the case (logos).

B II. While there are, of course, circumstances in which that is held true or claimed to be the case proves to be the case in the objective world of facts, this success has not been built into the meaning of the verb *doxazein* and *legein*. There are, however, verbs of knowing, whose meaning does entail that what is held true is indeed true. Such verbs are, in this respect, comparable to verbs of seeing, hearing, or touching.

Accordingly, at least three fundamental distinctions should be kept in mind. (a) the distinction between A and B: cases in which the acts of *doxazein* and *legein* are directed to things which may be components of states of affairs but are not themselves complete states of affairs, and cases in which it is thought or said that something is the case. (b) the distinction between, on the one hand, intending to think of something or to refer to something and holding something true, and on the other hand, succeeding in these endeavours and being right about the alleged state of affair. (c) The distinction between internal objects and external objects.” (Nuchelmans, 1973, 10.)

¹⁶⁶ *Met.* Θ.10, 1051b6. This passage plays a central role in my argument and that I have discussed both in chapter One and Two.

3.2 Interpreting “likenesses as affections of souls” in Aristotle.

Mark Wheeler (2019) has discussed how likenesses as intentional content are involved in mental assertions and further argues that mental images are the intentional contents of acts of assertions. In this case, mental images are supposed to be like real things because both the images and the things have qualities in common. These qualities are the perceptible and intelligible qualities possessed by real things and represented by mental images, which means that the affections of the psyche are signified by spoken sounds,¹⁶⁷ and these affections are likenesses of real things in virtue of being like real things. These affections of the soul are also likenesses of the real things in the world in virtue of having the same qualities of the real things in the world.

As we can see, here, likenesses as the intentional contents of acts of assertion are likenesses of real correlates. This is in virtue of instantiating a perceptible or intelligible form that is like a perceptible or intelligible form instantiated by the real correlate. In this case, Aristotle embraces a strong representational theory whereby intentional contents have the qualities possessed by the things in the world of which they are likenesses.¹⁶⁸

Moreover, the role of words as a mediator between thoughts and things is supported by Deborah Modrak (2009). She has used this relationship between words, thoughts, and things as a means to discuss questions of meaning in Aristotle.¹⁶⁹ Firstly, she has summarized that there are three levels of words, including words as expressed in written and spoken tokens, mental states, and mind-independent objects. Second, she admits that the interpretation of a word refers to objects in the world, and the mental state as a likeness fixes the reference of the spoken or written tokens of the word. What is more, she further explores the motivation of why Aristotle applies the term of “likeness” to explain the relation between thoughts and things. She argues that the concept of likeness explains how the mental state refers to an extra-mental referent and thus explains how the mental state makes knowing the world possible. For the resemblance between the internal state and the external object fixes the referent of the term or the memory. Thus, the likeness exists between an essence as an object of thought and the same essence as a nature in the world.¹⁷⁰

Meanwhile, language is one step removed from actual things in the world. Consequently, the “affections of the psyche,” are usually accurate apprehensions, yet there is an indirect but reliable connection between what we say about the world and the actual things in the world that affect us. This connection makes it possible for language to articulate the truth about those actual things.¹⁷¹

Whatever the intermediate role performed by words or thoughts, in a direct or indirect way, these kinds of interpretations are usually regarded as a representational realism. A representationalist reading of T36 reveals that things in the world cause mental images that are representations of these things in the soul of the perceiving and thinking person.¹⁷² In this

¹⁶⁷ *De An.* III.8, 431b26–432a6.

¹⁶⁸ Wheeler, 2019a, 178.

¹⁶⁹ Modrak, 2009, 23.

¹⁷⁰ Modrak, 2009, 235, 267. A similar interpretation is also offered by David Roochnik (2012).

¹⁷¹ Roochnik, 2012, 143–144.

¹⁷² Esfeld, 2000, 321.

case, a person has access to the world by means of such representations in perceptions and thoughts.

Matthew Walz (2006) explains the intermediate role of linguistic items, which he brings out by a literal translation of *De interpretatione*.

T37: Ones in vocal-sound, then, are symbols of affectednesses in the soul, and ones written are symbols of ones in vocal-sound. And as letters are not the same for all, neither are vocal-sounds the same. But those firsts of which these are signs {or: those of which these are signs firstly} – the affectednesses of the soul – are the same for all, and those of which these [affectednesses] are likenednesses – the things – are already the same.¹⁷³ (*Int.* 1, 16a4–16a8)

According to his interpretation, he provides us with insight into how Aristotle understands the causality of things on the cognitive soul.¹⁷⁴ Linguistic items in vocal-sound are symbols of ‘affectednesses in the soul.’ And, these affectedness and likenedness are thoughts in intellect. It is the intellect itself that has been acted upon and likened to things. Given that the vocal-sound is a sensible reality, the ‘items in vocal-sound’ suggests the relation between form and material. Moreover, since linguistic entities are not by nature, vocal-sound is comparable not to the material of a natural being, but to that of an artifact.

As for how the fact that a name is a symbol explains the fact that audible speech causes learning in virtue of something, Walz explains that it is because the intellectual content of names—in other words, that in audible speech which “contributes the largest part with respect to intelligence”—is accidental to the audible vocal-sound that serves as its material or medium.¹⁷⁵ And this is what it means to say that the “in” in “ones in vocal-sound” indicates that vocal-sound is the material in which the name, verb, denial, affirmation, declaration, or articulation exists.

In order to clarify the vocal-sound as the material to a speaker, Walz makes an analogy with between marble to a sculptor or color to a painter. For, like a sculptor and a painter, a speaker embodies his ideas in something perceptible that is able to transfer what he understands to someone else.¹⁷⁶ Calling ‘ones in vocal sound’ symbols, Aristotle is arguing that they are accidental, quasi-artificial form/material composites. In this case, the form in the material corresponds to and stands in for “affections in the soul.”¹⁷⁷

As we can see, the notion of likenesses plays a major role in the discussion of relations between words, thoughts, and things in the external world. In this case, those affections in the soul as likenesses between thoughts and things would be an alternative explanation of how souls capture things as things are by means of thoughts expressed by words. If so, the problem is rather, it seems to me, how things manage to affect the soul in such a way that it comes to have likenesses of them. That Aristotle leaves somewhat in the dark, as he argues:

¹⁷³ Walz, 2006, 231-232.

¹⁷⁴ Walz, 2006, 234.

¹⁷⁵ See *Arist. Sens.* 437a11-15.

¹⁷⁶ Walz, 2006, 241.

¹⁷⁷ Walz, 2006, 243-244.

T38: And from experience, or from the whole universal that has come to rest in the soul (the one apart from the many, whatever is one and the same in all those things), there comes a principle of skill and of understanding—of skill if it deals with how things come about, of understanding if it deals with what is the case. Thus the states neither belong in us in a determinate form, nor come about from other states that are more cognitive; but they come about from perception [...] And the soul is such as to be capable of undergoing this. What we have just said but not said clearly, let us say again: when one of the undifferentiated things makes a stand, there is a primitive universal in the mind (for though one perceives the particular, perception is of the universal—e.g. of man but not of Callias the man); again a stand is made in these, until what has no parts and is universal stands—e.g. such and such an animal stands, until animal does, and in this a stand is made in the same way. [...] Since of the intellectual states by which we grasp truth some are always true and some admit falsehood (e.g. opinion and reasoning—whereas understanding and comprehension are always true), [...] so if we have no other true kind apart from understanding, comprehension will be the principle of understanding. (*A. Pst.* II.19, 100a6-100a11; 100a13-100b3; 100b5-100b8; 100b14-100b15)

Although Aristotle argues that perception is the key point to explain how the soul is affected by things, the representationalism still needs to clarify what it is that a likeness actually gives us, and this is the kind of unclarity that attaches to *representationalism*, which might become an explicit reason to reject representationalism in favour of *direct realism*.

4. A direct realism: truth in thoughts as the form of objects in the soul

Aristotle interpreted the capacity of thought in the soul in terms of matter and form, as well as potentiality and actuality. Generally speaking, Aristotle provides an account of the various types of cognitive and perceptual faculties and states as different parts of the soul, including perceptions, thoughts, imaginations, judgments, and beliefs. It is well known that the theory of how thoughts match things is developed in book III of the *De Anima*, along similar lines to the theory of perception. In both cases, Aristotle describes their power in the manner of a “receiving form of the thing without the matter.” Perhaps, then there is room to argue for a direct realism in terms of “receiving form of things without the matter.”

T39: If thinking is like perceiving, it must be either a process in which the soul is acted upon by what is capable of being thought, or a process different from but analogous to that. The thinking part of the soul must therefore be, while impassible, capable of receiving the form of an object; that is, must be potentially identical in character with its object without being the object. Thought must be related to what is thinkable, as sense is to what is sensible. (*De An.* III.4, 429a13-429a17)

According to this passage, Aristotle investigates the role of thoughts by making an analogy with the role of perceptions. Considering the position of perception played in the process of thoughts, we need to ask why Aristotle initially describes how thought works in terms of perceptions.¹⁷⁸ Although there are still differences in this analogy between perceptions and

¹⁷⁸ Modrak, 2009, 250.

thoughts,¹⁷⁹ we can still find some common points. First, both perceptions and thoughts involve a part of the soul being acted upon by their respective objects: the relevant part of the soul receives the form without the matter. Specifically, the mind grasps intelligible objects by receiving forms of intelligible objects, in the way that sensation grasps sensible things in virtue of receiving the forms of sensible objects. Second, sensible things, are sensible prior to being sensed, just as sensation is a potentiality prior to actual sensation. In this case, it is said that thoughts and things must share the same form, which suggests an identity relation between thoughts and things, even if only in a potential way.

In this regard, scholars have widely accepted that objects of thoughts are forms of objects without matter. Michael Esfeld (2000) regards this passage as an evidence for a direct realism interpretation about the relation between thoughts and things in the world.¹⁸⁰ He criticizes representational realism and then implies that in Aristotle's view, there are no epistemic intermediaries between acts or states of perceptions and thoughts and the qualities, things, or events in the world that are intentional objects of these acts or states.¹⁸¹ He also argues that, based on the direct realism interpretation of the relation between words and thoughts, the crucial point of this direct realist reading is that, on Aristotle's view the things in the world are made up of form and matter. He suggests that the forms of the things in the world are qualitatively identical with our perceptions and concepts. The structure of the thinking and perceiving mind is identical with the structure of the world.¹⁸² Therefore, Aristotle's direct realism is grounded in an ontology according to which our perceptions and conceptions are identical with the form of things.

C.W.A. Whitaker (1996) holds that thoughts are identical in form to things, which stands between words and things. He explains it using two different accounts. Firstly, he explains the likeness describing the relationship between words, thoughts, and things in terms of the same form shared by all of them. He is in agreement with Aristotle that if thoughts are a likeness of things, then thoughts are formal copies of things. For example, a thinker takes on the form of the thing, so that the form is present both in the thing and in his mind, just as the same impression might be shared by two wax tables.¹⁸³ Second, the intelligible form of the object of thought is taken on by the thinker, so that this same form is common to both the object and to the thinker. In this way, a likeness of the object of thought is present in the mind.¹⁸⁴ Consequently, a thought is like its object since both share the same form.¹⁸⁵

Even though thoughts and things share the same form, things with form are more fundamental than thoughts with form. This point has been explored by Michael Peramatzis (2011) who admits that there is 'match' between the levels of words and reality in Aristotle's view with reference to definitions. He proposes that Aristotle argues that the ontological order

¹⁷⁹ *De An.* II-III, 418a3-418a6, 427b28-427b29, 432a1-432a6, 431b2-431b3, 432a12-432a13, 449b2-450a15.

¹⁸⁰ Esfeld, 2000, 321.

¹⁸¹ Esfeld, 2000, 321.

¹⁸² Esfeld, 2000, 334.

¹⁸³ Whitaker, 1996, 22.

¹⁸⁴ Whitaker, 1996, 15.

¹⁸⁵ Whitaker, 1996, 15.

is more fundamental than the definitional order,¹⁸⁶ since, “a definition is only an account, a linguistic or conceptual item that gains its importance because of its corresponding or referring to an ontologically primary entity, a form.”¹⁸⁷ Consequently, a form is what makes things what they are and so it determines what the correct account is, the account which specifies what the thing in question is. Moreover, he has introduced the notion of ontological priority to describe basic being rather than the priority of definition. It is clear that the idea underlying the priority in being is that an ontologically basic entity is the fundamental part of the posterior entity because it makes an entity of this type what it is.¹⁸⁸

In this case, Aristotle connects the relationship between words, thoughts, and things with the concept of “affection of souls” and “the likenesses of actual things” in which the relation between thoughts and words is a symbol and a sign about things in the world. However, this representational realism merely emphasizes a representational relation between words, thoughts, and things, without clearly explaining concrete contents and the underlying foundations of a representational relation consisting of these unstated terms. Rather than representational realism, I opt for direct realism, since the likenesses of actual things as affections of souls is better clarified by the form commonly shared by thoughts and things. In this case, things or constituents of things are the ultimate ground of the relation between words, thoughts, and things. Therefore, if truth in thoughts is prior to truth in assertions, then the relevance of the existence of truth-values in assertions is ultimately determined by the priority of things over thoughts as affections in the soul, which share the same form of things with modes of being in the world. In this case, the form with matter in a certain thing is a concrete thing, while the form without matter in thoughts is an object of thought.

5. Further evidence for direct realism in terms of actuality and potentiality

Save for the evidence of direct realism that thoughts and things sharing the same form without matter of objects in the world, Aristotle further turns to actuality and potentiality to express his view on the relationship between what thoughts and objects of thoughts really are.

T40: The problem might be suggested: if thinking is a passive affection, then if thought is simple and impassible and has nothing in common with anything else, as Anaxagoras says, how can it come to think at all? [...] What it thinks must be in it just as characters may be said to be on a writing-table on which as yet nothing actually stands written: this is exactly what happens with thought. Thought is itself thinkable in exactly the same way as its objects are. For in the case of objects which involve no matter, what thinks and what is thought are identical; for speculative knowledge and its object are identical. (Why thought is not always thinking we must consider later.) In the case of those which contain matter each of the objects of thought is only potentially present. It follows that while they will not have thought in them (for thought is a potentiality of them only in so far as they are capable of being disengaged from matter) thought may yet be thinkable. (*De An.* III.4, 429b22-429b24; 429b32-430a9)

¹⁸⁶ Peramatzis, 2011, 301-302.

¹⁸⁷ Peramatzis, 2011, 301-302.

¹⁸⁸ Peramatzis, 2011, 301-302. Cleary, 1988.

Here, the major difference between thinking and passive perception is becoming clearer. Thinking, to fulfill its role, must have the ability to think, and objects of thought the ability to be thought.¹⁸⁹ Aristotle further distinguishes a kind of identity between processes of thinking and objects of thought. Due to the conjunction of two things—including a thinker naturally capable of receiving forms and forms that are by nature intelligible—there emerges an explanation of how thinking is possible. In this case, before conceiving of any objects of thought, the mind is blank. This means that it is not actually anything, until it begins to think.¹⁹⁰ This corresponds to the organ of perception which is potentially what the thing perceived already actually is, and becomes like it when it perceives it.¹⁹¹ The process of thinking thus is an actuality of two potentialities,¹⁹² viz. the potentiality to think, that is the ability of human beings with souls, and the potentiality to be thought, which belongs to everything intelligible.¹⁹³ Mind, must be a potentiality for thinking anything whatsoever.¹⁹⁴ In this sense, mind is a pure potentiality for thinking, an unaffected potentiality for receiving form.¹⁹⁵

According to these multiple levels of actuality and potentiality, Aristotle has made a division of affections between a passive affection and an active intellect.¹⁹⁶ For instance, Aristotle provides the example of a blank writing tablet, whereby the potential intellect has nothing written on the blank writing tablet, and this mode of potentiality before it has learned or discovered anything, is contrasted with the potency of an intellect which has become all things, like someone actually in possession of sciences.¹⁹⁷ It is the transition from the former to the latter stage of potentiality that Aristotle attempts to explain. Furthermore, it is for this explanation that he requires the agent intellect. Moreover, the active intellect is identical with the set of its objects, which is the organized and intelligible world.¹⁹⁸ As Aristotle claims, it is identical with its objects, in that both it and its objects can equally be described as the cause of the passive mind's operation. According to this view, knowledge is the same as the thing known.¹⁹⁹ Aristotle's thesis, that the second actuality of the object perceived or thought is identical with the actuality of the act of perception or thinking of the person, fits into this interpretation in terms of direct realism, because of the identity between what thinks and what

¹⁸⁹ *De An.* III.4, 429a18, 429b25, 430a10-430a20.

¹⁹⁰ *De An.* III.4, 429a23.

¹⁹¹ *De An.* II.6, 418a3, 429b30.

¹⁹² *De An.* II.5, 417a23-417b1, 429b6-429b9.

¹⁹³ Aristotle has already argued that, since mind is able to think about all things, it must be completely pure and without affections. Unlike the sense faculties, mind has no bodily organ, for such a material realization would hinder and distort its ability to think.

¹⁹⁴ *De An.* III.4, 429a28, 430a1-5.

¹⁹⁵ Jiménez, 2017, 25.

¹⁹⁶ Based on Aristotle's view, the passive intellect is not what initiates thought but is the potential to become all things. *De An.* III.5, 430a10-430a25, the actual intellect is just like light because it makes the potential intellect an actual intellect. The potential only has the ability to contain and store the imprints from imagination and perceptions, but with no ability to divide, distinguish, or combine them. It is only when the productive intellect encounters the potential intellect and takes over the matter that the two become one. Moreover, it remains unclear whether the agent intellect is our human intellect in a state of knowledge, or a divine intellect, or the sum total of all intelligible things as forms in the structure of the universe.

¹⁹⁷ *De An.* III. 4-5, 429b5-429b9.

¹⁹⁸ Lear, 1988, 77, 78, 125.

¹⁹⁹ *De An.* III.5, 430a3-430a5, 431a1. For the example of the "knower" see *De An.* II.5, 417a23-417b1, III.4, 429b6-429b9.

is thought in light of Aristotle's view on actuality and potentiality.²⁰⁰

6. 'Truth in things' has ontological priority to 'truth in thoughts'

Over the course of this argument, several key points have come to light. In the beginning of this story, in Aristotle *On interpretation*, the theory of words that is also simple, and taken separately before composition, like the categories, so as to match or explain simple concepts before their possible combinations in thought. Then, Aristotle investigated the relationship between words and thoughts by means of words with significations. In this case, words are signs or symbols of thoughts. With regard to the relationship between words, thoughts, and things, some scholars have established a representational realism by means of words as signs of thoughts. Furthermore, Aristotle has investigated the relationship between thoughts and things in the world in virtue of the same form shared by both of them. In this case, thoughts are more or less exact copies of things as modes of being with whom they share the same form. What is more, according to Aristotle's view on the relation between thoughts and things, thoughts share the same form with things in light of the theory of potentiality and actuality. Hence other scholars have argued for direct realism. According to a direct realist interpretation on the relationship between thoughts and things in the world, it would seem to follow that words would ultimately also be signs of things as modes of being. In this case, the ontological truth is prior to the truth in psychological states,²⁰¹ which in its turn is prior to truth in assertions. Therefore, a hierarchy of truth has been established in which truth in things is prior to and responsible for the truth in thoughts that are expressed by truth in statements.

What is more, referring to the items of truth-bearers and truth-makers belonging to the traditional interpretation of truth in Aristotle, this same form shared by and performed in different levels, including things in the world, thoughts and language, form in things making truth-makers true, so that to perform the functions of truth-makers making truth-bearers to be true in which the same form in minds is expressed in language. Referring to the knowledge mode concerning in-composites in *Metaphysics* Θ.10, as we discussed in chapter Two, knowledge/ignorance concerning in-composites also reflects our cognitive relation to ontological truth, this in fact extends the domain of the so-called correspondence theory of truth. Hence we cannot only accept the traditional view for composites that are statements and thoughts, which is composition and division in things, but we show that there is a similar correspondence for non-composites. So there is a general correspondence from truth in things to whatever kind of cognition.

Given the hierarchy of truth established in this chapter, this correspondence between truth in things and cognition has been guaranteed and determined by the priority of truth in things, the correspondence theory of truth is just a kind of derivative truth, in which things are as causes of affections of the soul, which are thoughts, to which words refer as signs of both the thoughts, and their origin. Here, this reading is in fact applicable to both in-composites and composites. The theory works better if it shows the causal relation from things to thoughts to

²⁰⁰ Lear, 1988, 140.

²⁰¹ Roochnik, 2012, 127.

words regardless of their being composites or not.

This causal relation does not only communicate the form, or content, of the thing to the soul, but also its aspect of truth. Simple thoughts and words, and composites thoughts and words combined in speech, receive their ontological truth from the truth in things by means of the causal process described in *De interpretatione* 1. Moreover, this kind of causal process performing in a hierarchy of truth has also been suggested at the end of *Metaphysics* a.1:

T41: It is right also that philosophy should be called knowledge of the truth. For the end of theoretical knowledge is truth, while that of practical knowledge is action (for even if they consider how things are, practical men do not study what is eternal but what stands in some relation at some time). Now we do not know a truth without its cause; and a thing has a quality in a higher degree than other things if in virtue of it the similar quality belongs to the other things (e.g. fire is the hottest of things; for it is the cause of the heat of all other things); so that that which causes derivative truths to be true is most true. Therefore the principles of eternal things must be always most true; for they are not merely sometimes true, nor is there any cause of their being, but they themselves are the cause of the being of other things, so that as each thing is in respect of being, so is it in respect of truth. (*Met. a.1*, 993b20-993b30)

This passage should be taken seriously. It says that there is a first truth, including truth of eternal beings as Aristotle mentioned in *Metaphysics* Θ.10, which is the cause of later things being true, which points out a hierarchy of truth that should be explored. My ontological truth shows that this intuition was in fact right, even if medieval and later philosophers busied themselves far more with statement truth. This passage ends with the suggestion that as each thing is in respect of being, so it is in respect of truth. Then, after establishing the hierarchy of truth in this chapter, the following task would be to explore causes of truth in various modes of being mentioned in *Metaphysics* Θ.10, so as to reveal the hierarchy of being in Aristotle, which shall be the purpose of the following chapter Four.