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A pursuit of ontological truth in Aristotle's philosophy

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Citation

Jin, D. (2025, January 15). *A pursuit of ontological truth in Aristotle's philosophy*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4176263>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Chapter Six

The Principle of Non-Contradiction

Philosophers need to inquire into principles, demonstrations starting with the first principles, and axioms as the starting-point of all other principles mentioned in *Metaphysics* Γ. 3. As we have found in the previous chapters, the structure of demonstrations with the first principles and the definitions in demonstrations, as well as the truth and certainty of demonstrations are established on the necessity of the first principles that are primitive, immediate and always true. Apart from the demonstrable knowledge, indemonstrable knowledge still can be touched by human beings. So, the aim of this chapter is to explore what is left in the role of axioms that are indemonstrable and self-evident, and in particular the axiom of the principle of non-contradiction. How is the principle of non-contradiction as indemonstrable principle capable of serving as the starting-point of all other principles?.

Firstly, we need to discuss the basic content and different interpretations of the principle of non-contradiction, including the logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction and the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction.

In view of the hierarchy of truth described in chapter Three, the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction can stand for truth in things which is ontologically prior to the logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction as an example of truth in thoughts that have been expressed as truth in words. In this case, the principle of non-contradiction as truth in things is the cause of, and then should be responsible for truth in thoughts and truth in statements. No statement or thought is even possible without the principle of non-contradiction. If so, the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction shall be prior to and responsible for the logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction.

The discussion of the hierarchy of being in chapter Four has shown that among categories the primary substances are first, and in being in terms of potentiality and actuality, what is always actuality and does not undergo any changes in itself is first. The truth in composites can be specified by the terms of actuality and potentiality since composites may change over time and changes are the actuality of what is potentially such.²⁶⁶ Then, within the hierarchy of being, the first substances are always in actuality, in particular the highest substance and the highest cause of the world, which is the primary being. Similarly, the truth of composites in terms of actuality and potentiality can be specified and supported by the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction that stands for as ontological truth.

1. The formulation of the principle of non-contradiction

Aristotle first introduces the notion of a contradictory pair of assertions in *De Interpretatione*, at 17a31–17a36:

²⁶⁶ *Phys.* III.1, 201a10–201a11.

T77: Thus it is clear that for every affirmation there is an opposite denial, and for every denial an opposite affirmation. Let us call an affirmation and a denial which are opposite a contradiction. I speak of assertions as opposite when they affirm and deny the same thing of the same thing—not homonymously, together with all other such conditions that we add to counter the troublesome objections of sophists. (*Int.* 6, 17a31–17a36)

As we can see from this passage, a contradictory pair of assertions is constituted by two assertions that are opposite from one another. The first of these is an affirmation that one thing Y belongs to another thing X. The second is a denial in which the very same thing Y does not belong to the very same thing X.²⁶⁷ Naturally, we can consider an affirmation and a denial which are in opposition to one another to be a contradiction. And so, based on the formulation of contradiction, Aristotle continues to explain the principle of non-contradiction as the most indisputable principle:

T78: Let this, then, suffice to show that the most indisputable of all beliefs is that contradictory statements are not at the same time true, and what consequences follow from the denial of this belief, and why people deny it. Now since it is impossible that contradictories should be at the same time true of the same thing, obviously contraries also cannot belong at the same time to the same thing. (*Met.* Γ.6, 1011b13-1011b17)

The formulation of this principle of non-contradiction has been widely acknowledged as an important principle, since Aristotle calls the law of non-contradiction the “arche of all understanding.”²⁶⁸ There is less than universal agreement on exactly what the law amounts to, and the principle of non-contradiction has been discussed from different angles. For instance, Jan Łukasiewicz (1971) famously distinguishes no less than three different formulations of the principle of non-contradiction in Aristotle: : ontological, logical, and psychological.²⁶⁹ For example:

Ontological formulation: *Met.* Γ.3, 1005b19-1005b20: “It is impossible that the same thing belongs or does not belong to the same thing at the same time and in the same respect.”

Logical formulation: *Met.* Γ.6, 1011b13-1011b14: “The most certain of all basic principles is that contradictory propositions are not simultaneously true.”

Psychological formulation: *Met.* Γ.3, 1005b23-1005b24: “No one can believe that the same thing can at the same time be and not be.”

Based on these original texts from Aristotle, it is clear that Aristotle himself already suggests that the formulation of the principle of non-contradiction can be interpreted on different levels. Summarily, the principle of non-contradiction may be interpreted as narrowly as the assertion that one and the same subject cannot both be and not be – where being is treated as an attribute and, as the principle of non-contradiction specifies, cannot both belong and not belong to the same subject at the same time.

²⁶⁷ Wheeler, 2019a, 92.

²⁶⁸ *Met.* Γ.3, 1005b9

²⁶⁹ Łukasiewicz suggests that Aristotle formulates the principle of contradiction in a three-fold manner—as an ontological, logical, and psychological law—without being explicit about any one of them in particular. (Łukasiewicz, 1971.)

Among these various readings, the logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction shall be the starting point of the project of this chapter.

2. The logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction

When the principle of non-contradiction is taken as a logical principle, it is argued by more than one commentator that the principle of non-contradiction can perform at least two roles:²⁷⁰ the first, to guarantee the possibility of communication between human beings;²⁷¹ and the second, to pick out and concretely define certain things so as to achieve the goal of talking about two things as they are.²⁷² It is easier and accessible for us to fully appreciate the principle of non-contradiction with these two functions, if we first investigate the principle of non-contradiction as a logical principle.

Numerous scholars (Alan Code²⁷³, Jan Łukasiewicz²⁷⁴, Paula Gottlieb²⁷⁵, Christopher Kirwan²⁷⁶, Vasilis Politis²⁷⁷, Graham Priest²⁷⁸, and Michael Wedin²⁷⁹) have taken this logical interpretation for granted. Based on this reading, the principle of non-contradiction is applied to contradictory statements. Considering the range of objects to which the principle of non-contradiction applies, with reference to the formulation of the principle of non-contradiction consisting of statements, when we speak of the principle of non-contradiction as a logical principle, we usually describe it under the guise of truth as truth-values of statements. In the case of describing truth as truth-values, the formulation of the principle of non-contradiction could be translated into: it is not possible for a proposition to be true and not true at the same time and in the same aspect.

Frank Salter (1995) advocates that the formulation of the principle of non-contradiction comes out as a logical principle – by arguing that it relies on negations.²⁸⁰ However, Aristotelian contradictions always consist of an affirmation and a denial – these principles govern the distribution of truth-values among pairs of contradictory statements. Zygmunt Ziemiński (1976) holds this logical reading by arguing that “the principle of non-contradiction says that two propositions, mutually contradictory, cannot both be true.”²⁸¹ What is more, Jan Łukasiewicz (1971) concludes this argument by suggesting that truth and falsity contain one another and cannot both be characteristic of the same object.²⁸² This traditionally logical explanation is normally viewed as the standard view about the principle of the non-contradiction.²⁸³ In any event, as we can see, the key point for considering the

²⁷⁰ Dancy, 1975. and Coren, 2018.

²⁷¹ Dancy, 1975, 35, 39.

²⁷² Dancy, 1975, 87.

²⁷³ Code, 1986.

²⁷⁴ Łukasiewicz, 1910 (in Polish).

²⁷⁵ Gottlieb, 1994, 2015.

²⁷⁶ Kirwan, 1993.

²⁷⁷ Politis, 2004.

²⁷⁸ Priest, 2006, 1998.

²⁷⁹ Wedin, 2003, 1982.

²⁸⁰ Salter, 1995.

²⁸¹ Ziemiński, 1976, 95.

²⁸² Łukasiewicz, 1971.

²⁸³ Dancy, 1975, 92-93.

principle of non-contradiction as a logical principle is that it is usually expressed along the lines of truth as truth-values of statements.²⁸⁴

Nevertheless, this logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction has been questioned. For instance, Tuomas Tahko (2009) disagrees with the logical reading of the principle of contradiction by explaining that the logical explanation is a principle that governs our thoughts and perhaps our language, or even simply a principle which is true in certain models—for instance, the logical system—and has no bearing on mind-independent reality.²⁸⁵ However, what T78 underlines is the mutual exclusiveness of having a certain attribute and lacking that attribute at the same time.²⁸⁶ Thus, this passage should be restricted to modes of being rather than negative statements or propositions.

Moreover, Thomas Upton (2002) admits the connection of the law of non-contradiction with the syllogism in that the syllogism must meet the requirement of the principle of non-contradiction, and that it is tempting to take the law as solely a law of logic or of correct speaking. However, Upton argues that Aristotle's various formulations of the law and his presentation of its explanation or defense appear inconsistent with such a limited interpretation. Two major issues must be addressed in making this claim about the larger scope of the law. First, the law of non-contradiction can govern the form of the premises of a demonstration – a predicate cannot be affirmed and denied for a subject in a properly formulated premise. Second, the law can also govern our investigation of scientific premises. In this case, no scientific object initially encountered by sense perception can both be what it is and not be what it is at the same time and in the same respect. In other words, in Aristotle's world, substances, which have non-contradictory essences, are the primary referents.²⁸⁷

3. The principle of non-contradiction as an ontological principle

There are several reasons why I believe that this fundamental principle should be regarded as an application of the ontological reading of truth that is being in the strictest sense: first, because Aristotle has investigated the relationship of truth and falsity in terms of the principle of non-contradiction; and second, because Aristotle himself already suggests that the formulation of the principle of non-contradiction can be interpreted in ontological level, logical level and psychological level mentioned before. These transitions between different levels can be exemplified by the transition from truth as truth-values of assertions that serve as truth-bearers in chapter One—that is in a logical sense—to the truth as being in the strictest sense investigated in chapter Two.

This metaphysical reading of the principle of non-contradiction can be found in Aristotle's observations in *Categories* and *Metaphysics*.

3.1 An ontological reading in *Categories*

In *Categories*, Aristotle investigates the primary substances in order to discuss contraries,

²⁸⁴ Boongaling, 2019.

²⁸⁵ Tahko, 2009, 33.

²⁸⁶ Tahko, 2009, 33.

²⁸⁷ *Met.* Γ.4, 1007a20-21. Upton, 2002, 469.

which are basic elements of the formulation of the principle of non-contradiction. Aristotle uses the term “contraries” here to describe the character and nature of substances and qualities, especially for the primary substance:

T79: Another characteristic of substances is that there is nothing contrary to them. For what would be contrary to a primary substance? For example, there is nothing contrary to an individual man, nor yet is there anything contrary to man or to animal. This, however, is not peculiar to substance but holds of many other things also, for example, of quantity. For there is nothing contrary to four-foot or to ten or to anything of this kind—unless someone were to say that many is contrary to few or large to small; but still there is nothing contrary to any definite quantity. (*Cat.* 5,3b24-3b31)

T80: But nothing seems to admit contraries at the same time. In the case of a substance, for example, while it seems to be able to receive contraries, yet it is certainly not at the same time ill and well nor is it at the same time pale and dark; nor does anything else admit contraries at the same time. It turns out also that things are their own contraries. For if large is contrary to small, and the same thing is at the same time large and small, a thing would be its own contrary. But it is impossible for a thing to be its own contrary. Large, therefore, is not contrary to small, nor many to few. So that even if someone says that these belong not to relatives but to quantity, it will still have no contrary. (*Cat.* 6, 6a3-6a12)

Based on these passages, Aristotle uses the contraries to describe single categories – such as substances, qualities, or quantities. Given the aim of this chapter, there are at least two points that we need to bear in mind: first, for substances, nothing admits contraries at the same time, in this sense, substances are always what it is and in actuality; and second, although, substances are without contraries, they are able to receive contraries. Contraries expressed by categories are not only immediate constituent elements of the principle of non-contradiction, but also exemplify the ontological foundation of the principle of non-contradiction – since single categories, similar to the principle of non-contradiction, cannot admit contraries at the same time. In this case, contraries to qualities can become evidence to support the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction, because the principle of non-contradiction could be reduced to and analyzed into contraries that concentrate on single categories.

Additionally, the principle of non-contradiction is explained in a range of contraries to various modes of being, such as substances without contraries as what is the simple things or qualities of substances. As Thomas Upton remarks: “the real question is not whether or not we can put contradictions into words, but whether or not in actual fact contradictions can exist together in the same thing. E.g., the same thing be, at the same time, both “man” and “not man” essentially. Aristotle himself maintains that in fact some substance, e.g., an individual man or some kind of substance, e.g., the species “man” or the genus “animal”, cannot both be and not be (what it is) at the same time and in the same respect.”²⁸⁸

By contrast with being with reference to categories, including categories without contraries or categories with contraries, Aristotle further makes a distinction between contraries in

²⁸⁸ Upton, 2002, 462.

modes of being and contraries in statements. Aristotle claims that:

T81: Similarly with beliefs. Hence at least the way in which it is able to receive contraries—through a change in itself—would be distinctive of substance, even if we were to grant that beliefs and statements are able to receive contraries. However, this is not true. 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, they are not able to receive contraries. A substance, on the other hand, is said to be able to receive contraries because it itself receives contraries. For it receives sickness and health, and paleness and darkness; and because it itself receives the various things of this kind it is said to be able to receive contraries. It is, therefore, distinctive of substance that what is numerically one and the same is able to receive contraries. This brings to an end our discussion of substance.” (*Cat.* 5, 4b5-4b19; cf T23)

It would appear that it is things rather than statements which receive contraries, since statements cannot change over time, while various modes of being could change over time, e.g. substances though without contraries can receive contraries. How could statements that cannot receive contraries describe things which change their contraries over time? If not, it seems impossible that statement truth serves as the fundamental account of truth in Aristotle. As long as it is the primary substances that receives contraries over time, the discussion of truth and falsity should be located in being in the strictest sense.

If so, the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction will be founded on being, instead of statement truth. The character of being with reference to categories, including substances without contraries or qualities with contraries is the ontologically basic element of the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction in Aristotle.

3. 2 An ontological reading in *Metaphysics*

With the expectation of contraries in *Categories* used to support the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction, the ontological reading has been further supported in *Metaphysics* by underlining the important position of this principle in his all of Aristotle’s works and explaining the formulation of the principle of non-contradiction as the starting-point for all the other axioms.

T82: But he who knows best about each genus must be able to state the most certain principles of his subject, so that he whose subject is being qua being must be able to state the most certain principles of all things [...] and the most certain principle of all is that regarding which it is impossible to be mistaken; for such a principle must be both the best known and non-hypothetical. [...] Evidently then such a principle is the most certain of all. [...] It is, that the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect. [...] This, then, is the most certain of all principles [...] for this is naturally the starting-point even for all the other axioms.” (*Met.* Γ.3, 1005b9-1005b11; 1005b13-1005b14;

A few points can be learned from this passage. Firstly, Aristotle suggests the position of the principle of non-contradiction among all principles. The principle of non-contradiction is the most certain and the best known of all principles, so that that is the starting-point of all the other axioms. Referring to the list of characters of the first principles of demonstrations in chapter Five, we can infer that the principle of non-contradiction also has these characters, since it is the starting point of all other principles, including the principles of demonstration. In this sense, the principle of non-contradiction is of course, immediate, indemonstrable, true, primitive, the best known and prior to all other principles. The principle of non-contradiction is already there before our knowledge.

Secondly, Aristotle explains the principle of non-contradiction in terms of attributes and a subject that is a kind of mode of being. Here, Aristotle opens up within this law a new dimension in which nature dwells and could be seen.²⁸⁹ In addition, with reference to the ultimate task of *Metaphysics* providing theoretical knowledge about being qua being, the principle of non-contradiction as the first principle of the science of being qua being must apply to all modes of being. Therefore, if there should be one principle for the science of being qua being, then the principle of non-contradiction must be the starting point of the science of being qua being.²⁹⁰ In this case, the principle of non-contradiction definitely plays the role of a metaphysical principle that has been considered the metaphysical formulation of the principle of non-contradiction by Łukasiewicz. Up to now, it is clear why, among the three levels of interpretation of the principle of non-contradiction, the ontological formulation is the basic one of these interpretations.

Moreover, Aristotle claims that the principle of non-contradiction must be considered as “a principle in things:”

T83: There is a principle in things, about which we cannot be deceived, but must always, on the contrary, recognize the truth,—viz. that the same thing cannot at one and the same time be and not be, or admit any other similar pair of opposites [...] for thus alone can he demonstrate his thesis to the man who says that opposite statements can be truly made about the same subject.[...] 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. He, then, who says this is and is not denies what he affirms, so that what the word signifies, he says it does not signify; and this is impossible. Therefore if ‘this is’ signifies something, one cannot truly assert the contradictory. (*Met.* K.5, 1062a19-1062a21; 1062b2-1062b3; 1062b6-1062b11)

According to T83²⁹¹, the principle of non-contradiction is a principle in things. Based on this principle in things, we must always recognize the truth that the same thing cannot both be and

²⁸⁹ Brogan, 2005,74.

²⁹⁰ Halper, 2006.

²⁹¹ There are doubts about the authenticity of book K, which do not affect my argument. For exhaustive discussions see e.g. Vianney (1983), Aubenque (1983), and for a brief assessment see Madigan (1999) xxxviii-xxxix.

not be at the same time, since every word must be intelligible and signify something – which has been examined in chapter Three. As Aristotle underlines, without signifying something, the principle of non-contradiction would be impossible, and the contradictory cannot be asserted. The necessary involvement of things in this principle *in things* should be a clue for the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction. After all, if we compare it with the principle of non-contradiction as a logical principle, the ontological reading ultimately turns to things, rather than applying to statements.

Given that this ontological explanation for the principle of non-contradiction is restricted to things as a reality in our world, then, the principle of non-contradiction when applied to various modes of being could be the starting-point of all investigations about reality.

4. The principle of non-contradiction within the hierarchy of truth

We have seen that for Aristotle the principle of non-contradiction is more than a logical principle concentrating on statements, because the principle of non-contradiction derives from the scope of being. Moreover, the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction is a fundamental base for the logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction. This line of argument suggests how the ontological reading of the principle on non-contradiction as the highest truth makes statements true.

Based on the discussion above, it is clear that the logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction applies to statements, which underlines how contradictory statements cannot be true of the same thing at the same time. In turn, the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction applies to things with properties, which claims that something cannot simultaneously be and not be in the same respect at the same time.²⁹²

I agree with the logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction, just as I agree with the traditional interpretation of truth in Aristotle. In addition, I argue for the priority of the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction, just as I am supporting the priority of the ontological reading of truth in Aristotle. Given the hierarchy of truth in chapter Three, truth in things is prior to truth in thoughts, which in its turn is mirrored in words, which is truth in statements. This ontological priority of truth in things is responsible for truth in thoughts and truth in statements. Similarly, it is clear that the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction is a fundamental basis of, and also shall be responsible for the logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction.

This correspondence between the two kinds of interpretation about the principle of non-contradiction has been observed by John Boongaling (2018). In his view, the principle of non-contradiction involving subjects and attributes is central to Aristotle's theory of predication. It is important to note that subject and attributes are similar to what Aristotle earlier referred to as entities and properties.²⁹³ Therefore, the problem is not about whether the same thing at the same time can both “be” and “not be” a man in name, but whether this is possible in fact.

²⁹² Boyd, 2017, 54.

²⁹³ Boongaling, 2018.

In addition, there is some shared ground among these interpretations. The relationship between the logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction and the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction has been clarified by Jonathan Lear (1988). He argues that the goal of Aristotle is neither to prove the principle of non-contradiction nor to convince an opponent of the principle to change his mind, but rather trying to show how the structure of reality constrains the structure of our thoughts – in essence, the starting point of all investigations into Aristotle is our daily life surrounding us. The very fact that the world is constituted of substances and properties forces us to think, speak, and act in certain ways. In a world made up of substances, any thinker must be someone who believes the principle of non-contradiction.²⁹⁴ As Lear argues, “It is because the structure of our thought is responsive to or expressive of the structure of reality that we thinkers are capable of conducting a very general inquiry into reality. Since substance is the basis of reality, we thinkers are capable of conducting a general inquiry into substance. That is, we are capable of being philosophers engaged in metaphysical inquiry.”²⁹⁵ Therefore the relation between these two readings of the principle of non-contradiction is based on how human beings communicate, and interact with the world.

What is more, Aristotle further points out the differences in their relationship with time. Aristotle believes the contraries in statements cannot be changed through the passing of time, while the contraries in modes of being can change over time. Notably, the primary substance can receive contraries at different times, which has been discussed early in T81 above.

According to T81, 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 content of modes of being could change over time. The change occurs in the substances in the world, and not in the statements about the world. There is a significant difference in the way in which substances and truth-bearers have contrary properties at different times. Considering the fact that statements cannot capture modes of being which could change sufficiently, the people who make judgement by means of truth-bearers with truth-values have to change their statements in order to capture the reality fixed by modes of being as truth-makers – while these modes of being are able to receive contraries over time in their own right. In this case, the primary modes of being can receive contraries at different times, while nothing could be contraries at the same time.

From the differences between the principle of non-contradiction in things and in statements or beliefs, we can conclude that changes are in things that can accept contraries, but statements or beliefs do not undergo any changes. That could be a reason to take the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction as having priority over the logical reading, since this principle in things is a necessary condition for the possibility of thought and language about things that are reflected by the principle of non-contradiction as a logical principle expressed in statements. This conclusion of the line of argument is a concrete example of the hierarchy of truth that has been established in chapter Three in which truth in

²⁹⁴ Lear, 1988, 265.

²⁹⁵ Lear, 1988, 265.

things is prior to, and responsible for the truth in statements.

Therefore, the relationship between the two explanations for the principle of non-contradiction reflects the relation between the truth in thoughts and truth in things. By analogy, the truth of the principle of non-contradiction at the ontological level is prior to truth at the statement level. Last but not least, this ontological priority promises not only the truth of statements but also the truth of the logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction.

5. The principle of non-contradiction performing within the hierarchy of being

After revealing the relation between these two kinds of reading of the principle of non-contradiction reflecting on the hierarchy of truth described in chapter Three, in this part, I would like to show how the principle of non-contradiction as an ontological principle performs within the hierarchy of being described in chapter Four. Taking the principle of non-contradiction as an ontological principle, its formulation would be that any one character of the modes of being must follow the principle that the same thing cannot “be” and “not be” at the same time in the same aspect.

As we can see above, in T79, substances are have no contraries, but substances can receive contraries over time. Referring to what we have investigated regarding the hierarchy of beings in chapter Four, the primary substances have ontological priority over other categories . The other categories depend on the primary substances to exist. Because there is no change in the primary substances, the primary substances are always what they are, and always in actuality, which amounts to being always true in the sense of being in the strictest sense as investigated in chapters Two and Four.

In the *Categories*, the principle of non-contradiction could be reduced to single categories that cannot admit two contraries at the same time – and meanwhile, the primary modes of being can receive contraries at different times. In this case, it is obvious that the primary substances as essences that is always what it is, and cannot experience any changes. What is more, the primary substances could also be the receivers of contraries, which is the basic element of the formulation of the principle of non-contradiction, since, the object of the principle of non-contradiction is the subject that can change over time, and changes include changes from contraries.

Except for the primary substances without contraries, when the primary substances receive contraries in other categories, the object of the principle of non-contradiction turns to composites. So the next question would be that, if Aristotle explains the principle of non-contradiction as an ontological principle, connecting it with first substances, then how could the ontological principle of non-contradiction apply to accidental beings which are not the primary substances or essences in the *Metaphysics*? How to explain truth in composites that change over time? In order to resolve the problem, I would like to introduce once again Aristotle’s concepts of actuality and potentiality to resolve questions of the truth as the principle of non-contradiction in composites.

T84: Perhaps, indeed, the necessary and not necessary are first principles of everything’s either being or

not being, and one should look at the others as following from these. It is evident from what has been said that what is of necessity is in actuality; so that, if the things which are eternal are prior, then also actuality is prior to capability. Some things are actualities without capability (like the primary substances), others with capability (and these are prior by nature but posterior in time to the capability); and others are never actualities but only capabilities. (*Int.* 13, 23a19-23a27)

Apart from this understanding about actuality as a way of being in chapter Four —especially the actuality of eternal beings and perishable beings, as well as the ontological priority of actuality—Aristotle also introduces what is necessary in terms of actuality in such situations. Therefore, we can connect these seemingly separate aspects together as being in the strictest sense as truth in Aristotle. Based on T86, Aristotle discussed the first principle in terms of being or not being in terms of necessary and not necessary, which is a concrete example of the principle of non-contradiction. Furthermore, based on this opinion that what is necessary is in actuality, Aristotle establishes the relationship between necessity and actuality. In this case, there are three kinds of things, including what is actuality without potentiality, what is actuality with potentiality, as well as things that are never actuality, but only potentiality. Then, for composites with changes over time, that can be identified with things are actuality with potentiality, the principle of non-contradiction should be understood as having only one side of a contradiction actualized at any given time.

Thus, it is clear that there is connection between the principle of non-contradiction in statements concerning beings in *Categories* and in reference to potentiality/actuality in *Metaphysics*. I would like to interpret the principle of non-contradiction in terms of categories with or without contraries and the actualization of various modes of being. For the primary substances which never undergo any changes as such, are capable of serving as the receiver of contraries. While, for composites, the other categories have to be connected with these primary substances for them to exist. In this situation, the principle of non-contradiction as truth in composites should be understood in term of actuality and potentiality. Changes are the actuality of what is potentially qua such.²⁹⁶ Then, this ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction can be translated as the actualization of only one side of a contradiction in the modes of being as reality.

I would like to claim that, firstly, as we discussed early, the logical interpretation of the principle of non-contradiction is grounded in being, both in terms of the categories, and in terms of actuality and potentiality. Based on our studies in previous chapters referring to the list of modes of being in *Metaphysics* Θ.10, being in the strictest sense as truth shall be considered as truth in in-composites as in essences and actualities that are always true, and truth in composites which reflect categories with contraries that experience changes over time.

So far, it is clear that the principle of non-contradiction has been operating not only on the structure of being mentioned in *Metaphysics* Θ.10, but also the hierarchy of being investigated in chapter Four. This line of argument involves being in terms of the categories, being in terms of actuality and potentiality, as well as being in the strictest sense as truth, in which

²⁹⁶ *Phys.* III.1, 201a10-201a11.

what is always in actuality is the highest substance that is the first cause of other things in the world.

What is more, the principle of non-contradiction as “a truth in things” is what is necessary in its own right, or what cannot be otherwise, serving as the *arche* of all other axioms in the knowledge of human beings that need always be true. It assumes the principle of non-contradiction is already here before our knowledge. Based on the limitation of knowledge, being in the strictest sense as truth in the context of principle of non-contradiction is a very special case of truth in being, which is the foundation to everything we do.

6. Conclusion

After I first introduced the basic formulation of the principle of non-contradiction and two different kinds of reading of this principle, including the logical reading, as well as the ontological reading, I have established the connections between the principle of non-contradiction with categories, actuality, and being in the strictest sense as truth.

From the logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction to the research on its ontological formulation, my journey is to explain why the logical reading of truth is right or exists, which is an instance of truth in thoughts. The ontological reading suggests that the principle of non-contradiction should apply to all modes of being, which has been supported both in *Categories* and in *Metaphysics*. In order to resolve the question of how can we explain the difference between being with contraries and being in terms of essences which have no contraries, the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction has been introduced, by means of Aristotle’s theory of what is necessary in terms of actuality and potentiality. In the end, we can conclude that the principle of non-contradiction is not only restricted to propositions, but also applies to various modes of being as things signified by propositions – especially primary substances and actuality.

Among the various of modes of being, the actualization of modes of being is my preferred option to fill in the specific content of the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction, not just the primary substances as essence in *Metaphysics*. For truth in composites, in term of the actualization of modes of being, this line of reasoning would be that if only one side of a contradictory mode of being can be asserted to be true—and if the principle of non-contradiction is true—then only one actualization of things that is to be or not to be could be real.

Considering the relationship between these different readings of the principle of non-contradiction, the fact that something contradictory cannot exist at the same way is the ultimate reason for the logical reading of this principle of non-contradiction, and the logical reading of the principle of non-contradiction is the result of the performance of the principle of non-contradiction operating on all modes of being. Therefore, the ontological reading is more fundamental than the logical reading since the logical reading is depending on the ontological reading that serves as the ground and makes the logical reading true, which mirrors the hierarchy of truth in chapter Three in which the truth in things is prior and is responsible for truth in thoughts and truth in statements. In this manner, the principle of

non-contradiction as a logical principle rests on the ontological reading of the principle of non-contradiction, and it is this ontological reading makes the logical reading true. Ultimately, the truth in thing makes the statement true.