

**FALSITY AND THE FALSE IN ARISTOTLE'S  
METAPHYSICS Δ**  
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*In memory of Michael Frede*  
ἀψευδέα καὶ ἀληθέα ἥματα πάντα

The true and truth do not find an entry in the philosophical dictionary of book Δ (except as one of the four senses of being in ch. 7, 1017<sup>a</sup>31–35). But the false does (ch. 29). Three distinct fields are discerned: (i) things (1024<sup>b</sup>17–26), (ii) discourses or, more accurately, statements (1024<sup>b</sup>26–1025<sup>a</sup>1), and (iii) human beings (1025<sup>a</sup>1–13). The treatment of those distinct fields and their sequence do not tally very well with our ordinary conceptions which tend to ascribe falsity only to beliefs and propositions.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle does not say what we would like him to say, or does not say what we would like him to say in a manner that we would immediately understand. As a matter of fact, we may interpret him in such a way as to make his views compatible with our own. But the point of coming to terms with Aristotle's thought is to learn something from him, something unexpected that we may not have thought of. The following attempt intends to reach such a result.

### **Analysis**

#### 1. False things (1024<sup>b</sup>17–26)

Aristotle bifurcates the category of falsity with respect to things. On the one hand, he speaks of false objects (at rest or in motion), such as dreams

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* 431.2 Hayduck

and *chiaroscuro* paintings which are not what they seem to be. Let us call this class of false things ‘illusionary objects’. On the other hand, he speaks of false relations (in or outside time), such as the diagonal of a square that is commensurable with the side of the square, or a sitting person when the person intended is actually standing. Let us call this class of false things ‘non-obtaining relations’.

Aristotle speaks first of non-obtaining relations and then of illusionary objects. It is as if non-obtaining relations are more exemplary cases of falsity in things than illusionary objects. We might perhaps think the reverse. In any case, illusionary objects are said to be false not because they are non-beings – for they are surely something – but because what they are, what it is for them to be, is different from the impression they make on our imagination (1024<sup>b</sup>23–24). They are *not* false because *we* take them to be false; *nor* are they false because they deceive *us*: they are false because they possess in themselves the property of manifesting their being in a manner that not only hides what they are – for that would not be deceiving – but hides what they are by showing something other, something that they are not. Our deception is not the cause but rather the result of their deceptive – false – nature. We are deceived because *they* are *objectively* deceitful, and they are deceitful because in their own being there is a *discrepancy* between essence (or property) and manifestation of essence (or property).

It is clear that we as perceivers and thinkers manage to grasp the falsity of illusionary objects because we are accustomed with many things whose being is not false, i.e. things which manifest themselves in manners that do justice to their essence (or properties). It is because there are non-illusionary objects that illusionary objects can be distinguished. Unless there is waking life dream life is not false. And unless there is perception of sleeping people who are not seen to travel or fly in their bodies (as they dream that they do during sleep), dream life cannot be deemed illusionary life. However, Aristotle does *not* use any argument here that would refer to perceivers and thinkers. His point is that illusionary objects such as dreams and *chiaroscuro* paintings appear to be different from what they are because they manifest themselves in a false way, i.e. a way that does not exhibit their true nature but pretends to a different kind of nature. The possibility of appearing different (and of deceiving as a result) is thus grounded in the *gap* created between essence (or property) and manifestation of essence (or property). Such a gap gives rise to appearance as distinct from manifestation.

Among non-obtaining relations, Aristotle distinguishes those non-obtaining relations that are always and necessarily false from those whose

falsity is contingent upon time. The two examples that Aristotle uses (the commensurable diagonal of a square with respect to its side; and his addressee, the intentional object of the deictic ‘you’, said to be sitting while he is in fact standing) are meant to illustrate cases of *necessarily* false relations and of *contingently* false relations, respectively. In contrast to illusionary objects, which are beings but not the beings that they seem to be, those *πράγματα* are explicitly said to be non-beings (οὐκ ὄντα, 1024<sup>b</sup>21). But in what sense are they non-beings? They are non-beings, Aristotle wants us to understand, because they do not exist combined, in the sense that *either* the two ‘parts’ that form their presumed ‘being’ do not combine *now* (in the case of a standing addressee when ‘sitting’ and the intentional object of ‘you’ do not combine) *or* in the sense that it is *impossible* for them *ever* to combine (in the case of the diagonal and commensurability with the side of its square). Again, it is worth noticing that Aristotle does *not* say that *our concepts* of ‘diagonal’ and ‘commensurability’ do not combine – for this is surely possible in a false propositional belief –, *nor* does he say that our concepts do not combine in the formation of a true propositional belief – which is what ‘to combine’ should actually mean in such a context. What he says is that the things do not combine. How are we to understand that?

It seems that Aristotle wants to emphatically *deny* that there are false facts *in* the world (when he says that those presumed relations are non-beings), and at the same time *affirm* that the *cause* of falsehood of a proposition such as ‘the diagonal of a square is commensurable with its side’ lies *in* the world. What Aristotle wants to reject is the idea that the falsehood of a false proposition is the exclusive property of the mind that is thinking it. No, this is not the case, he implies. The falsehood of a false proposition has a lot to do with the state of affairs in the world. What makes this proposition false is not some property or other that the proposition itself, or the mind containing it, has, but something external to both proposition and mind (cf. *Θ*.10 1051<sup>a</sup>6–9). And this external something is the fact that the diagonal and the side of the square are always and necessarily incommensurable, i.e. ‘diagonal’ and ‘commensurability-with-the-side’ are always and necessarily separate, or that ‘you’ and ‘sitting’ happen now to be separate. It is the *actual* incommensurability of diagonal and side, which is a necessary fact of the world, that makes the said proposition always false. And it is the *actual* ‘unsittingness’ of you now, which is a contingent fact of the world, that makes the proposition ‘you are sitting’ false now (although it may become true later). In this sense, the cause, which makes any false proposition in any case false, is, always and necessarily, a true state of affairs, i.e. what is the case in the

world (now or ever). Taken in this sense, the *fact* of non-obtaining relations necessarily and always precedes falsehood of verbal statements.

In the first part of his analysis of falsity Aristotle means to say that falsity does not begin with human discourse but with the (necessary or contingent) *actuality* of the world, and the *presence* in it of relations (that *exclude* other relations) and of illusion (that casts a veil, breaking the continuity of essence and manifestation).

## 2. False statements (1024<sup>b</sup>26–1025<sup>a</sup>1)

Aristotle begins by stating that false discourse is the discourse that announces what is not the case. Obviously, *λόγος* denotes a propositional statement or *ἀποφαντικὸς λόγος*. The view of the false presented here is substantially identical with the definition of the false given in Γ.7 1011<sup>b</sup>26. However, in our passage Aristotle unexpectedly continues with the assertion that every false statement refers to something else than the corresponding true statement. What he has primarily in mind is the definition of a thing as applied to a different thing. The example he mentions is the definition of the triangle falsely applied to define the circle (1024<sup>b</sup>28). When we say that ‘the circle is a closed plane figure made up of three straight lines’, the statement is false, because it has the circle as *definiendum*; it would be true if it had the triangle as *definiendum*. Each entity has just *one* (εἷς) such statement (hence just one *definiens*), which is the statement that says of the thing what it is for the thing to be the thing that it is (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι), namely its definition. However, many other statements are truly applicable to the selfsame entity as descriptions of properties, qualities and affections of that entity. Take, for example, the case of Socrates-being-versed-in-music-and-poetry. To say that ‘Socrates is a human being’ and that ‘Socrates is musical-and-poetical’ are two different statements, and they are both true, since they both say what is the case with reference to the very same entity, i.e. Socrates. But how is it possible for one and the same entity to have two different statements said truly of it? That was Antisthenes’ objection.

Antisthenes claimed that each thing has only one statement said truly of it. What Antisthenes had in mind was the definitional formula proper to the thing. If ‘Socrates is a human being’ is the definitional statement proper to Socrates, in the sense that it not merely applies to him, but also names his being, then, Antisthenes concluded, no other statements can be truly predicated of Socrates. For all other statements, according to Antisthenes, would predicate of Socrates something other than his being, and they would, therefore, be false. To see Antisthenes’ point, we must understand the verb ‘is’

as used in the two statements in exactly the same sense. If 'is' names what it is for Socrates to be the thing that he is, then, since Socrates is one, he must be exclusively *either* human *or* musical-and-poetical.

Aristotle thought that Antisthenes' idea is naïve. And it most certainly seems so from a modern perspective. But what has rendered Antisthenes' idea naïve is Aristotle's own doctrine of the categories, which is presupposed in our passage. It is only because there are eight or ten categories, of which *ousia* is just one, albeit the first, that Aristotle may easily say that Antisthenes' view sounds naïve. Aristotle's categories are ways or modes of being and the corresponding different senses that the verb 'be' assumes in different predicative statements said truly of a thing. One of them, the first, is the most pronounced and authoritative sense because it says of an entity what it is, i.e. it names the what-being of this entity, its essence. The other categories signify the many properties that this entity may have, its how-being, so to speak. Between the first and the other seven or nine categories, there is a profound discontinuity. If we were to limit the proper sense of being to the first category of 'what-something-is', Antisthenes would be right. For, as Aristotle concedes, each entity has just one definitional formula that is proper to it.

As it becomes clear from Aristotle's formulation, Antisthenes made a suggestion for the proper use of language (*ἀξιῶν*). His suggestion was philosophical and was meant to have a regulative value. Antisthenes did not describe the actual use of language, and of the verb 'be' in particular. He seems to have thought that a rigorous use of the verb should be limited to the definitional formula. The other, loose, senses of the verb should be expressed artificially by means of other verbs. Instead of saying 'Socrates is musical-and-poetical', Antisthenes claimed that we should rather say, for instance, 'Socrates musicalizes-and-poetizes' (or something similar depending on the context).

Antisthenes' idea had far-reaching consequences. For he did not only limit being to what-something-is in the strict sense. He also seems to have made restrictions about what counts as a *λόγος*. A statement, in his opinion, counts as a *λόγος* if and only if the verb 'be' is meant in the definitional sense, and if and only if it is a definitional statement in which the *definiens* applies truly to the *definiendum*, or the predicate to the subject. If there is no such subject, or if the definitional predicate does not apply truly to it, Antisthenes thought that the statement cannot count as a *λόγος* at all. What follows from that is that the possibility of contra-diction (*ἀντιλέγειν*), in the proper sense of saying something opposite to what has been said before, and of refutation

as a result, is eliminated. For to say something definitionally different from, hence opposite to, what has been said before about the same subject is either to say something true of the subject or else something false. In the latter case, the statement is not a λόγος in the strict sense; in the former case, it is a λόγος in the strict sense. But when the refuting or contradictory statement happens to be indeed a λόγος in the strict sense, the previous statement, of which this one is the contradiction, could not have been a λόγος (in the same strict sense) in the first place. Hence, refutation and contradiction are impossible. But if that is so, it follows that the possibility of falsehood is practically eliminated.

*Prima facie* it would seem that the elimination of the possibility of contradiction and refutation is based on the elimination of the possibility of falsehood. But Aristotle ascribes the reverse sequence to Antisthenes. He says that from what Antisthenes claimed it would follow that there can be no contradiction and refutation, from which it ‘also almost’ (σχεδὸν δὲ μηδὲ) follows that falsehood is impossible. If Aristotle is precise about the sequence, we may infer that Antisthenes was not interested in claiming, at least primarily, that falsehood and contradiction are impossible. He was interested in claiming that the proper understanding of *what counts as being should guide us to the proper understanding of what counts as λόγος*, and not the other way round. For λόγος is derivative and based on being: it is a reflection of being, in the sense that it says what a real thing is, or else it is not λόγος at all, but just empty words and noises. According to Antisthenes, a statement is empty words if it does not refer or does not predicate correctly in a strictly definitional sense. Ultimately, the two conditions which Antisthenes has imposed on a statement if it is to count as λόγος (i.e. referring and definitional predicating) coincide. For to say, for instance, that ‘Socrates is an irrational biped’ can be seen as either not referring to Socrates at all, or as not predicating of him what he is.

Aristotle accepts what is true in Antisthenes’ intuition, namely that each entity, being one, has just one definitional formula and this formula is the only statement that names its ‘what-it-is’, or the essence of the said entity. But he does not accept Antisthenes’ restriction of what counts as λόγος to the definition. For Aristotle, a statement *may* be false, and, if true, may name *any* property of the thing other than its essence. But we must see Aristotle’s claim that all statements which predicate falsely something of something are true of something else (1024<sup>a</sup>27–28), against the background created by Aristotle’s (and Plato’s) dispute with Antisthenes. Although the example that Aristotle employs is the definitional formula of the triangle, which is applied falsely to

the circle, it is clear that Aristotle thinks of any false statement, not just the definitional formula, as truly applicable to a different subject. In one sense, a false statement is of absolutely nothing, we learn (1024<sup>a</sup>31–32). In another sense, it is of something, but not of the said thing (1024<sup>a</sup>27–28). There is no contradiction here. Our example about Socrates as an irrational biped may be seen as false of Socrates but true of the cock, or as false in an absolute sense, meaning that there is nothing in the world that is both Socrates and irrational. These considerations, then, carry over to the other categories.

Therefore, Aristotle's points are: (i) that false statements are not restricted to the predications of what-something-is, but are to be found in the other categories as well, and (ii) that a false statement in any one category may, but need not, be true of some other subject (presumably unless a contradiction is involved in the predicate itself). Aristotle's own example comes from the category of relation: "eight is double". The statement is true of eight, since eight is double four, although it does not name the essence of eight, what eight is, its what-being. The statement does not name the essence of double either. It is a definitional statement of neither eight, nor double. Yet, it is a true statement because in eight doubleness is present. And doubleness is present in eight by means of some implication of double's essence, i.e. of what it is for something to be double, which (essence) boils down to duality or two-ness. The double is defined with reference to a specific number, i.e. number two, as that which is 'twice (= two times) one'. But though in a definitional sense only duality *per se*, i.e. number two, is, strictly speaking, double, many more numbers are double in a derivative way, as for instance number eight – two times four – by means of some presence of the essence, and hence the definition, of duality in it. Number eight is double because it stands to number four in exactly the same relation as number two, the primarily dual number, stands to the unit. By mentioning the implication of duality's essence in the doubleness of eight, Aristotle implies that all true statements made in categories other than that of *ousia*, are true by virtue of *some implicit involvement of essences*, and hence of definitional formulae, in them.

### 3. False persons (1025<sup>a</sup>1–13)

In proceeding to explore false persons, Aristotle is using what we have learned from the exploration of false statements. A false person is described as one who employs deliberately the pronouncement of false statements and who, as a consequence, makes other people take as true what is false. The false person, according to Aristotle, means to deceive and deceives knowingly. Somebody who deceives by error or accident, perhaps because

s/he is her/himself deceived, does not count as a false person, since s/he is not a deliberate deceiver. Deception is for the false person an end in itself, something pursued for its own sake (δι' αὐτό), not something caused by some other cause (μὴ δι' ἕτερόν τι), say ignorance, negligence self-deception or even profit.<sup>2</sup> Aristotle is not concerned here with the moral question of whether or not it is advisable in some cases to deceive and to lie. He is simply concerned to show that a person is deemed false only when s/he is the kind of person who knowingly, deliberately, and perhaps repeatedly (inferred from εὐχερής) deceives for the sake of deceiving. Otherwise, we may add, s/he is ignorant and self-deceived but not false.

In his account of false persons, Aristotle employs his understanding of false statements as well as his second class of falsity in things, i.e. illusionary objects. The false person, according to Aristotle, employs false statements in order to deceive. And since deception is the imposition of a false representation in the mind of another, the false person deceives by creating and communicating to another a false representation. Illusionary objects such as dreams and *chiaroscuro* paintings deceive in a similar manner since they cause a mental impression to emerge on the perceiver's mind that differs from the actual being of those objects. The false person does *intentionally* what illusionary objects do through what they are, without any choice – let alone moral choice – involved.

Aristotle detects a fallacious and insane argument (*παρακρούεται*) in Plato's *Hippias minor* (366D–367D, cf. 369B) when Socrates argues that the same person is ἀληθής (truthful/sincere/true) and ψευδής (liar/insincere/false). Aristotle accepts that only a knower can knowingly deceive. But for him, unlike Plato's Socrates, the knower becomes a false person only when he *chooses* to deceive, that is to say only when he willingly deceives. The potential deceiver is not a false person, according to Aristotle. It follows that *actual* deception, as that which characterizes the false person, is the outcome not only of knowledge but of moral character as well. And this holds true not only in the case of verbal statements but of actions as well. Somebody may deceive by pretending to be lame, i.e. by imitating the kind of movement that characterizes a lame person, although s/he is not lame her/himself. In such a case, insofar as walking is concerned, the pretender is a more able (κρείττων) human being than the lame, because the former can walk properly if s/he wishes, whereas the latter cannot. On the other hand, whoever turns truly lame on his/her own account and intentionally (χωλὸς ἐκῶν), rather than pretending to be lame (ἐκῶν

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Alexander, *In Met.* 436.15–17

χωλαίνων), is probably (ἴσως) a worse person, insofar as his moral character is concerned (ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τοῦ ἥθους). Aristotle is reluctant to say that all cases of intentional lameness, as distinct from intentional mimicking of lameness, are cases of moral inferiority, presumably because the moral worth of an action is determined by the particular circumstances in which it is chosen as well as the purpose that the doer has in mind while choosing and performing it. This obviously applies also to the cases of mock lameness and intentional lies. But in general, insofar as knowledge and capacity are concerned, a lying or pretending person is better off than an ignoramus who cannot deceive, although the former may be, and in many cases actually is, morally worse. It is this important distinction between the moral and the epistemic perspectives that Plato's Socrates seems to have neglected in the *Hippias minor*, according to Aristotle. But Socrates' sophism lay also in the elimination of the distinction between the *potential* and the *actual* deceiver understood in the appropriate Aristotelian senses of having a capacity but not exercising it as opposed to both having a capacity and exercising it (cf. Θ.3). Only a knower is a potential deceiver in this sense. But whenever the potentiality of deceiving that the knower possesses is exercised in word or deed, it is a moral, no longer an epistemic, question to see whether it is for better or worse.

The account of a false human being that Δ.29 gives presupposes a great deal of Aristotle's ethical theory. As an ethical virtue ἀλήθεια means not just the habitual practice of verbal sincerity or active truthfulness but the permanent state of mind of a person that acknowledges his/her own excellences and limitations, does not hesitate to exhibit them without distortion, and does not pretend to possess any virtue or vice that s/he does not truly possess (*Nicomachean Ethics* II.7 1108<sup>a</sup>19–23; IV.7 1127<sup>a</sup>13–<sup>b</sup>32). In ethical ἀλήθεια the verbal and the non-verbal aspects of human behaviour are harmonized in the moral and cognitive authenticity of an integrated human being. In stark contrast with the extremes of boastfulness (ἀλαζονεία) and irony (εἰρωνεία), where pretension (by excess or by default) creates a *duality* in the moral integrity of an agent, the Aristotelian ἀληθής is ethically 'true' in the sense that s/he is, truly and not just apparently, *one* with him/herself.

## Discussion and Conclusions

A dictionary lists the many senses of a word as used in common linguistic practice and/or past literature. A philosophical dictionary lists the many philosophically relevant senses of technical or quasi-technical terms as used in past and/or contemporary philosophy. The oldest surviving philosophical

dictionary in the history of Western philosophy does neither work. In *Metaphysics* Δ Aristotle was interested in clarifying the various philosophically relevant senses of thirty selected terms of his own philosophy. Those selected terms pertain to various branches of Aristotle's philosophy but they all (with the possible exception of κολοβόν in ch. 27) have a relevance to the science of being *qua* being. They form a group of so-called 'common concepts' that all particular sciences employ.<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, Aristotle believes in the wisdom embedded in ordinary language. But in book Δ he presents us with no endoxic views or arguments from ordinary linguistic practice unless they have a relevance to his own understanding of the senses of the selected terms. Ordinary Greek usage cannot fully account for the fact that Aristotle includes the sense of false 'as a thing' (ὡς πράγμα) in ch. 29. Nor can linguistic usage easily explain why this sense precedes the sense of false *qua* 'false statement' (λόγος δὲ ψευδής). What is more, if we take into account what Aristotle maintains elsewhere, i.e. that "the true and the false are not in things (ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν) but in discursive minds (ἐν διανοίᾳ)" (E.4 1027<sup>b</sup>25–27), it would seem that Aristotle, for one, contradicts himself and, moreover, he omits from his discussion in Δ.29 the sense of false as false *belief*, which is a property of a discursive mind and is clearly distinguishable from a false proposition.

One easy way out would be to interpret the sense of false 'as a thing' of Δ.29 as the equivalent of a wrong combination between the subject and the predicate of a mental proposition, i.e. as a mental error. But nothing in the text indicates that it should be so interpreted. As Alexander rightly explains, Aristotle's phrase in 1024<sup>b</sup>18–19 τῶ μὴ συγκεῖσθαι ἢ ἀδύνατον εἶναι συντεθῆναι "denotes what is not and what cannot be *the case*"<sup>4</sup>, rather than any non-combination of concepts; and in the Loeb edition Aristotle's phrase is faithfully rendered as "because it is not or cannot be *substantiated*" (my emphasis). Whereas propositional falsehood is the property of erroneously combined concepts in a discursive mind, what is not the case in the world has nothing to do with concepts and their combination or non-combination. It follows that mental falsehood is omitted in Δ 29 not because it is implied in the discussion of the false 'as a thing' but because it is implied in the discussion of false 'as a statement'. Mental falsehood implies the presence of a false belief in the mind, and a belief (in the relevant sense) is nothing but an unpronounced propositional statement. As Alexander writes with

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Alexander, *In Met.* 344.13–14

<sup>4</sup> *In Met.* 432.2–4, cf. 431.9–12.

understanding: *Εἴη δ' ἂν καὶ τὸ ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ ψεῦδος ὑπαγόμενον τῷ ἐν τῷ λόγῳ ψεύδει· λόγος γάρ τις καὶ ἡ διάνοια.*<sup>5</sup>

Now, it does not seem accidental that in Δ.29 Aristotle moves from falsity in things to falsehood of statements (the definition of a thing being the statement *par excellence*), and from falsehood of statements to falsity in human beings understood as deliberate insincerity and dissemblance in word or deed. The sequence in treating classes of falsity seems to move in an order of *decreasing causal power*. Falsity in things seems to open up the horizon of mental falsehood; potential or actual mental falsehood (i.e. confusion or presumed confusion) seems to lead to the possibility of falsehood in statements; and the possibility of propositional falsehood seems to open up the horizon not only of occasional falsity in human expression but of falsity in human character as well.

If the order of presentation of cases of falsity is not accidental, then the primary case of falsity is non-being as *actual* non-combination. In actual non-combination Aristotle distinguishes a necessary non-combination from an accidental or contingent, non-combination. We might wish to call the necessity of a necessary non-combination 'essential' and the contingency of an accidental non-combination 'factual'. Essential necessity is for Aristotle a superior kind of necessity because it is eternal and fully knowable. Unlike the domain of 'what can be otherwise' which is limited to the sublunary sphere and relates to states of affairs that do not occur with perfect regularity, essential necessity has the advantage that it is cognitively transparent. And it is in the cognitively transparent domain of essential necessity that falsity seems to be generated in the first place. How so? Because in the cognitively transparent domain of essential necessity there still is some *ontological difference* between one thing and another. On our reading, the primary cause of all kinds falsity is, according to Aristotle, ontological difference: once there are two things, falsity is the *essential 'not'* that distinguishes them from one another and does not allow them to combine. Primary falsity lies, therefore, in being *as distinct ousia*. That *omnis determinatio est negatio* is a principle that applies only secondarily to true statements: it primarily applies to the *determinacy of essence*.

That this is not an arbitrary inference but a conclusion that Aristotle has in mind is shown not only from the sequence that the treatment of cases of falsity follows in chapter 29; it is also, and primarily, shown by the concluding statement of the first case (i.e. falsity in things) in the context of

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<sup>5</sup> *In Met.* 436.10–11.

what follows later in the chapter. In summarizing what he said about falsity in things, Aristotle refers to the two classes (i.e. ‘non-obtaining relations’ and ‘illusionary objects’) with the following words (1024<sup>b</sup>25–26):

πράγματα μὲν οὖν ψευδῆ οὕτω λέγεται,

(i) ἢ τῶ μὴ εἶναι αὐτὰ

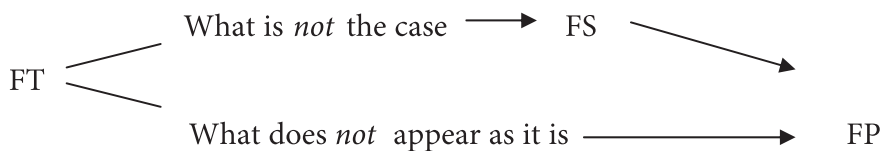
(ii) ἢ τῶ τῆν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν φαντασίαν μὴ ὄντος εἶναι.

He then picks up the first class (i) when he deals with the falsehood of statements and the second class (ii) when he deals with the falsity of persons:

(i) λόγος δὲ ψευδῆς ὁ τῶν μὴ ὄντων (1024<sup>b</sup>26–27)

(ii) ἄνθρωπος δὲ ψευδῆς ὁ εὐχερῆς καὶ προαιρετικὸς τῶν τοιούτων λόγων [...], ὥσπερ καὶ τὰ πράγματά φαμεν ψευδῆ εἶναι ὅσα ἐμποιεῖ φαντασίαν ψευδῆ (1025<sup>a</sup>2–6).

Aristotle uses the first class of falsity in things (i.e. ‘non-obtaining relations’) as the necessary condition that brings about falsehood of statements, and the second class of falsity in things (i.e. ‘illusionary objects’) as the necessary condition that brings about falsity of persons. In general, it is falsity in things that allows for falsity in both statements and persons. But falsity of persons may also be mediated by falsehood of statements. Hence, it seems that the overall scheme that Aristotle has in mind is something like the following:



FT = false things, FS = false statements, FP = false persons, — = ‘species’ of a genus,  $\rightarrow$  = ‘allows for,’ ‘is a necessary condition for the emergence of’

To the extent that a necessary condition is for Aristotle a kind of ἀρχή, falsity in things may be said to be the *origin* of all other kinds of falsity. But we may go a step further and ask how the two classes of falsity in things relate to each other. The available options seem to be four:

(i) they are related homonymously,

(ii) they form the two exclusive species of a higher genus that is falsity in things (as implied in the scheme above)

(iii) one of them is subordinate to the other as a species is to its proximate genus,

(iv) they are related by means of so-called focal reference, *πρὸς ἕν*.

To begin with option (i), we may exclude the possibility of a homonymous relation immediately. For if one class is homonymously related to the other, then at least one class will not be an actual case of falsity, and nothing in the text indicates that this may be so. On the contrary, it is clear that Aristotle thinks of both classes as classes of real *ψεῦδος* understood in the appropriate, and obviously the same, sense.

As we move to option (ii), the possibility must remain open that the genus of real *ψεῦδος* has as first species (1) *τὸ μὴ συγκεῖσθαι ἢ ἀδύνατον συντεθῆναι*, or non-combination, and as second species (2) *τὸ φαίνεσθαι ἢ μὴ οἶά ἐστι ἢ ἄ μὴ ἔστιν*, or illusionary appearance. Then, the first species of non-combination would be bifurcated into the subspecies of, in our terminology, (1.1) factual-cum-temporal non-combination (*τὸ μὴ συγκεῖσθαι*) and the subspecies of (1.2) essential-cum-eternal non-combination (*ἀδύνατον συντεθῆναι*). In a similar manner, the second species, that of illusionary appearance, would be bifurcated into the subspecies of (2.1) false appearing in some qualification of an entity (*μὴ οἶά ἐστι*) and the subspecies of (2.2) false appearing in the category of what-something-is (*ἄ μὴ ἔστιν*). An example of the former would be a *chiaroscuro* painting which does appear as a painting, esp. when it has a frame or hangs on the wall, but appears as having a quality which it does not possess, e.g. a third dimension, and it deceives the viewer precisely by means of that quality. Examples of the latter would be vivid illusionary dreams and hallucinations, which appear as waking-life and normal-life experiences, respectively. One might also include animal dissemblance in this class. Lucid dreaming, by contrast, would be more like mimetic, illusionary art than illusionary dreaming, since the dreamer, much like the spectator of a tragic play, knows that he is dreaming and enjoys the spectacle knowingly.

If *ψεῦδος* is the genus, the *differentia* between its two species would be 'being' in the sense of 'being out there' or 'existence': things such as a commensurable diagonal and a sitting Socrates are not beings (ever or now, respectively) in the sense that they do not exist out there; things like illusionary paintings and dreams are beings in the sense that they do exist, although in their case a fundamental discrepancy obtains between what they are and what they appear to be. In the former case, the nature of a commensurable-diagonal or a sitting-Socrates is such that it cannot ever be, or is not now, *present*. In the latter case, the nature of an illusionary painting or a dream is such that the thing necessarily appears *different* from what it is.

As to option (iii), the possibility that one class of falsity be subordinate to the other as a species is to a genus must be excluded, since the two classes are said to be opposite with respect to being. We may thus consider the possibility that the two classes relate by means of a focal reference,  $\pi\rho\delta\varsigma \ \acute{\epsilon}\nu$  (iv).

It seems that it makes good sense to speak of focal reference at this juncture, and that the focal reference desired should be found in actual non-combination, i.e. actual *discrepancy*. It is evident how this immediately applies to the first class of false things, i.e. ‘non-obtaining relations’. As to the second, we may think that the essential non-combination or disjunction of illusionary objects is between what something is and its appearing, or between its essence and manifestation.

The suggestion that the two classes of falsity in things relate by means of a focal point of reference exhibited most clearly in the first class has the advantage that it may apply to *all* cases of falsity discussed in  $\Delta$ .29, and not just the two classes of false things. All kinds of falsity are such that there is to be found in them a discrepancy between one thing and another (between being and appearing, or between the statement and the state of affairs to which it refers, or between what is known by a person and what is said or done by him/her, etc.). This also explains how the decreasing scale of causal power across the three different fields of falsity in Aristotle’s exposition may be understood. The essence of falsity, we are led to conclude, lies in rupture, and *the prime case of rupture is ontological difference*. Falsity is therefore *a necessary by-product of ontological determinacy*. Only a homogeneous Parmenidean Being would shun falsity from the world. But it would *eo ipso* exclude truth too, insofar as truth is meant to be correspondence, as distinct from identity, between mind and thing (as it was meant to be in  $\Gamma$ .7).

In conclusion, we may say that, from the dual account of false things at the beginning of the chapter to the account of false persons at its end, Aristotle assumes that a fundamental *difference* operates in all cases of falsity, be they ‘factual’, ‘propositional’ or ‘ethical’. The difference may be between one entity (with its necessary and contingent properties) and another, or between an object and its appearance, or between a statement and its reference, or between what a person knows and what his/her sayings and doings purport to manifest. In trying to delve deeper into the fundamental cause or starting-point ( $\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\eta$ ) that allows for the possibility of such a difference we have found out that for Aristotle difference is a necessary outcome of the ontological *determinacy of essence*, i.e. of the priority of form over matter and of actuality over potentiality, as the central books of the *Metaphysics* will clarify. What

is logically implied in Aristotle's account of  $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\delta\omicron\varsigma$  in  $\Delta.29$  may help us understand why the false is included in the philosophical dictionary of the *Metaphysics*.<sup>6\*</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to the editors of *Rhizai* for some very perceptive suggestions.