

Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* 8 is about Ambiguity

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My goal in this paper is to show that, contrary to the prevalent view, in his *De Interpretatione* 8, Aristotle is concerned with homonymy; more precisely, with homonymy of linguistic expressions as it may occur in dialectical argument. The paper has two parts. In the first part, I argue that in *Soph. el.* 175^b39–176^a5 Aristotle indubitably deals with homonymy in dialectical argument; that *De Interpretatione* 8 is a parallel to *Soph. el.* 175^b39–176^a5; that *De Interpretatione* 8 is concerned with dialectical argument; that, hence, *De Interpretatione* 8, too, deals with homonymy in dialectical argument. In the second part I discuss objections that have been put forward against the view that *De Interpretatione* 8 is about homonymy and demonstrate that they do not succeed.

1. HOMONYMY IN SOPHISTICAL REFUTATIONS 17 AND *DE INTERPRETATIONE* 8

In chapter 17 of his *Sophistici Elenchi* (or *Sophistical Refutations*), Aristotle makes the following remarks about fallacies of homonymy:

If nobody ever made two questions into one question, the fallacy based on homonymy and amphiboly would not have come about, but either a refutation or no refutation. For how does asking whether Callias and Themistocles are musical differ from <what one might ask> if both, though being different people, shared a single name? *For if the name indicated¹ more than one thing, <the questioner> asked more than one question.* Now, if it is not right to ask to be given without qualification one answer to two questions, it is clear that it is not proper to answer without qualification any homonymous <questions>. (Arist. *Soph. el.* 175^b39–176^a5, my italics)

Myles Burnyeat has been a source of inspiration for me for many years, both through his boundless expertise and enthusiasm in ancient philosophy and as a friend, and I am pleased to dedicate this paper to him.

¹ I translate *δηλώω* by 'indicate' and *σημαίνω* by 'signify', but I believe that Aristotle uses them interchangeably in the passages I discuss; see below n. 11.

Aristotle here gives some explanation about the 'fallacy based on homonymy and amphiboly'. In modern terms, these are, roughly, the fallacies that come about as a result of either lexical ambiguity or ambiguity of phrases.² The example Aristotle uses is one of lexical ambiguity only, but what he says may be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to structural ambiguities, too. There can be absolutely no doubt that in the passage quoted Aristotle discusses homonymy: he mentions homonymy three times.³

In the passage, Aristotle's explanation of the fallacy of homonymy works by analogy. He starts with the assumption that someone who asks 'Are Callias and Themistocles musical?' puts forward two questions. These are, we can confidently assume, the questions 'Is Callias musical?' and 'Is Themistocles musical?'. So here we have what Aristotle seems to regard as an obvious case in which two questions are asked with one sentence.⁴ And he states that a questioner in a dialectical game who asks 'to be given without qualification one answer to two questions', i.e. who demands the answerer to answer without qualification either 'yes' or 'no' to 'Are Callias and Themistocles musical?' does something that is not right. All this Aristotle appears to take as given in the passage quoted.

Aristotle then draws the analogy by moving from sentences with two subject expressions to sentences with one, ambiguous, subject expression of the kind that occurs in fallacies of homonymy. Imagine that the questioner asked, 'Is Callias musical?', but there are actually two Calliases present, one musical and one not. Call the musical one Callias_m, the unmusical one Callias_n. Then we have a 'homonymous question', potentially leading to a fallacy of homonymy.⁵ Aristotle argues that here, too, we have two questions asked with one sentence, since the name ('Callias') signifies more than one thing (*Soph. el.* 176a2). These two questions are 'Is Callias musical?' and 'Is Callias musical?', where in one question 'Callias' signifies Callias_m, and in the other question 'Callias' signifies Callias_n. Aristotle draws the conclusion that, hence, in this case, too, the questioner does something wrong, if he demands the answerer to answer without qualification either 'yes' or 'no' to 'Is Callias musical?'.⁶

Thus, according to Aristotle, if, as in the case of fallacies of homonymy, we have as a premiss or as a conclusion a question sentence that contains an ambiguous term, the questioner has asked more than one question: two questions if the term has two significations, three questions if the term has three significations, etc.

² Sometimes Aristotle seems to use 'amphiboly' (*ἀμφιβολία*) in a wider sense, where it also covers cases in which we have an (obscured) lack of specificity; cf. e.g. *Rh.* 1407^a33–9, where the Delphic Oracle is unspecific about whose realm Croesus is going to destroy if he crosses the Hades.

³ The third time is at the end of the section, at *Soph. el.* 176^a15.

⁴ Aristotle has a test for whether what is asked with one question sentence is two questions. If we could give different answers to whether Callias is musical and whether Themistocles is musical, there must be two questions in the one sentence (e.g. *Soph. el.* 177^a9–15).

⁵ Aristotelian homonymy covers both cases in which one proper name has more than one referent and cases in which one common noun has more than one meaning.

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Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, chapter 8, is a close parallel to the *Sophistici elenchi* passage, with the non-essential differences (i) that instead of proper names we seem to have common nouns, and (ii) that the focus is on statements rather than on questions:

But if one name is assigned to two things which do not make up one thing, there is not a single affirmation, nor is there a single negation.⁶ Suppose, for example, that someone assigned the name cloak to horse and to human being; then a cloak is white would not be a single affirmation. For to say this is <then> no different from saying a horse and a human being is white, and this is no different from saying a horse is white and a human being is white.⁷ *So if these last <affirmations> signify more than one thing and are more than one <affirmation>, clearly the first also signifies either more than one thing or else nothing—for it is not the case that some human being is a horse. (Arist. Int. 8 18^a18–26, my italics)*

Again, Aristotle argues by analogy from a sentence with two subject expressions to a sentence with one ambiguous subject expression. Someone states the sentence (S1) 'A horse and a human being are white'. By stating (S1), that person makes two affirmations: 'A horse is white' and 'A human being is white'. This is so, because (S1) signifies more than one thing: it signifies both that a horse is white and that a human being is white. Hence (S1) is more than one affirmation: it is two affirmations.

The case to be explained by analogy is this: It is assumed that someone has determined that the word 'cloak' is to mean both horse and human being. Now suppose someone states the sentence (S2) 'A cloak is white'. Then there are two alternatives. The first is that (S2) signifies more than one thing: it signifies both a horse and a human being. And by stating (S2), the person makes two affirmations: (A1) 'A cloak is white' and (A2) 'A cloak is white', where in (A1) 'cloak' signifies a horse that is white and in (A2) 'cloak' signifies a human being that is white. Alternatively, (S2) signifies nothing. For the only other possibility would be that (S2) signified some kind of horse–human compound that is white (a case of 'two things that make up one thing', *Int.* 8 18^a18). But such compounds don't exist, and the second alternative can hence be dismissed.

Thus, if read as a parallel to *Soph. el.* 175^b39–176^a5, *De Interpretatione* 8 is about homonymy of expressions, and in the clause 'one name ... given to two things which do not make up one thing' (*Int.* 8 18^a18) Aristotle talks about lexical ambiguity. Moreover, this interpretation is internally consistent and makes perfect sense of the entire passage.

⁶ I agree with Weidemann (1994: 222), that 'nor is there a single negation' (οὐδὲ ἀπόφασις μία) from 18^a21, which is rightly excised by Minio-Paluello, was most probably originally placed after 'affirmation' (κατάφασις) at 18^a19.

⁷ The text is ambiguous between (a) "'A horse is white and a human being is white'" and (b) "'A horse is white'" and "'A human being is white'".

The interpretation fits the immediate context of the passage from *De Interpretatione* 8⁸

It is sometimes assumed that *De Interpretatione* 8 cannot be about homonymy, because in chapters 7, 8, and 9 Aristotle introduces three exceptions to the Semantic Principle of Excluded Middle (SPEM), that of contradictory pairs of statements exactly one is true and one is false, and the first and the third exceptions introduce types of statements that can be differentiated at least in part syntactically (indefinite statements in *De Interpretatione* 7, and future contingents in *De Interpretatione* 9), whereas homonymy is a pragmatic feature. It can occur in any type of statement and you can't find out from looking at the structure of a sentence whether it contains a lexical ambiguity.

But Aristotle is fully aware that what he discusses in *De Interpretatione* 8 is of a different kind than what he discusses in Chapters 7 and 9. The result in Chapter 7 is (i) that for particular, universal, and singular statements, necessarily one of a contradictory pair is true and the other false; but (ii) that this does not hold for contradictory pairs of indefinite statements like '(a) human being is white', '(a) human being is not white'; they can both be true (*Int.* 18^a8–12) at the same time. This result, i.e. (i) and (ii), is based on the assumption that in the pairs of contradictions, exactly one affirmation is contradictorily opposed to exactly one negation (*Int.* 17b37–40, 18^a8–9; cf. *Int.* 18^a13–14, 18^a18–19). Call this the singularity requirement for SPEM. At the beginning of *De Interpretatione* 8 Aristotle explicates the singularity requirement,⁹ and then discusses cases in which this singularity requirement is tacitly violated: that is, cases in which, syntactically, it looks as if we have exactly one (*μία*) affirmation opposed to exactly one (*μία*) negation, but nonetheless this is not so. These are (or at least include) cases of homonymy.

Thus we can understand the clause that concludes *De Interpretatione* 8, which follows immediately after the passage quoted above:

Hence in these <affirmations and negations>,¹⁰ too, it is not necessary that the one of a contradictory pair is true and the other false. (*Int.* 8 18^a26–7)

⁸ This section is boring and may be skipped without much loss.

⁹ The first sentence of *Int.* 8 does not introduce a new topic, as the medieval chapter division and Ackrill's translation may make one think. (Ackrill (1963) suppresses the connective particle 'δέ' in 18^a12.) Rather, with 'but single are those affirmations and negations which ...' (*μία δέ ἐστι κατάφασις καὶ ἀπόφασις ἢ ...*) Aristotle picks up 'a single' (*μία*) from the beginning of the previous sentence: 'a single (*μία*) affirmation is contradictorily opposed to a single (*μία*) negation'. Thus all of *Int.* 8 is, in a way, a gloss on *Int.* 18^a8–9. (Perhaps the δέ in 18^a12 picks up the μέν from 18^a8, and we don't have a μέν οὖν? I owe this suggestion to Jonathan Barnes.)

¹⁰ What is the antecedent of 'these' (which is in the feminine, *ταύταις* (*Int.* 8 18^a26))? The context requires it to pick up 'affirmations and negations' from 18^a19. It is sometimes assumed that the immediate antecedent of *ταύταις* is 'these' (*αὗται*) in *Int.* 18^a24, since it is the closest feminine plural. But this can't be. Let us assume by hypothesis that *αὗται* is the antecedent of *ταύταις*. This raises the question: what is the antecedent of *αὗται*? The answer depends on how one takes (i) *ἔστιν ἵππος λευκός καὶ ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος λευκός* (18^a23) from the preceding sentence (18^a21–3):

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Any statement that contains a homonymous subject expression (or predicate expression, for that matter), is a possible exception to SPEM. Take the syntactically contradictory pair (A3) 'Every cloak is rational' and (N1) 'Some cloak is not rational'.¹¹ According to *De Interpretatione* 8, each is two statements; (A3) is two affirmations, and (N1) is two negations. One of the affirmations is true, one false, and one of the negations is true, one false. It is quite unclear what semantic value that gives to (A3) and (N1), if any, in Aristotle's eyes. But we can rule out that Aristotle regarded either of them as true. Hence, SPEM doesn't hold for the syntactically contradictory pair (A3), (N1). However, as statements like (A3) and (N1) violate the singularity restriction, they had effectively already been ruled out as candidates for SPEM in *De Interpretatione* 7. All Aristotle does in chapter 8 is to make such cases explicit.

De Interpretatione 9 begins thus:

With regard to what is and what has been it is necessary for the affirmation or the negation to be true or false. And with universals taken universally it is always necessary for one to be true and the other false, and with particulars too, as we have said. (*Int.* 8 18^a28–31, trans. Ackrill)

If *De Interpretatione* 8 were on a par with chapters 7 and 9, and had introduced simply another case of exceptions to SPEM on a par with those in chapters 7

(a) If one takes it as one utterance, *αὔται* must refer to this utterance together with (ii) *ἔστιν ἵππος καὶ ἄνθρωπος λευκός* from 18^a22.

(b) If one takes it as two utterances, separated by *καὶ*, *αὔται* either refers solely to these two utterances (distributively), or to them together with (ii).

Regardless of whether (a) or (b) is correct, *αὔται* refers to the analogon of the analogy Aristotle uses in *Int.* 8.

This fact can be used to show the absurdity of the hypothesis that the immediate antecedent of *ταύταις* is *αὔται*. Aristotle introduced (i) and (ii) to draw an analogy; by contrast, (iii) is the example for the kinds of statement that are the *topic* of *Int.* 8, i.e. the statements in which *δυνεῖν ἐν ὄνομα κείται, ἐξ ὧν μὴ ἔστιν ἓν*. And it would be absurd if, instead of drawing a conclusion about what the topic of the passage is, Aristotle drew a conclusion about the analogon he introduced in an example in order to elucidate the topic of the passage.

αὔται is hence not the immediate antecedent of *ταύταις*. What is it, then? Aristotle's conclusion in the *ὥστε* clause should be about the topic of *Int.* 8, i.e. the statements in which *δυνεῖν ἐν ὄνομα κείται, ἐξ ὧν μὴ ἔστιν ἓν*. Therefore I suggest that Aristotle speaks loosely, and that the immediate antecedent is *ἡ πρώτη* (18^a25), whose immediate antecedent in turn is the illustrative statement (iii). Aristotle speaks loosely in so far as he uses 'Hence, in the case of these, too, it is not the case ...' (*ὥστε οὐδ' ἐν ταύταις*) as short for saying 'Hence, in the case of statements like this one, too, it is not the case ...'. Read in this way, the *ταύταις* of *Int.* 8 18^b6 fits perfectly with the rest of the passage *Int.* 8 18^a18–27.

¹¹ Aristotle's own choice of 'A cloak is white' (if that was his choice) is unfortunate, in so far as it is an indefinite statement, and SPEM does not hold for it anyhow. If we read, instead, 'Cloak is white' and 'Cloak is not white' (with cloak as a generic), we don't fare much better. First, Aristotle would have changed how he understands indefinite statements quite suddenly and without warning. Second, both his examples, 'Human being is white' and 'Horse is white' (*Int.* 8 18^a23) would be blatantly false, which goes against the almost universal practice in ancient logic of using illustrative statements that are true. The quirky interpretation that Aristotle uses *ἱμάτιον* as a name ('Cloaky') fares best here.

and 9, this sentence would be evidently false. For what Aristotle has shown in chapter 8 implies that even for universals taken universally there are exceptions to SPEM—take the example of (A3) and (N1). However, if, as I suggest, chapter 8 is an extended gloss on 'μία' from chapter 7, there is nothing odd with the first sentence of chapter 9. Aristotle simply picks up his thought from before his little detour. Statements with homonymous expressions have been excluded because they violate one of the requirements for SPEM, not because they are exceptions to SPEM.

The immediate context of the controversial passage from *De Interpretatione* 8 hence fits nicely with the assumption that Aristotle discusses linguistic homonymy in that passage.

The differences between *Soph. el.* 175^b39–176^a5 and *Int.* 8 18^a18–26

We still need to explain the four differences between the parallel passages from *Sophistical Refutations* and *De Interpretatione*, and why they are immaterial for the question as to whether Aristotle deals with linguistic homonymy in *De Interpretatione* 8.¹²

(i) Proper names versus common nouns

In the *Sophistici Elenchi* passage Aristotle uses proper names as examples for homonymous expressions. In *De Interpretatione* 8, arguably, Aristotle uses a common noun in his example. Does this give us reason to doubt that *De Interpretatione* 8 is a parallel to *Soph. el.* 175^b39–176^a5? It does not. First, although at some point Aristotle becomes aware of the difference, he often lumps proper names and common nouns together in one category: names, ὀνόματα (e.g. *Int.* 1 and 2). Second, Aristotle's notion of homonymy equally covers common nouns and proper names. Third, we have examples with common nouns of fallacies of homonymy in the *Sophistical Refutations*, and nothing in 175^b39–176^a5 suggests that what Aristotle argues there is restricted to those fallacies of homonymy that contain a homonymous proper name.

(ii) 'are' (εἶσιν) versus 'is' (ἔστιν)

In *Soph. el.*, Aristotle uses 'are' in the analogon, whereas in *De Interpretatione* he uses 'is':¹³

¹² I discuss three of these differences in this section. A fourth difference is that in *Int.* 8 Aristotle restricts consideration to 'things which do not make up one thing', but in *Soph. el.* 17 there is no such clause. I discuss this restriction below together with the prevalent view. A fifth difference is that in the *Soph. el.* passage Aristotle uses 'to indicate' (δηλόω), whereas in the *De Interpretatione* passage he uses 'to signify' (σημαίνω). This difference is not significant, however, as is shown by the fact that in several parallel passages in *Soph. el.* Aristotle uses 'to signify', and in *Int.* 17^a16 he uses 'to indicate'. (These passages are quoted below.)

¹³ Here, I disregard distinctions (i) and (iii), as they seem irrelevant to (ii).

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For to say this is <then> no different from saying a horse and a human being is (*ἔστιν*) white, and this is no different from saying a horse is white and a human being is white ... (*Int.* 18^a22–3)

Does this matter? First, there is a natural explanation for this difference from the direction in which Aristotle presents the argument. In the *Soph. el.* sentence, Aristotle works from 'a and b are F' to 'c is F', where 'c' has two significations. In the *De Interpretatione* sentence, Aristotle works from 'c is F' to 'a and b is F'. Thus he may have simply opted each time for the minimal change from one sentence to the next, without intending anything different. Second, we have four different syntactic structures, (a) to (d):

(a)	<i>είσιν x καὶ y F</i>	x and y are F	(explanandum)
(b)	<i>ἔστιν x καὶ y F</i>	x and y is F	(explanandum)
(c)	<i>ἔστιν x F καὶ ἔστιν y F</i>	x is F and y is F	(explanandum)
(d)	<i>ἔστι z F</i>	z is F	(explanans)

In *De Interpretatione* Aristotle works from (d) via (b) to (c). In *Soph. el.* he works from (a) directly to (d), although (d) is not explicitly given. Rightly or wrongly, Aristotle assumes that both (a) and (c) are *evidently* saying two things, and that (b) and (c) are evidently equivalent, and argues from there that the explanans, too, is saying two things, if not evidently so. So although (a), (b), and (c) may all differ in some important respect, this is not germane to the point that Aristotle is making.¹⁴

(iii) Affirmations versus questions

In *Soph. el.* 175^b39–176^a5 Aristotle considers homonymy in questions. This is so, because in the *Sophistici Elenchi* he discusses fallacies directly as they occur within the dialectical game, where every premiss and conclusion is asked by the questioner, and the answerer is expected to reply.¹⁵ By contrast, in *De Interpretatione* Aristotle generally considers not questions but declarative statements (*λόγοι ἀποφαντικοί, ἀπόφανσεις*), and their two basic types, affirmation and negation. Does this mean that in *De Interpretatione* Aristotle is not discussing dialectic? Certainly not. As C. W. A. Whitaker has shown in great detail, in *De Interpretatione* Aristotle discusses affirmations and negations with dialectic at least in the back of his mind.¹⁶ Dialectic is not all questions. Rather, dialectic is crucially concerned with truth-evaluable items. For Aristotle, truth-bearers, at least

¹⁴ The context in *Soph. el.* strongly suggests that Aristotle parses (a) 'x and y are F' as 'x is F and y is F', or "'x is F' and 'y is F'", and thus that he takes it to be equivalent to (c).

¹⁵ For dialectic at Aristotle's time see e.g. Smith 1997, introduction.

¹⁶ Whitaker 1996: *passim*. However, Whitaker, following Ackrill, believes that the passage quoted does not cover homonyms. I consider his arguments below.

those relevant to dialectic discourse, are linguistic items (Arist. *Int.* 16^a9–11, 16^b33–17^a3). Thus, statements (*ἀπόφανσεις*), in particular affirmations and negations, are the entities that are either true or false. In the context of dialectic, affirmations and negations *qua* truth-bearers enter in at least four ways: First, they are the answers to dialectical questions. For example, if the question is 'Is animal the genus of human?', the possible answers are the affirmative statement 'Animal is the genus of human' and the negative statement 'Animal is not the genus of human'. 'Yes' and 'no' are abbreviations for the affirmative and negative answer respectively.¹⁷ Second, Aristotle also sometimes says that what is said in a dialectical question is 'true' or 'false'.¹⁸ We can assume that what is, in this sense, said in a question could be expressed by the corresponding affirmative statement if the question is in positive form and by the corresponding negative statement if the question is in negative form. Third, we can imagine an entire fallacy explicitly put in declarative sentences rather than questions—for instance, when someone tries to solve it by himself, at his leisure, without being subjected to questions. Aristotle mentions this possibility for example at *Soph. el.* 177^a6–8. Fourth, the questioner may at any point give a summary of the premisses admitted up to then, and this would be done in the form of affirmative statements rather than questions.¹⁹ Even if Whitaker's conclusion that *De Interpretatione* is all about dialectic may be a little too narrow, there can be no doubt that elements from dialectic are sprinkled throughout the work, and that *De Interpretatione* would have been useful for participants in dialectical games.

Thus, we can conclude, in *De Interpretatione* 8, Aristotle may well discuss cases of homonymy as they would occur in dialectic; and that is first and foremost, in fallacies of homonymy. He holds that in dialectic, (i) someone using a homonymous expression when putting forward a question sentence may ask two questions,²⁰ and (ii) someone using a homonymous expression when stating a declarative sentence may make two statements—either two affirmations or two negations.²¹ He discusses (i) in *Sophistici Elenchi* 17 and (ii) in *De Interpretatione* 8.

¹⁷ Cf. e.g. Whitaker 1996: 101.

¹⁸ e.g. *Top.* VIII 7 160^a25.

¹⁹ We find this frequently in Plato's dialogues.

²⁰ Cf. also *Top.* 160^a23–9, quoted below.

²¹ Thus, for Aristotle, one statement is more than one statement (more than one affirmation or more than one negation), and one question is more than one question. How can this be? Statements as well as affirmations and questions are linguistic items; but evidently the one statement that is two statements (two affirmations or two negations) must differ from those two, since it is subject to different rules of individuation from the latter. For the same reason, the one question that is two questions must differ from those two. We could say that *by* putting forward one question sentence the speaker asks two questions; and *by* putting forward one declarative sentence the speaker makes two statements (affirmations, negations) or states (affirms, negates) two things. We could think of the sentences as grammatical items, the statements (affirmations and negations) and questions as semantic items (that have a certain grammatical form). This fits the fact that Aristotle mostly talks as if it is the latter who are (or correspond to) truth-bearers. But Aristotle is not consistent on this point, and we are left with a muddle.

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Homonymy in ordinary discourse versus homonymy in dialectic

This result suggests that we cannot infer that what Aristotle says about homonymy of expressions in *De Interpretatione* 8 is what he thinks about homonymy of expressions generally. (Nor can we rule it out.) In everyday life, people normally use ambiguous expressions in such a way that either (i) the non-linguistic or (ii) the linguistic context disambiguates the expressions. Moreover (iii), metaphors, poetry, and deliberate deception aside, speakers will intend exactly one signification of a homonymous expression. (i) When I state (S3) 'I'm going to the bank' and wield a cheque that needs to be deposited, this will make it clear that 'bank' refers to a monetary institution. (ii) When I state (S4) 'The local bank doesn't sell Euros', the linguistic context makes it clear that 'bank' refers to a monetary institution. (iii) Each time I intend the signification 'monetary institution', and presumably the notion of the verge of a river doesn't even cross my mind. It seems at least possible that Aristotle thought along these lines and would have taken (S3) and (S4) each to be just one affirmation, especially since Aristotle's logic mostly deals with oral statements as primary truth-bearers.²²

However, I am not here concerned with Aristotle's view on homonymy in ordinary discourse. Regardless of whether he thought that in ordinary discourse context disambiguates, in dialectic the situation is different. Dialectic is a game which the questioner has won when he has led the answerer to contradict himself. And although sophistry is not allowed officially, if the questioner can smuggle it in unnoticed to produce a contradiction, he will, to all intents and purposes, have won the game.²³ Fallacies of homonymy and ambiguity are particularly useful for this purpose. And here we have the—interesting—case that the questioner may put forward a statement and leave it deliberately unclear which, if any, is the intended meaning. Most probably, the questioner has no intention one way or the other, since the response of the answerer may determine which way the argumentation takes. In addition, dialectical discourse differs from ordinary discourse in that both linguistic and non-linguistic context tend to be, by comparison, impoverished.

Aristotle himself never comes quite clear about what he takes to be the criterion for when a speaker who uses a homonymous expression in a sentence asks more than one question or makes more than one statement. Mostly speaker intention appears to be irrelevant.²⁴ But there is evidence in Aristotle's logical writings that

²² Cf. e.g. *Int.* 1. If, in *Int.* 8, Aristotle doesn't discuss homonymy in general, this fact may explain also why in *Int.* 8 Aristotle does not state that he discusses homonymy. He is not interested in the general phenomenon of homonymy, but in a specific phenomenon that we can observe in certain cases in which homonymous expressions are used, as we encounter it—among other things—in dialectic.

²³ Cf. Arist. *Soph. el.* 17 175a39–41, where Aristotle notes that we have to beware of *seeming* to be refuted.

²⁴ There is one passage, *Soph. el.* 178^a27–8, where 'listener decoding' seems to matter to whether or not an answerer has been refuted.

it is a sufficient condition for a case of ambiguity in which someone makes two statements simultaneously by stating one declarative sentence²⁵ when (i) we have an ambiguous expression in the statement and (ii) it is unclear to the listeners which of the two possible significations of the ambiguous expression, if any, is intended by the speaker.

Here are some passages from *Sophistici Elenchi* chapters 17 and 19 and from *Topics* VIII 7 which support the point that Aristotle believes that in some fallacies of homonymy and amphiboly the questioner simultaneously asks two questions, and that in those cases two things are said simultaneously with the question sentence. In *Sophistici Elenchi* 19 Aristotle begins with some general remarks about such fallacies:

(1) Now, of the refutations that depend upon homonymy and ambiguity some have one of the premise-questions with more than one signified thing ... e.g. ... in the <argument> that the one who knows does not understand <what he knows> one of the premise-questions is ambiguous. (2) And that which is said in two ways is in the one case <true> and in the other it isn't; and that which is said in two ways signifies something that is and something that is not. ... (*Soph. el.* 177^a9–15)

In (2), Aristotle picks up on what he said at *Soph. el.* 175^b39–176^a18 (quoted above)—that is, that the questioner asks two questions in one, and that the ambiguous expression has two 'signified things' at the same time. The first clause of (2) makes sense only if we assume that with the phrase 'is in one case <true> and in the other it isn't' (*ὅτ' ἐ μὲν ... ὅτ' ἐ δ'* ...). Aristotle intends the two ways in which the thing is said; or more precisely, these two ways as they are simultaneously signified *when* the premiss question is uttered. For only then is it reasonable to say that one is (true), the other isn't.²⁶ This is confirmed by the way the passage continues:

(3) Whenever <that which is said in several ways>²⁷ lies in the premise-questions, it is not necessary to begin by denying that which is said in two ways; for argument is not for the sake of this, but through this. (4) At the beginning one should reply concerning that which is said in two ways, whether it is a word or a phrase, in this way, that in one sense

²⁵ Or in which someone asks two questions simultaneously by putting forward one question sentence.

²⁶ If Aristotle had meant to use 'ὅτ' ἐ μὲν ... ὅτ' ἐ δ'

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it is so, and in another not so, (5) for example that speaking of the silent is possible in one sense but not in another. (*Soph. el.* 177^a18–23)

The premiss here is 'Speaking of the silent is possible' (cf. *Soph. el.* 4 166^a12–14). This is a case where it is unclear to the listener which signification, if any, the questioner is intending, and the context does not disambiguate.²⁸ Hence it falls to the answerer to disambiguate: that is, to say that the premiss has one signification that makes it true and another that makes it false. Thus evidently Aristotle takes the premiss to have two significations at the same time.²⁹ Two short passages from *Sophistici Elenchi* 17 confirm that Aristotle discusses cases of homonymy and ambiguity in which one premiss has two significations at the same time:

Now, if it is not right to ask to be given without qualification one answer to two questions, it is clear that it is not proper to answer without qualification any homonymous <questions>. (*Soph. el.* 176^a3–5)

This passage implies that homonymous questions may have two significations simultaneously. For otherwise one could give one answer without qualification.

Now, if one should not give a single answer to two questions, it is evident that in the case of homonyms one should not say 'yes' or 'no' either; for the one who says <that> has not given an answer, he has merely spoken. (*Soph. el.* 176^a14–16)

This passage, too, implies that homonymous questions may have two significations simultaneously. For otherwise, by saying 'yes' or 'no' the answerer would have given an answer. Finally, a passage from the *Topics* corroborates the same point:

If <the answerer> understands the question, but it is said in several ways, then ... if what is said is, <said> in one way, false and, <said> in the other, true, he should indicate that it is said in several ways, and that in one it is false, in the other true. For if he makes the distinction only later, it is unclear whether he saw the ambiguity at the beginning. (*Top.* 160^a23–9)

Here Aristotle discusses a case of fallacy of ambiguity (*τὸ ἀμφίβολον*) in which only one question is asked, and it is said in several ways (i.e. it is ambiguous), and this one question simultaneously has two significations—or is two questions, as

²⁸ In fact, we may have some sort of 'second-order' intention: the questioner may intend that their intention is unclear to the answerer.

²⁹ Cf. Arist. *Soph. el.* 4 166^a12–14: 'Moreover, "speaking of the silent is possible"; for "speaking of the silent" has a double meaning. It may mean that the speaker is silent and that the things of which he speaks are so.' The passage in *Soph. el.* 19 continues: 'and that in one sense one should do what must be done, but not in another; for what must be done is said in several ways' (*Soph. el.* 177^a23–4). The corresponding fallacy is 'Things that must be are good. Evils must be. Hence evils are good.' In this case, the immediate linguistic context is likely to make the innocent answerer take the meaning to differ from premiss to premiss. Still, there is no way of guessing the meaning(s) intended by the questioner. The fact that Aristotle wants the answerer to determine explicitly in which way the ambiguous expression is to be understood in each premiss implies that he thought that otherwise each premiss might have two meanings at the same time.

Aristotle would put it. For if it had only one signification when asked, there would be no reason for the answerer to disambiguate the premiss before answering it.

These quotes taken together support the following interpretation: Aristotle's criterion for whether we have two questions or statements in one seems to be independent of speaker intention. This is further confirmed by the fact that Aristotle considers the case that we try to solve a fallacy at our leisure without anybody actually asking the questions (*Soph. el.* 177^a6–8), and thus without any questioner having any intentions. Rather, at least in the context of dialectic, a sufficient condition for having two questions or statements in one, with two simultaneous significations, seems to be that neither the linguistic nor the non-linguistic context³⁰ disambiguates.³¹ In actual question-and-answer situations, a consequence of this is that the speaker's intention is unclear to the listeners.

2. THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE VIEW THAT *DE INTERPRETATIONE* 8 IS ABOUT HOMONYMY

The prevalent view and the challenge it poses to my interpretation

Before I discuss the arguments against the view that *De Interpretatione* 8 is about homonymy, I should briefly state what the prevailing view is. The most famous proponent of this view is John Ackrill. The most recent defendant is C. W. A. Whitaker. This view assumes that Aristotle wants us to give '(a) cloak' the conjunctive sense '(a) horse and (a) human being', which, however, is not to be understood as equivalent to '(a) horse-and-human-being';³² the latter we might characterize as giving '(a) cloak' a unifying as opposed to a conjunctive sense.

³⁰ Interestingly and oddly, *Soph. el.* 175^b15–24 suggests that for Aristotle the non-linguistic context of our pointing at an object (a Coriscus) while using a demonstrative phrase ('this Coriscus') does not serve to disambiguate the statement 'This Coriscus is musical' made in the presence of two Coriscuses.

³¹ Can the facts (i) that at *Soph. el.* 4 166^a4–5 Aristotle uses *ὅτι μὲν ... ὅτι δ'* ... to explain double signification, and (ii) that at *Soph. el.* 4 166^a20–1 he uses *ἢ ... ἢ ...* when saying that an expression signifies two things, be used to rebut my claim that for Aristotle, in dialectical contexts, question sentences and declarative sentences containing ambiguous expressions have two significations at the same time? I believe not. Above (in n. 26) I have shown that Aristotle uses *ὅτι μὲν ... ὅτι δ'* ... non-temporally for double signification. At 166^a4–5 he may do just the same. And as in English the two sentences "bank" means both "verge of river" and "financial institution" and "bank" means either "verge of river" or "financial institution" do not usually allow any inference as to whether the speaker assumes that the word has both meanings at the same time, so for Greek sentences with *ἢ ... ἢ ...* . (Cf. also in the *same* passage on ambiguity the use of *καὶ ... καὶ ...* at 166^a8 and of *καὶ* at 166^a14 in sentences that contain double signification.) Alternatively, one has to assume that what Aristotle says about homonymy in *Soph. el.* 4 at 166^a4–5 and 166^a20–1 is about cases like the fallacy with 'τὰ δέοντα', in which each premiss could be interpreted as providing sufficient linguistic context for disambiguation, and the fallacious element comes in only when the questioner pretends to draw the conclusion. But it is quite unclear whether Aristotle took this line.

³² Ackrill 1963: 130–1.

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Ackrill thinks that on this interpretation, Aristotle's two ways of understanding 'A cloak is white' are 'reasonable';³³ but he doesn't expand on what the conjunctive sense of '(a) horse and (a) human being' is. Here Whitaker chimes in and suggests that 'a statement about cloak involves making a statement both about man and about horse', and that this implies 'that "cloak" is meant as a word that is adopted to stand for two separate things misleadingly taken together as if they were a single unit, such as a horse and a rider'.³⁴

This still leaves me wondering what it is to adopt a word 'to stand for two separate things misleadingly taken together as if they were a single unit'. Taking a horse and a rider as 'a single unit' we may state 'a horse and rider is a pleasant sight'. But this is not equivalent to 'a horse is a pleasant sight and a rider is a pleasant sight'. So that is not the sort of unit that Aristotle can have in mind, as in this case the speaker doesn't make a mistake. Let's try again: taking a horse and a rider as 'a single unit' we may state 'a horse and rider is jumping over the fence'. But this is not equivalent to 'a horse is jumping over the fence and a rider is jumping over the fence'. So that is also not the sort of unit Aristotle can have in mind, as in this case, too, the speaker doesn't make a mistake. Let's try again: 'a horse and rider is white'. This could be equivalent to 'a horse is white' and 'a rider is white'. What, then, would be the mistake that Whitaker assumes Aristotle to take the speaker to make? Perhaps that the speaker assumes that there is one specific whiteness in which the horse and rider share (as it would be if someone painted a horse and rider white with body-paint), whereas each of them has their own specific whiteness? I have to admit that both Ackrill's and Whitaker's versions of the prevailing view leave me puzzled.

No doubt, the prevalent view owes its existence in part to Aristotle's restrictive clause at the beginning of our passage from *De Interpretatione* 8:

But if one name is assigned to two things which do not make up one thing, there is not a single affirmation, nor is there a single negation. (*Int.* 18^a18–19)

This clause suggests that it is somehow germane to the cloak example that (a) horse and (a) human being do not make up one thing. Thus I owe the reader an explanation of how this phrase fits in with my own interpretation, and I may as well make good on this point here. My explanation goes as follows. Underlying *De Interpretatione* 8 is Aristotle's assumption that there are two ways in which two things can be called by one name.³⁵ Take the sentence 'A and B are called C'. This can in principle be taken in the following two ways:

- (i) Here's one word, 'C'; it's a name for what is A, and it's a name for what is B.
- (ii) Here's one word, 'C'; it's a name for what is A and B.

³³ Ackrill 1963: 131.

³⁴ Whitaker 1996: 97–8.

³⁵ This is Ackrill's assumption, too; but I differ in what I think these two ways are. So does Weidemann (1994: 220).

Both (i) and (ii) are covered by a clause like: “C” is assigned to A and B’. In other words, that clause is ambiguous between (i) and (ii). The same holds for its Greek counterpart. Now, according to Aristotle, (ii) is what is typically used in definitions. For example, ‘human being’ is a name for what is rational and mortal and living; (i) is what we typically find in all other cases.³⁶

Aristotle’s course of argumentation in our passage from *De Interpretatione* 8 is then as follows: he asks the reader to take a case in which both A and B are called C (εἰ δὲ δυεῖν ἐν ὄνομα κείται, *Int.* 8 18^a18), but to set aside those cases in which A belongs essentially to all Bs or B belongs essentially to all As (ἐξ ὧν μὴ ἔστω ἐν, *ibid.*). For the remaining cases it holds that if we have a statement ‘C is D’, we do not have just one affirmation (οὐ μία κατάφασιν <οὐδὲ μία ἀπόφασιν>, *Int.* 8 18^a18–19). Aristotle then provides an example to illustrate those remaining cases (οἶον ... δῆλον ὅτι καὶ ἡ πρώτη ἦτοι πολλὰ, *Int.* 8 18^a19–25, to be interpreted as suggested above, with reading (i)). At *Int.* 8 18^a25, Aristotle reverts to reading (ii) and pre-empts a possible objection, which is: ‘but what if you take “a cloak is white” in way (ii), wouldn’t we then have just one affirmation?’ Aristotle’s retort is that if we take his example in way (ii), then we have no affirmation, since the subject term would not refer to anything (ἢ οὐδὲν σημαίνει, οὐ γὰρ ἔστω τις ἄνθρωπος ἵππος’—, *Int.* 8 18^a25–6).³⁷ This is an argument *ad hominem*; that is, it considers an objection tailored to Aristotle’s example. And as such, it succeeds.

Had Aristotle’s example been ‘assign the name “cloak” to human being and walking’, and were we to construct an exact parallel, at *Int.* 8 18^a25 he would have had to say: in this case, even with reading (ii) we have more than one affirmation, since on reading (ii) (S5) ‘a human and walking thing is white’ is equivalent to (S6) ‘a human being is white and a walking thing is white’. And—if this was Aristotle’s view³⁸—someone saying this would make (at least) two affirmations, with the difference to reading (i), that in this case the two affirmations may apply to the same individual. We know this from *De Interpretatione* 11, in which sentences like (S6) are discussed. Thus, with Aristotle’s restricting clause ‘which do not make up one thing’ in place, it holds for all remaining cases of one name assigned to two things that, whether you choose reading (i), as Aristotle discusses in *Int.* 8 18^a19–25, or reading (ii), as Aristotle discusses for

³⁶ One might suggest that no one would ever *assign* the same name to two different (kinds of) things. Yet, the multiple use of one and the same proper name proves this wrong; and in the case of common nouns, the Stoics, e.g., are a wonderful counter-example, as their philosophy is full of terms which they deliberately use in more than one way. In any event, it is irrelevant to Aristotle’s point whether the one name is assigned to two things or happens to designate two things or to hold of two kinds of thing.

³⁷ My interpretation requires the clause ‘οὐ γὰρ ἔστω τις ἄνθρωπος ἵππος’ to explicate ‘ἢ οὐδὲν σημαίνει’ only.

³⁸ *Int.* 11 20^b18–22 rather suggests that Aristotle would consider (S5) equivalent to (S7) ‘a human being is white and a walking thing is white and the human being and the walking thing are the same thing’ or something along these lines.

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his particular example in *Int.* 8 18^a25–6, you never make exactly one statement, and never signify exactly one thing. You either overshoot or undershoot. This is how my interpretation integrates the clause 'ἐξ ὧν μὴ ἔστιν ἓν'.

I now turn to the arguments in favour of the view that in *De Interpretatione* 8 Aristotle does not discuss homonymy. I will consider Ackrill's and Whitaker's arguments in turn.

Ackrill's arguments

Ackrill nowhere directly argues for his view. He bases it on the assumption that in *De Interpretatione* 8 Aristotle discusses the same issue that he discusses in chapter 5 and at the beginning of chapter 11.³⁹ However, there is no evidence for this assumption. In chapter 5 Aristotle does not in any way refer to what he says in chapter 8; and neither does he give any indication in chapter 11 that he has discussed before what he discusses there, nor does he give any indication in chapter 8 that he has discussed what he discusses there before in *De Interpretatione* or that he will discuss it again later in *De Interpretatione*.

Let us briefly see what it is that Aristotle discusses in the presumed parallels in chapters 5 and 11. The relevant sentence in *De Interpretatione* 5 is this:

A piece of statement-making discourse is one, if either it indicates one <thing> or it is one by a connective; a piece of statement-making discourse is many, if either it <indicates> many <things> and not one or it is connective-less. (*Int.* 5 17^a15–17)⁴⁰

Aristotle distinguishes two criteria for whether a piece of statement-making speech is one or many: First, are one or more things indicated? Second, are the relevant parts of the statement-making discourse connected by a connective or not?

The second criterion is fairly straightforward and not relevant here. Cf. (S8) 'Callias is white, Socrates is not white' with (S9) 'Either Callias is white or Socrates is not white'. (Recall that for Aristotle sentences or statements (*ἀποφάνσεις*) are primarily utterances.⁴¹) (S8) is a piece of statement-making discourse that makes two simple statements. (S9) is a piece of statement-making discourse that makes one compound statement.⁴²

The first criterion is the relevant one: Are one or more things indicated? In simple statements, we have one piece of statement-making discourse if only one thing is indicated. We have more than one piece of statement-making discourse if more than one thing is indicated. In *De Interpretatione* 5, Aristotle says nothing

³⁹ Cf. Ackrill 1963: 126–7, 130–2, 145–6.

⁴⁰ ἐστι δὲ εἰς λόγος ἀποφαντικός ἢ ὁ ἐν δηλῶν ἢ ὁ συνδέσμων εἰς, πολλοὶ δὲ οἱ πολλὰ καὶ μὴ ἐν ἢ οἱ ἀσύνδετοι.

⁴¹ Moreover, when it comes to written language, there was no punctuation at Aristotle's time.

⁴² Cf. *Int.* 17^a20–3: 'is compounded of simple statements and is a kind of composite sentence' (trans. Ackrill).

further about these cases in which more than one thing is indicated; nothing at all. This is not surprising: these cases are not the topic of this chapter. They are only mentioned because they are *contrasted* with what is its topic: simple pieces of statement-making discourse that are one because they indicate one <thing>. Theoretically, there are four possibilities regarding what cases Aristotle has in mind for those cases where more than one thing is indicated, if he has anything specific in mind, that is:

1. He has in mind only what he discusses in chapter 11.
2. He has in mind only what he discusses in chapter 8.
3. He has in mind both what he discusses in chapter 8 and what he discusses in chapter 11, but chapter 8 is not about homonymy.
4. He has in mind both what he discusses in chapter 8 and what he discusses in chapter 11, and these are two different kinds of thing.⁴³

The text of chapter 5 neither favours nor precludes any of these. I believe that Aristotle did not have (3) in mind.

The relevant part of chapter 11 is:

To affirm or deny one thing of many, or many of one, is not one affirmation or negation unless the many things together make up some one thing. (I do not call them one if there exists one name but there is not some one thing they make up.) For example, man is perhaps an animal and two-footed and tame, yet these do make up some one thing; whereas white and man and walking do not make up one thing. So if (a) someone affirms some one thing of these it is not one affirmation; it is one spoken sound, but more than one affirmation. Similarly, if (b) these are affirmed of one thing, that is more than one affirmation. (*Int.* 20^b12–22, trans. Ackrill)

The aim of chapters 11 and 12 is to determine when 'To affirm or deny one thing of many, or many of one, is one affirmation or negation' and when not. This requires Aristotle to figure out when many things make up one thing and when they don't. It is the 'when they don't' things that are pertinent to us. Aristotle distinguishes two cases, (a) and (b): An example of (a) would be '(a) white walking human is musical'. An example of (b) would be 'Callias is a white walking human'. The reason we have 'more than one thing' turns out to be that 'white' and 'walking' are accidental to 'human being' (cf. *Int.* 12). The—otherwise important—details are immaterial to my purpose. What matters is this: according to Aristotle, both in (a) and in (b) we have grammatically one sentence but semantically three affirmations.

It is reasonable to assume that both (a) and (b) give us 'a piece of statement-making discourse' that is 'many' because it '<indicates> many <things>' of the kind mentioned in chapter 5. But there is nothing in the passage in chapter 11

⁴³ This doesn't preclude that each is a special kind of what Aristotle would call 'double question' when it is put in the form of a 'yes'–'no' question. Cf. *Soph. el.* 17, where Aristotle classifies the fallacy of homonymy as a kind of the fallacy of the double question.

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that suggests that Aristotle here discusses something he has already discussed before in chapter 8, or that implies that he thinks that he has already discussed it anywhere in *De Interpretatione*.⁴⁴

There is only one sentence in chapter 11 that may harp back to chapter 8: 'I do not call <many things> one if there exists one name but there is not some one thing they make up.' In chapter 8 Aristotle excluded from his discussion the cases in which two or more things that share one name make up one thing. Now, in chapter 11, what was excluded from discussion—namely, the case of many things that make up one thing—is the topic. And in the case where essential properties are predicated, like 'Human beings are two-footed, tame, living beings', the shared name ('human being') features as subject expression, and the things that make up one thing (two-footed, tame, living being) are predicated. The function of the 'I do not call ...' sentence is to prevent the reader from wrongly assuming that those things which share one name but which do not make up one thing (be that in reading (i) or (ii) above) are under discussion here, too.⁴⁵ These were exactly the things Aristotle discussed in chapter 8. Thus, far from discussing the same topic in chapters 8 and 11, careful reading shows that Aristotle discusses different topics, and takes care each time to alert the reader to what he is not discussing in the respective chapter.

In short, the results of scrutinizing the relevant passages in chapter 5 and 11 are:

- The passage in chapter 5 leaves it entirely open what the cases are in which even a simple piece of statement-making discourse indicates more than one thing.
- The passage in chapter 11 discusses cases in which one sentence has multiple subject or predicate expressions, and determines when these make up more than one statement and why. These cases are clearly different from those discussed in chapter 8, whichever interpretation of chapter 8 one prefers.
- chapter 5 in no way refers to chapter 8. The passage in chapter 11 mentions cases as discussed in chapter 8 only in order to preclude them from consideration in chapter 11.

⁴⁴ Aristotle does say that he has discussed the issue in the *Topics*, though: the passage quoted above continues: 'So if a dialectical question demands as answer either the statement proposed or one side of a contradiction (the statement in fact being a side of one contradiction), there could not be one answer in these cases. For the question itself would not be one question, even if true. These matters have been discussed in the *Topics*' (*Int.* 20^b22–26, trans. Ackrill). The passage Aristotle refers to is most probably *Soph. el.* 175^b41–176^a1 and 176^a6–14; the *Sophistici Elenchi* were originally part of the *Topics*.

⁴⁵ I put the 'I do not call ...' sentence in brackets to indicate that it is not part of Aristotle's main thought, but simply serves to exclude certain cases from discussion. That this is indeed the case is easily seen if one asks oneself what the example introduced by 'for example' (*oion*) is meant to illustrate. It can only illustrate the case Aristotle puts in the 'unless' (*εάν μη*) clause (20^b13–14), that many things together make up some one thing. The 'I do not call them one ...' sentence (20^b15–16) is a side remark on the 'unless' clause, to prevent the reader from wrongly taking certain cases as belonging to the class Aristotle introduces in the 'unless' clause.

Thus Ackrill does not succeed in backing up his claim that in chapter 8 'Aristotle is not discussing ambiguity of names' (1963: 131).⁴⁶ The merits of his interpretation of chapter 8 thus have to be judged entirely by how well it does justice to the text of chapter 8 itself. Ackrill himself argues that 'Aristotle fails to show' what he intends to show in chapter 8. That is, if interpreted in the way Ackrill does, Aristotle fails to show what, on that interpretation, he is taken to intend to show. This should make Ackrill's interpretation less plausible than interpretations like the one suggested above. Moreover, the one suggested above has the advantage of providing a clear parallel to the *Topics*, whereas there seems to be no parallel anywhere in Aristotle's writings for Ackrill's first reading of '(a) cloak is white'.

Whitaker's argument from the meaning of 'ambiguity'

Unlike Ackrill, Whitaker argues explicitly against the possibility that *De Interpretatione* 8 is about homonymy. He outlines three interpretations for Chapter 8:

Is 'cloak' supposed to be ambiguous between the two senses, so that *in certain contexts* it would mean 'man' and in others 'horse'? Or is 'man and horse' supposed to denote a compound entity, like a horse and rider, which might be talked about as a unit, without counting as one in the proper sense? Or, again, might 'cloak' be intended as the genus of man and horse? (Whitaker 1996: 96, my italics)

He argues against the first alternative thus:

Aristotle cannot mean cloak to be an ambiguous word, which might signify either man or horse. Had he meant this, 1 ['cloak is pale'] would not be equivalent to 3 ['Horse is pale and man is pale', as Aristotle argues]; instead, 'cloak is pale' would either mean 'horse is pale' or 'man is pale', depending on which sense of 'cloak' *was intended*, just as 'bank' does not mean 'a financial institution and a hill', but one or the other *depending on context*. We see instead that a statement about cloak involves making a statement both about man and about horse, not an ambiguous claim about one or the other. (Whitaker 1996: 97, my italics)

Whitaker's argument against Chapter 8 being about ambiguity fails, because his notion of ambiguity is too restricted, both from a contemporary and from Aristotle's point of view. Whitaker assumes that if an expression used in a statement is ambiguous (has more than one meaning), it means exactly one thing in that statement. As to which meaning it has, Whitaker first says that this is determined by the context, then that it is determined by the intention of the speaker, and then again that it is determined by the context. Perhaps

⁴⁶ There is also a whiff of circularity in the way Ackrill proceeds. In his commentary on chapter 8 he refers the reader to his commentary on chapter 5 (and chapter 11), but in his commentary on chapter 5 he simply says it's clear from chapter 8 (and chapter 11) that Aristotle is not speaking of ambiguity. In his commentary on chapter 11 all he says about chapter 5 and chapter 8 is that 'the question what constitutes a single affirmation or negation has already been discussed' there.

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he means that the determining element of the context *is* the intention of the speaker.

Now, it is true that in most cases in which an ambiguous expression is used in ordinary discourse, both the speaker intends exactly one meaning and the context disambiguates. But the fact that this is true does not make speaker intention and contextual disambiguation the same thing. Nor does it make either speaker intention or contextual disambiguation a defining element of a statement containing an ambiguous expression. There are certain situations in which a speaker may utter a sentence containing an ambiguous expression, in which (i) the speaker does not intend either meaning and/or (ii) the context does not disambiguate. These include situations of dialectical discourse.⁴⁷

As we have seen above, it is Aristotle's view that in situations of dialectical discourse, statements containing an ambiguous expression may preserve both meanings of the expression at the same time, and that this is standardly so in fallacies of homonymy.

Now, the *De Interpretatione* is concerned with dialectical discourse.⁴⁸ This is the main thesis of Whitaker, which he argues in his book *passim*. That is, *De Interpretatione* is precisely about situations in which, when ambiguous expressions are used, the speaker may not intend exactly one signification, and in which there may be no disambiguating context. Thus Whitaker is not successful in his argument against the view that *De Interpretatione* 8 is about ambiguity. Rather, he himself provides us with the perfect reason why Aristotle is in fact discussing ambiguity here: the *De Interpretatione* is—among other things—concerned with dialectical discourse, and it is in dialectical discourse that we are in constant danger that a sentence containing an ambiguous expression may be stated without the context disambiguating it, and hence where the stated sentence involves two statements: in Aristotle's example, one about a horse and one about a human being.

⁴⁷ Whitaker himself admits as much where he discusses homonymy in *Soph. el.* and describes Aristotle's Coriscus example thus: "Coriscus", which stands for two men of the same name (175^b15ff.) ... "Coriscus" is ... a name which might apply to either one of the two namesakes, *although it is left unclear which* (1996: 103, my italics). If it is left unclear which of the two Coriscuses the name applies to, then either speaker intention does not disambiguate or context does not disambiguate, or both.

⁴⁸ Whitaker claims that *De Interpretatione* was 'meant to provide theoretical underpinning for dialectic, and so should be read closely with the *Topics* and *Sophistici Elenchi*, rather than with the *Categories* and *Prior Analytics*' (1996: 2) and that it 'does not take as its subject propositions, seen as the components of the syllogism, but rather contradictory pairs, which are central to the workings of dialectic' (ibid.). This seems to me to be a false contrast entirely. In Aristotle's syllogistic, it is important in many ways to know what the contradictory of a proposition is: examples are Aristotle's 'rejection proofs' (I take the term from Smith (1989: p. xxii) and deductions through impossibility, both central to Aristotle's syllogistic; moreover, contradictories feature in syllogisms from a hypothesis generally, and the reader's knowledge of what the contradictory, or what the contrary, of a proposition is presupposed in the *Analytica priora* repeatedly. I also believe that Whitaker's claim that the topic of *De Interpretatione* is contradictory pairs is too narrow.

Whitaker's argument from the wider context in *De Interpretatione*

Whitaker attempts a second argument in favour of his view that chapter 8 is not about ambiguity due to the wider context. Whitaker argues (1996: 104–5) that in chapter 5 Aristotle restricts the scope of the discussion to simple assertions, ruling out compound assertions; and that in chapter 6 he restricts the scope further by ruling out statements which assert and deny homonymously. 'So both obviously compound assertions and those in which homonymous terms appear have been excluded from the discussion in chapters 5 and 6' (1996: 105). From this Whitaker infers that since ambiguity has already been excluded before chapter 8, in this chapter Aristotle does not discuss ambiguity (cf. 1996: 105 and again 107).

However, Whitaker's claims are not borne out by the text. The topic of chapter 5 is 'simple single-statement-making sentences' (using Ackrill's terminology). Accordingly, in chapter 5 Aristotle works toward an account of simple single-statement-making sentences. To that end, he contrasts them both with compound single-statement-making sentences and with simple non-single-statement-making sentences. He does not discuss compound single-statement-making sentences as such anywhere in the *De Interpretatione*. But he does discuss two types of simple non-single-statement-making sentences, one in chapter 8 and one in chapter 11. Thus the fact that in chapter 5 Aristotle contrasts 'simple single-statement-making sentences' with two other types of sentences does not mean that he *restricts* the discussion to the former in the sense that he will not later discuss the latter.

The topic of chapter 6 is contradictory pairs (*ἀντιφάσεις*). We find the passage in which homonymy is mentioned at the end of the chapter:

Let us call an affirmation and a negation which are opposite a contradiction. I speak of statements as opposite when they affirm and deny the same thing of the same thing—not homonymously, nor whatever other such things that we add to counter the troublesome objections of the sophists. (*Int.* 17^a33–7, trans. Ackrill)

This passage needs careful reading. In the sentence in which the word 'homonymously' occurs, Aristotle explains what he means by 'opposite' (*ἀντικείμενον*). He explains what he means by 'opposite', because he uses the expression in his definition of contradictory pair. Thus, by mentioning homonymy, he is not restricting the topic of the discussion of the *De Interpretatione* at all. Rather, he is explaining how we are to understand a term he uses in the definition of contradictory pair. He glosses his phrase 'affirm and deny the same thing of the same thing' from 17^a35: for there to be true opposites, it is not enough that we have two sentences with the same subject and predicate expression, like 'The bank is over there' and 'The bank is not over there', but the expression (here 'bank') must be used non-homonymously.

Thus we have no reason to assume that by the end of chapter 6 'homonymy, ambiguity, and other sophistic tricks [have been] excluded [from the discussion]

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as impermissible' (1996: 107) and hence cannot be discussed in Chapter 8. Thus Whitaker's second argument against the view that in Chapter 8 Aristotle discusses ambiguity (homonymy) fails, too.

CONCLUSION

I conclude that it is time that we emancipate ourselves from the bonds of Ackrill's authoritative interpretation of *De Interpretatione* 8 and see it afresh in the light of the result of Whitaker's contribution to our understanding of Aristotle's work. *De Interpretatione* is—among other things—written with a view to dialectical argument; and *De Interpretatione* 8 is about homonymy of linguistic expressions as it may occur in dialectical argument.⁴⁹

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⁴⁹ I am most grateful to Jonathan Barnes for his incisive comments on a draft version of this paper.