The meaning of the name of this work is obscure. The word "interpretation" does not occur in the body of the work itself.

The work is mainly devoted to matching pairs of opposed affirmations and negations.

Aristotle does not recognize the truth-functional operators as such, but his notion of the relation between affirmation and its contradictorily opposed negation is generally consistent with the ordinary truth-functional meaning of negation.

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There are some qualifications on this in that the principle of bivalency does not hold for certain kinds of affirmations and their contradictorily opposed negations. See below.

The principle of bivalency in the form in which Aristotle states it in this work: for each pair of contradictorily opposed affirmation and negation, one member is true and the other is false.

The beginning of the work is devoted to explicating the concept of a proposition as a part of speech (namely, a kind of "LO-GOS").

From its context within the theory of the parts of speech, it is clear that for Aristotle a proposition ("statement", in our translation) is an item of language. However, as is the case with all significant parts of speech, a proposition symbolizes thought.

CHAPTER ONE

"Prologue": four-tier theory of meaning:

- WRITTEN LANGUAGE symbolizes
- SPOKEN LANGUAGE ("in speech-sound") symbolizes
- THOUGHTS resemble
- THINGS

There is a cross-reference here to ON THE SOUL, but if this doctrine is explicated there the match is obscure.

Note that it appears that Aristotle is contrasting the relations of language to thought as conventional with the relation of thought to "things" as natural.

In all of Greek philosophy there is a pervasive concern with respect to various human institutions concerning whether they are natural or conventional. Plato addresses this issue with respect to language in the CRATYLUS. In the CRATYLUS the issue is stated as the question whether the "correctness of names" is by nature or by convention.

From the present passage and from the discussion of nouns in Chapter 2 it seems that according to ON INTERPRETATION the correctness of names is conventional, but names are only symbols of thought, and the correctness of thoughts is natural. This agrees, in my opinion, with the outcome of the CRATYLUS, according to which the dialectician is the only proper "namegiver". (The CRATYLUS is a controversial dialogue.)

CHAPTER TWO--NOUNS
The definitions given of NOUN, VERB, INFLECTION, and *LO-GOS* in the ensuing chapters agree more or less with the corresponding definitions in POETICS 20. It seems clear that the two texts express fundamentally the same theory.

NOUN: Sound significant according to convention, without tense, which has no part which is significant independently.

INDEFINITE NOUN: Negated noun. Example: "not man".

INFLECTION OF A NOUN: That which in all other ways is a noun except that when combined with a verb it does not make a proposition. Example: "of Philo". Aristotle means here nouns in forms other than the nominative case in Greek. In English these would be roughly nouns that are the objects of prepositions or objects of verbs.

CHAPTER THREE--VERBS

VERB: Same as noun except with tense. Here there is an additional attribute given to the verb over what was said in POETICS 20: verbs are signs of things said of other things.

INDEFINITE VERB and INFLECTION OF A VERB are defined analogously to the corresponding variants of nouns.

A verb is said to be a kind of name. The reason given here, that the speaker stops his thought and the listener pauses, is obscure. This passage is my basis for saying that Aristotle used "name" in a broad and in narrow sense--broad as including verb (because it is significant by convention) and narrow as restricted to what does not "additionally signify" time.

"To additionally signify" (which is one word in Greek, *PROS-SE-MAI-NEIN*), seems to be a technical term meaning for a word to have a secondary signification which somehow follows from its identity as a certain part of speech (in modern linguistic terms, grammatical category). A complete account of Aristotle's semantics would include an explication of this term.

Here Aristotle insists again that neither a noun nor a verb by itself is true or false (i.e., is a proposition). His explanation is that "to be" and "not to be" in the sense in which they are contained in the verb (he runs = he IS running) are not significant (in the sense that nouns and verbs are) but instead "additionally signify" COMPOSITION and DIVISION.

We shall discuss composition and division as modes of thought later, but let me posit the following construct relating language, thought, and a kind of set theory in Aristotle's thought:

In saying "man is just", we symbolize in language a thought which is (if it is true) a "mental model" of the world. In "combining" or connecting the thought symbolized by "man" and "just" we are modeling their (supposed) connection in the world, which consists of the non-emptiness of the intersection of the sets Man and Just. I.e.,

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CHAPTER FOUR--*LO-GOS* AND PROPOSITION
"LO-GOS" is defined as in POETICS 20--a significant sound which DOES have parts significant independently.

PROPOSITION is differentiated from "LO-GOS" in general as that which can be true or false.

Note: from various passages, including this one, noun phrases, definitions, and prayers, are all examples of types of "LO-GOIs" which are not propositions.

CHAPTER FIVE--PROPOSITIONS WHICH ARE ONE BY SHOWING ONE VERSUS ONE BY CONJUNCTION, AND OF THOSE THAT ARE ONE BY SHOWING ONE,

AFFIRMATIONS AND NEGATIONS

Here Aristotle for the first time in our reading enunciates a central theme of his philosophy: he asks how things being combined (in this case components of language) can become one, having formerly been many--how they become "organic wholes".

Propositions are more or less unified according to whether they are "one by showing one" or "one by conjunction". A proposition which is one by conjunction is in some way a list of propositions. A proposition which is one by showing one, on the other hand, signifies some unified thing which exists, as we would say, "in the world". Seemingly, the unified thing which an affirmation signifies is the connectedness of the things which are "composed" or "combined" in the thought it expressed.

Note that according to Aristotle's view propositions derive whatever kind of unity they have from the kind of unity possessed by the things they signify.

The ILIAD is given in POETICS 20 as an example of a proposition which is one by conjunction. But was not the wrath of Achilles one thing? (The ILIAD is about the wrath of Achilles and its terrible consequences for both the Greeks and the Trojans.) Aristotle might answer that the individual affirmations and negations in the ILIAD do not signify the wrath of Achilles directly, but rather the smaller events that made up this great event.

Aristotle sometimes matches up concepts with simple grammatical models or schemata--here affirmation is "something of something" and negation is "something from something".

CHAPTER SIX--FOR EVERY AFFIRMATION THERE IS AN EXACTLY OPPOSED NEGATION AND VICE-VERSA

A minor point in this context, but one that differentiates Aristotle's logic from the usual forms of symbolic logic--for Aristotle all propositions have tense.

Whatever someone affirms can be denied, and vice-versa. Therefore, for every affirmation there is an opposed negation, and vice-versa. (The negation opposed to a certain affirmation is the proposition which denies exactly what the other affirmed.)

CHAPTER SEVEN--MORE DIVISIONS IN THE FORMS OF PROPOSITIONS--UNIVERSAL VS. INDIVIDUAL SUBJECT, UNIVERSALLY, NOT UNIVERSALLY. CONTRARIES AND CONTRADICTORIES.

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propositions
|__________________________|
|                        |
| affirmations | negations |
|__________________________|
|                        |
| past       present     future |
|__________________________|
| of universals            of individuals |
|__________________________|
| universally       not universally |
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CONTRADICTORY OPPOSITIONS:
All men are just  -----  Not all men are just
No men are just  -----  Some men are just
Man is just  -----  Man is not just

CONTRARY OPPOSITION:

All men are just  -----  No men are just

PROPOSITIONS WHOSE CONTRADICTORIES ARE CONTRARIES (LATER, "SUBCONTARIES"):

Some men are just  -----  Not all men are just

Aristotle points out that the last pair of contradictories violate the principle of bivalency, even though they fulfill definition of contradictories—they affirm and deny the same thing respectively of the same thing.

CHAPTER EIGHT—A seemingly simple proposition is not one in the requisite sense if either of its terms are ambiguous. Such ambiguity also creates a violation of the principle of bivalency.

Example: suppose "cloak" meant both "man" and "horse". Then (slightly altering the example), the principle of bivalency would not apply to the (seemingly) contradictory pair "Every cloak is white" and "Not every cloak is white". (This proposition would be covertly conjunctive.)

CHAPTER NINE—The principle of bivalency does not apply to future tense contingent propositions.

Example: "There will / will not be a seafight tomorrow."

If the principle of bivalency applied to this kind of sentence, then everything would happen of necessity, and deliberation would be useless.

CHAPTER ELEVEN—When and when not two predicates of a single subject can be combined into a single predicate of that subject.

Two predicates can be combined iff one is per se predicable of the other (i.e., they combine in a definition or one is a proper substrate of the other according to the theory of categories.

The theme touched on here is important but obscure. There appear to be several senses of the intrinsic/accidental dictotomy, and sometimes it is obscure which sense Aristotle is invoking.

Two senses spelled out in POSTERIOR ANALYTICS I, 7, are the following:

(1) An attribute is true per se (or essentially) of a thing, iff, given that the thing exists, it necessarily (or for the most part for a natural object) has that attribute. Classical example: a triangle essentially has the sum of its angles equal to two right angles (180 degrees).

(2) An attribute is true per se (essentially) of a thing, iff given that the attribute exists, it is an attribute of the given kind of thing. Classical example: white is an essential attribute of surface -- if anything is white, it must be a surface. In this case white belongs to a range (color) which is essential to surface in sense (1) -- if a surface exists, it must have a color.

In the present passage:

"White" names a per se attribute of body (because it is a per se attribute of surface, which is part of body), "musical" of soul. Therefore, it seems, they both name per se attributes of man, because body and soul are parts of man. But they do not name per se attributes of each other, because it is not as musical that a man becomes white (meaning pale) or as white that a man becomes musical (meaning cultured).