

DIALECTICAL THOUGHT IN ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPTION OF THE WORLD: A MATERIALIST REINTERPRETATION

Nga Thi Khuat¹

Thuongmai University, Hanoi, Vietnam

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1538-7634>

E-mail: nga.kt@tmu.edu.vn

ABSTRACT:

This article explores the dialectical elements embedded in Aristotle's philosophical conception of the world, with the aim of reevaluating his contributions through the lens of Marxist dialectical materialism. While Aristotle's system contains idealist elements, particularly in his metaphysical notion of the Prime Mover, his treatment of core concepts such as motion, change, contradiction, and the relationship between form and matter reveals a proto-dialectical logic. The study focuses on Aristotle's critique of Plato's Theory of Forms, his theory of the four causes, and his conception of potentiality and actuality, demonstrating how these themes anticipate later developments in Hegelian and Marxist thought. By engaging both classical texts and contemporary Vietnamese scholarship, the paper argues that Aristotle's thought remains a valuable foundation for understanding the dynamic and contradictory nature of reality. His contributions offer critical insights into the historical continuity of dialectical philosophy and its relevance to present-day theoretical discourse.

KEYWORDS: Aristotle, dialectical thought; Marxist philosophy; materialism; metaphysics; Vietnam.

¹PhD in Philosophy from the Academy of Journalism and Communication. She serves a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Political Theory at the Thuongmai University, Hanoi, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

The renewal of theoretical thinking was identified as a critical mission at the 6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, emphasizing the necessity for a methodical engagement with philosophical knowledge. However, nearly four decades into the reform period, the development of theoretical thought in Vietnam has yet to adequately respond to the intellectual and socio-cultural complexities of the contemporary era. One persistent issue lies in the limited scope of philosophical education, which remains narrowly focused on Marxist-Leninist theory, while insufficiently integrating the broader historical evolution of philosophical traditions. As Friedrich Engels observed, a nation aspiring toward scientific and intellectual advancement must cultivate a rigorous theoretical foundation—one that requires a systematic study of the entire history of philosophical thought (Marx; Engels, 1995).

As recent scholarship has shown, the capacity to critically revisit foundational philosophical paradigms is essential for navigating modern epistemological challenges (Dafermos, 2020; Thielicke-Witt, 2025). Philosophy evolves through a dialectic of continuity, critique, and inheritance. Revisiting classical philosophical frameworks—particularly those that laid the groundwork for dialectical reasoning—remains crucial for renewing contemporary theoretical discourse.

Among these, ancient Greek philosophy—especially the thought of Aristotle—represents a formative stage in the evolution of dialectics. Engels emphasized that Greek philosophy contained the embryonic forms of all later worldviews (Marx; Engels, 1995), and Lenin acknowledged Aristotle's treatment of dialectical questions in his *Philosophical Notebooks* (Lenin, 2006). Despite his idealist orientation, Aristotle's inquiries into being, motion, contradiction, and causality show striking resonances with dialectical materialism.

As Mié (2022) demonstrates, Aristotle's dialectical reasoning was not merely rhetorical but served as a methodological precursor to scientific inquiry, particularly through his use of endoxa (reputable opinions) as starting points for conceptual definition. This methodological groundwork laid by Aristotle has gained renewed relevance in contemporary debates on the foundations of scientific rationality.

Although classical Marxist theorists such as Marx, Engels, and Lenin recognized Aristotle as a proto-dialectician, much of contemporary scholarship has marginalized the dialectical dimensions of his work. His critiques of Platonic idealism, the doctrine of four causes, and his views on the transformation of opposites in nature warrant further examination. Vietnamese scholars have recently revisited Aristotle's thought through the lens of dialectical materialism to reassess foundational categories such as contradiction and transformation (Khuat, 2024; Nguyen, 2025; Nguyen; Dang, 2024).

Furthermore, studies by Yang (2024) and Zwart (2022) underline that Marxist dialectics, while diverging from Hegelian idealism, retains a structural indebtedness to Aristotelian logic in its materialist reinterpretation. These works also emphasize the need to continuously refine dialectical methods in light of modern scientific and cultural transformations.

This study seeks to address this theoretical gap by examining Aristotle's conception of the world through the framework of dialectical materialism. By employing a philosophical-historical approach, it analyzes Aristotle's treatment of matter, form, motion, and contradiction using both primary texts and interpretations by Marxist and Vietnamese philosophers. As argued by Khuat (2025), and Nguyen e Nguyen (2021), a renewed engagement with classical philosophy is especially urgent in an age defined by technological transformation and socio-political restructuring.

Moreover, in light of recent theoretical currents such as the resurgence of dialectical logic in democratic theory (Thielicke-Witt, 2025) and the call for a metamodern dialectical sensibility (Vandevert, 2025), the relevance of Aristotelian dialectics has acquired a broader epistemological and cultural significance.

The article is structured as follows: the second section surveys the historical development of dialectics from ancient Greece to Marxism. The third section investigates dialectical motifs in Aristotle's metaphysics, natural philosophy, and logic, with special attention to his critique of Platonic forms and his account of the unity of opposites. The conclusion reflects on the relevance of Aristotelian dialectics for revitalizing philosophical discourse in Vietnam today, in alignment with broader calls to integrate classical philosophical insights with contemporary theoretical challenges (Anrubia; Marín, 2025; Nguyen; Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen; Phung; Le, 2021).

2. Literature Review

Aristotle's philosophy has long attracted considerable scholarly attention both in Vietnam and internationally, encompassing his work in logic, metaphysics, ethics, and natural science. While traditional Vietnamese works such as those by Dang (1972), Nguyen (1996), and Vu (1998) have offered extensive treatments of Aristotle's contributions, they tend to emphasize categorical logic and metaphysical categorization while overlooking his dialectical methodology. Despite their valuable insights, these texts often subordinate dialectics to formal logic or metaphysical demonstration.

In recent scholarship, however, there has been growing recognition of the dialectical dimension of Aristotle's methodology, especially in relation to scientific inquiry and definitional reasoning. Mié (2022) provides a crucial reinterpretation of Aristotle's *Topics* and *Posterior Analytics*, arguing that dialectics serves not merely to discard contradictions but also plays a foundational role in initiating scientific inquiry through the analysis of reputable opinions (endoxa). This work challenges the dichotomy between dialectic and demonstration, proposing that dialectic operates as a pre-demonstrative heuristic crucial for discovering scientific principles.

In the broader landscape of philosophical discourse, the relevance of dialectical reasoning has re-emerged in critiques of rigid formalism. Thielicke-Witt (2025), for instance, critiques the "Logic of Identity" dominant since Aristotle and suggests that dialectical logic—particularly in its Hegelian and Lefebvrian formulations—offers a more dynamic framework for understanding contradiction and change. This reopens the question of whether Aristotle's own dialectic may contain seeds of a more radical logic than previously acknowledged (Mié, 2022).

A particularly innovative approach is seen in the work of Yang (2024), who examines the relationship between Hegelian dialectics and Marxist thought. While his focus lies with Marx, Yang traces how dialectical structures—thesis, antithesis, synthesis—evolve into tools for socio-historical critique. This framework invites a retrospective reading of Aristotle's potentiality-actuality dyad as an early precursor to dialectical structures concerned with transformation and negation.

Furthermore, Zwart (2022) discusses the methodological implications of dialectical materialism, emphasizing its roots in Aristotelian, Hegelian, and Marxist traditions. He underscores how Aristotle's own works laid foundational insights for the development of dialectical materialism, particularly through the synthesis of metaphysical inquiry and empirical observation—an aspect often overshadowed in analytic interpretations.

While comprehensive surveys such as those by Dang Thai Mai (1958), Thai Ninh (1987), and Nguyen Tien Dung (2006) affirm Aristotle's towering status in the Western canon, they

largely interpret him through a rationalist and formalist lens. In contrast, a more dialectically attuned historiography—such as the *History of Dialectics* (Soviet Academy of Sciences, 1998) translated by Do Minh Hop—places Aristotle within a lineage of thinkers grappling with contradiction and movement, though often downplaying his unique contributions relative to Hegel or Marx.

Recent Vietnamese philosophical studies, including Nguyen e Dang (2024), reflect a shift toward materialist reinterpretations of classical thought. Their examination of Trần Đức Thảo's intellectual evolution offers a methodological bridge for re-reading Aristotle: just as Thảo reconfigured phenomenology through dialectical materialism, Aristotle's notions of form, matter, and teleology may be reinterpreted as latent dialectical structures—especially when understood through Thảo's labor-based conception of consciousness and transformation.

The metaphysical concepts of potentiality (*dunamis*) and actuality (*energeia*) in Aristotle's philosophy resonate with dialectical tensions between form and matter, or essence and existence. These ideas find new relevance when viewed through the lens of dialectical evolution, as outlined in recent debates on metamodernism and speculative philosophy (Vandevert, 2025; Zwart, 2022).

In sum, this study builds upon these renewed perspectives by re-engaging Aristotle's metaphysics and natural philosophy from a dialectical materialist standpoint. It aims not only to recover neglected dimensions of his thought but also to situate them within contemporary philosophical concerns over contradiction, transformation, and scientific methodology.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a philosophical-historical methodology grounded in the interpretive lens of dialectical materialism. Central to this approach is the close textual analysis of Aristotle's primary works—*Metaphysics*, *Physics*, and the *Organon*—with particular emphasis on conceptual categories such as contradiction, potentiality and actuality, causation, motion, and the unity of opposites. These philosophical elements are examined not in isolation but through their internal relations and the dynamic processes they express.

The research aims to reconstruct the proto-dialectical logic embedded in Aristotle's thought by tracing how his treatment of natural phenomena and conceptual structures anticipates later developments in dialectical philosophy. The analysis highlights how internal contradictions—within concepts and within nature—function as generative forces of transformation, thereby aligning Aristotle's thought with core tenets of dialectical reasoning.

In doing so, the study draws upon the theoretical contributions of classical Marxist thinkers such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and V.I. Lenin, whose interpretations of dialectics provide a materialist framework for understanding philosophical development. At the same time, the research incorporates insights from contemporary Vietnamese scholars, including recent reinterpretations of Aristotle through the works of Trần Đức Thảo and other thinkers engaged in bridging phenomenology, historical materialism, and the renewal of dialectical logic.

Rather than seeking to empirically test hypotheses, this study prioritizes conceptual analysis and theoretical synthesis. It aims to identify and clarify how Aristotle's philosophical categories—particularly his theories of motion, form, and causality—can be critically reinterpreted within a dialectical materialist paradigm. The methodology thus serves both an exegetical and evaluative function: explicating Aristotle's original formulations while assessing their significance for contemporary dialectical thought.

4. Two Conceptions of Dialectics in the History of Philosophy

While Aristotle's dialectics lacks the historical dynamism of Hegelian-Marxist dialectics, elements of his philosophy—such as the interplay of matter and form, potentiality and actuality—prefigure core dialectical principles. Unlike Heraclitus, who focused on the flux of opposites, or Hegel, who spiritualized contradiction, Aristotle offered a proto-dialectical model rooted in concrete natural phenomena.

Marx and Engels appropriated Hegel's dialectical logic, grounding it in materialist ontology. This transformation gave rise to dialectical materialism, a framework that interprets nature, society, and thought as interconnected systems in perpetual development. Lenin emphasized that dialectics captures both the relative and absolute character of knowledge, highlighting the dynamic, contradictory, and processual nature of reality.

In contrast to the ancient Greek emphasis on dialectics as method or argument, modern dialectical thought—primarily through Hegel and Marx—conceives dialectics as the science of development rooted in the unity and struggle of opposites. Hegel's system of objective idealism views change as an immanent, rational process driven by contradiction, expressed through the triadic process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. His **Science of Logic** articulates a conceptual dialectics that mirrors real processes of change, albeit within an idealist framework.

4.1. The Ancient Greek Conception

Dialectical perspectives played a central role in ancient Greek philosophy, arising alongside the genesis of philosophical inquiry itself. From early on, dialectics bore a dual significance: it was simultaneously a method of argumentative dialogue and an embryonic form of understanding reality's contradictions. This dual function—argumentative and ontological—evolved in tandem, forming the foundation for subsequent developments in dialectical logic.

As Khuat (2024) highlights, early philosophical inquiries were inseparable from broader ontological questions about being and the cosmos. This emphasis on unity amid change laid the groundwork for dialectical reasoning to develop as a mode of investigating contradictions inherent in reality.

Zeno of Elea is often credited, notably by Aristotle, as the founder of dialectics due to his paradoxes that challenged common notions of plurality and motion. These paradoxes were structured in a dialogical, question-and-answer format resembling what would later be refined in Socratic and Aristotelian methods. For example, Zeno's paradoxes—such as the dichotomy, Achilles and the tortoise, and the flying arrow—demonstrated the contradictions underlying empirical concepts of motion and multiplicity, thereby elevating abstract reasoning above sensory perception.

Zeno rejected the coherence of multiplicity by arguing that the assumption of infinitely divisible entities leads to logical absurdities: entities would simultaneously be finite and infinite. This method of exposing contradictions through abstract reasoning would profoundly influence subsequent dialectical formulations.

Socrates expanded the dialectical tradition by formalizing the method of critical dialogue. Although he left no writings, Plato's dialogues such as *Laches* and *Charmides* capture the essence of Socratic dialectics: a pursuit of definitions through systematic questioning. Socratic dialectics emphasized the clarification of moral concepts through the exposure and resolution of contradictions. For Socrates, contradiction was not merely an error to be eliminated but a heuristic for discovering deeper truths.

Aristotle inherited and systematized these developments. His theory of the syllogism—structured around major and minor premises leading to a logically necessary conclusion—enabled formal deductive reasoning. For example: All men are mortal (major premise). Socrates is a man (minor premise). Therefore, Socrates is mortal (conclusion). Aristotle's syllogistic reasoning underpinned his broader dialectical method, which he used to investigate scientific and metaphysical problems. Crucially, he identified three laws of thought: the Law of Non-Contradiction, the Law of the Excluded Middle, and the Law of Identity (Vu, 1998). These laws became foundational to Western logic.

Aristotle's dialectical framework, while often formalistic, anticipated materialist reinterpretations of contradiction and motion. *Trần Đức Thảo* reinterpreted such Aristotelian categories through the lens of dialectical materialism, suggesting that contradictions are not static logical anomalies but expressions of real movement and transformation in nature and society (Nguyen; Dang, 2024).

Moreover, *Thảo* emphasized the historical and social dimensions of consciousness, implying that ancient dialectics could be recontextualized within a materialist conception of human development (Nguyen; Dang, 2024). This aligns with Khuat's (2025) call for revisiting classical philosophical systems in light of the transformative pressures of contemporary social and technological change.

The ancient Greek conception of dialectics evolved from Zeno's paradoxes and Socratic elenchus to Aristotle's formal logic. While rooted in abstract reasoning, these early dialectical forms laid the groundwork for later materialist theories that view contradiction not merely as logical inconsistency, but as the dynamic motor of development in thought, nature, and society.

4.2. The Conception of Hegel and the Marxist Philosophers

In addition to the ancient Greek understanding of dialectics discussed earlier, there exists a second conception that defines dialectics as a doctrine concerning the universal laws governing the motion and development of nature, human society, and thought. Under this interpretation, dialectics was systematically constructed by Hegel and later developed by Marxist philosophers.

Hegel (1770–1831) was a remarkable philosopher and a direct predecessor of Marxist thought. As Friedrich Engels observed, Hegel was not only a creative genius but also a scholar with encyclopedic knowledge. A proponent of objective idealism, Hegel believed that the “Absolute Spirit” existed prior to and was responsible for creating both nature and humankind. Although his philosophical system was idealist, it was deeply dialectical in character. Hegel is considered the foundational figure in shaping dialectics as a theory of the unity of opposites.

In contrast to metaphysical thinkers who viewed development as a simple quantitative increase or a spatial displacement of objects, Hegel saw development as a process of dialectical negation, wherein the new replaces the old while inheriting certain aspects of it and thereby enabling progressive transformation. Based on this view of development as a continuous motion governed by the law of the negation of the negation, Hegel built his philosophical system upon a triadic structure: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. These elements are organically connected and mutually transformative.

According to Hegel, the process of development of the Absolute Spirit passes through three fundamental stages: subjective spirit, objective spirit, and absolute spirit. This progression also entails the emergence and resolution of contradictions between opposing elements such as matter and spirit, and object and subject, within the Absolute Spirit itself.

Hegel's dialectical thought is particularly evident in his *Science of Logic*. Drawing from his foundational work, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel's logic aimed to provide a new and authentic

perspective on the nature of thought, while also establishing a philosophical methodology that could serve as the foundation for all other sciences. He argued that philosophy had never possessed its own methodology and had long depended on other disciplines. Therefore, logic needed to supply philosophy with a new method—dialectics conceived as a doctrine of development, which would serve as the foundation of the human worldview and function as a universal means of discovering truth.

In Hegel's idealist dialectics, a coherent system of categories and general laws was developed to reflect the inner logic of consciousness and spirit. V.I. Lenin praised Hegel's accomplishment, stating that "Hegel brilliantly anticipated the dialectic of things (of phenomena, of the world, of nature) in the dialectic of concepts" (Lenin, 2006, p. 209). Similarly, Engels emphasized that although dialectics took on a mystical form in Hegel's hands, this did not prevent him from being the first to present the general forms of dialectical motion in a comprehensive and conscious way. Engels wrote, "With Hegel, dialectics is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again to uncover the rational kernel within the mystical shell" (Marx; Engels, 1995, p. 494).

In criticizing the idealism in Hegel's system, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels inherited and developed his dialectical methodology, extracting its rational core and transforming it into a more scientific and materialist approach—dialectical materialism. Engels provided a general definition of dialectical materialism as "the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society, and thought" (Marx; Engels, 1995, p. 201).

The classical thinkers of Marxism-Leninism also proposed several complementary definitions. When emphasizing the principle of universal connection, Engels defined dialectics as "the science of universal interconnection" (Marx; Engels, 1995, p. 445). Meanwhile, focusing on the principle of development, which Marx inherited from Hegel, Lenin described dialectics as the most complete, profound, and non-reductionist theory of development. He viewed it as a theory of the relativity of human knowledge, which reflects the ever-developing material world. Unlike metaphysical viewpoints that understand development in a static or one-sided manner, dialectics as interpreted by Marxism views development as the unity of opposites. In short, dialectics can be defined as the theory of the unity of opposites.

From this standpoint, dialectics seeks to explain development, the inherently contradictory nature of nature and thought, the struggle and unity of opposites, and related topics such as interconnection, negation, and the incremental character of development. This scientific framework has been further emphasized in contemporary Vietnamese Marxist scholarship, where thinkers like *Trần Đức Thảo* demonstrate how dialectical materialism bridges subjective human experience with the objective structures of socio-historical development (Nguyen; Dang, 2024).

Thus, from this second perspective, ancient Greek dialectics must be considered a formative and foundational stage in the broader evolution of Western philosophy—a precursor to the science of universal laws governing the development of nature, society, and human cognition.

In the case of Aristotle, elements of dialectical thinking in this second sense are clearly evident. While not free from intuitive or naive elements, his philosophy contains many profound dialectical insights. These appear across various domains, including cosmology, epistemology, logic, ethics, and socio-political thought.

The development of Aristotle's dialectical thought was shaped by several important factors, including family background, socio-economic conditions, and the influence of preceding philosophers. Like all philosophical systems, Aristotle's ideas—especially his dialectical reasoning—were the product of synthesizing, inheriting, and creatively advancing the intellectual

legacy of his predecessors. Additionally, the complex transformations in production, the division of labor, and the evolving social structure during the height of the Greek slave-owning city-states all contributed to new social relations. These changes provided fertile ground for the emergence and development of Aristotle's philosophical system, which functioned as a summation of earlier thought and allowed his dialectical thinking to flourish. These socio-historical dynamics mirror, in a classical form, the dialectical premise later articulated by Marx—that material conditions and class structures fundamentally shape consciousness and intellectual development (Khuat, 2025; Nguyen; Dang, 2024).

In any discussion of dialectical thought, it is essential to consider both aforementioned conceptions. The first is the classical Greek interpretation, in which dialectics is understood as the art of argumentation—discovering truth through discursive conflict. The second, proposed by Hegel and further developed by Marxist theorists, presents dialectics as a scientific doctrine of the universal laws of motion and development in nature, society, and human thought. In Aristotle's philosophy, dialectics may be explored through both lenses. However, due to certain objective reasons, this study will primarily focus on examining dialectics in the second sense.

5. Dialectical Thought in Aristotle's Conception of the World

5.1. Critique of Plato's Theory of Forms

A central premise throughout Aristotle's philosophical system is his sustained critique of Plato's Theory of Forms, particularly concerning the ontological and epistemological status of concepts. This tension is not merely a doctrinal disagreement but signals a deeper philosophical shift—from metaphysical dualism to an immanent realism grounded in empirical observation and logical analysis.

As Nguyen e Dang (2024) emphasize in their discussion of *Trần Đức Thảo's* transformation from phenomenology to dialectical materialism, the transition from idealism to a materialist framework often entails a fundamental critique of transcendental abstractions detached from social and material conditions. In a similar vein, Aristotle's rejection of separate Forms can be seen as an early gesture toward grounding universals in material reality.

Plato, influenced by Socratic thought and Heraclitus's theory of flux, sought stability in knowledge by positing an ontological realm of immutable Forms. For Plato, true knowledge is about what *is*—that is, about the eternal, unchanging essences rather than the transient sensory particulars. In contrast, Aristotle reinterpreted this issue by relocating the essence within things themselves, not beyond them.

Aristotle systematically dismantled the metaphysical assumptions behind the Theory of Forms in *Metaphysics*, Books VII and XIII. His critique can be grouped into four major objections:

First, Aristotle argued that the notion of Forms as separate substances fails to illuminate the nature of particulars. Rather than offering explanatory depth, the Forms appear as redundant duplicates. As Vu (1998) notes, Aristotle identified that Plato's Forms “contribute nothing to the explanation of the sensible world.” (p. 18) If both Forms and particulars contain the same universal, then the duplicative ontology lacks necessity.

Second, Aristotle questioned the causal efficacy of Forms. According to his principle of immanence, causes must be in the same realm as their effects. But Plato's Forms exist apart from sensible reality. His notion of “participation” (*methexis*) fails to account for how Forms bring about existence or change, rendering the explanation metaphorical rather than scientific.

Third, Aristotle criticized the internal inconsistencies within the Form hierarchy. If the universal is the essence of the particular, then every new generality requires a higher Form—a

structure that leads to an infinite regress, famously captured in his “third man” argument (*Metaphysics*, XIII.9). This reveals the logical implausibility of positing abstract universals as real entities.

Fourth, and crucially, Aristotle argued that Plato’s Forms cannot account for change. Since Forms are static and eternal, they cannot explain motion, generation, or corruption. In contrast, Aristotle’s own concept of *form* and *matter* as principles of actuality and potentiality allows for a dynamic account of becoming—one that aligns with the dialectical view of contradiction and transformation.

This emphasis on dynamic change resonates with Marxist interpretations of nature and history, particularly the dialectical unity of being and becoming (Khuat, 2024; Nguyen; Dang, 2024). As Khuat (2025) notes in relation to technological transformation, a philosophy that neglects process and contradiction cannot adequately account for real-world development.

In addition, Aristotle contested Plato’s tendency to align Forms with numbers in his later thought, criticizing the abstraction of mathematical entities as metaphysically autonomous. He argued that while mathematics serves analytical purposes, numbers cannot substitute for substance. This view was later applauded by Lenin, who regarded Aristotle’s materialist stance on mathematical abstraction as a rational, grounded intervention in the longstanding problem of universals.

Consequently, Aristotle’s critique of Plato’s metaphysical dualism served as the foundation for his integrated system—one that retained the rational structure of conceptual analysis but embedded it within a material and dynamic ontology. This reinterpretation of being, motion, and form laid the groundwork for dialectical inquiries into the nature of contradiction, transformation, and becoming. It also anticipates later philosophical developments in dialectical materialism, as explored in contemporary Vietnamese scholarship on Marxist philosophy and the human condition.

Therefore, Aristotle’s critique not only revises Plato’s ontological commitments but aligns with a broader philosophical tradition that views knowledge as immanent, transformative, and historically situated. His efforts to resolve the tension between the universal and the particular offer enduring value for present-day analyses of philosophical and social change.

5.2. The Thought on Objectivity and Movement of Things and Phenomena in the World

Aristotle’s conception of nature begins with the assertion of its objective existence: nature exists in and of itself, independent of perception. He viewed the natural world as composed of countless individual and concrete things which are not isolated, but interconnected, forming a necessary unity. Thus, his ontology required not merely an analysis of discrete entities but an investigation into the unified and necessary structure of being itself.

In his *Doctrine of the Four Causes*, Aristotle wrote, “Whatever exists, some exist by nature, others exist due to other causes” (Ha, 2000, p. 93). By “nature,” he meant those phenomena that arise and develop spontaneously, distinct from artifacts created by human intention. Nature unfolds according to its internal logic, driven by what Aristotle termed *form* (μορφή). This principle of form governs development—a seed realizes its telos in becoming a tree. As he states, “Growing things... arise not into what created them, but into what they are meant to become. Therefore, form is nature” (Ha, 2000, p. 93).

Aristotle’s account of causality reflects a nuanced position between materialism and idealism. On the one hand, he acknowledged the primacy of matter—earth, water, fire, and air—as eternal and uncreated, aligning with pre-Socratic materialists. On the other, he upheld form as the determining cause, culminating in the idea of a divine Prime Mover. This contradiction

reflects Aristotle's unresolved synthesis of material and formal causation. As Khuat (2024) remarks, this duality parallels broader philosophical tensions in Western thought between the immanent and the transcendent, the concrete and the abstract.

Aristotle's dialectical mode of reasoning becomes evident in his theory of motion. Influenced by Heraclitus, he saw motion as intrinsic to nature. "Nature has been defined as the origin of motion and change" (Ha, 2000, p. 96). He proposed that motion is not imposed externally but arises from within, transforming potentiality into actuality. Motion, for Aristotle, is a fundamental principle of being.

He emphasized that motion is not a separable essence but an inherent aspect of things. "There is no motion outside of things," he noted (Ha, 2000, p. 96), and because motion is eternal, its study should not focus on origin or cessation but on its role in cosmic organization. Here, Aristotle moves beyond static ontology to a dynamic framework, which Lenin later recognized as a proto-dialectical materialist conception (Lenin, 2006).

However, Aristotle departed from strict materialism by positing a Prime Mover—an unmoved mover, pure form, and intellect—to account for the unity and directionality of motion. This being is not a creator deity but a metaphysical principle necessary to sustain cosmic order. Nguyen e Dang (2024) observe that Aristotle's synthesis of internal and external sources of motion anticipates later Marxist concerns with reconciling subjective and objective dimensions of historical development.

Aristotle's classification of motion encompassed emergence and disappearance, qualitative change, quantitative change, and spatial displacement. Among these, spatial motion was deemed primary. All forms of change presuppose movement in space, which he subdivided into linear, circular, and mixed types. Circular motion was considered most perfect due to its continuity and constancy.

His most enduring contribution lies in linking motion to space and time. Time, he argued, is the measure of change relative to before and after. "We perceive time when we say time has passed," and thus, time is discernible only through motion (Soviet Academy of Sciences, 1998, p. 294). Space and time are continuous and infinitely divisible; motion reflects the dialectical unity of continuity and discontinuity.

Lenin praised Aristotle's treatment of motion as the unity of opposites, observing: "Motion is the unity of continuity and discontinuity in time and space. Motion is a contradiction, a unity of opposites" (Lenin, 2006, p. 273). This insight foreshadows dialectical materialism's understanding of process and contradiction as fundamental to reality.

Nevertheless, Aristotle introduced ambiguity by suggesting that time might not exist without the soul's capacity to count. "If nothing besides the soul's reason is capable of counting, then without the soul, time cannot exist" (Nguyen, 1996, p. 86). This subjectivist undertone contrasts with his broader materialist commitments and opened the door to later idealist interpretations of time and motion.

Khuat (2025) notes that such ambiguities continue to resonate in the context of contemporary technological transformations, where the interplay between material conditions and subjective experience redefines our understanding of temporality and movement. Aristotle's attempt to integrate rest (immobility) within his theory by assigning it to "first philosophy" (metaphysics) marks his departure from a purely materialist view. While he affirmed that "no kind of motion can exist apart from things" (Ha, 2000, p. 73), he treated form—the unmoved mover—as a cause that itself remains at rest.

Aristotle advanced a dialectical conception of nature in which matter, form, motion, space, and time are internally related. Yet, his introduction of a transcendent Prime Mover reveals an unresolved tension between materialism and idealism. As such, Aristotle's philosophy

occupies a pivotal position in the history of dialectical thought: not fully materialist, yet not merely idealist—a complex foundation upon which later thinkers like Hegel, Marx, and *Trần Đức Thảo* would build their theories of transformation and becoming.

5.3. The Idea of the Unity and Transformation of Opposites

The idea of the unity and transformation of opposites emerged early in ancient Greek philosophy and played a pivotal role in shaping the dialectical disputes between Heraclitus and Aristotle. While Heraclitus emphasized the inherent conflict within reality, Aristotle sought a systematic framework that could accommodate change within a stable ontological structure. As Lenin observed, Aristotle “racked his brains over it” in his *Metaphysics* (Lenin, 2006, p. 367), reflecting the enduring challenge of reconciling unity and contradiction.

Following his critique of Plato’s Theory of Forms, Aristotle’s metaphysical approach revealed an increasing recognition of oppositional elements within unified substances. He articulated a four-cause theory—material, formal, efficient, and final causes—to explain the genesis of entities. For instance, in constructing a house, the material cause includes bricks and wood, the formal cause is the design, the efficient cause is the activity of the builders, and the final cause is the function of habitation. Crucially, none of these causes can independently account for being; their unity constitutes existence.

Among these, form and matter are fundamental and dialectically opposed. Matter, in Aristotle’s view, is indeterminate potentiality—eternal and passive. It becomes actual only when determined by form, the active principle. Thus, form and matter represent a unity of opposites: the actual and the possible, the determinate and the indeterminate. This interpretation anticipates dialectical materialist thought, as seen in the work of *Trần Đức Thảo*. Nguyen e Dang (2024) emphasize that *Thảo*’s synthesis of phenomenology and Marxism hinges on the dynamic interplay between potentiality and actualization, a concept deeply resonant with Aristotle’s treatment of matter and form.

Aristotle’s *Physics* furthers this dialectical orientation by positing nature as a totality of moving substances composed of elemental qualities: hot, cold, wet, and dry. These qualities interact dialectically, giving rise to the classical elements: fire, air, water, and earth. Notably, Aristotle contended that direct opposites (e.g., hot and cold) cannot combine directly but instead yield new entities through mediation. This framework emphasizes transformation through internal contradiction. Khuat (2024) similarly frames the human condition as a dialectical unity shaped by technological and existential transformations, affirming that identity emerges from the constant negotiation of opposing forces such as stability and innovation, tradition and rupture.

In contrast to atomists like Democritus, who posited additive aggregation, Aristotle argued for substantial change in which prior elements are absorbed and transformed. He proposed that matter can shift from one elemental state to another under environmental influence—a concept that later influenced alchemical and early scientific theories.

Plato also theorized the transformation of elements in *Timaeus*, asserting cyclical change among water, air, and fire. Yet unlike Plato, Aristotle grounded transformation in empirical observation and logical categorization, reinforcing the role of oppositional qualities as generative.

Aristotle’s inclusion of the qualities of heaviness and lightness to explain physical motion further illustrates his dialectical model. These attributes determine directional movement and reflect the natural tendencies of matter, again emphasizing how opposing properties inform unified behaviors. In this respect, Aristotle does not offer a static metaphysical dualism but a dynamic system where contradictions are internalized within the structure of being. While his

emphasis on form's primacy may reveal idealist leanings, his explanation of change through internal differentiation aligns with dialectical reasoning. Contemporary interpretations, including those from Khuat (2025), argue that Aristotle's concept of unity-in-contradiction provides a philosophical foundation for understanding transformations in modern technological society, where identity, labor, and existence themselves are undergoing redefinition.

In sum, Aristotle's notion of the unity and transformation of opposites integrates empirical observation with metaphysical insight. While he ultimately upheld the primacy of form, his recognition of the formative role of internal opposition marks a critical contribution to the history of dialectical thinking—a contribution that resonates in both classical philosophy and contemporary materialist analysis.

Conclusion

This study investigated the dialectical dimensions within Aristotle's philosophical conception of the world, with the aim of reassessing his contributions in relation to the framework of dialectical materialism. It focused on how Aristotle's notions of form and matter, motion and change, and the unity of opposites can be interpreted as early expressions of dialectical reasoning. The analysis revealed that although Aristotle's system does not fully align with the materialist tradition—given its idealist components such as the Prime Mover—it nonetheless contains significant proto-dialectical elements. These include his recognition of internal contradiction as a driver of transformation, his view of motion as intrinsic to nature, and his conception of the unity between potentiality and actuality.

In light of these findings, the research contributes to a broader understanding of how Aristotelian thought intersects with and informs later dialectical systems, particularly those developed by Hegel, Marx, and Lenin. The study supports the hypothesis that Aristotle, despite his metaphysical orientation, laid essential groundwork for dialectical materialism by treating contradiction, change, and development as inherent features of being.

However, the study is limited by its focus on textual interpretation and philosophical reconstruction. It does not explore empirical or cross-cultural perspectives that might further enrich the dialogue between classical Greek and Marxist traditions. Future research might consider comparative studies between Aristotle's dialectics and other traditions of dynamic ontology—such as Chinese dialectics or modern systems theory—or examine the applicability of Aristotelian dialectical categories in contemporary scientific and technological discourse.

Ultimately, this research underscores the enduring relevance of Aristotle's dialectical insights for understanding transformation in nature, thought, and society. By revisiting his contributions through the lens of dialectical materialism, the study not only illuminates the historical continuity of philosophical inquiry but also offers a conceptual foundation for renewing contemporary debates in ontology, ethics, and social theory.

References

- ANRUBIA, E.; MARÍN, H. Future and Freedom: An Inquiry from Philosophy of Culture. *Scientia et Fides*, 13, n. 1, p. 25-38, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.12775/SetF.2025.002>.
- DAFERMOS, M. The metaphysics of psychology and a dialectical perspective. *Theory & Psychology*, 31, n. 3, p. 355-374, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354320975491>.
- DANG, P. Q. *Aristotle's Philosophy*. Saigon: Dem Trang Publishing House, 1972.
- DANG, T. M. *History of Western Philosophy*. Hanoi: Construction Publishing House, 1958.
- HA, T. M. *Philosophy of Ancient Greek and Roman*. Ho Chi Minh City: Ca Mau Cape Publishing House, 2000.
- KHUAT, N. T. Integrating Innovation with Integrity: Navigating the Humanistic and Ethical Dimensions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. *Griot : Revista de Filosofia*, 25, n. 1, p. 123-134, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.31977/grirfi.v25i1.5281>.
- KHUAT, T. N. Human Existence Through Philosophical Inquiry and Technological Transformation: An Analytical Study. *Kalagatos*, 21, n. 2, p. eK24054, 2024.
- LENIN, V. *Lenin: Complete Works*. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2006.
- MARX, K.; ENGELS, F. *Complete works*. National Political Publishing House, 1995.
- MIÉ, F. Aristotle on dialectic and definition in scientific inquiry. *Revista Archai*, 32, p. e03216, 2022. https://doi.org/10.14195/1984-249X_32_16.
- NGUYEN, H. T. T. Balancing Feudal Legacies and Socialist Aspirations: Vietnam's Ethical Transformation. *Griot : Revista de Filosofia*, 25, n. 1, p. 68-79, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.31977/grirfi.v25i1.5276>.
- NGUYEN, N. T.; DANG, C. H. The Intellectual Transformation of Trần Đức Thảo: From Phenomenology to Dialectical Materialism. *Kalagatos*, 21, n. 2, p. eK24053, 2024.
- NGUYEN, P. T.; NGUYEN, Q. T. The philosophy of human emancipation in Ho Chi Minh's ideas and its contemporary relevance in Vietnam. *Kalagatos*, 21, n. 1, p. eK24009, 2024.
- NGUYEN, T. D. *History of Western philosophy*. Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House, 2006.
- NGUYEN, T. N. T.; NGUYEN, T. Q. Current education of revolutionary ideals for university students in the context of international integration in Vietnam. *Nuances-Estudos Sobre Educacao*, 32, p. e021007, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.32930/NUANCES.V32I00.9120>.
- NGUYEN, T. Q.; PHUNG, T. A.; LE, Q. C. The current education on professional ethics for Vietnamese students. *Revista on line de Política e Gestão Educacional*, 25, n. 3, p. 2655–2669, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.22633/rpge.v25i3.15869>.
- NGUYEN, V. D. *Aristotle and the theory of categories*. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House, 1996.
- SOVIET ACADEMY OF SCIENCES. *History of Dialectics*. Tradução DO, M. H. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 1998.
- THAI, N. *Ancient Greek Philosophy*. Hanoi: Marxist-Leninist Textbook Publishing House, 1987.
- THIELICKE-WITT, V. Logical fallacies in democratic theory or how dialectical logic may help. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, p. 01914537251334549, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01914537251334549>.
- VANDEVERT, J. D. From the Postmodern to the Metamodern: The Hegelian Dialectical Process and its Contemporarization. *Filozofija i društvo/Philosophy and Society*, 36, n. 1, p. 219-242, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.2298/FID240228007V>.
- VU, V. V. *Aristotle's Philosophy*. Hanoi: Social Science Publishing House, 1998.

YANG, C. Explaining Marxist dialectics: the dialectical traditions of Hegel and Marx. *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology*, 21, n. 2, p. 280-292, 2024.

ZWART, H. Dialectical Materialism. In: ZWART, H. (Ed.). *Continental Philosophy of Technoscience*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022. p. 67-109. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84570-4_3.

Autor(a) para correspondência / Corresponding author: Nga Thi Khuat. nga.kt@tmu.edu.vn