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Substance, Accident, and Modes

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Abstract
This article presents the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accident, and the interpretational problems it generated for medieval philosophers and theologians. A survey of the extensional and intensional problems of the distinction and some of the solutions proposed for them will lead to an analysis of the theoretical need to introduce the new ontological category of modes in late-medieval philosophy, paving the way to the abandonment of substance-accident metaphysics in early modern philosophy.

Aristotle’s Ontological Square
The medieval distinction between substance and accident goes back to Aristotle’s remarks in his Categories, describing what is often referred to as his ontological square (Angelelli 1991). The basis of the fourfold distinction is provided in terms of two pairs of criteria, namely, being in/not being in and being said of/not being said of a subject, yielding what is meant to be an exhaustive and mutually exclusive division of the realm of all existents. The resulting division was usually taken to provide the division of all entities into particular and universal substances, and particular and universal accidents (Table 1).

This is the most fundamental division of the Aristotelian ontology of actual entities. Accordingly, slight differences in its interpretation led to vastly different solutions to several problems it generated, both in metaphysics and in theology. The following discussion provides a sampling of these problems, relating them to these interpretational differences.

Some Problems with the Ontological Square
The problems generated by the Aristotelian Ontological Square can be grouped into extensional ones on the one hand (dealing with the extent of these divisions), and intensional ones (dealing with their interpretation), on the other. The extensional problems concern the sufficiency and necessity of the division of entities provided by the Square. The intensional problems are related to the interpretation of the extent (what counts as an existent in what sense) and criteria (what does it mean for something to be in/said of or not to be in/said of a subject) of the fourfold division.

The problem of the sufficiency of the division is whether it really comprehends all entities, or perhaps there are others that cannot be placed in any of the four domains of the Square. The problem of the necessity of the division is whether it contains perhaps more than what is needed for classifying all entities, that is to say, whether it contains some nonentities.

The first, naturally emerging Aristotelian suspicion concerning the Square should be that about its necessity. After all, the division is supposed to contain universals, whereas Aristotle denies the existence of universal entities. If, therefore, the Square contains universals, and universals are not entities, then it seems that the Square has to contain some nonentities, i.e., it contains more than is necessary for the classification of all entities, for all entities are either particular substances or particular accidents, but there are no universal substances or accidents among real existents.

The problem of sufficiency, however, is generated by considerations concerning entities that somehow would not seem to fit into Aristotle’s fourfold division. A case in point is provided by the significata of propositions, described most poignantly by the anonymous author of the twelfth-century tract Ars Burana as being “extrapredicamental,” i.e., as not belonging to any of the ten Aristotelian categories, namely, the category of substance, and the nine categories of accidents (De Rijk 1967:357–359). Earlier on, Abelard’s dicta were also assigned by him a peculiar place, apparently outside the Aristotelian Square. And later authors, continuing in the tradition of assigning propositions their significata as
distinct from the significata or supposita of their categorematic terms, would also place them outside the divisions of the Square; thus enuntiabilia as conceived by thirteenth-century authors, or the real propositions of Walter Burley, or the complexe significabilia of Adam Wodeham or Gregory of Rimini, not being identifiable with either substances or accidents, were placed in their own, separate category (Nuchelmans 1973, 1980).

The problem with all these additions is that since Aristotle’s division was provided in terms of contradictory criteria it was supposed to be an exhaustive and mutually exclusive division of everything there is.

This way of putting the problem, however, directly leads us to the intensional problems of the Square. Aristotle’s opening words in the relevant passage indicate that his division is supposed to cover all existents. However, depending on the interpretation of what we take to be existent and in what sense, different items will be taken to fall within the realm of existents to be divided by the Square.

Taking his cue from Boethius’ remarks concerning the subject matter of Aristotle’s Categories, almost a millennium later Thomas de Vio Cajetan characterized the entities to be considered here in the following way:

- if one is to ask whether it is words or things which are principally treated of here, we have to say that it is things, though not absolutely, but insofar as they are conceived in an incomplex manner, and, by consequent necessity, insofar as signified by words. (Cajetan 1939:5)

Cajetan’s interpretation of the subject matter of the Categories provides an elegant solution to both problems with the Square posed above. Since the entities to be considered here are not only mind-independent real beings, but any objects of our simple concepts, universals fit into the Square, even if there are no mind-independent entities existing in a universal manner, insofar as universals are beings of reason, having some foundation in reality. For the same reason, however, enuntiabilia are ruled out, insofar as they are the objects not of simple, but of complex concepts, namely, of complex thoughts formed by the judgment-forming intellect.

Clearly, Cajetan’s solution is able to accommodate beings of reason, because it presupposes the Thomistic interpretation of what and how being is divided in the Aristotelian Square, namely, the extension of an analogical notion into the extensions of its analogata. According to this doctrine, the extent of the Aristotelian Square should cover both beings in an absolute sense, without qualification, and beings in some diminished sense, with qualification (see the entry on Being).

This is, in fact, the basis of Aquinas’ understanding of the Aristotelian idea of inherence, that is, an accident’s being-in a subject. For an accident to be is nothing but for its subject to be informed by it, or, conversely, for it to be in its subject: accidentis esse est inesse [“for an accident to be is for it to be in (a subject)’’]. This is precisely why on Aquinas’s conception an accident cannot be said to be in the same sense as a substance. When we say that an accident, say, the whiteness of a sheet of paper, exists, the act of being signified by the predicate of this predication is not the act of being of this sheet of paper without qualification (for that would be the substantial act of being of this sheet), but the act of being of the sheet with respect to its whiteness; it is not the being of the sheet absolutely, rather, it is the sheet’s being white. So the act of being of the whiteness of this sheet is nothing but an act of being of the sheet, although, of course, it is just an accidental act of being of the sheet: the sheet may continue in its own existence even if its whiteness perishes, say, when the sheet is dipped in black ink.

Aristotle vs. the Theology of the Eucharist

However, this interpretation of the Aristotelian notion of the inherence of an accident in its subject seems to be in direct conflict with the theological doctrine of the miracle of the Eucharist, which would require at least the logical possibility of the existence of the accidents of transsubstantiated bread and wine without inhereing in any substance. For if for an accident to exist is for its subject to be informed by it, then it seems to involve a direct contradiction to claim that an accident exists and yet it does not inform any subject.

The theological requirement of the separability of accidents in continued existence from their subject, therefore, introduced a number of complications into the interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine of accidental being. The fundamental question is whether the Aristotelian doctrine is absolutely incompatible with the theological doctrine of the Eucharist, or whether there is some authentic interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine that would allow the separate existence of accidents to be at least supernaturally possible, i.e., free from contradiction.

A striking exposition of the “incompatabilist position” is provided in the fourteenth century by John Buridan, who argues that since Aristotle’s position is incompatible with Christian faith, Christians actually have to have a radically different concept of accidental being from that of Aristotle (Bakker 2001:247–257). On Buridan’s view, the Aristotelian position necessarily implies that an accident is inseparable in continued existence from its subject precisely because on that position for an accident...
to be is for it to be in a subject, whence the very concept of an accident must be connotative, necessarily implying its being an accident of some substance. Therefore, Buridan finds it inevitable that Christians, who uphold the supernatural separability of accidents, must part company with Aristotle on the issue of accidental being, as well as the Aristotelian doctrine of the analogy of being. For Christians, the accidents persisting in the Eucharist without a subject ought to be conceived by means of absolute concepts without any connotation of their subject, and so as beings in exactly the same sense as their underlying subject.

Thus, Buridan's analysis closely ties together the Aristotelian doctrine of the analogy of being with that of the absolute inseparability of accidents in continued existence, and, consequently, he also holds that the theological doctrine of the supernatural separability of accidents directly leads to the conception of the univocity of being with regard to substance and accident.

In fact, the nominalist theologian Marsilius of Inghen, summarizing what he takes to be "the common opinion of many theologians" on the basis of the doctrine of the philosopher, John Buridan, explicitly draws the conclusion that on the basis of this opinion "being" should be regarded as a genus common to substance and all accidents, or at least to those accidents that are supernaturally separable in continued existence by divine power. Marsilius, however, does not want to side with the common opinion as described by Buridan. Working out what he takes to be a "more metaphysical" solution, he affirms the analogy of being between substance and accident; still, he does not equate it with the inseparability of accidents in the way Buridan does. He argues that substance and accident do not have the sort of essential agreement on the basis of which we could form a common univocal concept of the two; however, this does not mean that an accident remaining of the same nature could not be miraculously preserved in its being (Bakker 2001:257–264).

So, the question really is whether Buridan is correct in claiming that the Aristotelian doctrine of the analogy of being inevitably leads to the claim of the inseparability of accidents in continued existence, and thus whether upholding the theological doctrine of the Eucharist entails the commitment to the denial of the doctrine of the analogy of being with regard to substance and accident. The position of Duns Scotus certainly may give this impression. However, Aquinas, who definitely upheld the Aristotelian view concerning the analogy of being, found it to be compatible with the Christian doctrine of the Eucharist.

On Aquinas's view, the division of "being" into substance and accident is not the division of a genus by means of essential, specific differences, but a division of the extension of an analogical term into its analogata, in which the nature of the thing, determining the kind of being the thing has, functions as a diminishing determination added to a distinct determinable, the act of being of the thing (Klima 2002). Thus, the kind of being the thing demands by its nature is determined by the thing's nature. However, if a superior power overrides the natural tendency of this nature to have a certain kind of being, this does not take away the natural tendency of the thing itself, and hence does not destroy the thing's nature, just as a heavy body would not lose its natural tendency to be down, even if an external power lifts it up. The crucial point in Aquinas's solution, therefore, is the Avicennean interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine of the analogy of being, as based on the real distinction between the essence and existence of created beings. For this is what grounds his claim that even if the actual mode of being of an accident changes in the Eucharist (from "inherent" to "subsistent"), still, this may leave the distinct nature of the thing unaffected, which only contains the natural tendency to be in a subject.

But then it should not come as a surprise that the philosopher Siger of Brabant, who rejects the Avicennean interpretation of Aristotle, and sides with Averroes in rejecting the real distinction between essence and existence in creatures, could not endorse this sort of solution (Siger of Brabant 1972a:41). His position is actually the closest to the position of Aristotle as described by Buridan. In his commentary on the Metaphysics, after vehemently denying the thesis of the real distinction between essence and existence in the creatures as stemming from an error of Avicenna's (Siger of Brabant 1983:34), Siger insists (in his reply to one of Aquinas's arguments for the real distinction) that the act of being (esse) need not multiply in beings because of something added to it, but rather it is multiplied on account of its ratio essendi (its mode of being), the diversity of which in different kinds of beings is entailed by Aristotle's claim that ens cannot be a genus (Siger of Brabant 1983:36–37). However, in the question directly addressing the issue whether existence is a genus, Siger explicitly concludes that the reason why ens cannot be a genus is that the ratio essendi of accidents, being a non-absolute ratio, cannot be the same as the ratio essendi of substances, which is an absolute ratio (Siger of Brabant 1983:101). In a different context – most notably in the context of the question whether the intellect can be both subsistent and inherent – he also insists that these rationes essendi are so incompatible, that they cannot
while remaining the same thing, cannot have one of essence with existence, is clearly that the same thing, an accident does not have a ratio essendi, except in relation to a substance, whence it cannot be defined, except in relation to substance. (Siger of Brabant 1983:341)

The implication of all this, along with Siger’s identification of essence with existence, is clearly that the same thing, while remaining the same thing, cannot have one ratio essendi after the other, and thus, an accident, having the ratio essendi of an inherent being, cannot, while remaining what it was, an accident, have later on the ratio essendi of a subsistent being, on pain of contradiction. But this leaves him with a sheer “fideistic” position concerning the possibility of the separate existence of accidents in the Eucharist, without resolving the contradiction with his philosophical conclusions, provoking both Aquinas’s philosophical criticisms, while defending his own “Avicennan Aristotle,” and the wrath of Augustinian theologians, rejecting Siger’s “Averroistic Aristotle.”

It was this kind of “Averroistic Aristotelianism,” famously condemned in 1277, which was sternly rejected by theologians such as Henry of Ghent and later Duns Scotus. However, since they also rejected the Avicennan-Thomistic thesis of the real distinction of being and essence, they more radically reinterpreted the Aristotelian distinction between substance and accident, ending up with positions closer to what Marsilius (taking his cue from Buridan) described as “the common opinion” of theologians.

In general, the most fundamental issue concerning the interpretation of the Aristotelian notion of inherence and its compatibility with the doctrine of the Eucharist seems to be whether the Aristotelian notion can consistently be interpreted in such a way that according to this interpretation transubstantiation does not have to destroy the nature of accidents. Aquinas’s “Avicennan solution” is based on the thesis of real distinction between essence and existence, on the basis of which, even if the mode of being of the thing changes, this can leave the distinct nature of the thing unaffected.

Those, however, who rejected this Avicennan interpretation of Aristotle, be they philosophers, like Siger or Buridan, or theologians, like Henry of Ghent or Duns Scotus, ended up either with an irresoluble conflict between their Aristotelianism and their faith, as Siger did, or with a more radical departure from Aristotle in their interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine of the analogy of being, as Henry, Scotus, and Buridan did.

Either way, abandoning the Thomistic interpretation of the Aristotelian distinction seems to drive a wedge between faith and reason, culminating in the attribution of radically different notions of accidental being to philosophers and to theologians by Buridan. Perhaps, this is what motivated Marsilius of Inghen’s “more metaphysical” solution, echoing the gist of Aquinas’s.

The gist of Marsilius’s solution is the permanence of the natural tendency of the accident to be in a subject, even if its actual existence changes from inherent to subsistent, just as it was in Aquinas (Bakker 2001:262). However, for Marsilius, the nominalist theologian, this solution was no longer based on the Avicennan interpretation of Aristotle provided by Aquinas, but rather on the strict separation of what is naturally and what is only supernaturally possible, indeed, on a radical separation of theological and secular philosophical and scientific discourse initiated in many ways by the nominalism of William Ockham (see Klima 2009).

Ockham’s nominalism, on the other hand, was partly motivated by what he perceived as entirely futile metaphysical problems concerning the categories, based on a mistaken semantic conception of his contemporaries (Klima 1999a). His new semantic conception motivated by this perception, in turn, led to a radical transformation of scholastic discourse and, along with other conceptual changes in late-medieval philosophy, to the emergence of the possibility of completely and systematically eliminating accidents really distinct from substances, and thus eventually to the collapse of the scholastic substance-accident metaphysics in early modern philosophy.

The Problem of the Distinction of Accidents, and the Emergence of Modes

As we have seen, the theological problem of the Eucharist naturally gave rise to the intensional problem of the interpretation of the Aristotelian notion of the inherence of accidents. Particular philosophical problems concerning the distinction of specific kinds of accidents from each other as well as from their subject, however, tended to give rise to a number of more specific extensional problems of the necessity and sufficiency of the Aristotelian division.

The framework of the medieval discussion concerning the distinction of specific kinds of accidents was provided by Aristotle’s distinction of the ten categories, namely, distinguishing substance from the nine categories of accidents: quantity, quality, relation, action, passion, time, place, position, and habit. One fundamental question concerning the distinction of the categories was precisely what sort of items these categories classify. Are they words, or the concepts expressed by these words, or are they the
entities themselves already fitted into the broader framework of the Ontological Square by Aristotle?

Various authors handled these issues variously in their interpretation of Aristotle, but few would have subscribed to a simplistic “mirroring” idea, namely, the idea that the ten classes of simple words “mirror” ten classes of simple concepts, which in turn “mirror” the ten fundamental classes of entities there are in reality.

In the first place, that the relationship between words and concepts is more complicated is clear from the phenomena of equivocation (one word expressing several concepts) as well as synonymy (several words expressing the same concept) and translatability (different words in different languages expressing the same concept) or from the fact that a simple word may express a complex concept and a complex phrase may occasionally convey a simple concept (Buridan 2001:xxxvii–xxxix).

In the second place, the relationship between concepts and things is quite complicated as well: universal concepts comprehend several particular things (even if several particular things of the same kind), but even the same (kinds of) things may be conceived in terms of radically different concepts (as for example, all triangular things may also be conceived as trilateral and vice versa).

Thus, even the medieval modistae, who insisted that the modes of signifying of words (modi significandi) follow upon our ways of understanding things (modi intelligendi), which in turn reflect the ways things are (modi essendi), would not have subscribed to the simplistic mirroring view of semantic relations; and, a fortiori, such a view would have been rejected by their late-medieval, especially, nominalist critics (Marmo 1999). But still, especially in the thirteenth-century literature on Aristotle’s Categories and Metaphysics, there were various speculations about the sufficiency of Aristotle’s classification (in the so-called sufficientiae literature), trying to establish that his ten categories comprehend all entities, sorting them into their ten and only ten most universal essential kinds (McMahon 2002; Gracia and Lloyd 2006).

However, apart from the issue of the sufficiency of the categories to classify all entities into their essential kinds, there was also the intriguing question of the necessity of Aristotle’s categories, as far as the classification of real entities is concerned. For nobody seems to have denied the usefulness of Aristotle’s classification of predicables terms and the concepts they express in the ten genera he distinguished, establishing a certain system of them all; but there were serious doubts as to whether this classification is at the same time the classification of the essential, natural kinds of all entities there are. Are there really (at least) ten classes of really distinct, essentially different entities in the universe?

One consideration that prompts this conclusion is the following piece of reasoning, which may be dubbed the argument from separability:

1. Any entities that can exist without each other are distinct from each other
2. The entities in distinct categories can exist without each other
3. Therefore, the entities in distinct categories are distinct from each other

If this argument is sound, then the ten categories provide a mutually exclusive (and hopefully also exhaustive) ten-fold classification of all entities.

However, in this argument, a great deal depends on the interpretation of its second premise. The obvious justification for this premise is the fact that accidents are “separable” from their subject as well as from each other in the sense that a subject may continue to exist while its accidents come or cease to inform it, independently from each other. (Of course, this natural “separability” of accidents must not be confused with the question of their supernatural separability in continued existence discussed above.)

After all, on Porphyry’s description of accident, “accident is what comes and goes without the destruction of the substrate” (Spade 1994:11). For example, the white sheet of paper that turns black when dipped in ink certainly continues to exist, while its whiteness is gone, and the same goes for its other accidents in the other categories.

We need not be detained here too much by the issue of naturally inseparable accidents discussed by Porphyry, such as the blackness of a crow (to use his example), which are inseparable only assuming the present course of nature, but could be separated from their subject (without preserving them in continued existence) in a different system of nature, simply on account of their nonessentiality. So, in a different system of nature, with different laws in force, the same subjects could be present without their actually naturally inseparable accidents. For instance, in a different system of nature, there could be white crows. (Indeed, we could actually produce them even in this system of nature by dipping them in hydrogen peroxide, but Porphyry apparently did not think of this cruel possibility. Thus, a better example of a naturally inseparable accident in his sense might be the yellow color of pure gold.) By contrast, in a different system of nature, the same subjects could not be present without their essential properties, because then they would just not be the same things. We certainly could not have crows that...
are not crows or animals or bodies (or gold that is not an element or does not have atomic number 79).

However, the justification of premise (2) above in terms of the Porphyrian definition clearly presupposes that what we are referring to by means of the abstract term “whiteness,” namely, the accident that verifies the corresponding concrete term “white” of this sheet, cannot cease to be referred to by this term unless it ceases to exist, that is to say, that this abstract term is an essential predicate of this accident. For, if the term were not an essential predicate of this thing, or would not refer “rigidly” to this thing, to use the contemporary jargon, then the thing could cease to be referred to by the term “whiteness,” i.e., it could cease to be whiteness, without ceasing to exist. And so, even if the white sheet were identical with its whiteness, it could cease to be white without its whiteness ceasing to exist, for its whiteness could just cease to be whiteness without ceasing to be.

To be sure, in the case of this example, one may have the intuition that the thing that is called “whiteness” cannot cease to be whiteness without ceasing to be. However, consider another example in the category of quality, in the species of shape, such as straightness. Scholastic “realists” (for the significance of the quotes see Klima 2008) committed to the essentiality of abstract terms in this species would have to claim that when, say, a piece of wire is straight, then this is because of the matter of this piece of wire is informed by the quality of straightness, and so when the wire is bent, its straightness is destroyed while the wire itself continues to exist, which clearly indicates that the wire and its shape are not the same thing.

However, what if this shape is not construed as a simple quality essentially named “straightness”? After all, for the wire to be straight is just for its extremes to be maximally distant; thus, the wire’s shape is nothing but the way its quantity is extended, indeed, one may say, it is just this quantity extended this way. But of course when the wire goes from straight to bent, its quantity does not cease to exist; it just goes from existing in one way to existing in another. However, these “ways,” that is, modes of being of this quantity are not further things added to this quantity: they are the quantity itself arranged one way or another, on account of which it once can be called straight and then bent. Therefore, straightness is nothing but the quantity of the wire arranged in a certain way, not a thing really distinct from this quantity. Indeed, if quantity-terms can be analyzed along similar lines, then its quantity can also be identified with a material substance, for again, then the dimensions of the substance are nothing but the substance itself, its matter being arranged in a certain way.

This is precisely the gist of the idea of Ockham’s nominalist program of “ontological reduction,” whereby he sought to get rid of all sorts of “weird entities” to which his realist opponents were apparently committed (see Klima 1999a, b). Perhaps, the best illustration of the kind of ontological commitment Ockham wanted to eliminate can be found in the following passage, coming from the auspiciously titled treatise, “A very useful and realist logic of Campsal the Englishman against Ockham”:

> there are individuals subjected to each category that are really distinct from the individuals of another category of which it [their category] is properly and directly predicated; for example, we can truly assert: ‘This is [a] when’ pointing to the relation which is caused by the motion of the first movable [i.e., the celestial sphere of the fixed stars] in the inferior things, so that, if that individual had a distinct proper name imposed on it, one could just as truly respond to the question: ‘What is it?’ by saying: ‘[A] when’, as one can reply to the question ‘What is it?’ asked about a man, by saying: ‘A substance’. (Pseudo-Campsall 1982:216–217)

Indeed, the realist author of this treatise is willing to go far as to claim that denying the real distinction of individuals in the ten categories would lead to the destruction of philosophy and science:

> we should see whether a when-ness is distinct from absolute things. . . . And this appears but some quibble: for denying that in any category there is to be found a thing distinct from the things of all other categories amounts to denying philosophy in general and several particular sciences that deal with these categories (Pseudo-Campsall 1982:327)

The most important point in these passages is that our realist author would take the categories as well as their subordinate genera and species to be essential predicates of their particulars. But this is precisely the assumption that allows “the argument from separability” to go through, thereby generating a “Porphyrian forest” consisting of distinct Porphyrian trees (the arrangement of genera and their subordinate species) in each category. Consequently, it is no wonder that this is precisely the assumption that Ockham’s and his followers’ new semantic conception would systematically undermine, allowing them to cut down what they took to be the realists’ “Porphyrian forest,” leading to commitment to all sorts of “weird entities” in one’s ontology, causing all sorts of apparently insoluble problems in one’s logic, metaphysics, and physics (for some of Ockham’s particular arguments see Klima 1999a).
The gist of the Ockhamist idea, as I have indicated above, was that abstract terms in the accidental categories can be analyzed in terms of their nominal definitions, revealing the complex conceptual structures “covered-up” by the syntactic simplicity of these terms. But within the Ockhamist semantic framework, the revelation of this complex conceptual structure at the same time reveals that the corresponding term is a nonessential predicate of its particulars, which means that “the argument from separability” cannot stand in the way of identifying this particular with one in another category. Thus, providing such “eliminative definitions” could become a powerful analytic tool for carrying out the Ockhamist program of reducing the really distinct ontological categories to two (substance and quality – as was Ockham’s original program) or three (substance, quality, and quantity – as was Buridan’s program).

Indeed, this conceptual tool in principle could have been used to eliminate all real accidents, even in the category quality, leaving only substances whose matter being arranged in different ways is what causally accounts for their various properties classifiable in the system of the categories, in the framework of an atomist physical theory. Buridan, however, who was well aware of this possibility (explored by his contemporary John of Mirecourt), rejected atomism as “an obscure and dangerous” doctrine (Buridan 1899:122), and argued for the real distinction of some species of quality, quantity, and substance (for more on this, see Klima 2003).

However, despite the nominalists’ charges to the contrary, authors working in the older semantic framework did not have to be committed to a full blown “Porphyrian forest.” Even if they did not have the systematic analytic tool of “eliminative nominal definitions” that the nominalists could apply in eliminating unwanted ontological commitment to distinct entities in the accidental categories, these authors could still use other conceptual means to identify or “quasi-identify” entities across categories, provided they could abandon on principled grounds the crucial assumption of the essentiality of abstract terms in accidental categories.

One such conceptual tool was the distinction between two types of relations: relations in being (relationes secundum esse) and relations in speech (relationes secundum dixi). It is only abstract relational terms of the former type of that would be essential predicates of distinct relation-things; abstract relational terms of the latter type would just be relative denominations of absolute things in other categories. Apparently, some authors would identify this distinction with the distinction between real relations (relationes reales) and merely conceptual ones (relationes rationis). However, Cajetan insisted that the former distinction is one to be applied within the realm of real relations.

But similar considerations allowed the identification or quasi-identification of items in other categories. For instance, Aquinas would often cite Aristotle’s authority to endorse the identification of action and passion with the same motion, or a location with the dimensive quantity of the locating thing. In all such cases, what allows the identification of items across categories is the consideration that the terms referring to these items need not be their essential predicates, which neutralizes the force of the argument from separability. But the conceptual device of allowing the nonessentiality of abstract terms in accidental categories in and of itself would only produce the recognition of conceptual distinctions of otherwise really identical items in one’s ontology, just like the merely conceptual distinctions produced by the nominalists’ eliminative definitions.

Another important conceptual tool among non-nominalists, combined with allowing the nonessentiality of abstract terms, but also emphasizing the mind-independence of some distinctions, involved tweaking the notions of unity and distinctness. This is how Henry Ghent’s intentional distinction or Scoto’s formal distinction, or later Suarez’s modal distinction were all capable of providing a way to “quasi-identify” items across categories without, however, fully identifying them. The best description of this strategy can be found in Suarez’s presentation of his modal distinction, as being somehow halfway between a full-blown real distinction and a mere conceptual distinction:

- I think it is true without qualification that there is among created things a certain actual distinction which is found in nature prior to any activity of the mind, and that such distinction is not so great as the distinction between two altogether separate things or entities. This distinction, to be sure, could be designated by the general term “real”, inasmuch as it is truly verified in reality, and is not merely an extrinsic denomination issuing from the intellect. However, to differentiate it from the other, namely the major real distinction, we can call it either a “distinction from the nature of the case,” thus applying to this imperfect distinction a term that is in common use, or more properly a “modal distinction.” For, as I shall explain, this distinction is invariably found to intervene between a thing and its mode. (Suarez 1947:27)

So, what is a mode? Suarez is well aware of the fact that modes are not his invention. He mentions Giles of Rome, Durandus of Saint-Pourçain, and especially Petrus
Fonseca, as his forrunners on this issue; although he could have mentioned even earlier figures, such as John Peter Olivi or Peter Auriol. Indeed, even earlier, Albert the Great tended to refer to all accidents as the modes of substance, but he probably did not have in mind the specific notion of a *mode* in Suarez’s sense, which, following Fonseca, Suarez carefully distinguished from the broader senses of the term.

In this specific technical sense, a mode of something “is something affecting it” and, as it were, ultimately determining its state and manner of existing, without adding to it a proper new entity, but merely modifying a pre-existing entity” (Suarez 1947:28).

So, modes are something real, indeed, as Suarez insists, mind-independently distinct from the things of which they are the modes, and yet they are not *as* distinct as one thing from another, as a real accident would be distinct from a substance. Indeed, they are not sufficiently distinct to be separable even by divine power; thus modes could not be sustained in separation in the way accidents can in the Eucharist. Therefore, modes in this strict sense constitute a genuinely new category wedged “between” the categories of substance and accident.

Of course, this characterization of modes and their distinction from the substances and accidents of which they are the modes makes the problem of the sufficiency of the division of being into substance and accident return with a vengeance. Suarez valiantly struggled with the problem, trying to save the idea of sufficiency, but his solution may have just added to the sense of later generations that the distinction is radically flawed. Indeed, the conceptual tools introduced by late-medieval realists and nominalists discussed above opened up the possibility of totally eliminating the distinction, which, after a flourishing of talk about modes of substances instead of their real accidents, is basically what happened in the early modern period.

See also: ► Being ► Categories ► Essence and Existence ► John Buridan ► Parisian Condemnation of 1277 ► Siger of Brabant ► Terms ► Properties of, Thomas Aquinas

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### Substance, Accident, and Modes. Table 1 The Aristotelian Ontological Square

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Is not in a subject</th>
<th>Is in a subject</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is not said of a subject</td>
<td>Particular substance</td>
<td>Particular accident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>this man</em></td>
<td><em>this whiteness</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is said of a subject</td>
<td>Universal substance</td>
<td>Universal accident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>man</em></td>
<td><em>whiteness</em></td>
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