

Aristotle's Intermittently Existing Masked Man

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While Aristotle does not posit independently existing Forms such as justice and musical, his Theory of Accidental Compounds that arises out of the relationship of accidental sameness does establish a unique set of ontological entities referred to, by some, as “kooky objects” or “accidental compounds.”¹ Commentators such as Gareth Matthews argue that for Aristotle’s theory of accidental compounds to solve the paradoxes it is claimed to solve such compounds must be ontological compounds and not merely linguistic ones.² In this paper I argue that giving Aristotle’s accidental compounds ontological status allows for the intermittent existence of such entities. In section one I introduce the theory of accidental compounds and explicate the reasons provided for giving such compounds ontological status. Section two will make the case for the intermittent existence of such accidental compounds and section three will conclude by analyzing two possible ways Aristotle may respond to the claim of intermittent existence of accidental compounds.

¹ “Accidental compounds” is used in: Frank A. Lewis, “Accidental Sameness in Aristotle.” *Philosophical Studies* 42.1 (1982): 1-36. “Kooky objects” originated in: Gareth B. Matthews, “Accidental Unities,” in *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed. Malcolm Schofield and Martha Nussbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 223-40. I will mainly use the clearer term accidental compounds.

² Gareth B. Matthews, “On Knowing How to Take Aristotle’s Kooky Objects Seriously,” *Paper Presented at the Pacific Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association* (Portland: 1992). See also: S.M. Cohen, “Kooky Objects Revisited: Aristotle’s Ontology,” *Metaphilosophy* 39.1 (2008): 3-19; Lewis, “Accidental Sameness;” Matthews, “Accidental Unities.”

I. The Theory of Accidental Compounds

The problem of material constitution poses a problem for modern day metaphysicians. This problem asks, to use a famous example, what is the relationship between the bronze Statue of Athena and the lump of bronze that constitutes it? The relationship is surely not one of identity, for if it were then the bronze Statue of Athena must be able to survive being melted down as the lump of bronze is able to do. The relationship could be something much weaker, say co-location, but this creates its own problems. If the bronze Statue of Athena and the lump of bronze stood in the relation of co-location then they would each be discrete entities occupying the same space, a conclusion that is unsatisfactory for anyone who looks at the Statue of Athena and sees clearly only one entity.³

This problem of material constitution is similar to an ancient paradox proposed by Aristotle himself. In *Sophistical Refutations* he describes a paradox of identity that he thinks is in need of solving. This paradox asks if, “in the case of a man approaching [while] wearing a mask, is to be approaching the same thing as to be Coriscus, so that if I know Coriscus, but do not know the man who is approaching, it still isn’t the case that I both know and do not know the same man” (179b1-4).⁴ Put more clearly, Aristotle’s paradox looks like this:

- (1) I know Coriscus
- (2) Coriscus is the same as the masked man
- (3) I do not know the masked man

³ For a discussion of the problem of material constitution see Michael C. Rea, “Sameness without Identity: An Aristotelian Solution to the Problem of Material Constitution,” *Ratio* 11.3 (1998): 316-28.

⁴ All Aristotle quotations are taken from: Aristotle *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. Jonathan Barnes, 2 volumes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

The problem in this situation is that if (2) is read as an identity relationship, such that “Coriscus is the same as the masked man” is read as “Coriscus is identical to the masked man” then it would appear that I should be able to substitute “the masked man” in any sentence in which Coriscus is the subject. But if Coriscus is substituted out for “the masked man” in (1) I get a contradiction with (3). It is therefore not the case that Coriscus is identical with the masked man.

But if Coriscus is not identical with the masked man, what can (2) mean by “the same as”? It is in providing an answer to this question that Aristotle develops his Theory of Accidental Compounds. The solution begins by positing a third relationship that two objects may stand in relation to each other, one found between identity and co-location. According to Aristotle, two things may stand in a relationship of accidental sameness to each other. This relationship is stronger than co-location, because unlike co-location it is a species of numerical sameness. It is, however, weaker than identity because, unlike identity, accidental sameness does not imply that the two entities share in all their (essential) properties. When one thing is accidentally the same as another, according to Aristotle, “you should say that the subject of an accident is not absolutely different from the accident taken along with its subject” (*Topics* 133b31-36). He also says in the *Metaphysics* that “a thing and the thing modified are in a way the same, for example Socrates and musical Socrates” (1024b30-31). So when two entities are accidentally the same, such as Socrates and musical Socrates, they are in fact in a sense the same and in a sense different.⁵

So under the relationship of accidental sameness, (2) above can be read as saying that Coriscus is accidentally the same as the masked man; it can also be said that the bronze Statue of Athena is

⁵ Cohen, “Kooky Objects Revisited,” 6.

accidentally the same as the lump of bronze that constitutes it. In both instances, the two entities being related are numerically one, as identity would hold, but do not share in all their properties as Leibniz's Law would require for a strict identity relationship. Leibniz's Law, or the Identity of Indiscernibles, would require that two objects must possess *all* of their properties in common to be considered strictly identical. While Coriscus happens to be wearing a mask, and I happen to know Coriscus, it is still possible for me to not know the masked man and allow (2) to make sense. In the case of the statue, it is possible for me to say that while the Statue of Athena is kept whole it is accidentally and numerically the same as the lump of bronze that constitutes it, but once it is melted down it is not the case that the Statue of Athena and the lump of bronze are the same.

But it is not this relationship that is of main interest here. What is of interest here is what two sorts of objects may stand in relation of accidental sameness to each other. It is not seemingly problematic to see the lump of bronze, which is matter, as accidentally the same as the statue, which is a composite of form and matter. However, it is more interesting to understand the sorts of so-called "kooky objects" that come into existence when a substance, such as Socrates, takes on an accident, such as sitting. In these situations, it is not a piece of formless matter that is accidentally the same as Socrates, but rather a being whose essence, in this case, is to sit. As Aristotle explains:

And so one might raise the question whether 'to walk' and 'to be healthy' and 'to sit' signify in each case something that is, and similarly in any other case of this sort; for none of them is either self-subsistent or capable of being separated from substance, but rather, if anything, it is that which walks or is seated or is healthy that is an existent thing. Now these are seen to be more real because there is something definite which underlies them; and this is the substance or individual, which is implied in such a predicate; for 'good' or 'sitting' are not used without this. (1028a20-28)

Additionally, he tells us that two accidents may be accidentally the same as each other if they are both accidents of the same substance; an accident and a substance may be accidentally the same if the substance has been altered by the accident (1017b26-1018a4). But of course for two things to be accidentally the same, and therefore one in number, they both must be existent things that happen, for a time, to coincide. In the case of the lump of bronze and the bronze Statue of Athena it is not difficult to see both entities are existent things, but in the case of an accident such as “sitting” what sort of entity happens to coincide with Socrates to make him “sitting Socrates”?

The answer for Cohen and Matthews, is that “for an attribute to belong accidentally to a subject is for that attribute to belong essentially to a different entity, one that coincides with, that is, is one in number with but only accidentally the same as, the subject.”⁶ These different entities that have accidents essentially attached to them are not substances, however, but are instead ephemeral objects that exist, but not in the same sense that substances exist. As discussed above, Aristotle sees these accidental compounds such as “the seated one” or “the masked one” as more real than “sitting” or “masked” but not as real as a substance such as Socrates or Coriscus. The sitting one must be an ontological entity because accidental sameness is a type of numerical sameness, meaning it requires the existence of two (or more) entities that happen to coincide to create a unity, just like the lump of bronze and the bronze Statue of Athena.

So far it has been said that an accidental compound is an existent entity, but its existence is parasitic on the existence of substance. Were substance not to exist, accidental compounds would also not exist. But because of this accidental compounds cannot be said *to be* in the same sense that substances are said *to be*.

⁶ Cohen, “Kooky Objects Revisited,” 8-9.

Indeed, it is Aristotle's argument that there are different senses of the verb "to be", one of which applies to accidental compounds and the other to substances, that allows him to escape full-blown Platonism.⁷ Additionally, his lexical ordering of being, from substance to accidental compound to accident, further denigrates the being of mere accidents such as "just" from their position in the World of Ideas. But this isn't to say that accidental compounds don't have some sort of ontological status, and it is in giving them an ontological status and claiming that they do in fact *exist*, at least in some sense, that provokes discussion of intermittent existence, to which I will now turn.

II. The Intermittent Existence of Accidental Compounds

The previous section sought to explicate the Theory of Accidental Compounds as defended by those who give such entities ontological status. I do not aim to take a position on whether they are correct in assigning an ontological status to accidental compounds, but instead seek to take their work on the subject of accidental compounds to its logical conclusion. As Matthews, the man who coined the phrase "kooky objects" for accidental compounds explains: "The implications of this doctrine are staggering. When the man rises, the seated man ceases to be; when the woman awakens, the sleeping woman passes away; when the baby cries, the silent baby perishes."⁸ In each of these cases there is an underlying substance, the man, the woman or the baby, that persists through accidental change. But there is also an ephemeral object, the seated man, the sleeping woman, the silent baby, which exists before change occurs and has ceased to exist once the change

⁷ Matthews, "Accidental Unities," 224.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 225.

has occurred. While those who espouse the ontological view of accidental compounds have no problem admitting that it means certain entities will cease to be when accidental changes occur, they have not explored what happens when a change returns a substance to a previous state. For instance, if seated man ceases to be when the man stands up, does it return when the man sits again? This is the question of intermittent existence I aim to answer in this section.

The modern problem of intermittent existence asks “whether there are any cases in which the parts of an object separate, and later recombine, which should be counted as cases in which the existence of an object is temporarily interrupted.”⁹ Generally speaking, issues of intermittent existence look at objects such as tables that are disassembled and later reassembled with the same pieces and the same design. At the root of the question is if it is possible for a table at time t_1 to be identical with a table at time t_2 and yet not be the identical table between t_1 and t_2 . I aim to ask a similar question in the case of accidental compounds. If it is true that “the masked man” exists at time t_1 when Coriscus is wearing the mask, but ceases to exist for some time when Coriscus removes the mask, does an identical “masked man” return to existence when Coriscus replaces the mask? There are four conditions that must be met for this to be the case:

- (1) The masked man must be an existent entity;
- (2) The masked man must cease to exist;
- (3) The masked man must return to existence at another time;
- (4) And, the masked man at time t_1 must stand in the relationship of identity to the masked man at time t_2

⁹ Michael B. Burke, “Cohabitation, Stuff and Intermittent Existence,” *Mind* 39.355 (1980): 392.

The first condition was explained and accepted in the previous section, so I will deal with the other three conditions in turn now.

According to Matthews, among others, condition two is clearly met. As he told us, when the man rises the seated man ceases to be. Similarly, then, when the man removes his mask the masked man must cease to be. But Aristotle also provides a clear defense of the truth of this condition in the *Physics*. Here he argues that “to be a man is not the same as to be unmusical. One part survives, the other does not: what is not an opposite survives (for the man survives), but not-musical or unmusical does not survive, *nor does the compound of the two, namely the unmusical man*” (190a17-21, emphasis added). Indeed, Aristotle’s idea appears to be that “whenever a concrete individual substance changes in any accidental way, several purely ephemeral objects... go out of existence.”¹⁰ Or, as another defender of the ontology of accidental compounds puts it, “for Socrates, the change of becoming unmusical is mere alteration; but for [musical Socrates], it is sheer extinction.”¹¹

Indeed, it is quite clear among defenders of the ontology of accidental compounds, with some useful support from Aristotle himself that accidental compounds do cease to be when the substance they coincide with no longer accepts the necessary predicate. Condition two, then, is quite clearly met simply by way of explanation of Aristotle’s Theory of Accidental Compounds. Condition three, similarly, is justified by appeal simply to the explanation of the theory. Accidental compounds do in fact go out of existence when the accident ceases to apply to the substance, and they in fact due return to existence when the accident applies again.¹² For Coriscus to be accidentally the same as the masked man,

¹⁰ Matthews, “On Knowing How to Take Aristotle’s Kooky Objects Seriously,” 1.

¹¹ Lewis, “Accidental Sameness in Aristotle,” 5.

¹² Cohen, “Kooky Objects Revisited,” 4.

for instance, there must in fact be a masked man that the substance Coriscus can temporarily coincide and be numerically one with. And since the accidental compound's existence is parasitic on the existence of the substance, it cannot be the case that the masked man always exists for Coriscus to temporarily coincide with. As such, when Coriscus puts the mask back on the accidental compound "the masked man" must return to existence so that an accidental unity may return.

The example of material constitution may make this argument clearer. At time t_1 the bronze Statue of Athena is fully constructed and it is therefore accidentally the same as the lump of bronze that constitutes it. Next, the bronze Statue of Athena is melted down to its component bronze that is left to solidify. At this moment the bronze Statue of Athena has gone out of existence, but the lump of bronze that constitutes it remains. The relationship of accidental sameness has now ceased. But then at time t_2 the same lump of bronze is recast as the bronze Statue of Athena such that something called the bronze Statue of Athena is now in existence and it is accidentally the same as the lump of bronze that constitutes it.¹³ In this situation, it would be said that the bronze Statue of Athena has been brought into existence at time t_2 , which is all that must be shown to justify condition 3.

This leaves condition 4, which is the most necessary condition to prove to make the case for the intermittent existence of accidental compounds. If the masked man at time t_1 is not identical to the masked man at time t_2 then at best all that can be said is that the masked man went out of existence after t_1 and some other entity known by the same name came into existence at t_2 . Here I wish to

¹³ I do not claim to show here that both statues are *identical*. I leave that question open for now and only wish to argue that an entity labeled the bronze Statue of Athena existed at time t_1 and another entity called by the same name also existed at time t_2 .

make use of a commonly accepted understanding of identity, derived from Leibniz's Law. According to the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles two or more entities are identical when they have all their properties in common.¹⁴ Thus, so long as any predicate that attaches to one entity attaches to the other, they are identical entities. While some have taken issue with this view of identity, I see their arguments usually taking the form of the claim that it is too strict.¹⁵ They seek to reform it so that the only properties that the entities must share are essential ones. As such, my use of the more demanding principle should be uncontroversial here.

What properties does the accidental compound "the masked one" (as it is more rightly called than the "masked man" per Aristotle's discussion at 1028a20) have? Well according to Cohen, the only property it has is an essential one: it is (essentially) masked.¹⁶ Now in a discussion of "sitting Socrates" or another compound of an accident with a particular substance (as opposed to the accidental compound that the substance coincides with) it could be said that "sitting Socrates" has the property of sitting as well as any other predicates that may attach to Socrates at the time, but of concern to me here is not such unities of a substance with an accident but rather the accidental compound that essentially has whatever property a particular substance has only accidentally.

¹⁴ For a wider discussion of the relationship between Leibniz's Law and Aristotle's views on identity see Nicholas P. White, "Aristotle on Sameness and Oneness," *The Philosophical Review* 80.2 (1971): 177-97.

¹⁵ Kripke's discussion of essential properties in *Identity and Necessity* [in *Contemporary Analytic Philosophy*, ed. James Baillie. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997)] is an example of this. Leibniz saw all properties as essential ones, hence his Identity of Indiscernibles being a stronger claim than we may be happy with. My point here, though, is that even under this stricter interpretation my argument holds. For more on Kripke and Leibniz on identity see, for example, Elisabeta Sarca, "Leibniz and Kripke on Trans-World Identity," *Florida Philosophical Review* 9.1 (2009): 67-77.

¹⁶ Cohen, "Kooky Objects Revisited," 9.

Thus, each accidental compound (the seated one, the sleeping one, the masked one) only has a single property and it is an essential one.

Since each accidental compound only has one property, and that property is essential to it, then “the masked one” at time t_1 must be identical to “the masked one” at time t_2 . It is not merely that the same label is applied to two different entities, but that the same label is applied specifically because the two entities are in fact identical. They share in all the same properties, namely of being essentially masked. It is not as if when both Socrates and Coriscus sit they are accidentally the same as two distinct entities both labeled “the sitting one”; rather, when Socrates and Coriscus sit they are both accidentally the same as the single accidental compound “the sitting one”.

Thus, the accidental compound “the masked one” temporarily coincides with Coriscus, while Coriscus wears a mask, but once Coriscus removes the mask “the masked one” ceases to be. However, when Coriscus replaces the mask he is once again the same as, and thus brings back into existence, the accidental compound “the masked one”. At both times the entity being named is in fact one and the same: “the masked one” at time t_1 ceases to be but at time t_2 when it returns it is in fact the same “masked one” that has returned. This leaves all four conditions of intermittent existence appropriately met. Therefore, it is the case that Aristotle's Theory of Accidental Compounds, as explicated by Matthews, Cohen and others, makes room for the possibility of intermittent existence. With that defense in place I will move to explicating two possible arguments Aristotle may use to escape this conclusion while maintaining that accidental compounds are indeed ontological entities.

III. Potential Existence and Aristotelian Identity

My goal thus far has been to explicate the ontological version of Aristotle's Theory of Accidental Compounds as it has been defended by multiple commentators and offer the case of intermittent existence as one interesting conclusion of that theory. I did this not to reduce the ontological theory to absurdity or force Aristotle to accept intermittent existence, but merely to carry the theory to its logical conclusion. In the final section I wish to explore and problematize two ways Aristotle may respond to this conclusion. One denies condition (2) above on the grounds that potential existence means the accidental compounds are never fully removed from existence. The second will deny condition (4) by making use of Aristotle's discussions of identity and denying that the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles is sufficient for identity.

It has already been argued that although the accidental compound depends on a substance for its existence, it is not identical with the substance; if it were then the Paradox of the Masked Man would be intractable. Indeed, the accidental compound and the substance that both brings it about and temporarily coincides with it "are not indiscernible with respect to various modal and epistemic predicates."¹⁷ However, this neglects the potentiality inherent in the substance. For instance, although Socrates may be standing he is always *potentially* sitting and therefore the predicate "sitting" could always potentially attach to the substance Socrates. According to this objection, when I speak of "the masked one" ceasing to be when Coriscus removes his mask I am not actually claiming that it ceases *to be* but rather that it has moved from one sense of being to another. Indeed, Aristotle makes a distinction between potential and actual existence. A substance

¹⁷ Lewis, "Accidental Sameness in Aristotle," 20.

may exist both potentially and actually, but more importantly “qualities of substances... can exist both potentially (when inactive) and actually (when active).”¹⁸

If qualities or capacities of a substance, such as the capacity to sit which gives rise to the quality of sitting, always exist but just in different modes then perhaps accidental compounds always exist but just in different modes. It is not the case, then, as condition (2) asserts that “the masked man” ceases to be when Coriscus removes the mask, but rather that it has gone from being in the mode of actuality to being in the mode of potentiality. This distinction is most clear in *Metaphysics IX* where Aristotle introduces the concept of ontological potentiality.¹⁹

I take this objection as requiring two important assumptions. The first is that a substance’s disposition to coincide with an accidental compound has the power to bring that accidental compound into some form of being; the second is that any form of being is capable of denying intermittent existence. I find the first assumption less problematic than the second, but will deal with each in turn.

According to the first assumption, Socrates’ disposition to sit, even as he stands, is enough to bring about the reality of “the sitting one”. When I say reality here I do not mean actual existence, but at least some form of existence, even if it is just potential. Such a view, then, assigns a sort of rational power to Socrates’ possession of rational powers. As Aristotle explains, a rational power is one that can produce change in something other than itself and that is capable of contraries (1046b1-9). The sort of power that would allow a substance’s disposition to bring about the existence of another

¹⁸ Charlotte Witt, *Ways of Being: Potentiality and Actuality in Aristotle’s Metaphysics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 39.

¹⁹ See especially chapters 2 and 3. For a discussion of this addition of ontological potentiality see Witt, *Ways of Being*, chapter 2.

entity must, then, be a rational power. It is clearly a power that produces change in something else, namely the accidental compound; additionally, since Socrates is capable of both standing and sitting such a power is capable of contraries and only rational powers are capable of contraries. I find this assumption to be explicitly denied by Aristotle.

According to Aristotle all powers, rational or non-rational, are the ability to make actual what is potential (1046a29-32). But in what is at issue here it is clearly not the case that Socrates, while standing but having the disposition to sit, can make *actual* the accidental compound “the sitting one”. That accidental compound is only made actual when Socrates actually sits and therefore is accidentally the same as “the sitting one”. Since “the sitting one” only has dependent (actual) existence, if there is not a substance that coincides with it then it cannot exist. If it were to exist despite any substance coinciding with it, Aristotle would be left with an undesirably Platonic ontology. But this does not deny the accidental compound’s ability to exist potentially even as no substance coincides with it.

However, if Socrates’ disposition to sit is assigned the power to bring an accidental compound into potential existence then Aristotle’s understanding of power has been lost. Powers do not bring anything into *potential* existence; they only bring what already potentially exists into *actual* existence. In sitting, Socrates does have the power to bring “the sitting one” into actual existence; but the mere disposition to sit cannot be granted the power to bring “the sitting one” into potential existence. Therefore, it is not the case that a substance’s disposition to accept an accident is enough to bring the accidental compound into existence. But this has not resolved the issue of potential existence fully. Even if it is not the case that Socrates’ disposition to sit brings about the potential being of “the

sitting one” it may still be the case that “the sitting one” always exists potentially and therefore never ceases to exist in such a way that makes intermittent existence possible.

I would like to take two different paths in responding to this claim. I will first put pressure on the claim that accidental compounds can potentially exist at all. This I think is a possible way to respond to the criticism, but may rely too heavily on an unclear distinction in the *Metaphysics*. The second path I believe to be a stronger response, insofar as it does not deny the potential existence of accidental compounds but argues instead that intermittent existence is concerned wholly with actual existence and Aristotle even sees actual existence as a more full being than potentiality.

In chapter 7 of Book V, Aristotle discusses the different senses in which a thing may be said “to be”. His initial claim is that things are said to be in one of two ways: “in an accidental sense... [and]... by their own nature” (1017a8). But he goes on to offer four main points, and some commentators have read this to indicate that he actually divides being in four ways.²⁰ Read this way, Aristotle distinguishes between (1) being according to the categories, (2) being in an accidental sense, (3) being as true and false, and (4) being as potentiality and actuality. If this is true, then it would appear that to be in an accidental sense would be a separate way of being from being potentially. Thus, an accidental compound could either be accidentally or be potentially, but not both. Allowing for this distinction fits with other claims Aristotle makes as well, such as when he argues that there cannot be a science of the accidental but does see a discussion of potential and actual being as a part of First Philosophy, which he sees as a science.²¹

²⁰ Witt, *Ways of Being*, 44.

²¹ See for example, 1026b1-5 and 1017b1-8 as well as Witt, *Ways of Being*, 44.

If this distinction is allowed, then not only is it the case that a substance's disposition is not enough to make accidental compounds *exist* in any sense, but accidental compounds aren't even capable of potential existence! Read in this way, it could be said that only beings in the sense of substances can exist in potentiality and actuality but accidental compounds, as dependent entities, have no such ability. This being true means that condition (2) of intermittent existence is met in the fullest sense, as "the masked man" ceases to exist in any sense when Coriscus removes his mask. While the truth of this distinction between accidental existence and existence as potential or actual would make additional arguments against this objection unnecessary, as I read chapter 7 I see a distinction of being into two senses, the accidental and the essential, with the discussion of truth and falsity and actuality and potentiality as additions to those two elementary senses. If that is true, then a different path must be taken to maintain the possibility of intermittent existence.

Aristotle provides two statements that are vital to allowing for accidental compounds to potentially exist while still making room for their intermittent existence. In his discussion of actual and potential existence in *Metaphysics IX* he takes the Megaric school to task for their view that "a thing can act only when it is acting" (1046b29-30). In so doing, he offers as one reason to reject their view that it makes "potentiality and actuality the same, so that it is no small thing they are seeking to annihilate" (1047a17-20). If the Megaric school is right, Aristotle argues, "that which stands will always stand, and that which sits will always sit" (1047a15-16) which is an absurd conclusion. Here Aristotle maintains his distinction between being in the mode of potentiality and being in the mode of actuality, as he goes on to say that "of non-existent things some exist potentially; but they do not *exist*, because they do not exist in

fulfillment” (1047b1-2). Clearly Aristotle views potential being as one sense in which something may be said to be, but that does not indicate that to be potentially is the same as actual being.

And of course in common language the distinction between potential and actual being is maintained. When I ask to sit at a table, I do not mean I wish to sit at a heap of wood that is *potentially* a table, I wish to sit at an actualized table. If potential existence is taken as on par with actual existence it may certainly do away with the contemporary issue of intermittent existence since a disassembled table, even if reassembled into another piece of furniture, is always *potentially* a table. But in so doing, as Aristotle explains, we are also doing away with change and becoming as a whole. Therefore, to maintain the possibility of change and becoming potential existence must be read as a mode of being distinct from actual existence. And it is actual existence that is of concern when I ask does “the masked one” cease to exist when Coriscus removes his mask and return to existence when the mask is replaced? Thus, potential existence and a substance’s disposition to adopt accidents do not offer a serious challenge to the claim that Aristotle’s Theory of Accidental Compounds makes room for intermittent existence.

Perhaps a more powerful response can be found in denying condition (4), that “the masked man” at time t_1 is identical to “the masked man” at time t_2 . This could be done by either arguing that the two entities do not share all the same properties or by denying that the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles is a sufficient condition for identity. The former seems quite improbable, but Aristotle may be able to take the path of the latter. This objection gets its fullest defense in the *Sophistical Refutations*:

For it is evident in all these cases that there is no necessity for what is true of the accident to be true of the object as well. For only to things that are indistinguishable and one in substance does it seem that all the same attributes belong; whereas in the case of a good thing, to be good is not the same as to be going to be the subject of a question. (179a36-179b1)

The relationship of identity is simply not the sort of relationship that may hold between ephemeral, dependent entities such as accidental compounds since, not being substances, they cannot ever be “one in substance”. Indeed, his discussion of “a good thing” appears to fully deny accidental compounds access to identity relations.

I will deal with the two different clauses of this claim in reverse order. First, I wish to deal with his claim that “a good thing” cannot stand in an identity relationship and then his prior claim that only things that are “one in substance” can stand in identity relations. The problem I find with his discussion of “a good thing” is that it relies on the accidental compound not being capable of being “the subject of a question.” While this may be true of the accident, say masked, itself, it is not necessarily true of the accidental compound, “the masked one”.

Recall that according to Aristotle’s Theory of Accidental Compounds there are three, not two, components to the lexical order of being. Substances exist in their own right, accidental compounds are dependent on substances, and accidents are even more dependent or less real than accidental compounds. This is why “the seated one” is more real than “sitting”. Aristotle’s claim from the *Sophistical Refutations* appears only to deny accidents the ability to stand in identity relations, since it is the case that “sitting” cannot be the subject of a question. But “the seated one” surely can be the subject of a question. I can ask “is the seated one your friend?” Indeed, Aristotle must ask this question of “the masked one”. I can ask “do you know Coriscus?” since Coriscus is a substance but I can also ask “do you know the masked one?” If I

couldn't then the Paradox of the Masked Man would not be a concern at all. The concern is why I am *not* able to substitute "the masked one" for Coriscus in the phrase "I know Coriscus" but the answer is not because "the masked one" simply cannot be such a subject; the answer is "the masked one" and Coriscus are not identical.

The upshot of this discussion is that if Aristotle wishes to restrict identity relations only to the sorts of entities that can be subjects then this does not rule out accidental compounds, but it does certainly rule out accidents. Of course the reason that "the masked one" can in fact be the subject of a question is because of the substance that underlies it, but this is not the argument Aristotle is making when he discusses "a good thing". The relationship of a substance to an accidental compound is, however, relevant in the prior statement that only substances can stand in identity relationships. I turn to that claim now.

Using Leibniz's Law it was quite easy to make the case that "the masked one" at time t_1 was identical to "the masked one" at time t_2 , since "the masked one" is only capable of having one property. Were "the masked one" also to be snub-nosed, it would only be because a single substance is both masked and snub-nosed; "the masked one" and "the snub-nosed one" would be accidentally the same only because a substance temporarily coincides with them both simultaneously. But it is perhaps because it was too easy to make the case for their identity relationship that Aristotle's claim that only substances can stand in identity relationships must be taken seriously.

Perhaps it is the case that for one thing to be identical to another there has to be the potential for it to be otherwise. So to say that the Evening Star is identical with the Morning Star is to say that while they do in fact share all the same properties it would be

possible for one property to be different. The reason that only substances can stand in an identity relationship simply is because they can take on different properties, whereas accidental compounds cannot. But it is important to recall the first sentence of this passage, where Aristotle is trying to argue that what is true of the accident need not necessarily be true of the object. He is trying to make a case for why accidents (and perhaps accidental compounds) cannot stand in identity relationships with substances, but that doesn't answer the question of if they may stand in identity relationships with each other. Additionally, he claims that *it seems* as though only things that are "indistinguishable and one in substance" can stand in identity relationships with one another, but there is no argument given for why they must *in fact* be one in substance.

Perhaps the conjunction is merely a disjunction, such that so long as two entities are in fact indistinguishable they need not be one in substance. "The masked one" at both time t_1 and time t_2 is clearly indistinguishable except by temporal properties, which must be excluded from discussions of identity lest we believe nothing is ever identical to anything else. Of course this twist of Aristotle's words will not do to defend the claim that accidental compounds are the sorts of entities that can be placed in identity relationships, at least with one another. Aristotle seems to help out a bit in the *Topics*, however, when he asserts that "for all that is predicated of the one should be predicated also of the other, and *of whatever the one is a predicate, the other should be a predicate as well*" (152b27-29, emphasis added). While the first half of this sentence is clearly discussing the sorts of entities that can have predicates attached to them, that is substances, the second half seems to indicate that so long as two predicates, say masked, are predicated of the same substance, say Coriscus, then they are identical. In this way, "the

masked one” at time t_1 is identical to “the masked one” at time t_2 because masked is predicated of the same substance in both situations. Indeed, additional and seemingly conflicting statements on what Aristotle means by identity can be found throughout his work, which has led some commentators to argue that perhaps Aristotle did not even have a concept of identity.²²

I do not claim to give a satisfactory answer to the objection that only substances can stand in identity relations to one another. Most certainly the constraints Aristotle puts on the sorts of entities capable of identity relations at various points can most often be met by accidental compounds, and Aristotle appears to change his concept of identity multiple times, but if it is the case that only substances can stand in identity relationships then it is most certainly true that accidental compounds cannot intermittently exist. However, more work needs to be done on *why* Aristotle believes only substances can stand in identity relationships for this objection to be completely successful. In the end, the possibility of intermittent existence of accidental compounds cannot be denied, even if it also cannot be fully justified.

IV. Conclusion

Various commentators have tried to get straight the ontological status of Aristotle's so-called “kooky objects” or “accidental compounds”. Here I did not take a stand on whether or not such compounds are in fact existent, but instead argued that if they are given ontological status then it leads quite easily to the possibility of intermittent existence. After explicating and defending

²² See for example, Fred Miller, “Did Aristotle have the Concept of Identity?” *The Philosophical Review* 82.4 (1973): 483-90 and Nicholas P. White, “Aristotle on Sameness and Oneness.”

the necessary conditions for accidental compounds to intermittently exist I dealt with two possible responses Aristotle may be able to give to maintain accidental compounds' ontological status while denying their ability to exist intermittently. One possible response was found to violate Aristotle's explicit understanding of a power as what makes the potential actual. The other was shown to provide a possible response that would need to be more fully developed to completely do away with the possibility of intermittent existence. Therefore, Aristotle's Theory of Accidental Compounds, when taken ontologically, allows for such entities to exist intermittently.²³

²³ My thanks to the anonymous reviewers and Andre Archie for comments on earlier versions of this paper.