SYNTHESIS

Journal for Philosophy

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Several Senses of Being Starting from Metaphysics Δ7

Edited by Giovanni Ventimiglia

List of contributions

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A nominalist account of the senses of being
William of Ockham on being *per accidens* and being *per se*

Abstract: William of Ockham maintains that being *per accidens* and being *per se*, two senses of being listed by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* V 7, 1017a 7-30, must be understood as two different types of modal propositions, and not as two different real beings. The latter interpretation of *Metaphysics* V 7, proper to authors such as Duns Scotus, may be described as a 'realist account' of being *per accidens* and being *per se*, and is the polemical target of two arguments Ockham formulates in his *Summa logicae* and his *Expositio in librum Porphyrii de praedicabilibus*. This paper will first examine Ockham's arguments against the realist account (*pars destruens*), and then his nominalist account of being *per accidens* and being *per se* as modal propositions (*pars construens*).

Introduction[1]

This article is devoted to the ontological status of being *per accidens* and being *per se*, two opposed senses of being listed by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* V 7 1017a 7-30.

By 'ontological status' I mean the place that an item occupies within a given ontology, such as the Aristotelian one. By 'item' I mean an entity which may be any kind of possible entity, such as a real being or a proposition considered as a mental or linguistic entity[2]. By 'place' I mean

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[2] For the difference between contemporary and medieval definitions of 'proposition' see Brower-Toland (2023: 115-116): 'in its contemporary sense, the concept of a proposition is a functional notion and refers to those entities (whatever their nature) that play certain theoretical roles – e.g., fundamental truthbearer, object of propositional attitudes, semantic content of sentences, etc. So understood, the contemporary notion of a

the class of the ontology – taken as broadly or narrowly as one wishes, and not necessarily an Aristotelian category – to which the item belongs. An item is an item, that is, something included in the ontology, if and only if it is in a class, which may also be constituted by that item alone. To investigate the ontological status of something, therefore, is to examine the position that an item occupies within a given ontology.

For an inquiry to qualify as an investigation of ontological status, there must be something whose status is genuinely in question. This is, for example, the case for being *per accidens* and *per se* within the Aristotelian ontology: talking about ontological status in the case of *Metaphysics* V 7 1017a 7-30 signifies assuming an interpretation of this text in which being *per accidens* and being *per se* are items whose ontological status is not clear[3].

The ontological status of being *per accidens* and *per se* is, indeed, not clearly defined by Aristotle. Therefore, as a preliminary step, I will consider the Aristotelian account of being *per accidens* and *per se*. With this explanation of Aristotle's text, my aim is not so much to resolve the problems in *Metaphysics* V 7, as to formulate them clearly, pointing out

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proposition is to be distinguished from that which medieval philosophers associate with the corresponding Latin cognate (*propositio*). For medievals, the term '*propositio*' most closely corresponds to our own notion of a token sentence (whether spoken, written, or mental).' See also Brower-Toland (2023: 125, n. 2): 'the term '*propositio*' comes from the Latin verb '*propono*', which means to propose or to say. Thus, *propositiones* are just things that propose or say something, which medievals take to be token sentences.' By using the term 'proposition' hereafter I will refer to the medieval use described by Brower-Toland.

[3] Note that this chapter of book V of the *Metaphysics* could be also understood as presenting a list of *uses* of the word 'being' in ancient Greek, without making any statements about the ontological status of items. Within this interpretation, to establish the ontological status of two *uses* of the word 'being' is of course senseless. However, the interpretation of *Metaphysics* V 7 as a classification of items seems to be the medieval interpretation of *Metaphysics* V 7 (shared also by many modern commentators). Since this is a study on William of Ockham, I will therefore adopt this reading of *Metaphysics* V 7, without discussing other possible interpretations.

the ambiguity of this text as basis of the medieval accounts. The explanation of *Metaphysics* V 7 will lead to the formulation of the following questions, which are nothing other than the questions concerning the ontological status of being *per accidens* and being *per se*: which kind of items are being *per accidens* and *per se*? Do being *per accidens* and being *per se* belong to the realm of reality, or are they mental/linguistic entities?

These questions underpin a debate in the 14th century, which I think can be understood as a dispute between a *realist* and a *nominalist* position regarding being *per accidens* and being *per se*. As has already been shown[4], realism and nominalism are labels that apply not only to metaphysical positions related to the well-known dispute on universals, but also to other areas of medieval ontology, such as the status of relations or of indivisibles within continuous quantities. The main thesis of this paper is thus the following: the ontological status of being *per accidens* and being *per se* is the object of a dispute between realists and nominalists, similar to the dispute concerning the ontological status of universals, relations or indivisibles[5].

In particular, I will consider here one of the most prominent nominalist accounts of being *per se* and *per accidens* in the 14th century,

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[4] See, for example, Normore (1987), 203: 'it is precisely the assumption that mediaeval nominalism was, fundamentally, a position about universals which I wish to question here. I claim that mediaeval nominalism was only incidentally connected with the problem of universals and that, once that is seen, both the philosophical terrain of the Middle Ages and some of our contemporary metaphysics vocabulary look somewhat different'. See also Zupko (1993) for the relationship between medieval nominalism and the notion of continuity.

[5] It is not possible in this paper to present in detail all the realist and nominalist authors who comment on *Metaphysics* V 7; consequently, it is not possible to provide a full explanation of the realist and nominalist debate. The aim here is to present in detail only Ockham's nominalist position. For a thorough study of the realist/nominalist opposition regarding the status of being per accidens and being per se, I refer the reader to my PhD thesis, '*On the Several Senses of Being in Late Medieval Philosophy*: A *Study on the Medieval Latin Reception of* Metaphysics V 7', where I present the dispute in much greater detail.

namely William of Ockham's account[6]. Ockham argues against the hypothesis that being *per accidens* is a real being distinct from being *per se* (a position I define as realist) and instead proposes the interpretation that being *per accidens* and being *per se* are two different types of propositions (a position I define as nominalist). More specifically, Ockham understands *per se* and *per accidens* as propositions involving the modal operators '*per accidens*' and '*per se*'.

The structure of the paper is as follows: after briefly presenting the ambiguity of *Metaphysics* V 7 (1017a 7-30) and the debate between the realist and the nominalist account of being *per accidens* and *per se* originating from the issues of Aristotle's textand the polemical target of Ockham, namely the realist position, I will outline the pars destruens of Ockham's account and explain the arguments Ockham sets forth against it. I will then present the *pars construens* of Ockham's account, namely being *per accidens* and *per se* as modal propositions.

1. Aristotle's account and the nominalist/realist debate

Metaphysics V 7 begins with an opposition between being *per accidens* and being *per se*, an opposition confirmed not only by the pair '*per accidens/per se*', but also by the couple 'μὲν/δὲ', '*quidem/uero*'[7], 'from one side/from the other side'. The opposition between being *per accidens* and being *per se* seems to correspond directly to the distinction Aristotle presents in *Metaphysics* V 6 between unity *per accidens* and unity *per se*, given that Aristotle usually associates the notion of unity and that of being.

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[6] For a general overview of Ockham's nominalism, see, for example, Adams (1987) and Panaccio (2023).

[7] When I quote the Latin translation of the *Metaphysics*, I will refer to Moerbecke's version. I will not consider here the other Latin translations available at the time of Ockham.

Being *per accidens* is illustrated with propositions as examples. In 1017a 8-10, Aristotle enumerates the ways in which accidental being is expressed, identifying three types of propositions: (a) accident + accident ('the just is musical'); (b) substance + accident ('the man is musical'); (c) accident + substance ('the musical is a man'). Aristotle connects these propositions with what corresponds to them at the level of reality, that is, with what they denote. Summarising his account, Aristotle states as follows:

> For when we say the man is musical and the musical is a man, or the white is musical or the musical is white, [we say] the last two [*i.e., case (a) 'accident + accident'*] because both happen to the same thing [*i.e., a substance*]; [we say] the first [*i.e., case (b) 'substance + accident'*] because [*the accident*] happens to that which is [*i.e., a substance*]; while [we say] the musical is a man [*i.e., case (c) 'accident + substance'*] because 'musical' happens to this [*i.e., a man*]. [Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V 7, 1017a 15-18, ed. W. Jaeger, transl. Mine[8]]

A proposition of the form (a), i.e., an accident as predicate term said of an accident as subject term, can be formulated because, on the level of reality, both those accidents belong to or inhere in a third thing not named in the proposition, a thing that 'is' or 'exists'. A proposition of the form (b), i.e., an accident as predicate term said of a substance as subject term, can be formulated because the accident belongs to or inheres in the substance. Finally, a proposition of the form (c), i.e., a substance as predicate term said of an accident as subject term, can be formulated because, once again, it is always the accident that belongs to or inheres in the substance, even if the proposition has the accident as subject term.

All in all, Aristotle seems to outline two levels: one pertaining to propositions, expressed in Greek with 'we say' ('φαμεν'/ 'λέγωμεν'– '*dicimus*'), and another pertaining to the reality, i.e., the real inherence of

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[8] All existing English translations of this chapter of the *Metaphysics* are not literal. Therefore, I have decided to provide my own translation from the Greek.

an accident, expressed with the Greek verbs 'to happen' ('συμβεβήκασι/συμβέβηκεν' – '*acciderunt/accidit*') and 'to inhere' ('ὑπάρχει'– '*insunt*'). One level is said to be related to the other as follows: for example, one says that 'a man is white' *because* ('ὅτι' – '*quia*') the accident 'white' inheres in the substance 'man'. In other words, accidental propositions are formed on the basis of accidental real inherences in reality.

Even if the relationship between the two levels, namely, propositions and the reality denoted by those propositions, is clear, what remains unclear is the level at which being *per accidens* should be placed. Being *per accidens* must belong either to the level of propositions (a mental or linguistic item) or to that of real and accidental inherence (a real item). Where, then, should being *per accidens* be situated? Or, to put it more precisely, what is the ontological status of a being *per accidens*?

Being *per accidens* could be understood as expressing the accidental copula involved in propositions, whereby every accidental proposition will be an instance of being *per accidens*[9]. In this case, being *per accidens* would be an accidental proposition, 'a man is white', expressing the accidental (predicational) inherence of a predicate in a subject.

In favour of this reading there are the examples provided by Aristotle in 1017a 7-22. These examples seem clearly to be examples of propositions with an implicit copula, which are then further related to the real inherence as denotation of those propositions, and this could suggest that being *per accidens* should be on the level of propositions, and not on the level of real inherence.

Alternatively, being *per accidens* could be understood as something in reality. It is not clear, however, how to interpret being *per accidens* as a real being, that is, either as the accidental inherence where there are two distinct things (e.g., white and man) and one inheres in the other or

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[9] For this interpretation, see for example Ross (1924: 305).

as an aggregate, some third thing, resulting from these two things and distinct from them ('white man').

Some interpretations present being *per accidens* as an accidental inherence, without any commitment to the existence of a third thing distinct from the components[10]. Others state that being *per accidens* is the aggregate expressing the real inherence of an accident in a substance, a 'kooky object'[11], such as 'white man'[12].

An argument in favour of the reading of being *per accidens* as kooky object expressing a real accidental inherence is the parallel one can set forth between unity *per accidens* and being *per accidens*: being *per accidens* as 'white man' is an accidental aggregate or a unity *per accidens* that signifies the inherence of an accident in a substance. Moreover, the examples presented by Aristotle can also suggest a parallelism between the notion of 'being' and that of 'unity'. Both in Greek and Latin, some of the examples that open *Metaphysics* V 7 (1017a 9-10) are presented in the following form: 'τὸν ἄνθρωπον μουσικὸν' – '*hominem musicum*'; 'τὸν μουσικὸν ἄνθρωπον' – '*musicum hominem*'. There are two terms without a copula linking them, as the verb 'to be' is implicit, expressed through the construction 'φαμεν…εἶναί' – '*dicimus...esse*'. Since *Metaphysics* V 7 is the chapter dedicated to the notion of being, in parallel with the notion of unity in *Metaphysics* V 6, it is understandable that an example like τὸν ἄνθρωπον μουσικὸν', *hominem musicum* can be interpreted not as a proposition (as they actually are), but as an accidental aggregate expressing the accidental inherence of an accident in a substance.

Since being *per se* is defined on the basis of being *per accidens* (and vice versa), it shares the same ambiguity: it is unclear whether an example of being *per se* is a mental/linguistic entity or a real entity.

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[10] For this interpretation, see for example Kosman (2013: 32): being per accidens is 'the result of the co-incidence of two beings.'

[11] For the notion of 'kooky object' see Cohen (2008).

[12] For this interpretation, see for example Yu (2003: 7): being per accidens is 'an accidental composite of two beings.'

Aristotle clearly states that being *per se* is said to be divided according to the categories. It seems thus difficult to assert that being *per se* is related to propositions, such as an essential proposition. In what sense, indeed, an essential proposition such as 'a man is rational' is what is divided into the categories? Ross, for example, argues that being *per se* is that essential proposition whose subject and predicate terms belong to the same category, e.g. 'a man is an animal'[13]. This, however, seems to lack textual evidence and, furthermore, it seems that Aristotle also lists examples of accidental propositions among being *per se*, as Buchanan points out:

> [...] as Ross admits, Aristotle's examples ('the man is walking', etc.) are against it (*i.e., Ross' interpretation*), being examples of accidental predication.[14]

Others claim that being *per se* is not an essential predication, but it expresses the 1-place being involved in predications, thereby a proposition such 'a man exists' will be an example of being *per se*[15]. However, still there is no textual evidence of this point and it still remains unclear how being *per se*, understood as being involved in a proposition, is connected to the categorial articulation.

One might argue that being *per se* is a mental or linguistic item, but not a proposition: being *per se* could be a simple term, as opposed to the complex term that would constitute a being *per accidens*[16]. In this way, it becomes clear how being *per se* is divided into categories and opposed

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[13] See Ross (1924: 305).

[14] Buchanan, (1962: 12, n. 11). See also Bäck (2000: 71), Weiner (2015: 7): 'it is worth asking why Ross's interpretation (that Aristotle refers to the distinction between essential and accidental predication) appears to be convincing although there is no direct textual evidence for it.' Finally see Menn (2021: 206).

[15] See, for example, Owen, (1965: 260-261).

[16] See, for example, Buchanan, (1962:12): 'being or to be taken by itself seems to mean the whole predicate [...] taken by itself in isolation from the propositions.'

to being *per accidens*, but still there is no textual evidence in *Metaphysics* V 7 that being *per se* is a simple term.

Finally, being *per se* can be understood, at the level of reality, as a simple entity belonging to a category, in contrast to being *per accidens* as a being resulting from the accidental aggregation of simple beings[17]. This represents the parallel solution, at the level of reality, to the interpretation of being *per se* as a simple term. In this way, too, being *per se* appears to stand in opposition to being *per accidens* and to be divided among the categories. However, as with the parallel solution of being *per se* as simple term, there is no textual evidence to support this interpretation either.

In summary, Aristotle's text does not clarify what is the ontological status of being *per accidens* and being *per se* as items: they seem both to be either mental/linguistic items or real ones. The text thus presents an ambiguity regarding the status of these senses of being, which lies at the heart of the realist-nominalist debate surrounding *Metaphysics* V 7, 1017a 7-30.

Any realist account can be roughly defined as follows: given an entity whose ontological status is arguable within a given ontology, a realist account is defined as one which asserts that that entity belongs to the ontology as a real being – thus, as part of extra-mental reality, distinct from other real entities, and irreducible to other real beings. In the case of being *per se* and being *per accidens*, the debatable entity is being *per accidens*.

Realists understand being *per accidens* as a real being, but neither as a substance nor as an accident; otherwise, it would be included in one of the categories and thus not opposed to being *per se* as what is divided into the categories. Hence there must be a being that is a real one, but not included in the categorial framework. This implies that the categories are not sufficient to delimitate all that exists as real: being *per accidens* is a real being which does not belong to any category. Therefore, a realist

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[17] See, for example, Yu (2003:7).

expands the Aristotelian ontology to admit a being beyond the categorial framework: a real composite of substance and accident, which, in itself, as a composite, is neither substance nor accident.

A clear example of realist account is Duns Scotus's account of being *per accidens* and *per se*. Distinguishing the senses of '*per accidens*' in the *Ordinatio*, Scotus claims as follows:

> I say that in one way '*per accidens*' is used by the metaphysician, in another way by the logician. Indeed, the metaphysician calls 'being *per accidens*' what includes in itself things of different genera, as it is clear in *Metaphysics* V, chapter on being [*Metaphysics* V 7] and chapter on unity [*Metaphysics* V 6]. By contrast, the logician calls a 'proposition *per accidens*' that proposition whose subject does not include the *ratio* for the inherence of the predicate [...] (Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, III, d. 1, p. II, q. unica, 100, 8-13, ed. *Commisio scotista*, transl. mine)[18]

Scotus distinguishes different senses of '*per accidens*'. First, '*per accidens*' can be understood as applied to a being that is an aggregate made up of different things. This is the *metaphysical* sense of '*per accidens*'. In contrast, there is also a *logical* sense of '*per accidens*' related not to beings, but to propositions. A proposition where the inherence of the predicate in a subject is not included in the *ratio*, namely the ground of the inherence of the predicate in the subject. Hence, the inherence of the accident in the subject is not grounded in the nature of the subject. For example, in the proposition 'a man is white', the inherence of 'white' in 'man' is not an essential inherence, for 'white' is not grounded in the nature of 'man'. Therefore, according to Scotus, the proposition *per accidens*, expressing the logical sense of '*per accidens*', is not the sense of '*per accidens*' Aristotle presents in *Metaphysics* V 7: according to Scotus,

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[18] 'Dico quod alio modo loquitur de "per accidens" metaphysicus, alio modo logicus: metaphysicus enim dicit "ens per accidens" quod includit in se res diversorum generum, sicut patet V Metaphysicae cap. "De ente" et "De uno"; logicus vero dicit propositionem esse per accidens cuius subiectum non includit rationem inhaerentiae praedicati [...]'

this chapter of the *Metaphysics* deals with beings, not with propositions.

Being *per accidens* as an aggregate made up of beings is opposed to being *per se* as simple being, belonging to one of the ten categories. Hence, not only substances, but also accidents are beings *per se*. An accident like 'white' is a simple being which belongs to the category of quality, as Scotus himself claims:

> The accident by itself is a *per se* being, according to Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V 7, – so it is *per se* in a genus. (Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, l. IV, d. 12, p. I, q. 1, 311, 257, ed. *Commisio scotista*, transl. mine)[19]

Even if an accident does not have an autonomous existence, because it exists insofar as it inheres in a substance, it is nonetheless a being *per se* as what belongs *per se* to a category. Therefore, an accident is not a being *per accidens* in the realist account: a being *per accidens* is an accidental aggregate that does not belong to any category; an accident is a being *per se*, a simple being belonging to one of the ten categories.

The nominalist account rules out the possibility that a being *per accidens* could be a being distinct from a being *per se*: there is no such thing as an aggregate separate from its components. The only beings are simple beings belonging to the categories. When Aristotle speaks of being *per accidens* and being *per se* in *Metaphysics* V 7, he is referring to entities at the level of language, not of being itself. William of Ockham is the foremost exponent of this position. His account comprises a *pars destruens*, aimed at refuting the realist reading, and a *pars construens*, concerned with the determination of propositions *per accidens* and *per se*. This will be the subject of the next two paragraphs.

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[19] 'Accidens autem secundum se est ens per se, secundum Philosophum V Metaphysicae cap. "De ente", – unde et per se est in genere.'

2. *Pars destruens*

The realist account of being *per accidens* and being *per se*, as described above in the case of Duns Scotus, is rejected by William of Ockham with two arguments, presented in two different works, the *Summa logicae* and the *Expositio in librum Porphyrii de praedicabilibus*.

Let us start with the argument in the *Summa logicae*. In chapter 31 of the first part of the *Summa*, Ockham discusses the notion of 'being', and, quoting the distinction between being *per accidens* and *per se* in *Metaphysics* V 7, he formulates an argument against the realist account based on the notion of *exhaustiveness of the substance-accident distinction* as follows:

> That some thing is not a being *per se* and another thing a being *per accidens* is clear, for no thing is unless it is a substance or an accident. But both substance and accident are beings *per se*. This notwithstanding, something is predicated of something *per se*, and something *per accidens*. (William of Ockham, *Summa logicae*, p. I, §38, 108, 49-53, ed. P. Boehner, G. Gál and S. Brown, transl. mine)[20]

The argument is based on the assumption that the categorical framework should fully encompass everything that is a real being. The very nature of the categories, and the necessity of their introduction, rests on the idea that they must entirely account for everything that exists. For if there are beings that do not fall within the categories, what purpose would the categories serve? How is it possible to determine in what sense a real being that is not included in the categories is a being?

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[20] 'Quod enim aliqua res non sit ens per se et aliqua per accidens patet, quia nulla res est quin sit substantia vel accidens; sed tam substantia quam accidens est ens per se; igitur etc. Hoc tamen non obstante aliquid praedicatur de aliquo per se et aliquid per accidens.'

Ockham is strict on this point: everything that exists is included in one of the categories, is either a substance or an accident; *tertium non datur*[21]. If this is true, then being *per accidens*, if it is a real being as the realists claim, must necessarily be either a substance or an accident. However, substances and accidents are beings *per se*, according to the realists. Therefore, the distinction '*per accidens-per se*' as applied to real beings is meaningless, because everything that exists is always and only a being *per se*, that is, either a substance or an accident. The distinction '*per accidens-per se*' can be applied to account for types of propositions, which can be either *per accidens* or *per se*. As we shall see, according to Ockham, Aristotle's distinction between being *per accidens* and being *per se* in *Metaphysics* V 7 is nothing else but the distinction between propositions *per accidens* and *per se*.

Nevertheless, the assumption that substance and accident are sufficient to account for reality is explicitly denied by Scotus. Ockham is supposed to demonstrate that there are only substances and accidents, and this cannot serve as a premise of the argument; thus, Ockham's argument, as it stands, is very weak, as it appears to be question-begging.

An Ockhamist response might be that it is not possible to deny this assumption without risking the undermining of the entire categorial framework: if the categories do not encompass all of reality, then what categories are they? Yet this remains an assumption on Ockham's part, and it is not as self-evident as he seems implicitly to suggest.

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[21] This argument is often presented by Ockham as the basis for the refutation of a nominalist position. For example, it can be found in the rejection of the indivisible in continuous quantity as a real being (see, for example, in the *Tractatus de quantitate*). A similar argument is also found in other authors, such as Hervaeus Natalis, *De secundis intentionibus*, d. 2, q. 3, 63, 189, 10-12, ed. J. Dijs: 'illud quod dividitur contra ens divisum in decem praedicamenta non est substantia nec accidens. Sed quod non est substantia nec accidens non dicit aliquam entitatem realem. Ergo etc.'

The second argument, presented in the *Expositio in librum Porphyrii de praedicabilibus*, is more articulated.

The argument is a *reductio ad absurdum*, showing that it is not possible to admit a distinction between a being *per accidens*, as aggregate, and a being *per se*, as simple being.

Realists such as Scotus maintain that even though being *per accidens* is an aggregate made up of simple beings – that is, of beings *per se* – this does not imply that being *per accidens* is reducible to being *per se*. According to a realist, an aggregate as a whole is ontologically a distinct item from the parts that compose it. The fact that being *per accidens* is not ontologically reducible to being *per se* is what makes them two distinct items, which is basically what underpins the realist account.

Against this, Ockham provides his *reductio ad absurdum* as follows:

> And if it is said that a being *per se* differs from an accidental aggregate, but that Socrates is a being *per se* and the white Socrates is an accidental aggregate and that therefore Socrates differs from the white Socrates, then it must be replied that understood literally (*de virtute sermonis*), the following is simply false: 'The white Socrates is an accidental aggregate'; for, it implies 'Socrates is an accidental aggregate.' (William of Ockham, *Expositio in librum Porphyrii de praedicabilibus*, 3, §1, 58 97-101, ed. E. Moody, transl. E.-H.W. Klunge, partially modified)[22]

According to Ockham, the aggregate 'white Socrates' is reducible to the simple being 'Socrates', that is, to the individual, which by itself already contains the totality of the accidental properties inhering in it, so also its being white. To reject the distinction, the *reductio ad absurdum* is the

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[22] 'Et si dicatur quod ens per se differt ab aggregato per accidens, sed Sortes est ens per se et Sortes albus est aggregatum per accidens, ergo Sortes differt a Sorte albo, dicendum est quod de virtute sermonis haec est simpliciter falsa "Sortes albus est aggregatum per accidens", quia infert istam "Sortes est aggregatum per accidens".'

inference 'the white Socrates is an accidental aggregate; therefore, Socrates is an accidental aggregate'. By analysing the inference from the proposition p 'The white Socrates is an accidental aggregate' to the proposition p^1 'Socrates is an accidental aggregate', Ockham shows the absurd that the inference from p to p^1 is valid, where p^1 is clearly false.

Ockham begins with the exposition of the following principle:

> For to go from a determinable taken together with a determination that neither takes away (*non distrahente*) nor diminishes (*diminuente*) [to the determinable by itself] is always to employ a formally valid inference. So, for instance, 'A white man is running, therefore a man is running' is formally valid (*formalis consequentia*); and so in all other cases. (William of Ockham, *Expositio in librum Porphyrii de praedicabilibus*, 3, §1, 58, 103-105, ed. E. Moody, transl. E.-H.W. Klunge)[23]

Ockham defines the conditions under which it is possible to have a valid inference when, in passing from the antecedent to the consequent, the predicate term remains unchanged, e.g., 'running', but a determination of the subject term is present in the antecedent and removed in the subject term of the consequent, e.g. 'white man' in the antecedent, and 'man' in the consequent. Such inferences often constitute fallacies *secundum quid et simpliciter*, that is, illicit inferences from a proposition with a term having a determination (*secundum quid*) to another proposition with the same term without that determination (*simpliciter*)[24]. Similarly, the inference from p to p^1 could (erroneously) be considered a case of a *fallacy*

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[23] 'Quia semper a determinabili sumpto cum determinatione non distrahente nec diminuente, est formalis consequentia; sicut formaliter sequitur "homo albus currit, ergo homo currit", et sic de omnibus aliis.'

[24] Note that Ockham presents a similar example of the inference from p to p^1 in the section of the *Summa logicae* dedicated to the fallacy *secundum quid et simpliciter* as follows: 'patet quod talia argumenta non peccant per fallaciam secundum quid et simpliciter "homo albus est aggregatum per accidens, igitur homo est aggregatum per accidens"'. (William of Ockham, *Summa logicae*, III-4, c. 13, 834, 109-111, ed. P. Boehner, G. Gál and S. Brown).

secundum quid et simpliciter. To clarify why the inference from p to p^1 is valid, Ockham considers in detail which kind of determination produces a fallacy. Indeed, an inference is an instance of a fallacy *secundum quid et simpliciter* on the basis of *the nature of the determination* that is removed in the consequent. Ockham identifies two types of determinations that, if eliminated in the consequent, result in an invalid inference: a determination '*that takes away*' (*determinatio distrahens*) and a determination that '*diminishes*' (*determinatio diminuens*).

A determination '*that takes away*' is a determination that takes something away from the term to which it is applied. In other words, it is a determination that is entirely or partially incompatible with the thing to which it is added. For instance, if 'dead man' is used in the inference 'Socrates is a dead man, therefore Socrates is a man', there is a fallacy *secundum quid et simpliciter*[25].

A determination that '*diminishes*' is a determination that diminishes the term to which it is added, in the sense that it applies only to a part of the thing to which it is added. For example, 'white (having white teeth)' in the inference 'The Ethiopian is white having white teeth, therefore the Ethiopian is white'[26]. In this case, the determination 'white' refers only to a part of the subject and cannot be extended to the whole subject.

If the inference does not involve one of these two types of determinations, when the determination is removed there is no fallacy *secundum quid et simpliciter*. For example, in the inference 'A white man is running, therefore a man is running', the determination 'white' is neither a determination that takes away from the subject, because 'white' is not incompatible in any way with 'man', nor a determination that diminishes the subject, because a man, as a whole, is white. Therefore,

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[25] For this example, see William of Ockham, *Scriptum in librum primum Sententiarum*, d. 2, q. 7, 244, 19 – 245 15, ed. S. Brown and G. Gál.

[26] For this example, see William of Ockham, *Scriptum in librum primum Sententiarum*, d. 2, q. 7, 245 16 – 25, ed. S. Brown and G. Gál.

the inference is valid, and Ockham calls it a *consequentia formalis*. A *consequentia formalis* is a valid inference due to the syntactic/formal structure of the proposition. In the case of 'A white man is running, therefore a man is running', there is an alteration of a term in the proposition, first with a determination and then without it. Removing a determination, if it is neither *distrahens* nor *diminuens*, is purely a syntactic operation because what the determination adds to the subject is already included in the subject itself: the removal of such a determination is, in other words, a mere syntactic alteration of terms in two propositions, given that 'white man' and 'man' are equivalent.

If the inference 'A white man is running, therefore a man is running' is valid, there is no reason to assume that the inference from p to p^1, i.e., 'The white Socrates is an accidental aggregate, therefore Socrates is an accidental aggregate', is not valid. Indeed, according to Ockham, in the case of the inference from p to p^1 the determination 'white' applied to Socrates is neither a determination that takes away nor a determination that diminishes. 'White' applied to 'Socrates' is not incompatible with him and does not apply only to a part of him, but to whole Socrates. Therefore, Ockham concludes as follows:

> But white is not a determination that takes away or diminishes; therefore this is formally valid: 'The white Socrates is an accidental aggregate, therefore Socrates is an accidental aggregate.' The consequent is false, and therefore the antecedent is false as well. (William of Ockham, *Expositio in librum Porphyrii de praedicabilibus*, 3, §1, 58 105-108, ed. E. Moody, transl. E.-H.W. Klunge)[27]

Since the nature of the determination 'white' applied to 'Socrates' is not one of those determinations that, if removed in an inference, generates a fallacy, there is no issue with the inference from p to p^1. Now, everyone,

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[27] 'Sed albus non est determinatio distrahens neque diminuens, ergo formaliter sequitur "Sortes albus est aggregatum per accidens, ergo Sortes est aggregatum per accidens"; consequens est falsum, ergo et antecedens.'

particularly the realists, agrees that Socrates is a being *per se*, a simple being, and not an accidental aggregate. Therefore, the proposition p^1, 'Socrates is an accidental aggregate', is false. But if p^1 is false, then p must also be false if the inference from p to p^1 is valid. This follows from the semantics of material implication.

Ockham's argument shows that there is no real being in ontology that exists as an accidental aggregate distinct from the simple being that falls under one of the categories: a being *per accidens*, understood as an accidental aggregate with its own ontological status distinct from being *per se*, does not exist. If the accidental aggregate is admitted within the Aristotelian ontology, it leads to the absurd conclusion that a simple being, e.g., Socrates, could be said to be an accidental aggregate. This conclusion, however, cannot be accepted; so too must the accidental aggregate be rejected as a real being distinct from the simple one.

Nevertheless, this argument as well appears to involve a certain circularity. Ockham states that, in the case of 'white Socrates', 'white' is not a *distrahens* determination, that is, not a determination that takes something away, precisely because he assumes that there is no distinction between being *per accidens* and being *per se*. Yet this distinction is exactly what Ockham needs to prove. For a realist, 'white', when added to 'Socrates', produces a being *per accidens* which is other than the being *per se*. Hence, a realist such as Scotus could object that Ockham's argument is invalid, because 'white', in the case of 'white man', is in some sense *distrahens*, since 'white' is bound up with the *per accidens* condition. Indeed, the aggregate would cease to be a being *per accidens* if its accidental determination were removed: for the aggregate 'white Socrates', 'white' is a determination that cannot be withdrawn without compromising its nature. Therefore, it would not be possible to move from 'man' to 'white man' without a transition from being *per se* to being *per accidens*. To claim that 'white' is not a *distrahens*, as Ockham does, conceals the implicit assumption that there is no distinction

between being *per accidens* and being *per se*, but this is precisely what Ockham must demonstrate, and cannot simply assume.

Finally, Ockham concludes his rejection by clarifying how one should understand the proposition *p*, 'A white Socrates is an accidental aggregate', and the term 'A white Socrates' when they occur, for example, in authorities as follows:

> Nevertheless, if some such proposition is found in an author, it must be glossed thus: 'A white Socrates is an accidental aggregate' - that is, this whole, 'A white Socrates', signifies an accidental aggregate; and thus it has either simple or material supposition, although not when taken literally. (William of Ockham, *Expositio in librum Porphyrii de praedicabilibus*, 3, §1, 58 108-112, ed. E. Moody, transl. E.-H.W. Klunge)[28]

In Ockham's supposition theory[29], a term has simple supposition if it refers to a mental entity, a concept. For example, the term 'animal' in a proposition like 'animal is the genus of human being' does not refer to any real entity, but to a concept in the mind. Thus, 'animal' in 'animal is the genus of human being' has simple supposition. A term has material supposition if it refers to itself. For example, in the proposition 'man has three letters', the term 'man' stands for the word 'man' itself, and neither for a concept nor for an individual. Therefore, it has material supposition. The last of the three types of supposition in Ockham's account is personal supposition, that is, when a term stands for what it signifies, namely the entity it denotes. For example, in the sentence 'this man is white', 'man' stands for the individual human being.

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[28] 'Tamen si inveniatur aliqua talis propositio in aliquo auctore, debet sic glossari: "Sortes albus est aggregatum per accidens", hoc est, hoc totum "Sortes albus" significat unum aggregatum per accidens, et ita tunc quamvis non de virtute sermonis habet suppositionem simplicem vel materialem.'

[29] For Ockham's supposition theory, see, among others, Matthews (1964), Adams (1976) and Concoran (1978). For an overview on the supposition theory in medieval logic, see, among others, Dutilh Novaes (2007).

Ockham asserts that 'a white Socrates', and any similar expression that realists might consider referring to a real entity, cannot have personal supposition; it cannot stand for any individual or property of individuals. Rather, it has either simple or material supposition. It does indeed signify an aggregate, but either a mental being or a complex term, not a real being.

All in all, according to Ockham, being *per accidens* as an accidental aggregate cannot be admitted into ontology as a real entity with its own status because (1) it is not included in any category (the argument of the *Summa logicae*); (2) it is reducible to being *per se* (the argument from the *Expositio in librum Porphyrii de praedicabilibus*). Therefore, the distinction between being *per accidens* and being *per se* cannot, as realists would have it, be a distinction between real beings.

It is, however, possible, according to Ockham, to account for the distinction of '*per accidens/per se*' of *Metaphysics* V 7 as distinction of *propositions* or of *modes of predication*, not of beings. This is Ockham's positive account, which is a nominalist one, and will be the object of the following paragraph.

3. *Pars construens*

In chapter 31 of the first part of the *Summa Logicae*, where Ockham provides his theory on the meanings of the term '*ens*', he offers the following interpretation of *Metaphysics* V 7, 1017a 7-30:

> Furthermore, it should be known that according to the Philosopher, *Metaphysics* V, "being is predicated in one way *per accidens*, in another *per se*." This distinction is not to be understood as meaning that one being is *per se* and another being *per accidens*. Rather, he shows there a diverse mode of predication of one thing of another by the verb 'is'. This is quite clear from the example given by the Philosopher, for he says that we say 'a musician is *per accidens* just', and similarly 'a musician is *per accidens* a man' and we say that a musician

builds something *per accidens*. From which it is clear that he only speaks of a diverse mode of predication of something of something, because something is said of something *per se*, and something is said of something *per accidens*. (William of Ockham, *Summa logicae*, p. I, §38, 107, 38 – 108,48, ed. P. Boehner, G. Gál and S. Brown, transl. mine)[30]

Ockham clearly rejects (for arguments presented above in the *Pars destruens*) that the distinction between *per accidens* and *per se* in *Metaphysics* V 7 1017a 7-30 refers to a distinction between real beings, as claimed by the realists. On the contrary, the distinction expresses different ways of predicating one term of another through the use of the copula 'is'. In support of this thesis, Ockham quotes one of the examples presented by Aristotle himself: 'a musician is a man'. This is a strong point in favour of his interpretation, since these examples are listed in the very text of *Metaphysics* V 7, 1017a7-30.

The example quoted by Ockham, i.e. 'a musician is a man', is a proposition, and to make it even clearer that '*per accidens*' must be applied to the proposition, not to a being, Ockham alters the copula within the proposition to include '*secundum accidens*' making explicit in the accidental inherence of the predicate in the subject, reproposing Aristotle's example as 'a musician is *per accidens* a man'. The distinction in *Metaphysics* V 7, 1017a7–30 is therefore a distinction between propositions: a proposition *per accidens* and a proposition *per se*. Ockham clearly defines the meaning of the modal operators '*per accidens*' and '*per se*', the two senses in which propositions involving '*per accidens*' and '*per se*' can be understood, and their truth-conditions. This

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[30] 'Ulterius sciendum est quod secundum Philosophum, V Metaphysicae: "Ens dicitur hoc quidem secundum accidens, illud vero secundum se". Quae distinctio non est intelligenda quod aliquod ens sit per se, aliud per accidens, sed ostendit ibi diversum modum praedicandi unius de reliquo mediante hoc verbo "est". Quod satis claret per exempla Philosophi, quia dicit quod dicimus "musicum secundum accidens est iustum", et similiter "musicum secundum accidens est homo", et musicum dicimus aedificare secundum accidens. Ex quo patet quod non loquitur nisi de diverso modo praedicandi alicuius de aliquo, quia aliquid dicitur de aliquo per se et aliquid dicitur de aliquo per accidens.'

will be the object of this *pars construens*. For to define what propositions *per accidens* and *per se* are in Ockham's thought is nothing other than to define what being *per accidens* and *per se* are, since being *per accidens* and *per se* are precisely these types of propositions.

In particular, Ockham thinks that '*per accidens*' and '*per se*' are *modes*, and being *per accidens* and being *per se* are thus *modal propositions* whose modal operator is '*per accidens*' and '*per se*' respectively.

Ockham clarifies this point in the *Expositio super libros Elenchorum* as follows:

> Indeed, as it is said about a whole proposition that is true, false, necessary, possible, impossible, in the same way it is said about the whole proposition that is either *per se* or *per accidens*. Therefore, every proposition like 'every man is an animal is *per se* true', 'every white man is a man is *per accidens* true', and the same for other cases, must be distinguished according to a compound sense or a divided sense. (William of Ockham, *Expositio super libros Elencorum*, l. I, c. 3, § 6, 37, 106 – 38, 117, ed. F. Del Punta, transl. mine)[31]

Ockham has a broad notion of 'mode' that encompasses not only the four standard modes, i.e., necessary, possible, impossible, and contingent, but also epistemic operators, deontological operators, and even 'true' and 'false'[32]. Similarly, '*per accidens*' and '*per se*' are modal operators that

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[31] 'Nam sicut dicitur de aliqua propositione tota quod est vera, vel falsa, vel necessaria, vel possibilis, vel impossibilis, ita dicitur de tota propositione quod est per se vel per accidens. Et ideo omnes tales propositiones "omnem hominem esse animal est per se verum", "omnem hominem album esse hominem [est per se verum", "omnem hominem esse album] est per accidens verum" et sic de aliis, sunt distinguendae secundum compositionem et divisionem.'

[32] According to Ockham, the modes are not only the four standard modes, as he claims in his *Summa logicae*, p. II, §1, 242 42-43: 'ideo generalius loquendo potest dici quod plures sunt modi facientes propositiones modales quam illi quatuor.'

modify the proposition and seem to be related to the modal operator 'true': a proposition is true either *per se* or *per accidens*.

It is therefore necessary to define what a proposition *per se* and a proposition *per accidens* are in Ockham, and then to consider in what sense there is a compound sense and a divided sense of these modal operators[33].

There are two main senses of a proposition *per se* that Ockham illustrates in *Summa logicae*, p. III-2, §7. A general (*large*) sense according to which a proposition is said to be *per se* when either the subject is a part of the definition of the predicate, or the predicate is part of the definition of the subject. For example, 'every man is an animal' is an example in which the predicate is contained in the definition of the subject[34]. Conversely, the proposition 'every triangle has three angles' exemplifies the case in which the subject is contained in the definition of the predicate. By contrast, strictly speaking (*stricte*), a proposition is said to be *per se* when, given all the conditions proper to what is *large per se*, it is also absolutely necessary, that is, it cannot be false and could not have been false (*simpliciter necessaria, ita quod nec potuit nec potest esse falsa*)[35]. Hence, a proposition *stricte per se* is a proposition *large per se* with the further addition that it must be absolutely or *simpliciter* necessary. For example, the proposition 'a man is an animal' is a *per se* predication, generally speaking or *large*, but not strictly speaking because it can be false, according to Ockham, as it would be if no man existed. On the contrary, the proposition 'every man can be an animal' is a *per se* proposition strictly speaking or *stricte* because it is necessary, and its truth does not require the existence of human beings[36]. Ockham

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[33] For Ockham on the nature of propositions as mental entities ('token mental representations playing the proposition role'), see Brower-Toland (2023).

[34] See William of Ockham *Summa Logicae*, p. III.2, §7, 515, 25 – 516, 31, ed. P. Boehner, G. Gál and S. Brown.

[35] See William of Ockham *Summa Logicae*, p. III.2, §7, 516, 31-44, ed. P. Boehner, G. Gál and S. Brown.

[36] See *ibidem*.

does not clarify whether the being *per se* of *Metaphysics* V 7, understood as a proposition *per se*, should be taken in a broad (*large*) or strict (*stricte*) sense. However, it is possible that the idea is to consider every proposition *per se* as an instance of being *per se*. If this is true, Ockham interprets being *per se* as a proposition *per se* understood in the broad sense (*large*).

On the other hand, a predication *per accidens* is when the predicate is not contained in the definition of the subject and subject is not contained in the definition of the predicate. It is thus like a contingent proposition that can either be or not be, just like an accident can either inhere or does not inhere in a subject. There is no distinction in this case between a *large* and a *stricte per accidens* proposition and all the possible examples of this type of proposition are those listed in *Metaphysics* V 7 1017a 8-10.

Having clarified what a proposition *per se* and *per accidens* are in Ockham, let us now consider in which sense they admit a compound and divided sense. Concerning the compound sense, Ockham affirms as follows:

> In the compound sense it means that the whole proposition is either *per se* or *per accidens*. (*Expositio super libros Elencorum*, l. I, c. 3, § 6, 38, 118-119, ed. F. Del Punta, transl. mine)[37]

A modal proposition '*per se*' or '*per accidens*' is taken in the compound sense if the modal operator refers to the entire proposition considered as a whole. On the contrary, a modal proposition '*per se*' or '*per accidens*' is taken in the divided sense if the modal operator is internal to the proposition and modifies the predication of the predicate said of the subject. Ockham states as follows:

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[37] 'In sensu compositionis denotatur quod talis tota propositio sit per se vel per accidens.'

In the divided sense it does not mean that the whole proposition is either *per se* or *per accidens*, but it means that the proposition in which the predicate is said about the same thing for which the subject stands for is such and such, i.e. either *per se* or *per accidens*. In the divided sense of those propositions is expressed by a proposition in which the predicate is said on the subject in that way. (*Expositio super libros Elencorum*, l. I, c. 3, § 6, 38, 119-124, ed. F. Del Punta, transl. mine)[38]

The divided sense of a modal operator indicates not that the modal operator refers to the whole proposition, but that in a given proposition the predicate is said of a subject according to that modal operator.

To sum up, in the divided sense, the modal operator modifies the way in which the predicate and the subject stand for something. In the compound sense, the modal operator applies to a proposition taken as whole, without saying anything about the predication. Consequently, there are two forms in which propositions with the modal operator *per se* and *per accidens* can be understood, as is the case with other modal operators as well:

- *Compound sense*[39]

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[38] 'In sensu divisionis non denotatur quod tota propositio sit per se vel per accidens, sed tantum denotatur quod propositio in qua praedicatur praedicatum de illo pro quo subiectum supponit sit talis, quia sensus divisionis talis propositionis exprimitur per propositionem in qua praedicatur praedicatum de subiecto cum tali modo.'

[39] Note that when addressing the difference between the modal proposition 'per accidens' and 'per se' in the *Expositio super libros Elencorum*, Ockham considers only the compound and divided sense, without discussing the distinction between modal propositions *cum dicto* and one *sine dicto* (for this distinction, see, for example, William of Ockham, *Summa logicae*., p. II, § 9, ed. P. Boehner, G. Gál and S. Brown). A *cum dicto* proposition is one where the modal operator is external to the categorical proposition (e.g., 'It is necessary that every man is an animal'); a *sine dicto* proposition is one where the modal operator is internal to the proposition (e.g., 'Every man is necessarily an animal'). A *sine dicto* proposition is always equivalent to a proposition in the divided sense. A *cum dicto* proposition can be taken in either the compound or divided sense, so disambiguation is necessary. A possible reason why Ockham perhaps does not present the *cum dicto/sine*

Proposition+ *per se / per accidens*
For example : 'omnem hominem album esse hominem est *per se*'[40]

• *Divided sense*
S + *per se / per accidens* + P
For example : 'omnis homo albus est *per se* homo'[41]

Considering the compound and divided sense, it is important to also outline the truth conditions, because a proposition with a modal operator can be true in the compound sense and false in the divided sense, or vice versa.

For example, consider a proposition like 'every animal is bipedal', and then introduce the modal operator '*per accidens*'. In the compound sense, the proposition is false because it is not true that every animal is bipedal *per accidens*. In the divided sense, the proposition can be true if the predicate 'bipedal' stands for all and only those animals whose being bipedal is *per accidens*. For instance, if 'every animal' and 'bipedal' both stand for 'dogs', since dogs are *per se* quadrupeds, but they can be bipeds *per accidens* (for example, if they lose two legs), then the proposition is true in the divided sense.

In other words, the truth conditions of the divided sense require an analysis of what the terms stand for, as Ockham clarifies when discussing the semantics of the proposition '*omnis homo albus est per se homo*':

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dicto distinction for the modal operators 'per accidens' and 'per se' is that the *sine dicto* form is usually expressed using adverbs/adjectives, and, while this is possible for alethic operators (such as 'necessary' or 'necessarily'), no other forms exist for 'per accidens' and 'per se'.

[40] See William of Ockham, *Expositio super libros Elencorum*, l. I, c. 3, § 6, 38, 124-125, ed. F. Del Punta.

[41] See William of Ockham, *Expositio super libros Elencorum*, l. I, c. 3, § 6, 38, 125-126, ed. F. Del Punta.

> In order to have this proposition true is not required that this
> proposition is *per se* 'every white man is a man', but it is sufficient that
> each of these propositions is *per se*: 'this is a man', 'that is a man',
> showing that all of these stands for the same thing for which the
> subject stands. (William of Ockham, *Expositio super libros Elencorum*, l.
> I, c. 3, § 6, 38, 126-129, ed. Del Punta, transl. mine)[42]

The proposition *per se/per accidens* taken in the divided sense is not
considered as a whole, but what is considered is the predication of terms
and, therefore, the supposition of the terms implied in it. In Ockham's
example, if every individual instance of 'white man', identified case by
case with demonstratives such as 'this' or 'that', stands for the same entity
as the term 'man' supposes, then the proposition is true *per se*. Thus,
while the truth conditions for a modal proposition *per se* or *per accidens*
in the compound sense are based on the *properties of the proposition
taken as a whole*, the truth conditions for a modal proposition *per se* or
per accidens in the divided sense require a verification of *the supposition
of the terms involved in the proposition*, ensuring that the subject term
and the predicate term stand for the same meaning.

We have thereby defined the meaning, the senses, and the truth-
conditions of the modal propositions '*per accidens*' and '*per se*', and,
consequently, what, according to Ockham, are being *per accidens* and
being *per se*.

4. Conclusions

The debate between nominalism and realism often arises from issues in
commenting on a text[43]. The case of being *per accidens* and being *per se* is
no exception. Starting from the ambiguity of *Metaphysics* V 7 1017a 7-30,
the field of dispute is defined between two different positions: one

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[42] 'Ad veritatem istius non requiritur quod haec sit per se "omnis homo albus est homo",
sed sufficit quod quaelibet talis sit per se "iste est homo" et "ille est homo", demonstrando
omnes illos pro quibus supponit subiectum.'

[43] Add Footnote: For this point, see De Libera (1996), 35-38.

asserting that being *per accidens* and being *per se* are real beings, and the other claiming that they define modes of predication instantiated in propositions. In this paper, I have analysed this latter interpretation, which I have defined 'nominalist', as proposed by William of Ockham, as well as the arguments he provided against the former interpretation, which I have defined as 'realist'.

Nominalism is described, first and foremost, by the claim that items which some (realists) believe to be real beings are instead mental or linguistic entities, such as concepts, terms or propositions. A nominalist position is thus typically defined by *parsimony* in admitting real beings. Having a parsimonious ontology concerning real beings, however, is not the result of a mere application of the 'Ockham's razor'. As already observed[44], *both nominalists and realists* are of course reluctant to admit unnecessary real beings. The question is, more properly, the following: which real beings are necessary? In answering this question, Ockham often demonstrates that a certain phenomenon, which realists explain by introducing a real being that they deem necessary for the explanation of that phenomenon, can be perfectly explained without admitting such a being.

Therefore, those who (1) reduce the number of real beings showing that they are not necessary to account for the phenomena and (2) claim that these items are actually mental/linguistic entities are usually labelled as nominalists.

Nevertheless, (1) and (2) are not fully sufficient to define when a certain account is nominalist or not. It is also true that Ockham's stance on being *per se* and being *per accidens* is nominalist because he does not regard being *per se* and being *per accidens* as real beings but as modal propositions, following (2). Ockham's account, however, is not nominalist because being *per se* and being *per accidens* as real beings are *unnecessary*: it is not a matter of parsimony in admitting real beings or

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[44] See Maurer (1978: 429) and Spade (1999: 102)

not. Rather, in explaining the distinction between being *per accidens* and *per se* in *Metaphysics* V 7, Ockham aims to show that positing a real being such as being *per accidens* is in *contradiction* with the fundamental distinction of the Aristotelian ontology: 'everything is either substance or accident'. Moreover, the realist account also entails the absurd conclusion that a being *per se* (e.g., Socrates) can also be a being *per accidens* (an accidental aggregate)[45].

Being *per se* and being *per accidens* as real beings are not unnecessary, but *inadmissible* within Aristotelian ontology. Therefore, the distinction between being *per accidens* and *per se* must not be a distinction between real beings but between propositions: *per se* and *per accidens* define modes of predication, and instances of being *per se* and being *per accidens* are modal propositions.

In other words, to use Scotus's distinction between different senses of '*per accidens*', namely '*per accidens*' in the metaphysical sense (e.g., 'a white man') and '*per accidens*' in the logical sense (e.g., 'a man is white'), Ockham accepts only the latter sense as valid for commenting on *Metaphysics* V 7 and demonstrates that a metaphysical sense of '*per accidens*', and by extension of '*per se*', cannot be admitted.

As we have seen, Ockham offers two arguments to reject the realist account. The first argument, based on the exhaustiveness of the substance/accident distinction, shows that since a being *per accidens* can be neither a substance nor an accident, it must therefore be nothing. This argument relies on a strict limitation of Aristotelian ontology and appears to beg the question. For what a realist in fact maintains is that

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[45] This strategy of argumentation belongs to what Spade (1999: 102-103) calls a 'second line of attack' of Ockham's rejection of realism: 'Ockham has two main lines of attack against other people's ontologies. One proceeds by arguing that the reasons others give for postulating certain entities are not good reasons, that everything that can be done with such entities can be done without them [...] The second main line of attack is different. It argues that certain other people's ontological theories not only postulate unnecessary entities but lead to plain falsehood – either to self-contradiction or, at least, to claims that contradict established facts.'

Aristotelian ontology allows for more than merely substances and accidents. One cannot simply assert that there are only substances and accidents, as Ockham does, otherwise one commits a question-begging argument.

The second argument focuses on the distinction between being *per accidens* and being *per se* and takes the form of a *reductio ad absurdum* based on the following inference: "The white Socrates is an accidental aggregate; therefore, Socrates is an accidental aggregate." The absurdity lies in the consequent, namely that Socrates is an accidental aggregate. Indeed, Socrates is a *per se* being, a simple being. However, Ockham shows that this absurdity follows from the realist assumption that 'white Socrates' is a *per accidens* aggregate, as the realists maintain.

This argument is structured around the analysis of the kind of distinction applied to a term in an inference, that is, from one proposition to another in which at least one term has an additional determination not present in the antecedent. For Ockham, 'white' is a determination that produces no fallacy when added to the term Socrates. Nevertheless, the realist would reject the validity of this inference, because for the realist the determination 'white' somehow changes the subject, introducing a shift from a simple being or being *per se* (Socrates) to an aggregate *per accidens* (white Socrates). To assume that 'white', if removed from 'white Socrates', is not a determination that takes something away from Socrates, as Ockham does, is based on the idea that Socrates is not different from 'white Socrates'. But this is precisely what Ockham must prove against the realist account. This argument, therefore, is also a form of question-begging argument.

Ockham claims that terms such as 'white man' do not denote any real being (they have no personal supposition), but only concepts or words (having only simple or material supposition). With regard to *Metaphysics* V 7, Ockham states that Aristotle is not speaking of beings, but of propositions *per se* and *per accidens*, that is, of modal propositions, which

have different senses (divided and composite) and different truth conditions.

In conclusion, both Ockham and a realist like Scotus accept that there are beings belonging to one of the Aristotelian categories and one could also call them 'beings *per se*'. The main question is the status of being *per accidens*. While Scotus maintains that there are also beings *per accidens*, i.e., things composed of beings *per se* (for example, a white man as a third thing composed of two *per se* beings, 'whiteness' and 'man'), Ockham holds that there are no such beings *per accidens*. According to Ockham, there are at most only combinations of beings *per se* with no unity whatsoever, without introducing any third being beyond the parts involved (for example, a white man consists of two *per se* beings and not one being *per accidens*). Therefore, according to Ockham, when Aristotle speaks of being *per accidens* (and being *per se*), he is, rather, referring to propositions.

Note, however, that being *per accidens* and *per se* are not removed from the Aristotelian ontology by Ockham's arguments. Being *per accidens* and being *per se*, understood as propositions, have a certain ontological status: they are items (in particular, propositions), *but not real beings*. *Per accidens* and *per se* describe modes of predication instantiated in modal propositions, for which Ockham defines also the truth conditions, distinguishing between the compound and divided sense. Real beings described as *per accidens* or *per se* cannot be admitted; however, propositions *per se* or *per accidens* are certainly admissible and provide, without positing unacceptable real beings, an interpretation of *Metaphysics* V 7.

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