

Aristotle Talks About the Behavioral Theory of "Accidental Combinations"

Yunfeng Zhang

Zhejiang Police College, Hangzhou, Zhejiang 310053, China

weilai_020691@126.com

Abstract. Aristotle raised a profound question in the first paragraph of Z6 in Metaphysics: Is the Accidental combinations the same as what it is? W.D.Ross and Nie Minli have given different explanations about the argumentation process of this paragraph. This paper attempts to restore the content of this paragraph and explain the differences between them. At the same time, it expounds how Aristotle understands the problem of "Accidental combinations" from a broader perspective, and points out that this is related to the evolution of Aristotle's ontological thought on the relationship between nature and parity, which is by no means an answer like an universal affirmative proposition. Aristotle is actually doubtful about this issue, and Ross's suspicion of Z6 has its value.

Keywords: Accidental Combinations; What It Is; Substance; Separate.

1. The Question Raised

Professor Nie Minli, in a footnote [1] 176 in Being and Substance Aristotle's Studies in Volume Z of Metaphysics (Z1-9), criticizes one of W.D.Ross's views:

It follows that Ross is incorrect to argue that the argument here is weak and merely literal (W.D. Ross 1924 (vol. 1), p.cix) on the basis that it is a fallacy and not a direct argument.

In fact, for Aristotle, whether what 'man' is' what white man is' is a strong premise, from which it can be proved paradoxically that 'white man is not what white man is'. "This passage in Nie Wen is based on Ross's analysis of a passage in Aristotle on the Accidental combinations.

Minnie believes that Ross's view that Aristotle's fallacy here is less effective is actually wrong; on the contrary, he believes that Aristotle has given a strong argument.

Let us first look at what Aristotle actually argues here, how Ross and Nie Minli understand it, whether, as Nie Minli criticized, Ross made a wrong analysis, and finally talk about how Aristotle actually viewed the problem.

2. Problems in Metaphysics Z6

Zetas 6 of Aristotle begins with the famous question, "Is a thing equal to what it is?" (Is a thing the same as its essence?) (1031a15) Here, "one thing" can be divided into "by oneself" and "not by oneself", the former can be understood as "form" or "phase", while the latter can be understood as "coincidence + by oneself", that is, "Accidental combinations", and the first paragraph of Z6 discusses the "Accidental combinations" problem. Aristotle then uses a syllogism to give a point of view - "It is generally believed that everything is not different from the noumenon, and how is the noumenon of everything", the first process of argument is as follows:

A thing = the body of a thing,

The noumenon of a thing = what a thing is,

So, a thing = what a thing is.

In Plato, "what is" is idea ("phase"), so Aristotle seems to confirm that things and phases cannot be separated.



Aristotle goes on to say, "Now, in the compound of attributes, things are different from how they are generally thought to be," referring here to the "Accidental combinations," that is, to the "Accidental combinations," and then he gives an example "for example, how the white man is different from the white man." If they are the same, the man's must be the same as the white man's; If people say that man is a white man, then how can the white man be the same as man?" The second argument goes like this:

If white = what white is (1)

People = White (2)

Man = What white people are (3)

And what man is = man (4)

So, what the white man is = what the man is. (5)

The second argument is *reductio absurdum*, in which Aristotle attempts to prove the error of the major premise (1) by the error of conclusion (5), and goes on to say: "What is a property compound word, however, may not necessarily be the same as what is a word." It is not the case that the outer term and the middle term become identical."

Aristotle then gave another example when he said, "Perhaps two external terms should be the same, for example, what is white and what is civilized; But that's not the case." The third argument process is as follows:

In case,

Civilized man = What civilized man is (1)

Man = civilized man (2),

White = People (3)

What is White = White (4)

Well,

What is white = What is civilized (5)

In short,

What is white = What is civilized (6)

Aristotle also believes that conclusion (6) is wrong, so he says, "But this is not the case."

This is how Aristotle, in paragraph 1 of Z6 (1031A15-26), argues the question of the "Accidental combinations," which, at least on the surface, seems to want to prove by *reductio ad absurdum* that the "Accidental combinations" is different from the "what of Accidental combinations." So did Aristotle achieve what he wanted? Let's take a look at how Ross sees this process of argument.

3. The Note of R. Ross

In his translation, [2] 176, on the *Metaphysics*, Ross decomposed the second argument process into three steps:(1) a white man=the essence of white man(2) a man=a white man

∴ a man= the essence of white man

He wrote about the second argument: "This *reductio ad absurdum*, however, Aristotle points out in 1.24, fail. It does not follow that the essence of Accidental combinations is identical, sc. With that of the corresponding simple terms. For the extremes are not identical in the same way, sc. with the middle term. In the first syllogism the major term is absolutely identified with the middle, while the minor is identical with the middle only *per accidens* ; in the second syllogism the converse is true." [2]

Here, Ross believes that the major (white) and the middle (white) are the same, while the middle (white) and (human) are only accidentally the same, the error of the conclusion (5) is not necessarily due to the error of the major premise (1), and Aristotle's second argument is the failure of the major premise (1).

On the third argument, Ross said this: "This conclusion might seem to follow, because here musical man and white man are both identical with the middle term man in the same way, i.e. *per accidens*. The argument is, of course, unsound; but Aristotle does not commit himself to its accuracy—he merely says δὲξαιεν ἂν συμβαίνειν." [2]

As with his questioning of the effect of the second argument, he argues that "man = civilized man" (2) and "white man = man" (3) are accidental, so the fallacy of this attempt to deduce the error of the major premise (1) from the error of the result is equally unsound.

Perhaps drawing on the English translation of Ross, Mr. Wu Shou Peng also wrote in his footnote [3] 150 on this paragraph in his Chinese translation of *Metaphysics*: "Lines 24-25: indicates that the two formulas (a) and (c) are ontologically yes, while the formula (b) is accidentally yes by attributes, so the above deduction cannot be mistaken." Here is for the second argument above, the key statement is "it is not so that the outer term and the middle term become the same", this sentence indicates that there is a fundamental difference between steps (1), (3) and (2), "white = white is" and "man = man is" are the noumenal is, and "white = man" is the coincidence is, and the standards of both are different. So it weakens the effect of reductive evidence itself.

To sum up, according to Ross and Wu Shoupeng, Aristotle does not in fact directly and strongly reduce the fallacy of "Accidental combinations" from "what Accidental combinations is".

4. Nie Minli's Understanding

Below, let's first look at how Professor Nie Minli analyzes this argument of Aristotle [1] 168-177. He first mentioned Aristotle's theoretical harvest in Z4-5, "The entity of every thing is strictly pure, it excludes all its compound existence in the coincidence sense, no longer is an coincident complex, but exists only as a strictly simple unity, which is the entity itself." [1] Then he repeated the question: "Are the existence of a thing and the essence of a thing the same?" Is the existence of a thing the existence of its essence?" [1] Then he points out that the real difficulty of the problem is that "everything as a concrete and individual being is first of all an coincident being, and therefore not identical in the immediate level with what it is, and in this sense has an existence different from its essence." [1] He also points out a characteristic of Aristotle's language in the first sentence of the first paragraph of Z6: "Aristotle does not say definitively and definitively that everything must be what it is, but uses the word 'seems' (δοκεῖ), which indicates uncertainty and speculation." This shows that it is precisely in the identity of every thing and what it is that there is a doubt, that there is not necessarily a direct and identical relation between every thing and what it is." [1] Nie Minli argues that Aristotle rejects the general recognition that all things are the same as they are. Nie then summarises "the answer that Aristotle seems to be trying to give - that each thing is separate in the sense of being coincident, while each thing is not separate in the sense of being itself." [1] He then explains the process of proving the second fallacy of this paragraph, which, unlike Ross's division of the argument into one syllogism, Nie Minli divides it into two syllogisms:

"What a white man is is a white man (1)

White people are people (2)

So, what a white person is is a person (3)

Man is what man is (4)

Therefore, what the white man is is what the man is (5)

But the white man is not the instigation of man (6)

Therefore, the white man is not the white man (7) "[1]

Nie Minli believes that "this is a fallacy proof based on two syllogisms, which sets a major premise that needs to be tested for its authenticity, 'What white people are is white people', and then draws an obviously wrong conclusion under the guidance of a series of minor premises in accordance with strict syllogistic reasoning, 'what white people are is what people are.'" The error of this conclusion, in turn, proves the error of the main premise, and thus the correctness of the proposition contrary to the main premise, that is, 'the white man is not a white man.'" [1] Nie Minli further argues that "In fact, for this fallacy proof, what is really set as a self-evident premise is nothing but the proposition that 'what the white man is is not what the man is.'" For Aristotle, the truth of this proposition is perfectly self-evident, as is the error of its antithesis. That's the whole point of the argument." [1]

These are Nie Minli's basic views on the process of argument in paragraph 1 of Z6. He believes that Aristotle uses a strong argument to refute the main premise (1), that the "Accidental combinations" is different from what it is, and that Ross's criticism of the weak argument in this paragraph is wrong.

In fact, by comparing with the original text, it can be found that Nie Minli's analysis process of the second argument is biased, and he first ignores a problem existing in the argument process itself, that is, the difference in the nature of the argument steps (1), (3) and (2) as pointed out above. As Wu Shoupeng pointed out in the footnote of his translation above, "' How is white = white 'is noumenon", some people may be confused: how can "how is white" be considered as the noumenon of "white"? Let us first recall what Aristotle had to say about the classification of "is" in *Metaphysics Delta 7*. Aristotle states that "the main categories of 'is' are analogous to the categories (categories) of the cloud, and that 'is' must have as many classes as there are classes of the cloud." The words say what the subject is, some say its quality, some say its quantity, some say its relation, some say its action or passivity, some say where, some say when, but there must be a meaning that corresponds to one of these descriptions." [3] Mr. Wang Zisong is surprised by the expression of this paragraph, which he thinks refers to nature (essence) and asks, "But why does Aristotle classify all categories of existence as essential existence?" It's worth discussing. Therefore, from Aristotle's consistent thought, only the noumenon is the essence, and the other categories, such as nature and quantity, cannot be called essential." [4] Then Wang Zisong argued that "Aristotle's own example can also see the problem here. For example, "This person is recovering" is no different from "this person is recovering." Why are such examples listed in essential existence? Aristotle doesn't say anything about it." [4] 51

Wang Zisong's confusion can be explained from the logic theory of Aristotle. "If a man is in his presence, and he says that here is a 'man' or an 'animal,' then he expresses its essence and represents an entity; But if a piece of white is placed before her, and he says that it is 'white 'or' a colour ', then he expresses its essence (what it is) and indicates a quality. For for all these class predicates, whether they assert themselves or assert their genus, then it represents the essence; On the other hand, if a predicate of one kind asserts another, then it does not denote essence, but quantity, quality, or one of the other kinds of predicates." (133b14-38) [5] 354 In view of the category classification here, Wang Lu believes that "the same is to elaborate the essence, but the things expressed can be different." 'Animal' illustrates the essence of human being and represents a kind of entity; 'Color' expresses the essence of 'white' and represents a quality. This classification is not based on what these words say about the subject, but on consideration of the words themselves, the predicates themselves." [6] 31 Thus, Aristotle did categorize the extraordinary meaning of "is," and, moreover, he incorporated in $\Delta 7$ this idea of the predicate doctrine of the Discourse, where the universal in the subcategory also represents the essential for the individual.

Therefore, what Wu Shoupeng said in the footnote, "' What is white = white is ontologically what is" is valid from the point of view of the meaning of the predicate itself, as to whether Aristotle in Z6 thinks about this matter from the predicate itself, at least it can be said that there is such a possibility.

Even if we do not consider the differences in the nature of the second argumentative steps (1), (3) and (2), considering only the contingency of (2), Nie Minli believes that the significant error of the conclusion (5) leads to the complete reduction of the major premise (1) is not valid, because there are

problems in the argumentative process and it cannot be completely reduced to the major premise (1) itself.

In the next paragraph, when Aristotle turns to the discussion of every thing in itself, he asks: "As for what is in itself, are they not necessarily the same?" (1031a28-29) This shows that for Aristotle everything that is in itself is exactly the same as what it is." [1] Nie Minli's translation of the question at the beginning of the second paragraph of Chapter 6 differs from that of Ross and Wu Shoupeng, who, according to them, should translate it as "But in the nature of the noun (from oneself) is a thing necessarily the same in how?" (But in the case of self-consistent things, is a thing necessarily the same as its essence?) This is just a general question, but Nie Wen understands it as a rhetorical question, and the difference in sentence meaning will have a great impact on the understanding of the logic of the text. Nie Wen tried to use the rhetorical question here to indirectly prove that "Accidental combinations" is different from "what Accidental combinations is", which can only exist.

At the same time, Nie points out that Z6 is closely related to chapters 4-5, while the former shows that only "being what it is" is the noumenon of every thing, and he emphasizes in particular that "Aristotle established in Z3 that" being what it is "is the only legitimate candidate for an entity." [1] Aristotle wrote in Z3, "One idea has matter as its base, the other shape, and the third is a combination of the two." If it is more true to think that form precedes matter, for the same reason it precedes the combination of the two." Thus it can be seen that Aristotle actually elaborated his "triple essentialism" in Z3, where form precedes individual things and materials and becomes the first noumenon, not the only noumenon. [7] 301

At another point, he writes, "Everything that is coincidence and what it is is not the same, and in this respect, like Plato's idea and the relationship between perceptible things, they are just separate." [1] 176 It has been shown above that the discussion on ontology in Z6 is based on the "triple essentialism", since individual things, as a kind of ontology, should certainly contain parity in a sense and not be separated from it. In addition, Plato strictly distinguished between "being" and "changing" in his theory of phases in *Phaedo* and the *State*, and proposed the separation of phases (ideas) as models from perceptible things, but if according to Plato's viewpoint in *Parmenides*, whether phases are separated from perceptible things or not, even perceptible things themselves are the collective of phases. [8] If this is backwards, Nie Minli seems to have strictly distinguished the nature and parity of individual things, placing ontological categories and sub-categories in different positions.

5. Aristotle's Views on the "Accidental Combinations"

The question now is, as far as Aristotle himself is concerned, is the Accidental combinations separate or not separate from what it is? The discussion of this question involves Aristotle's view of the relationship between ontological categories and sub-categories, the process of his ontological theory, and his understanding of coincidence.

(1) "This" and "absence" in individual things

In another article [9], Nie Minli argues: "The individual is what a thing is, which is also the individual essence of the thing, that is, itself; The individual thing, on the other hand, is the concrete, experiential, perceptual existence of that thing, that is, in addition to being itself, it is at the same time a concrete thing." Based on the term "this one", this paper holds that "individual" refers to form, and individual things are coincident matter-form complexes. The "this one" mentioned in this article is actually the "this nature" of the form, and Mr. Chen Kang has already pointed out in his research that "phase (form) is a nature, a fixed nature, and the purpose of occurrence." When matter is formed into individual things for phase (form), this nature is realized in the matter, and there is 'this one here'. This nature of phases, therefore, passes from the receiving form of matter to this nature of the individual essence." [7] 312

Moreover, the separation of the individual perceptible from the coincidence is due to the transition from the existence of the phase. [7] In *Metaphysics* $\Delta 8$, Aristotle states that "that which, being a 'this',

can also be separated and independent - here the second meaning does not refer to independent shapes or forms", meaning that the definition of phases "does not include" other sub-categories such as quantity, nature, and so on. It is equivalent to what Aristotle says in the doctrine of logic, "may", that man may or may not be white, that the property "white" is not included in the definition as "not necessary" rather than "necessarily not", and that when matter is realized, its separation (dissociation) is transferred to individual things, which can be separated from its parity. But it is worth noting that the separation of individual and parity is relative, for example, a person can be separated from a particular color, but he is always a certain color, can not exist without color, so can not be separated from the general color. [4] 29

In the *Polemics and Physics*, [10] Aristotle gives us more evidence of this from the point of view of logic and motion:

"The subject of the coincidence is not without limitation different from that which accompanies it, but is told differently because of their different nature." For there is a difference between being human and being white." (133b30)

If there are multiple definitions of the same thing, the essence revealed by each definition must be the same to the person who proposes it; But in practice, the definition is different, and the nature of disclosure is not the same." (141b1)

"There is no complete separation," Anaxagora said unconsciously, but he was right. Influence, for example, cannot exist alone. Therefore, suppose that the colour or condition is already contained in the original mixture, and if it can be separated from it, then a 'white' or 'healthy' self appears, that is, they are not supplementary words to any main word. So if his' reason 'wants to separate such things, he is pursuing the impossible. This attempt is absurd. And it doesn't work either quantitatively or qualitatively. As for quantity, since there is no minimum quantity, the qualitative aspect cannot exist on its own because of 'influence'." (188a6-13)

"In every change of circumstances there must be one thing which serves as the basis of the change, the changer, and although the basis is one in number, it is two in form. (The form I refer to here is the definition. For example, 'human' and 'uneducated') are two names with different definitions." (190a15-18)

"The material and the opposite attributes cannot be separated, but they are distinct; Color, hot and cold (if it happens to be these variations) materials can be one." (217a24-25)

"A whitened thing becomes the object of thought, and this is due to parity (for color is an parity to the thought); It becomes colored because white is part of the color, just as one goes to Europe because Athens is part of Europe; It turns white because of its nature." (224b20-24)

Moreover, in the *Treatise on Birth and Death*, Aristotle states that "each of the mixed sides must originally be able to exist separately; But no nature can exist in isolation." (327b23) In his *Treatise on the Construction of Animals*, Aristotle states, from the point of view of the definition of biological organs, that "blood is intrinsically hot in one sense, but not in another." The formula for 'whiteness' implies' whiteness '... "(649b26)

Therefore, it is difficult to imagine what kind of existence is a "plastic-shaped complex" that completely excludes coincidence? Moreover, Aristotle has clearly stated that "matter is the cause of coincidence" (1027a15), how can cause and effect be absolutely separated? The separation of the individual from the dual is relative, not absolute; how can Accidental combinations be mere form?

(2) Aristotle's natural teleological thought on "coincidence"

As mentioned above, Nie Minli seems to make a strict distinction between nature and coincidence, and we may wish to see what Aristotle's natural teleological view of coincidence is.

Strictly speaking, the work of classifying coincidence is carried out in *Physics*, and *Metaphysics* Δ7, E2, and z7, although they distinguish the nature of coincidence, the search for the cause of

coincidence, and the division of "spontaneity" into two categories of manufacturing and natural acts, are not sufficient to explain the meaning of coincidence itself. In Physics 2:4-6, Aristotle focuses on chance (τύχη) and spontaneity (τὰ τὸ ματὸν). Aristotle says that "of the things that arise, some arise for a purpose, and some do not. And of the former class, some are again by choice, and some are not, but both belong to the class of doing, whether by choice or not. Some things that do something happen by nature." (196b18-24) From this passage we find that what Aristotle usually calls "coincidence" (divided into chance and spontaneity) is active, and that it is the absolute coincidence which is completely purposeless and does nothing. "If something is among the general things that come into being by doing something, but, because of external causes, when it does not come into being as a result of something actually happening, we say that it comes into being spontaneously." If these spontaneous events arise in accordance with the choices of those who have the power of choice, they are called by chance." On careful observation of this passage, we find that Aristotle did not strictly distinguish between chance and necessity, and neither "chance" nor "spontaneous" is accidental in the true sense. Here, Aristotle highlights the color of natural teleology [11] 111, and the discussion of coincidence is actually imperfect. So Ross wondered if Aristotle really thought that chance existed at all. [12] 86

In addition, we should also pay attention to the so-called "extended doctrine of representation" in the Post-Analysis, 83a18-23, not only between species and individuals are true representations, but other universal sub-categories of nature and quantity (such as "white") can also be used as predicates on individual ontologies (man, wood), It is not just that the general whiteness in the Categories forms true representations of special sub-categories (such as special whiteness); In the Latter Analysis 83a30-32, 83b22-24, and Physics 188a7-9, special sub-categories (such as so-and-so white) are also allowed to describe individual things. In the end, both the universal white and the specific white can tell individual things. In this way, the narrow expression of predicate truth based on strict "species relations" in the Category is extended, and those in the subject can also express the noumenon. In this regard, Mr. Chen Kang profoundly pointed out that "Plato's" phrase "is transformed into nature, quantity, relations, etc., and they are all the second noumenon." [7] 337-352 Considering Aristotle's logical readjustment of the relation between coincidence and ontological truth representation, is there any reason to think that he completely denies that "Accidental combinations" has what it is?

Let alone "metaphysics" ⊕ "potential - reality" theory, in the form of reality, the material is potential, form and material but yes two different entities, the material is implemented as a potential movement process, and I was also a way of being, Aristotle through the theory of "potential - reality" finally realized the inclusive interpretation of sensible things, Both nature and coincidence are included, nature and coincidence are no longer so strictly distinguished, and in the end, the problem of the separation of form and matter, form and individual things is solved more satisfactorily.

6. Conclusion

From the wording of the original text of Metaphysics Z6, Aristotle's repeated use of the words "generally believed" and "perhaps" in paragraph 1 of Z6, as well as the actual existence of two fallacy proofs, at least indicates that he was hesitant when thinking about this problem, even if he did not affirm or completely deny it. Rather than what Nie Minli said, he came to the definitive conclusion that the "Accidental combinations" was different from what it was.

In Z5 Aristotle clearly states that "in the primary, first sense of definition and essence, only the noumenon has essence; But in the second sense, other categories can have an essence, and compound words like 'flat nose' can have an essence." Perhaps one can ask here, since compound words can have essence, why can't Accidental combinations have essence? In some cases, Aristotle even argued that "in definition, the property 'precedes' the whole, for example 'civilized 'should precede' civilized man ', for a definition cannot be made whole without its parts" (Metaph.1018b34).

In any case, it is necessary to pursue the ultimate question of ontology: form is single and poor in content, individual things are rich in content, how can something single and poor in content become the definition and origin of something rich in content?

References

- [1] Minli Nie. A Study of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Volume Z (Z1-9) [M]. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press,2011.
- [2] W.D. Ross. Aristotle's Metaphysics. A revised Text with Introduction and Commentary,volume II, Oxford: Clarendon Press,1924.
- [3] Aristotle, translated by Wu Shoupeng. Metaphysics [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press,1997.
- [4] Zisong Wang. Aristotle's Theory on Noumenon [M]. Beijing: Sanlian Publishing House,1982.
- [5] Aristotle, On Tools, translated by Liu Yetao et al. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House,2020.
- [6] Lu Wang. Aristotle's Theory of Logic [M]. Beijing: China Social Sciences Press,2017.
- [7] Kang Chen. On Greek Philosophy [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press,2017.
- [8] Minli Nie. Individual and Individual Things [J]. Tsinghua Institute of Western Philosophy, 2015,1(01):213-239.
- [9] Kang Chen. Parmenides' Commentary [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press,1985.
- [10] By Aristotle, translated by Wu Shoupeng. Physics [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press,2009.
- [11] Kailai Xu, Saving Nature: A Study of Aristotle's View of Nature, [M]. Chengdu: Sichuan University Press,2007.
- [12] W.D. Ross, Trans. Wang Lu [M]. Aristotle, Beijing: The Commercial Press,1997.