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Sortals and the Subject-Predicate Distinction

Michael Durrant

Edited by Stephen Horton



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ISBN 978-1-138-71684-1



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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2001 by Ashgate Publishing

Reissued 2018 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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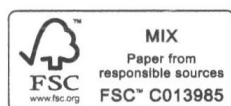
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A Library of Congress record exists under LC control number: 00134436

ISBN 13: 978-1-138-71684-1 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-1-315-19684-8 (ebk)



Printed in the United Kingdom
by Henry Ling Limited

SORTALS AND THE SUBJECT-PREDICATE DISTINCTION

The problem of the subject-predicate distinction has featured centrally in much of modern philosophy of language and philosophical logic, and the distinction is taken as basic or fundamental in modern philosophical logic. Michael Durrant, whilst explicitly not denying that the subject-predicate distinction as a distinction is ultimate, seeks to demonstrate that the distinction should not be taken as basic or fundamental and argues that the reason for it being held to be fundamental is a failure to acknowledge the category and role of the sortal.

A sortal is a symbol which furnishes us with a principle for distinguishing and counting particulars (objects), and which does so in its own right relying on no antecedent principle or method of so distinguishing or counting. This book explores sortals and their relationship to the subject-predicate distinction; arguing that the nature of sortal symbols has been misconstrued in much modern writing in the philosophy of logic by failing to distinguish sortals from names and predicates; contending that this misconstruction has led to a failure to appreciate what makes the subject-predicate distinction possible; demonstrating logical difficulties which then follow; and expounding an account of sortal symbols which seeks to be immune from the difficulties. Exploring and challenging aspects of the work of Frege, Russell, Geach, Quine, Evans and Strawson, amongst others, Durrant also provides a new challenge to certain popular presuppositions employed in many areas of contemporary philosophical debate, and offers important insights for those studying across philosophical logic, philosophy of language, and metaphysics and epistemology, in particular.

Michael Durrant is Reader in Philosophy and Honorary Senior Research Fellow in Philosophy, University of Wales, Cardiff, UK; Stephen Horton is Research Assistant, University of Wales, Cardiff, UK.

Editor's Preface

It is not my intention here to offer a detailed description of the content of this work as an introduction is provided by the author. Rather, the purpose of this preface is to briefly explain something of the history of the writing of this book.

Work on this book originally commenced in the late 1970s and continued up until the mid-to-late 1980s, whereupon it was interrupted by a series of events at University College, Cardiff. The net result of these occurrences led to the author becoming Head of the then Philosophy Department. This was a very traumatic period in the history of University College, Cardiff, which meant that the vast majority of the author's time and effort was taken up working for the continued existence of the Philosophy Department. Thus, owing to the overwhelming responsibility of his position, the author was unable to continue with his work on this book. Having set this work aside, it became increasingly difficult for him to find the time, until now, to return to it.

However, whilst having been forced to abandon his original efforts, the work itself was in its advanced stages with some eleven chapters and an introduction completed. Given the already immense amount of effort expended, the quality of the work already achieved and its continued philosophical relevance, funding has recently been made available by Prof. Christopher Norris for myself, acting as editor, to assist the author in the completion of this book.

With regard to the text itself, the Introduction and chapters I to XI inclusive largely mirror, with some amendments and alterations, their original content and format. Chapter XII, the concluding chapter to the book, is a recent addition. Also included is a postscript, written by the editor, which is intended to provide a bridging link between the original work herein and contemporary philosophical discussion. There is also the addition of a bibliography, an index and a bibliography of other writings by the author.

Stephen Horton

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Vice-Chancellor of Cardiff University; to Professor David Skilton, Head of the School of English, Communications and Philosophy and especially Professor Christopher Norris for making available some research funding to Dr. Stephen Horton for editing this book. My debt to Dr. Horton is enormous; in some instances he has had to work from hand-written manuscripts and in other instances from amateurishly typed text; he has done all the word-processing for and preparation of the final text.

I am indebted to the editor of the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* and other journals for permission to reproduce articles or sections of articles which originally appeared in their journals.

I should like to extend my great thanks to Professors Robin Attfield and Christopher Norris for their initial and continued encouragement to complete, revise and submit for publication a text originally written in the early-mid 1980s but never completed owing to increasingly demanding Administrative Duties. My thanks are equally extended to Professors Roger Trigg and Basil Mitchell for their unswerving support.

I retired from my teaching post at Cardiff in September 1999 after 37 years and I dedicate this work to the staff and students of Philosophy at Cardiff with whom it has been a privilege and joy to work for so many years.

Michael Durrant

Introduction to the Author

This book forms a fitting climax to Michael Durrant's career in Philosophy over some 40 years. It concerns one of his major interests in the discipline, but a feature of his work has been that he has not allowed himself to be confined to the narrow embrace of one part of philosophical thought. There is at the present day a great danger of over-specialisation in the subject, so that practitioners in one part of it have little idea of, or concern for, work in other parts. This can be particularly stultifying when developments in, say, philosophical logic are not allowed to illuminate philosophical thinking in very different areas.

Michael Durrant's teaching and research have allowed him to integrate thinking from disparate elements in philosophy. A good example of this is the way in which his work in logic has been able to fertilise his thinking in the philosophy of religion. Two books, *The Logical Status of God* (London: Macmillan, 1973) and *Theology and Intelligibility* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973) bear witness to this. He has also made substantial contributions to the study of ancient philosophy, a recent example of which is his edition of *Aristotle's De Anima in Focus* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

Philosophical logic, ancient philosophy and the philosophy of religion, separately and in combination, make a powerful repertoire for any philosopher. In his publications and in his teaching, Michael Durrant has been able to offer a balanced, but rigorous approach to his chosen subject matter. He has, as a result, earned the gratitude of colleagues and pupils alike. For 37 years his work has been centred in that part of the University of Wales which is now known as Cardiff University. He has at times played a vital role in its administration both as Dean of Theology, and as Head of the Philosophy Department.

Nevertheless this has not prevented him being known on a wider stage. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Nebraska in the United States, but perhaps more significantly has played a leading role in the formation of two important learned societies, devoted to the philosophy of religion. He was a member of the executive committee of the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion at its inception, and was also one of the founding members of the European Society for the Philosophy of Religion. This comprises academics from both philosophy and theology in a wide range of European countries. He became the first British President of the Society, and it

was partly because of his hard work that it has been able to encourage the development of the philosophy of religion as a rigorous and important discipline in European universities.

As this book shows, Michael Durrant is concerned with the importance of logical thinking. He has never seen this is an end in itself, but has striven to make connections with other issues of major importance. Moreover, he has not allowed himself to be trapped in a narrow academic world. He has played an important part in the life of his local community, and his love of music, shown particularly through his organ playing, has served to remind others that of the life of the scholar need not be dry and arid.

Roger Trigg
University of Warwick

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