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Sortals and the Subject-Predicate Distinction

Michael Durrant

Edited by Stephen Horton



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.

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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



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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



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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

Introduction:

Aims and Plan of Campaign

A. Principal Aims

My principal aims are: (I) To show that the nature of sortal symbols has been misconstrued and misunderstood in much modern classical writing in the philosophy of logic; (II) To contend that this misconstruction has led certain writers to fail to appreciate what makes possible the subject-predicate distinction; (III) To present and demonstrate the further consequences of this misconstruction, which generate logical difficulties of a fundamental type; (IV) (a) To illustrate the specific form which these general consequences assume in the writing of selected modern writers; and (b) to exhibit the distinctive difficulties arising for each of these writers; (V) To vindicate my own account of sortal symbols as immune from such difficulties and illuminative of the fundamental nature of systems of discourse.

I give the following as a preliminary account of what I shall mean by a 'sortal'. A sortal is a symbol which furnishes us with a principle for distinguishing and counting particulars and which does so in its own right relying on no antecedent principle or method of so distinguishing and counting.¹ Grammatically a sortal takes the form of a common noun which: (i) takes the indefinite article in its own right; (ii) takes the plural form in its own right. We have as examples: 'man'; 'apple'; 'house'; 'dog'; 'digit'.

A.1. The misconstruction I have alluded to above comprises the construction of the definite form of a sortal ('The so-and-so') as either: (a) a proper name; an 'object word';² (b) a definite description;³ and the indefinite form ('a so-and-so') as either (c) an indefinite description;⁴ (d) a general name;⁵ (e) a predicative symbol, a 'concept' word;⁶ (f) more crudely, a predicate.⁷ The misunderstanding, I claim, arises out of such misconstruction. Whilst at one level, the level or aspect of language as a symbolic system pertinent to the expression of thought,⁸ I concur with Geach⁹ (following Frege), that 'names and predicables are absolutely distinct' and hence mutually exclusive, it is my special claim that at such a level such categories of symbol are not mutually *exhaustive*. We need to recognise the category of the sortal as a *distinct* category of symbol *not* reducible to names or predicables but as being logically prior to, as underlying the introduction of such categories themselves and indeed as underlying the introduction of 'logically proper names' and that class of

symbol in favour of which all singular symbols are held by Quine to be eliminable, namely pronouns.

As at one level or aspect of language there has been failure to recognise the sortal as a distinct category of symbol, so also at the level or aspect of language as (i) the role of symbols, function of symbols in discourse; (ii) the use of symbols in speech, i.e. at the level or aspect of language as discourse or speech;¹⁰ there has, I claim, been a corresponding failure to recognise (a) a distinctive mode of language role or function; (b) a distinctive mode of speech activity which I shall call 'Sortal Identification', i.e. the identification of particulars in the sense of (1) the picking out, discrimination of an object by means of the definite form of a sortal; (2) the specification of an object by such means; (3) the specification of an object by means of the indefinite form of the sortal. Rather, such sortal identification, at the singular level, has been reduced to either naming or definite describing ('Descriptive Identification');¹¹ 'Identifying Reference';¹² at the general level such sortal identifying has been reduced to 'predicating',¹³ and thus, I claim, there has been failure to recognise (i) a mode of language role or function; (ii) a mode of speech activity;¹⁴ which is prior to, which underlies *both* naming and predicating or referring and predicating (whether naming/referring is carried out by 'ordinary proper names', 'logically proper names' or 'pronouns' in favour of which singular terms are allegedly eliminable).

Whilst holding the subject-predicate distinction explicated either in terms of categories of *term*¹⁵ or categories of *role*¹⁶ to be an ultimate distinction - a thesis I do not dispute - I claim that such writers have mistakenly regarded such terms, such roles, as *themselves basic* resting upon the introduction of no *other* terms or roles. They have offered an account of 'logical subject' *either* in terms of 'subject term' and then in terms of either *names* (including ordinary proper names)¹⁷ or 'logically proper names' (demonstratives)¹⁸ or pronouns; *or* an account of a symbol occurring in the role of logical subject in terms of naming or referring (or an account of our use of a symbol to perform such a role in terms of naming or referring) and (a) treated ordinary proper names or demonstratives (logically proper names) or pronouns¹⁹ as *either* basic categories of singular symbol resting upon the introduction of no prior category of singular symbol *or* resting upon the introduction of predicates only; (b) treated naming/referring as either (i) ultimately basic forms of language role or function, basic forms of speech activity, resting on no prior category of language function or speech activity or (ii) resting on the introduction of 'predicating' or 'describing' alone. Such writers have offered an account of 'logical predicate' either in terms of 'predicate term' or an account of a symbol occurring in the role of logical predicate in terms of 'predicating' and treated 'predicates' or 'predicables' as either (i) a basic category of symbol resting on no prior category of symbol other than that of the 'proper name' or (ii) a basic symbol resting on no other category of symbol at all; treated 'predicating' as a basic category of language function or speech activity resting on no prior function or activity other than that of naming or again on no such function or activity at all.

In this way I claim such writers have failed to appreciate what underlies the subject-predicate distinction in the sense of what makes this distinction *possible* in its typical manifestation or employment, i.e. in a language in which we speak of particulars in the sense of *objects*. It is to be noted that it is such a context which has, at least by implication, been held to be typical of the manifestation of the subject-predicate distinction. As far as I have been able to determine there is no treatment of the subject-predicate distinction in connection with propositions in which particulars introduced by reference to symbols (terms) formed from what Aristotle would call 'matter' terms, Quine calls 'mass' terms, and Geach calls 'substantival general' terms, feature as typical. I shall be concentrating considerable attention on 'matter' terms in Chapter I and the issue of the relation between such terms and sortals will be an endemic feature of this book. In relation to what I have termed as the typical manifestation of the subject-predicate distinction, it is my case that at *one* level or aspect language - what I have called the level or aspect of language as a symbolic system for the expression of thought - for the expression of thought concerning particulars in the sense of objects - what makes the subject-predicate distinction *possible* in such a system is indeed the presence of sortal symbols: at another level or aspect, at the level or aspect of mode of language role; at the level of speech concerning objects, what makes the subject-predicate distinction possible, what underlies the distinction in this sense, is sortal identification.

It follows from the thesis I am advocating that the definite form of the sortal 'The so-and-so'; 'The *F* which', may not primarily occur in, be used in the role of logical subject. What may so occur or be used in such a role is a *name* or its equivalent. This consequence is in accordance with tradition as exemplified in the writings of Frege;²⁰ initially Russell;²¹ Geach, and again, initially, Quine.²² I shall be considering objections to the thesis that the definite form of a sortal may never occur in or be used in such a role in Chapter III. It further follows from my thesis that I reject the account of 'logical subject' in terms of 'identifying'²³ or 'identifying reference'²⁴ as set forth by Strawson. On my thesis 'identifying' and in particular 'sortal identifying' is prior to 'referring' in a way to be explained in Chapter II and thus that 'identifying reference' is a confused notion.

It is further to be observed, that in that 'traditional logicians' such as those alluded to, have indeed failed to recognise the category of the sortal and sortal identification, they could not have analysed the notion of 'logical subject' in terms of 'identifying' granted my case to be advocated in Chapter II that other modes of 'identifying' either rest on or are reducible to sortal identification. Indeed Strawson himself could only offer such an account in that he is able to recognise the category of the sortal and sortal identification as a quite distinct category and mode, which I shall claim is not the case.²⁵ In crude terms, he reduces sortal identification to descriptive identification. Again, even if it could be held that 'traditional' logicians *did* recognise the category of the sortal and sortal identification, this is not *sufficient* for claiming that they could offer (as opposed to would offer) an analysis of 'logical subject' in terms of 'identifying'. To offer such an analysis they would further (a) have to subscribe

to the thesis that proper names of their essence have a sense - and notably Russell and Quine do *not*;²⁶ (b) have to subscribe to the thesis that a proper name is identical with its sense, which is open to strong objection.²⁷ Strawson, I shall hold, makes a *recommendation* as to the analysis of the notion of 'logical subject'; he cannot be held to be offering a *descriptive* analysis.

A.2. Failure to recognise the true nature of sortals in that sortals have been construed as predicates leads, I hold, to further unacceptable consequences:

- (1) Either (A) having to introduce a doctrine of 'absolutely simple' basic names or 'singular terms' (or a more sophisticated version of such a doctrine) and, correspondingly, having to vouchsafe a doctrine of 'absolutely simple individuals', 'pure particulars' or having to introduce a doctrine of 'relatively simple' basic names or singular terms and correspondingly a doctrine of 'relatively simple', 'relatively basic' individuals in a way to be explained in Chapter IV; Or (B) having to advocate either an unintelligible doctrine or no doctrine of what constitutes an instance of a sortal, what instantiates a 'sortal universal'.
- (2) Failing to appreciate that *necessarily* to be a particular, an individual in the sense of a particular *object*, is to be specifiable by reference to a sortal (to fall under a sortal) - as opposed to holding that to be a particular (object) is *necessarily* to be specifiable by reference to a sortal (to fall under a sortal).
- (3) (indirectly)²⁸ to the search for a basis for the introduction of 'particulars in general', a basis for 'particular introduction' which I shall claim is: (a) unsuccessful in fact; (b) misconceived in principle, and subsequently to the search for a basic notion of 'an instance' independently of the notion of a 'sortal', which I shall also claim is misconceived;
- (4) (indirectly) to the search for an underlying basis for the subject-predicate distinction in the sense: (i) of a search for some one type of *empirical* proposition which underlies the distinction; (ii) of a search for a certain type of empirical proposition which contains no reference to sortals and is formed independently of any reference to sortals. I shall argue that both such searches are misconceived.

As regards (i), I hold that such a search is misguided in principle (misconceived) since: (a) it would make a *logical* distinction rest upon a matter of fact; (b) it fails to appreciate that the subject-predicate distinction *is* a logical distinction, a transcendental distinction, which manifests itself in modes of discourse or speech; it is not merely a *general* distinction. We thus cannot hope to search for: (i) an *empirical* basis for the distinction; (ii) some *one* type of empirical proposition which will form such a basis. All we may hope to search for is a basis for the distinction as it is manifested in a mode of discourse e.g. as manifested in a mode of discourse or a way of speaking in which we (in general)

speak of 'objects'; or again e.g. in which we speak of individuals in the sense of 'parcels of matter'.

As regards (ii) I hold such a search to be misconceived: (a) on the grounds just advocated; (b) on the grounds that a sortal has to be invoked in order to *articulate* the proposed basis (*see* Chapter X).

One may further comment here that to hold that we may search for some *one* type of proposition of a certain *status* (e.g. an empirical proposition) as ultimately underlying the subject-predicate distinction, as an ultimate basis for the distinction, is to treat a mode of discourse or way of speaking as *itself* something *within* a mode of discourse or way of speaking, which is absurd. It commits an error parallel to treating a class as a member of itself. The subject-predicate distinction manifests itself *in* a mode of discourse, *in* a way of speaking.

In the light of these comments it may now be asked how I may claim that such writers as I have alluded to have failed to appreciate what underlies the subject-predicate distinction in the sense of what makes the distinction in *general possible*. In my earlier writing however I have made no such general claim. I have limited my claim to the effect that such writers have failed to appreciate what makes the subject-predicate distinction possible in its *typical* manifestation or employment,²⁹ viz., in a language, area of discourse, way of speaking in which we speak of particulars in the sense of *objects*. There is a sense in which we may raise the question: 'What makes the subject-predicate distinction possible?' but *this* question is strictly to be construed as: 'What makes it possible for the subject-predicate distinction to be manifested in language L, in mode of discourse D, in way of speaking S?', or alternatively: 'What makes it possible for this distinction to be employed in language L etc.?' And *this* question I shall seek to answer by reference to sortals and in this way offer an 'explanation' of the subject-predicate distinction (*see* Chapter III).

Having set out and offered some elucidation of some of my aims, it is now necessary for me to explain why I speak of the sortal as a category of *symbol* and not simply as a category of *expression*.

B. Sortals, Names, Descriptions, Predicables, Substantival General Terms, Predicates

B.1. To so speak is not to deny that a sortal is a category of expression, but it is unsatisfactory to speak of a sortal merely as a category of expression. To so speak does not bring out the point that the understanding of a sortal as set forth in my preliminary account in A above has a necessary reference to role or function. A sortal is a logical classification of an expression determined (a) partly by reference to grammatical criteria; it has the grammatical form of a common noun exhibiting the features of admitting the indefinite article and plural form in its own right; (b) partly by reference to semantic criteria - it is not analysable into parts which themselves have meaning but it itself has meaning; (c) partly by reference to what may be termed 'logical criteria', namely, it is a

complete symbol; (d) partly (indeed, relatively speaking, principally) by reference to function. A sortal is the logical classification of an expression *qua* furnishing in its own right a principle of distinction and counting for particulars in the sense of objects. It is in this regard a symbol in that a symbol is not merely an expression but an expression *qua* performing a certain general role.³⁰

We may, in this context, observe the following:

A *name*, a proper name, singular name, is a logical classification of an expression determined:

- (a) partly by reference to grammatical criteria - it does *not* admit of the indefinite article or the plural form;³¹
- (b) partly by reference to semantic criteria - it is not analysable into parts which themselves have meaning, though whether a proper name itself has meaning has been a matter of considerable dispute;³²
- (c) partly by reference to 'logical criteria'; a proper name has a complete sense in its own right;³³
- (d) partly (indeed principally) by reference to function - a proper name stands for, or, to refer to Quine, 'purports to stand for' a single object.

A *general name* again is a logical classification of an expression determined:

- (a) partly by reference to grammatical criteria - it has a grammatical form of a common noun which admits of the indefinite article and the plural form;
- (b) partly by reference to semantic criteria viz. it is not analysable into parts which themselves have meaning, but itself has meaning;
- (c) partly by reference to logical criteria - a general name has a complete sense in its own right;
- (d) partly (indeed principally) by reference to its role or function; a general name stands for or 'purports to stand for' several objects.

A *definite description* in Russell's sense is again a logical classification of an expression determined:

- (a) partly by reference to grammatical criteria - it is a phrase beginning with a definite article, of the form 'The so-and-so';
- (b) partly by reference to semantic criteria - the parts of a definite description, as opposed to those of a proper name, do have meaning;
- (c) partly by reference to logical criteria - a definite description does not have a complete sense in its own right; it is an 'incomplete symbol';³⁴
- (d) partly (indeed principally) by reference to its function - a definite description is reducible to a set of predicates which hold true or false of just one object.³⁵ Crudely, a definite description, as the locution suggests, describes just one object.

An *indefinite description* in Russell's sense is equally a logical classification of an expression determined:

- (a) partly by reference to grammatical criteria - it is a phrase of the form '*a* so-and-so';
- (b) partly by reference to semantic criteria - an indefinite description has meaning and in that it is comprised of a complex phrase its parts also have meaning (e.g. 'a man who sits at the receipt of custom');
- (c) partly by reference to logical criteria - it too is an 'incomplete symbol';
- (d) partly (and indeed principally) by reference to function; an indefinite description is reducible to a predicate or set of predicates which hold true or false of more than one object. Crudely, an indefinite description describes more than one object.

A *predicable*, as introduced by Geach³⁶ is a logical classification of an expression determined:

- (a) partly by reference to grammatical criteria - it has as its grammatical form a verb in the indicative mood or a verb in such a mood together with a complement;
- (b) partly by reference to semantic criteria; predicables have a sense, but not a complete sense;
- (c) partly by reference to logical criteria: a predicable is a fundamentally incomplete expression, a functional expression writable as '---- is *F*' or '---- *F*'s';
- (d) partly, and indeed crucially, by reference to function: a predicable is a functional expression which is a *potential predicate*. Geach writes: '... it has sense only as contributing toward the sense of a proposition; not at all by itself'.³⁷

A *substantial general term*, again as introduced by Geach,³⁸ a 'mass term' (Quine), a 'matter' term (Aristotle) is a logical classification of expression determined:

- (a) partly by reference to grammatical criteria - such an expression is a common noun which does not admit of the indefinite article or plural form in its own right and which is typically a common noun for a material substance (cf. Strawson: 'a material name');
- (b) partly by reference to semantic criteria - it is not analysable into parts which have a meaning but it itself has meaning;
- (c) partly (and indeed principally) by reference to function - it supplies a 'criterion of continued identity'.

Geach writes:

I had here best interject a note on how I mean this term "criterion of identity". I maintain that it makes no sense to judge whether *x* and *y* are 'the same' or

whether x remains 'the same' unless we add or understand some general term - 'the same F '. That in accordance with which we thus judge as to identity, I call a *criterion* of identity: this agrees with the etymology of "criterion".³⁹

He later adds: 'Countability is a sufficient condition for our considering as substantival a term in respect of which we count things' and this is so:

because we (logically) cannot count A 's unless we know whether the A we are now counting is the same A as we counted before. But it is not necessary, in order that "the same A " shall make sense, for the question 'How many A s?' to make sense; we can speak of the same gold as being first a statue and then a great number of coins but "How many golds?" does not make sense; thus 'gold' is a substantival term, though we cannot use it for counting.⁴⁰

In so far then as the accounts of all types of expression set out above⁴¹ have a necessary reference to function or role, they are symbols. A symbol is an expression in a role or *qua* performing a certain role and I justify my speaking of sortal *symbols* by claiming parity with these other cases. It may be asked why I speak in terms of symbols as opposed to *terms* - singular terms, count terms, substantival general terms etc. My reasons for this are: (i) 'term' seems to be rather too restrictive in the sense that a 'term' is an item of language where there is no clear distinction introduced between language and the use of language (speech) or where there is resistance to making language and speech alternatives;⁴² (ii) the use of 'term' in some philosophical writing carries with it a conflation of (a) a category of symbol or expression and (b) the role which such a symbol or expression plays on an occasion - as, for example, in Strawson's notion of 'subject term', 'predicate term'.⁴³

It will be noted that in the above list of symbols I have included *predicable* and not *predicate*. This is for the reason that *predicate* introduced as a class of symbol is strictly a confusion. A predicate is not strictly a class of symbol but a role a class of symbol plays on an occasion. As Geach has it:

a *predicable* is an expression that gives us a proposition about something if we attach it to another expression that stands for what we are forming the proposition about; the predicable then becomes a *predicate* and the other expression becomes its subject; I shall call such a proposition a *predication*.⁴⁴

Even though I have restrained from introducing 'predicate' as a class of symbol for reasons just offered, it will be necessary at stages throughout this book to so speak since some of the theses to be discussed: (i) cannot strictly or even intelligibly be discussed in terms of predicables; (ii) common philosophical parlance demands that they be so discussed. In spite of Geach's insights it has been, and still continues to be, quite common to speak of predicates as a class of symbol, expression or 'term'.

C. Plan of Campaign

I now turn to my plan of campaign. I shall first develop my preliminary account of what I understand as a 'sortal symbol', arguing for the thesis that such symbols are *not* to be construed as either (i) a type of name; (ii) a type of predicable or predicate. Rather, as I have already indicated, I shall argue that they are required for the introduction of such categories of symbol. I shall distinguish between principles of counting and distinction furnished by sortals and such principles formed from 'matter' or 'mass' terms arguing that neither principle may be reduced to the other. I shall then consider a general thesis which might be thought to arise from the arguments advocated in support of my case that sortals are not reducible to predicates or predicables - namely, that at a general theoretical level, sortals are required in order for us to indicate or specify the range of values which may coherently be substituted for an individual variable in a predicative function. I shall reject this strong thesis but nevertheless hold that at such a general theoretical level sortals *are* implicitly required such that whilst in one sense we may embrace Russell's doctrine of 'an essentially undetermined variable "x"', there is an important sense in which we may *not* (Chapter I).

In parallel fashion I shall argue that at the level or aspect of language as discourse (speech), identification by reference to sortals is logically prior to naming/referring on the one hand and predicating on the other and further that: (a) 'descriptive identification' as introduced by, e.g. Gareth Evans in *The Varieties of Reference* is either reducible to sortal identification or may be regarded as a *quasi* form of sortal identification; (b) 'demonstrative identification' as introduced by Evans rests on sortal identification and may not be regarded as *sui generis* in the way he holds (Chapter II).

I shall then turn to the subject-predicate distinction itself. I shall distinguish between: (a) *explication* of the distinction; (b) an *explanation* of the distinction in the sense of an answer to the question: 'What differentiates an expression occurring in subjective role from an expression occurring in predicative role?'; (c) a *criterion* for the distinction; (d) an *explanation* of the distinction in the sense of answers to the questions: (i) 'What makes the subject-predicate distinction *possible*?'; (ii) 'What *underlies* the distinction?'. I shall offer Geach's 'explanation' as an explication; an importantly revised version of Strawson's 'new' or 'mediating' criterion as given in *Individuals* as an explanation in sense (b); a criterion derived from my own explanation, having first considered Quine's 'explanation' as a possible criterion; an explanation in sense (d) specifically in terms of the presence of sortals in language, more generally in terms of the presence of symbols which supply principles of counting and distinction in their own right (Chapter III).

Next, I shall attempt to work out the *general* consequences of failure to recognise the category of the sortal in that sortals are reduced to 'predicates'; these general consequences I have initially set out at the beginning of A.2. above. This exercise will occupy Chapter IV.

In the rest of the book I shall:

- (1) Seek to establish that the writers I have selected do in fact fail to recognise the category of the sortal;
- (2) Attempt to work out the peculiar difficulties arising out of such failure;
- (3) Illustrate how the general consequences set out in Chapter IV have particular exemplification in the writings of selected authors.

I shall do this first by reference to Frege (Chapter V) and then by reference to Russell (Chapter VI); Geach (Chapter VII); Strawson (Chapters VIII, IX and X) and finally by reference to Quine (Chapter XI). It will be noted that three chapters are devoted to Strawson. My justification for this is the considerable contribution he in particular has made to the issues I am discussing and an undeniable fascination I personally have with his writing which has presented a constant challenge and source of philosophical reflection. After all, Strawson presents us with no less than five accounts of criteria for the subject-predicate distinction in his various works and has avidly sought to establish an ultimate basis for this distinction. Indeed, I hold that a discussion of Strawson's work in this area to be valuable and also illuminating in its own right but particularly so in the context I provide. My penultimate chapter on Quine will draw special attention to: (a) what is required as the basis for his doctrine of 'canonical notation'; (b) his list of 'basic constructions'. I shall claim that 'identification' must be admitted to his list. My final chapter will take the form of a survey of what I have argued in the course of the book and the drawing of conclusions from this survey vindicating my own account of sortals and their importance in our understanding of the nature of systems of discourse.⁴⁵

Notes

1. P.F. Strawson, *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1959), p. 168; my position even so is to be clearly distinguished from that of Strawson; cf. ch. I, pp. 21-24.
2. Frege.
3. Russell.
4. Russell.
5. Geach.
6. Frege.
7. Strawson, *op. cit.*
8. cf. ch. II, p. 84.
9. In *Reference and Generality* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1962), ch. 2.
10. The question of whether identification in speech is prior to identification in thought will be discussed explicitly in relation to Gareth Evans's position in *The Varieties of Reference*, ed. John McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), see ch. II, sec. M.
11. cf. my discussion of Evans, ch. II.
12. Strawson.
13. Strawson, *op. cit.*

14. I have introduced both (i) and (ii) since some writers, e.g. Geach wish to speak of the role or function of an expression rather than in terms of the use of it or our use of it.
15. Strawson, *op. cit.*
16. Geach. Geach is to be excluded from this general attack since he does hold that the introduction of proper names rests on the introduction of substantival general terms which he does not construe as predicates but he fails to recognise sortals as a distinct category of symbol or 'term' (see ch. VII).
17. Frege. Fregean names include Russellian Definite Descriptive phrases and other phrases beginning with the definite article.
18. Russell.
19. Quine.
20. Frege treats such definite forms as *names*, but this does not affect the present point.
21. As is well known, Russell in his final analysis holds that what may occur in such a role is a 'logically proper name': Quine in his final analysis reduces names to pronouns - in logic the variables of quantification.
22. cf. n. 21 above.
23. Strawson in 'Singular Terms and Predication', repr. in P. F. Strawson, *Logico-Linguistic Papers* (London: Methuen, 1971), pp. 53-74.
24. Strawson in *Individuals*.
25. See ch. VIII.
26. Frege's position is different (see ch. V); Geach clearly does hold such a doctrine.
27. For example, Saul Kripke in 'Identity and Necessity', in Stephen P. Schwartz (ed.), *Naming, Necessity and Natural Kinds* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 66ff., esp. pp. 89-94. Russell (e.g.) comes to treat ordinary proper names as 'veiled descriptions' but in that he does this he would reject an account of 'logical subject' in terms of 'identifying'. An expression in the role of logical subject is a 'logically proper name' (a demonstrative); an account of 'logical subject' is to be given in terms of *naming*.
28. The use of 'indirectly' here will be illustrated in Chapter IV and fully explained in Chapter X, section A.1. in reference to Strawson's search in *Individuals* and 'Particular and General'. Again the use of 'indirectly' in relation to (4) above will be explained in Chapter X, section C.
29. For those who wish to speak of *our* employing the subject-predicate distinction.
30. Russell, it is to be noted, speaks in terms of *symbols*; see his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1930), ch. XVI.
31. Frege, see ch. V.
32. Russell holds that logically proper names have no meaning other than what they stand for, i.e. they have no 'nominal essence' but logically proper names are a specially introduced class of symbol. Locke held that there is no 'nominal essence' of proper names - a thesis challenged by Anscombe in G. E. M. Anscombe and Peter T. Geach, *Three Philosophers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961).
33. cf. Russell and Geach.
34. See Russell's analysis of definite descriptions in (e.g.) *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, ch. XVI; Lecture VI of his 'Lectures on the Philosophy of Logical Atomism', repr. in R.C. Marsh (ed.), *Logic and Knowledge* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), pp. 177-281.
35. See note 34 above.
36. *Reference and Generality*, ch. 2.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.
41. And here one could add, e.g. ‘Rigid Designator’.
42. In spite of these worries I shall sometimes find it necessary or convenient, on account of the context of discussion, to use ‘term’. For further comments on (i) *see* my discussion in connection with Gareth Evans’ point in sec. M of ch. II.
43. *See* Geach’s criticism of Strawson in his review of *Subject and Predicate in Logic and Grammar*. I have had difficulty in tracing the precise publication details of this review and am grateful to Professor Geach for his help. The original review, from which I take my point, was published in the TLS soon after the book was published (1974). A more carefully reasoned critique was published in the *Festschrift* for Strawson, Zak van Streaton (ed.), *Philosophical Subjects* (Oxford: OUP, 1980).
44. *Reference and Generality*, p. 25.
45. Given relatively recent developments in ‘Discourse Theory’, I have to make it clear that my use of ‘discourse’ pre-dates such developments. Roughly, my use of ‘discourse’ corresponds to that use of ‘discourse’ as put forward and understood by e.g. Strawson in *Individuals*, *see* (e.g.) pp. 15, 16, 29, 137 *et al.*

Chapter I

Sortals, Names and Predicables

A. Sortals: a Detailed Investigation

A.1. As I have said in my preliminary account of a 'sortal' given in my 'Introduction', by a 'sortal' I shall initially mean a symbol which furnishes us with a principle for distinguishing and counting particulars and which does so in its own right relying on no antecedent principle or method of so distinguishing and counting. Grammatically a sortal in this sense takes the form of a common noun which:

- (i) takes the indefinite article in its own right;
- (ii) takes the plural form in its own right.

This account of 'sortals' rules out as sortal expressions:

- (a) Common nouns which are derived from other parts of speech (e.g. adjectives and verbs) via the criterion of 'taking the indefinite article and plural form in its own right';
- (b) Common nouns such as 'gold', 'snow', 'water', namely what Strawson calls 'material names'¹ or words designating 'feature' universals² and what other writers have variously called 'mass' terms (Quine), 'matter' terms (Aristotle), 'substantival general' terms (Geach) via the same criterion and, by implication, it rules out such noun forms as being forms of symbol which furnish, in their own right, principles for distinguishing and counting particulars. That such nouns are so ruled out and that they may not, as such, furnish such a form of symbol, I shall presently seek to establish.

To consider (a) first. This may be illustrated as follows. (i) 'Author', e.g. in Russell's famous example 'The author of *Waverley* was Scotch', is a common noun but it is derived from the verb 'to write'; an author is one who writes or has written. 'Author' does not take the indefinite article in its own right since we may only speak of 'an author' in that we may speak of an *F* (where '*F*' is a sortal expression) who writes or who has written. Again we may only speak of 'authors' in that we speak of *F*'s who write or have written. 'Author' takes the indefinite article and hence the definite article by derivation from the common noun 'man' or '*F*'. We may only have the form of expression, form of words, 'The author of *Waverley*' in that we have the form of expression, form of words, 'The person (*man*, *F*) who wrote *Waverley*'.

Similarly with a verbal noun such as 'runner' or 'swimmer'. (ii) We may only count the number of authors in that we may count the number of persons who write or who have written. A person could not begin to comply with the instruction: 'Count the number of authors' unless he understood what was to count as one author and to understand what it is to count as one author he has to have the concept of 'one *F* who writes or has written'. Indeed the point that such nouns as 'author' may not be regarded as the grammatical form of symbols which supply, in their own right, principles for distinguishing and counting particulars accidentally comes out in Russell's 'informal' analysis of definite descriptions when he offers an analysis of 'The author of *Waverley* was Scotch' in terms of: 'At the least and at the most one person wrote *Waverley* and whoever wrote *Waverley* was Scotch',³ but its impetus is not recognised by him since he reduces all sortals, (e.g. 'person') to indefinite descriptions and in due course to predicates.

The characteristic feature of sortals taking the form of common nouns exhibiting the features (i) and (ii) above have been well noted by Frege,⁴ and by Geach in his comments on Frege,⁵ but they were not thought by Frege to mark off a distinct category of symbol; rather for him, as we shall see, they mark off what he calls a 'concept', "properly so called". Again whilst Geach rightly draws attention to: (a) the focusing by Frege on such symbols; (b) the importance of such symbols, he likewise does not recognise that they form a distinct category.⁶

To consider (b). Such common nouns as 'gold', 'water' etc. are ruled out as grammatical forms of sortals in the sense I am considering. They do not, of themselves, take the indefinite article or the plural form. It is clearly nonsense to speak of '*a* gold' or 'golds' or of '*a* water' or 'waters',⁷ and in that it is nonsense such nouns may not be said to be the grammatical form of symbols which furnish, in their own right, principles of distinction and counting for particulars. In order to take the indefinite article or plural form they have to be precursed by a phrase such as 'bit of', 'piece of', 'parcel of', 'vein of', 'stretch of', 'area of'.⁸ As Quine has aptly observed such 'mass terms' do not divide their reference of themselves.⁹ By contrast, a sortal expression, common nouns such as 'cat' or 'apple', in no wise have to be precursed in order to furnish a principle of distinction and counting for particulars.

Here however it will be said that whilst it is a *sufficient* condition of *X* being a symbol which furnishes, in its own right, a principle of counting and distinction for particulars that *X* should have as its grammatical form a common noun exhibiting the features (i) and (ii) above, it is not a *necessary* condition. For whilst such common nouns as 'gold', 'water' may not, of themselves be the grammatical forms of such symbols, such nouns, when precursed by e.g. 'parcel (of)', 'stretch (of)' they *do* present us with such a grammatical form. In other words such locutions as 'piece of gold', 'stretch of water', *do* present us with principles of counting and distinction for particulars and do so in their own right. In general, such items as 'piece of *M*', 'parcel of *M*' (where '*M*' is a 'material name', 'matter' term) present us with such principles. That they do may be clearly illustrated. One can be asked to count and one can proceed to

count the number of bits or pieces of gold at a certain location or stretches of water in a certain area without having to introduce any antecedent principles of counting. One cannot claim that a person can only count the number of pieces of gold or stretches of water in that he can first count the number of cups, coins, rings that are golden or the number of lakes, rivers etc., that are water, since it will be objected¹⁰ that it is only *contingent* that pieces of gold or stretches of water are cups, coins, rivers, lakes and ponds. In a given situation bits of gold, stretches of water may be all that one is faced with but one can go ahead and count the number present. More generally, to invoke Strawson's vocabulary, 'feature' universals are not reducible to 'characterizing universals'.¹¹

Now I agree that such phrases as 'bit of *M*', where '*M*' is a 'material name', may be a grammatical form of symbols which furnish, in their own right, principles of counting and distinction for particulars and that 'feature' universals are not reducible to 'characterizing universals', central to my argument that sortals are required for the introduction of names and predicables (predicates) is the thesis that sortals are required for the introduction of the notion of a *single object* and just *this* might well be denied in the light of the position that noun phrases such as 'bit of *M*', 'stretch of *W*' are grammatical expressions of symbols which supply, in their own right, principles of counting and distinction for material particulars. That is, it might be held that such a principle is *sufficient* for the introduction of the notion of a 'single object'; *all* we need for such a notion is such a principle. It is not necessary that we introduce sortals.

A.2. I shall first consider this thesis and raise objections which I regard as sufficient to reject it thus holding that it *is* necessary that we introduce sortals. I shall then consider the converse thesis viz., that all we need for the introduction of particulars (and hence the names of particulars) introduced by 'matter' terms precursored as above are *sortals* i.e. that sortals are *primary vis-à-vis* principles of counting and distinction for material particulars in the sense that they are sufficient for the introduction of such principles.

To turn then to the arguments in favour of the thesis that principles of counting and distinction furnished by 'matter' terms precursored or modified in a certain way¹² are the *primary* principles of counting and distinction for objects, primary in the sense of 'sufficient'. The thesis is:

- (1) It is only necessary that we have such symbols, i.e. it is sufficient that we have 'matter' terms precursored in the way already illustrated for the introduction of 'single objects' and hence for the introduction of names and predicables (predicates) relating to single objects.

This minimal thesis is to be clearly distinguished from:

- (2) It is necessary that we *only* have such symbols;
- (3) It is necessary *only* that we have such symbols;

and (1) does not entail (2) or (3). (2) is a much stronger thesis; it would entail that sortals are eliminable in favour of, in some way reducible to 'matter' terms so precursed - that for the sortal 'man', say, we could write either: (i) 'man of ----', which is absurd or; (ii) 'animated parcel of flesh and bone', whereas the truth of the matter is the other way round. That we have one animated parcel of flesh and bone is determined by the fact that we have *one* man. It is not contingent that a man is an animated parcel of flesh and bone; in that we have a man we have one such parcel. It is however contingent that an animated parcel of flesh and bone is a man; more generally that an animated parcel of flesh and bone is an *F* (sortal). (3) is the strongest thesis of all. This would of necessity eliminate sortals as principles of counting and distinction for particulars altogether. It would of necessity reduce sortals to predicates; in Strawson's vocabulary it would of necessity reduce sortal universals to characterizing universals.

Having thus distinguished (1) from the stronger theses (2) and (3), let us now return to (1). This minimal thesis I contend is unsatisfactory. Having *only* such concepts as 'piece of gold' (in general 'piece of *M*', 'bit of *M*', etc.) is *not* sufficient for the introduction of the concept of 'a single object' or the introduction of the proper names of a single object since:

- (i) the concept of 'a piece of gold' (e.g.) is the concept of a relatively indeterminate parcel of matter; 'a coin', 'a ring', 'a cup' etc. are concepts of quite determinate parcels of matter. A coin, a ring, a cup etc., are quite determinate parcels of matter in that they are such objects i.e. we have one parcel of matter in that we have one coin, one ring etc. We cannot, I hold, from merely being in possession of a concept such as 'piece of gold' ('piece of *M*') claim we are in possession of a sortal such as 'cup', 'coin', 'ring'; more generally a 'material object' sortal. Here it might be objected that we can *derive* the concept of 'an *F*', where '*F*' is a material object sortal, from the concept of 'a piece (parcel) of *M*' (where '*M*' is a 'matter' term) together with the notion of 'shape' or 'form' in apparently Aristotelian fashion¹³ but: (a) the thesis here being considered is that 'piece of *M*' itself is sufficient to yield a material object sortal; (b) not *every* object falling under a sortal has a distinctive shape or 'form' which can be specified independently of the sortal e.g. pipe, car, man, tree, tulip, glove. In such cases, and many more which one may produce, one has to introduce the sortal or at least have implicit reference to the sortal in order to introduce the appropriate 'shape of', 'form' which, together with the notion of a 'parcel of *M*', is supposed to be sufficient for the introduction of the sortal. There is *no* distinctive shape or 'form' of e.g. pipe, car, man, tree, tulip, or glove which can be specified independently of pipes, cars, men, trees etc.¹⁴
- (ii) from the fact that Mr. A can count e.g. the number of pieces of gold at a certain location or the number of stretches of water in a given area it does not follow that he can count the number of coins, rings, or cups

which are golden, of gold; or again, the number of lakes or ponds. Being able to count pieces of gold is not sufficient for being able to count *F*'s that are of gold. He can simply be said to count pieces of gold of some shape or 'form' or again the number parcels of water of some shape or 'form' but not necessarily pieces of gold or parcels (stretches) of water that are ponds, lakes.

A.3. To consider the converse case, namely, that sortals are *primary* viz., sufficient for the introduction of particulars introduced by 'matter' terms precurred in the way illustrated; in that we introduce names by reference to sortals we therein or thereby¹⁵ have the means of introducing names introduced by reference to 'matter' terms so precurred.

Let me first draw the appropriate parallel with the minimal thesis advocated in (1) above. On the current thesis one would have to hold:

- (i) that the notion of an '*F*', where '*F*' is a material object sortal, is *sufficient* to give us the notion of 'a piece' or 'a bit' ('a parcel') of matter. In that (e.g.) we have the concept of a 'lake' or 'pond' we therein have the concept of a 'stretch' or 'expanse of water'. In that we have e.g. the concept of a 'coin', 'cup', or 'ring' we therein have the concept of a 'quite determinate parcel of matter';
- (ii) from the fact that Mr. A can count the number of rings, coins, cups etc., it follows that Mr. A can count the number of pieces of gold etc., or again, in that he can count the number of lakes, ponds, etc., it follows that he can count the number of stretches of water.

(i) and (ii) clearly will not do. It will be objected that in that one has e.g. the concept of a 'lake' or 'pond' all that one has is the concept of a 'stretch of water' which is a 'lake' or a 'pond'. One cannot be said to have the concept of a 'stretch of water' *simpliciter* since it is contingent that stretches of water are lakes or ponds. And this consideration prevents one from arguing as follows:

- (a) In that we have the concept of a 'coin' or 'ring' or 'pond' we have the concept of a quite determinate parcel of matter; in general, in that we have the concept of an *F* which is material, we therein have the concept of a quite determinate parcel of matter but we *thereby* have the concept of a relatively indeterminate parcel of matter i.e. a parcel of matter which is *simply* a parcel of matter e.g. 'a bit or piece of gold or bronze'. In other words it prevents us from arguing that the notion of an '*F*' which is a quite determinate parcel of matter is *sufficient* to give us the notion of a relatively indeterminate parcel of matter; from arguing that in that we have the concept of the determinate we have the concept of the relatively indeterminate - that there is no extra concept which we need for this; the indeterminate rests on the determinate - it is derived from the determinate. To use Quinean language in that we have terms