

PREDICATION: NEW AND OLD

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Englebretsen says¹ that my “account of the traditional theory does it little justice”, and on three occasions he claims that I have “distorted” the traditional theory of predication. In this note I will claim, but only once, that Englebretsen has distorted three things: (I) my paper, (II) traditional predication theory and (III) Frege. Next (IV) I will comment on a new possibility of *really* bridging the gap between the old and the new theories, in a way that, *prima facie* at least, seems to vindicate the old theory.

I. To evaluate Englebretsen’s criticism, I will restate briefly the thesis of my paper.² (1) I point out that traditional authors insisted on predicating universals not only of their corresponding individuals (‘animal’ of *this* or *that* man) but also, or even rather, of the subordinated universals (‘animal’ of *man*). (2) I claim that *relative* to a certain, Frege-inspired³ use of the word ‘predication’ that feature of traditional predication theory appears as nonsense: according to the use of ‘predication’ proposed in my paper ‘*P*’ is predicated of *t* iff *t* is really *P*; the universal man, however, is not really an animal.

¹ See G. Englebretsen, “Predication: Old and New, *Crítica* 40, pp. 117.

² *Crítica*, XII, 34 (1980), pp. 103-106.

³ *Die Beziehung der Unterordnung eines Begriffes unter einen Begriff ist so verschieden von jener* [= the falling of an object under a concept], *dass es nicht erlaubt ist, auch hierbei von Subjekt und Prädikat zu reden*, in a letter to Husserl, 1906, *Wissenschaftlicher Briefwechsel*, Hamburg, 1976, p. 103.

⁴ Here one is tempted to quote Zabarella: *Verbum praedicari, et verbum esse, idem significant, ordine tamen contrario* (‘to be predicated’ and ‘to be’ mean the same, but in the opposite order). Unfortunately, however, Zaba-

(1) is beyond dispute: the texts are available to anyone; (2) merely compares (1) with the “new” theory. Thus, I fail to see the alleged distortion in my paper. In fact, Englebretsen has not even spelled out exactly the nature of the alleged distortion.

II. The problem is now how could Englebretsen perceive a distortion where there is no distortion. The answer is straightforward: because he himself has distorted the old theory.

Englebretsen does not recognize the feature of the traditional theory presented in (1) as a genuine phenomenon. For him, the predication of a universal (‘animal’) of a subordinated universal (*man*) is a totally dispensable abbreviation of a universal affirmative categorical sentence (“all men are animals”). As Englebretsen puts it: “the (logical) *subject* [...] refers to all men, and the *predicate* [...] characterizes them as being animal” (italics mine).

This is not just to claim that ‘homo est animal’ implies in some sense ‘all men are animals’. Englebretsen *reduces* straightforwardly the former to the latter. The subject ‘homo’ becomes a merely auxiliary *liaison* between the predicate ‘animal’ and the *individuals* “referred to” by ‘homo’. The individuals of man, not the universal nature man, are *characterized* (*sic* Englebretsen) as animals by the predicate ‘animal’. In fact, in Englebretsen’s version, ‘homo’ is merely short for ‘omnis homo’: as he says, the logical subject of ‘homo est animal’ is . . . ‘(omnis)homo’.

I think this reduction is a distortion, at least of the traditional authors I have referred to. Under such a reduction of ‘homo est animal’ to ‘all men are animals’, subtle *nuances* of the traditional theory are lost — for example, the insis-

rella’s statement does not really help to support my proposed use of ‘predication’: Zabarella is tied to the traditional view, as shown by the example immediately following the quoted sentence: *nam animal praedicatur de homine, id est, homo est animal* (for animal is predicated of man, i.e. man is animal, *Tabulae logicae*, in *Opera Logica*, 1597, reprinted 1966, Olms, West Germany. See first page of *Tabulae Logicae*, bottom.)

tence that essential predicates are said *primarily* of universals and only secondarily of individuals.⁵ In Englebretsen's reduction to 'all men are animals', 'animal' is no longer a predicate said of *man*, either primarily or secondarily.

III. Englebretsen has seriously distorted also Frege's thought by claiming that "Frege chose to abandon the notion of predication altogether". Englebretsen has been probably misled by the *Begriffsschrift* text he cites in footnote 2. Frege was *profoundly* interested in predication. Evidence of this is his distinction of *mark* and *property* (*Merkmal-Eigenschaft*) which is nothing else but an effort to purify the use of 'predication'. His reluctance actually to use this and cognate terms stems not from abandoning the notion of predication but rather from a commitment to it: Frege thought so highly of predication that he did not want it confused with what he took to be pseudo-uses or abuses of the term.⁶ The worst of these abuses was to apply 'predication' in the case of the subordination (*Unterordnung*) of concepts ("animal praedicated of man"). Frege recognized *one fundamental logical relation* (*die logische Grundbeziehung*):⁷ the falling of an object under a concept. He thought that 'predication' (*Prädizierung*)⁸ either had to be restricted to (the converse of) the fundamental logical relation or else banned from logic.⁹ This is enough to show how erroneous it is to say that Frege "abandoned" the *notion* of predication "altogether".

IV. Englebretsen intends to defend the old theory ("all in all, the old theory is a sane and sensible one"), but his defense looks to me like a surrender: although the old logicians happen to *say* that in the sentence 'homo est animal'

⁵ Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, Ed. Marietti, Rome-Turin, 1950, section 845.

⁶ See my paper cited in footnote 2.

⁷ Frege, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, Hamburg 1969, p. 128.

⁸ Frege, *Wissenschaftlicher Briefwechsel*, p. 215.

⁹ See my paper cited in footnote 2.

'animal' is predicated of *homo*, what they really *mean* is that for every x , if x is a man, then x is an animal.

As opposed to this pseudo-defense, there is a real possibility of vindicating, at least to some extent, the traditional habit of predicating 'animal' of *man*. This is through modern abstraction. Starting from a universe of discourse which includes individual men, we introduce the equivalence relation ' x is man & y is man' and we decide to *abstract* in the sense of restricting our statements to those that are invariant with respect to this relation. What we say of Peter is true of John and viceversa. Peter and John become indiscernible under abstraction. We are no longer talking really about Peter and John, but rather about Peter-qua-man and John-qua-man, which are the same. Under this abstraction, the predicate ' x is man' behaves in such a way that it makes sense to generalize the familiar definite descriptions, introducing the following, new singular term: $\eta\tilde{x}(x \text{ is man})$, read "man" ("el hombre", "der Mensch", etc.), with the symbol \sim hinting at the particular relation with respect to which the abstraction was made.

Relevant for predication is what kind of statements we are going to make about *man*, *el hombre* . . . $\eta\tilde{x}(x \text{ is man})$. If, as I think, the statements we make are exactly those *left over* by abstraction, namely the invariant ones (with respect to the chosen equivalence relation), we end up with . . . "man is animal", "man is rational" . . . that is, we end up doing something strikingly similar to what is done in traditional logic.

Our statement " $\eta\tilde{x}(x \text{ is man})$ is animal" closely resembles the predication of a mark M of a concept of which M is a mark; just as in traditional logic, we cannot say that that of which 'animal' is predicated is really an animal. In fact, $\eta\tilde{x}(x \text{ is man})$ is an *abstract* object: we do say " $\eta\tilde{x}(x \text{ is man})$ is animal" but we cannot either affirm or deny that $\eta\tilde{x}(x \text{ is man})$, for example, weighs one hundred pounds.

Thus, modern abstraction seems to force us to give up the strict, Frege-inspired notion of predication proposed in

my previous paper. More precisely, modern abstraction forces us to consider an additional sense of ‘predication’, apart from the strict or primary one. This new sense might be called the “left over” notion of predication: we predicate of man, of $\eta\bar{x}(x \text{ is man})$, exactly what is left over after or rather during abstraction.

In my previous paper I referred to predication as the source of a “hopeless discrepancy” between traditional logic and modern logic. Through modern abstraction, itself a product of modern logic (not seen by Frege though) the discrepancy appears to be significantly reduced.