5. **MERKMAL–EIGENSCHAFT**

*Summary and general remarks.* After a brief reference to Frege’s distinction between *Merkmal* (mark) and *Eigenschaft* (property) of a concept (5.1), the philosophical significance of this distinction is pointed out, first, in general (5.2) and secondly, in the particular cases of the first antepredicamental rule (5.3) and the so-called “triplex status naturae” (5.4). Higher predicates could not be added easily to the standard Aristotelian predication theory (5.32) and they seem to have had a tendency to “descend” to the first-level predicates (5.5).

### 5.1 Exposition

Frege’s distinction of *Merkmal* and *Eigenschaft* is as simple as its applications in traditional philosophy are extraordinary. The doctrine appears in GRL, and its main motivation is Frege’s insight into concepts as the *real* subjects of statements of number. According to this insight, it would be unnecessarily confusing to maintain the traditional predication theory. In fact, against such a predication theory, Frege holds that *animal* is not a property of *man*, but a mark of it; a property of *man*, for instance, is *to have n individuals*. *Animal* and *man* are properties of Socrates.

The distinction mark-property is *intensional*: *animal* is a part of *man*. Marks “make up” concepts as stones make up houses.

### 5.2 The general philosophical significance of Frege’s distinction

Before considering some particularly fruitful applications of Frege’s distinction, it is well to observe that important chapters of the philosophical tradition are centered around the analysis of concepts as composed of marks. This is actually the way in which ideal being has been analysed since Plato. Kant, although condemning concepts to be *leer*, although depriving them of *Bedeutung*, *Sinn* and *Inhalt* unless an intuition was provided, permanently dissects concepts into marks and
thereby suggests that his concepts are quite complex structures. The well known distinctions of modern philosophy – clear, obscure, distinct or confused ideas – are elaborated according to the analysis of concepts into their marks. 6

Leibniz says, “la définition nominale explique le nom par les marques de la chose”7, and Kant affirms that the marks of a concept provide a partial knowledge of the thing.8 It should be remembered that these basic terms of ontology (chose, Ding) are rather indifferent with respect to universality and singularity. La chose may be man, and this man too. This already indicates that it will be difficult to find a sharp distinction between the double function of being a mark of a concept and of being a property of an individual falling under the concept.9

The distinction between a mark of a concept and a property of the concept does not seem to have existed at all before Frege.10 As will be seen in the next sections, traditional philosophy was compelled to introduce devices equivalent to Frege’s distinction.

5.3  The first antepredicamental rule

5.31  Formulation

At the beginning of Categoriae, Aristotle gives the following rule: “Whenever one thing is predicated of another as of a subject, all things said of what is predicated will be said of the subject also.”11 A few pages after, the rule is formulated once more: “For everything said of what is predicated will be said of the subject also.”12

The example immediately given by Aristotle shows that the meaning of the rule is what today would be called class-inclusion.13 The Greek commentators stress that the rule is to be understood as applying only to essential predication14, so that in the terminology of Categoriae15 the rule should be formulated in the following way:

\[
\text{KU}(x, y) \land \text{KU}(z, x) \\
\text{KU}(z, y).
\]

5.32  Traditional predication theory cannot immediately be enriched with predicates of predicates in the modern sense

This is obvious if one recalls that animal is a predicate of the predicate man.16 To say that genus is a predicate of animal, or species a predicate

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of *man*, would lead to absurdities unless special qualifications are introduced. Both traditional philosophy and Frege had to deal with higher predicates, but the qualifications they introduced were different.\(^{17}\)

5.33 *Aristotle's meager report on predicates of predicates*

The Aristotelian corpus seems to lack clear references about predicates of predicates. Hints are to be found mostly within contexts concerning Plato. Let us consider some texts.

1. *Topica* E, 7, 137b, 3–10.\(^ {18}\) The discussion is concerned with when a *proprium* may be recognized. The author suggests that one examine the Idea of the subject of the statement; thus it will be possible to decide whether a given property is a *proprium* or not. The name of the Idea is obtained by prefixing "a\(\circ\)\(\circ\)" to, for example, "\(\alpha\nu\theta\rho\omega\sigma\circ\)".\(^ {19}\) Aristotle explains that man-himself may have properties which do not belong to *man*, for instance being *motionless*. A classification of predicates results: (1) those belonging to man-himself *qua* Idea, (2) those belonging to man-himself *qua* man. It is important to observe the "reduplicative" approach, in contrast to Frege's distinction between properties of a concept and marks of a concept.\(^ {20}\)

2. *Metaphysics*, M, 4, 1079b, 3–11.\(^ {21}\) This is an anti-Plato argument appearing in book M but not in book A. Here predicates of predicates in the modern sense are clearly visible to the extent that Aristotle mentions a property like *to be an Idea*. The Idea of circle contains all the marks making up the essence of circle, *plus* the property *being an Idea of*. According to Bonitz\(^ {22}\), the aim of the argument is that this property cannot be placed on a level with the marks of the Idea of circle. We may observe that from Frege's point of view this requires the distinction of *Merkmal* and *Eigenschaft*.

3. *Metaphysics* A, 9, 990b, 29-34.\(^ {23}\) We are led to *double-itself*, and from this to *eternalness*. Without entering into the difficulties of the argument (whose aim is to show that there cannot be Ideas of things other than substances) it is worth noting that Aristotle suggests that higher predicates are "accidentally" shared by (said of) individuals.\(^ {24}\)

5.34 *The Greek commentators*

In this section the Greek commentators on the antepredicamental rule will be considered in detail; some concluding remarks will be added.
Porphyry [1] comments on *Categoriae* in the form of a dialogue. Once the rule is stated, the disciple asks: “But how may this be true?” The disciple observes that not only animal, but also species is predicated of man; nevertheless, Socrates is not a species, and this is the difficulty. The master replies by pointing to the phrase “as of a subject” in the formulation of the rule, and he observes that to be a species is rather an accident of man.

Simplicius [1]26, after presenting the rule and identifying it with *Barbara*, introduces the same objection. It is important to note that the objection is regarded as being made by “some people”.27 These “people” observe that genus being said of animal, and animal of man, would give rise to the false conclusion that man is a genus. Simplicius replies that genus is not said “as of a subject” of animal, and therefore the rule does not apply.

Dexippus [1]28 reiterates the same difficulties, but his response seems more complex. First, he employs the expression τὰ ἀνωτέρος to designate higher predicates, while “upwards” is normally meant in the line of class-inclusion (UO). Secondly, he states a sort of general rule for these higher predicates; they do not communicate their logos to their subjects, but only their names. Thirdly, he says that the other predicates (first-level predicates) may be submitted to the dictum de omni while this is not possible in the case of being a genus and being a species. Finally, Dexippus decides to approach the problem in metalinguistic terms; he says that higher predicates are rather names of names, whose function consists in indicating the universal application of other names.

Ammonius [1]29 formulates the same objection and replies in the same way: genus is not a predicate de subjecto of animal. Positively, Ammonius says that genus is predicated of animal κατὰ συμβεβηρῶς καὶ κατὰ σχέσιν; the first part of this phrase means that higher predication is accidental and the second part seems to refer to a metalinguistic approach, as in Dexippus.

Elias [1]30 develops a refined analysis of all the possibilities in which one may consider the premisses of the rule, but, curiously, he does not examine higher predicates. Similarly, Philoponus [2]31 does not consider higher predicates but only sophisms concerning metalanguage.

Finally, the Anonymous32 maintains that the rule requires predication “of a subject”, which avoids absurdities.

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Let us conclude with the following remarks.

1. The problem of predicates of predicates is quite alive in the tradition of the Greek commentators.

2. The first antepredicamental rule suggests an interpretation in the modern sense of predicates of predicates, not only to us, but also to the Greek readers of Aristotle. But then, why do the *Categoriae* give such a misleading formulation of such a simple rule?

3. The commentators reply to the objections in two steps: one, negative, consists in drawing the reader’s attention to the fact that the phrase “as of a subject” has not been respected; another, positive, consists in calling “accidental” that predication which applies between second-level and first-level concepts. In fact the *fallacia accidentis* will be a locus for higher predicates in the philosophical tradition. This vague reference to the already much-employed “accidental predication” should be compared with Frege’s clear distinction between marks of a concept and properties of a concept.

4. The notion of mode is (with respect to Aristotle’s ontology) an extension quite similar to that of higher predicates. The former applies in the dimension substance-accident. It is interesting to consider that there is some parallel between the traditional efforts to add the notion of mode to the Aristotelian system, and those concerning higher predicates.

5.35 A critical history of the rule: A ‘desideratum’.

‘Dictum de omni’, ‘nota notae’. ‘Sein ist gelten’.

A critical and exhaustive history of the first antepredicamental rule would provide an insight into the various reactions of traditional philosophers to higher predication, down to the present. Commentators range from Barthélemy de St. Hilaire, who says, “cette règle est evidente” to authors extensively discussing *utrum regula sit bona*.

In the scholastic tradition the rule has been associated with second intentions. There are interpreters who directly view the rule as identical with the *dictum de omni* and others who do not. This obviously depends on the above mentioned sensitivity to higher predicates.

The same distinction applies to the principle *nota notae est nota rei*. If a philosopher like Husserl does not accept this formulation, it is because he is sensitive to the subtleties of predication. On the contrary,
the easy acceptance of that principle, as in Kant, indicates that there is a lack of interest on his part in predicates of higher level.

Lask [1] is an example of how these subtleties are not mere commentaries on Aristotle. Lask [1] argues against the confusion of Sein and Gelten, which confusion would depend on a fallacy quite similar to those wrongly suggested by the Aristotelian rule.

5.4 The ‘triplex status naturae’

5.41 Presentation

De Wulf [1] presents Avicenna’s theory of the “triplex respectus essentiae” as a solution to the problem of universals which has been considered by all the great philosophers of the 13th century.

Avicenna holds that we may consider a predicate as existing in the things (in the individuals), or as existing in the mind, or as independent of any sort of existence.

5.42 A probable reason for the doctrine

Nizolius’ clear mind confesses not to understand why there is a consideration of essence in itself apart from essence in the individuals and essence in the mind.

The reason (or at least a reason) may be found in the following text of Avicenna.

Animal est in se quiddam, et idem est utrum sit sensibile aut intellectum in anima. In se autem [...] nec est universale nec est singulare. Si enim in se esset universale, ita quod animalitas, ex hoc quod est animalitas, esse[se]t universale, oporteret nullum animal esse singulare, sed omne animal esset universale.

In the first part of this text one can observe Avicenna’s general tendency to isolate predicates from anything which is not one of their own marks, and in particular from higher-level predicates.

It may be assumed that thinkers influenced by the Aristotelian predication theory, and who are anxious to introduce higher predicates into their system, have the natural tendency to count higher predicates as marks of concepts (not as properties of concepts). Under this assumption, Avicenna’s opposite tendency (to separate those higher predicates

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from the marks of the concepts to which they apply) becomes meaningful.

Avicenna expresses this isolation of the higher-level predicates by means of a qualification: marks are predicated of essence-in-itself, higher properties are predicated of essence-in-the-mind. *Praedicari de praedicato contingit dupliciter*, will say Caletans many centuries after.⁵⁰ If *universal* were said of *animal* . . . in-itself, then every animal would be a universal.⁵¹ This conditional statement is, in my view, the key for understanding the mediaeval doctrine.

We may conclude that the doctrine on the “triplel respectus essentiae” is due (at least partially) to a peculiar situation in predication theory, and that it is intended (aside from other possible reasons) to overcome that situation.

5.43 Misinterpretations of the doctrine

To inquire about the sort of existence or about the ontological status of the essence taken in itself, would be, in my view, to miss the real significance of the doctrine in question. Only misleading requirements of symmetry could motivate this inquiry because in traditional ontology there is not a third possibility apart from being in the mind and being *in rerum natura*. As Suarez indicates, questions about the kind of existence of essences “in themselves” would lead to a *fourth* distinction.⁵²

There is a remarkable text showing that the sense of the doctrine is primarily logical (predication theory): even “in the mind” the property *universal* does not belong to *man*.⁵³ Of course, even taking *man* as being “in the mind”, universality is not a mark of it.

5.44 The ‘triplel status’ and Frege’s ‘Merkmal-Eigenschaft’:

In a recent exposition of the doctrine on the *triplel status*, given by Tonquebede [1], it may be corroborated that the *triplel status* is an alternative approach to higher predication. Tonquebede [1] accepts *à la lettre* the formulation of the first antepredicamental rule⁵⁴; he assumes therefore that to say something about a predicate is to assign one of its marks to it. To this extent, one may not really say that *universality* is a predicate of *man*; and the Avicennian distinction of man-in-the-mind and man-in-itself (the “isolated” set of marks) appears as a means of still being able to have higher predicates without their descending to the individuals.
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But this goal could be attained in another way, namely in Frege’s way, and Tonquedec [1] actually undertakes this, although incidentally and perhaps unintentionally.\footnote{This other approach is indeed more elegant; one has simply to assume that predicates of \textit{man} are not necessarily marks of \textit{man}. But in a sense it is — it was — a more difficult way; it required substituting the theory of predication of the \textit{Organon} by that of \textit{Grundlagen der Arithmetik}.} Traditional logic may be characterized as being obliged to deal with higher predicates in a negative way: universality \textit{non intrat} in the concept of man, i.e., it is not a mark of \textit{man}. (Positively, it would be said, for instance, that universality belongs to \textit{man qua} known.) The concern of traditional philosophers is to ensure that a predicate of higher level does not fall down to individuals.\footnote{In contemporary logic, perhaps thanks to Frege, such a logical fear is not present.} REFERENCES

1. “Mark” and “property”; for the translation, “"Merkmal" = "mark" cf. my note in Birjukov [1], glossary.
2. § 53. In addition BGGE, p. 201; UBR, p. 9. The distinction is also mentioned in GRL, § 88, SUB, 42, GRG I, p. XIV (where “psychologism” — the word is not used — is said to be a reason why logicians did not make Frege’s distinction); cf. following note.
4. Of course, Frege says that marks are “logische Teile” (UGG, p. 373). But it should be observed how persistent Frege is in speaking of marks as \textit{composing} concepts. Cf. GRL, § 53, GRG I, p. 3, 24.
6. In the 16th century Caietanus gives careful definitions combining the analysis of a concept into its marks with the subordination (UO) of concepts. Caietanus [1], \textit{proe}.
7. Leibniz [1], V, p. 18.
8. Kant [2], \textit{Einleitung}, VIII.
9. A traditional textbook (19th century) says: “... L’idée inadequate nous present
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l'objet au moyen de caractères qui ne suffisent pas à nous le faire distinguer de toute autre . . . par exemple si je me représente le poisson comme un animal qui nage" (Mercier [1], p. 83, italics ours).

It may be presumed that le poisson or l'objet are those natures, typical of traditional philosophy, which are neutral with respect to singularity and universality. I would not assert, however, that Frege was exactly the first in introducing the distinction mark (of a concept)-property (of an individual falling under that concept). Höfler [1], 15, 21 (first ed., 1890) introduces practically the same distinction, without indicating his sources. Eisler [2] article "Merkmal", gives as the central meaning something close to Frege's distinction; the same applies with respect to some of the other reported meanings (Külpe, Honecker).

In the '90s a disciple of Brentano said: "Im übrigen ist der Terminus "Merkmal" einer von denjenigen, über dessen Anwendung eine Einigung unter den Logikern noch herbeizuführen ist . . ." (Marty [1], p. 214).

10. Cf., for instance, Trendelenburg [1], pp. 72–73 (in particular note 2). Commenting on Aristotle, Trendelenburg says: "Der Theil des ganzen Begriffes ist das Merkmal." But, at the very most, this implies the Fregean distinction between being a mark of a concept and being a property of the individual falling under that concept, not the distinction between a mark of a concept and a property of the concept. Trendelenburg, in agreement with traditional standards, holds in fact that a mark of a concept is a property of the concept: "… das Merkmal als ein Begriff des Begriffes . . ." (p. 73). "Und jedes Merkmal eines Begriffes darf von ihm ausgesagt werden" (Mauthner [1], III, p. 360). A similar distinction is that of "praedicatio intrinsecæ" and "extrinsecæ", an example of the latter being "animal est genus" (Signoriello [1], "praedicatio"). Of course, there may be incidental or isolated distinctions coinciding with that of Frege (cf. Section 5.44).

11. Aristotle [1.1], 1b, 10. It should be observed that Aristotle [3.1] does not translate the essential phrase "as of a subject".


13. Man predicated of this man and animal of man; therefore, animal is predicated of this man.

14. Cf. Section 5.34.

15. Cf. Section 1.2.

16. Cf. Section 4.3.

17. Cf. Section 5.4.

18. Aristotle [5].

19. "Man-himself" (Aristotle [3.1]) or "ipse homo" (Pacius [1]).

20. Pacius sums up the Aristotelian text in the following way: "Rei proprium convenire debet etiam ideae, non quatenus est idea simpliciter, sed quatenus illius rei est idea. Hinc refutatur proprium, si ideae non convenit. Confirmatur, si ideae convenit, quatenus est illius rei, cui proprium attribuitur, idea" (Pacius [1], p. 685).


22. Cf. Tricot's interesting note in Aristotle [2.1], II, p. 737. Bonitz's commentary is partially quoted there; it is interesting because it uses the Latin term "nota" to designate those "elements" which make up an Idea (biped, animal in the case of man). Frege's "Merkmal" is the exactly corresponding word in German.

23. Aristotle [2].
27. οὐν δὲ ἀποροβάς (ibid., p. 52, 1.9).
31. P. 38.
33. Petrus Hispanus [1], 7.45; also 6.06.
35. Aristotle [3.2], I, p. 57 note.
36. Duns Scotus [2].
37. “Ubi notandum, quod haec regula habet veritatem quando est praedicatio essentialis superioris de inferiori. Et hoc notatur per illo quod dicitur “ut de subiecto”. Et ideo si arguatur: Sortes est homo, homo est species, ergo sortes est species, non valet, quia cuum species sit secunda intentio et ens rationis non praedicatur essentia inferius de homine” (Nicolaus Dorbello [1]).
Joseph [1], on the contrary, affirms that the antepredicamental rule is not the dictum de omni (p. 50). Of course, these are but two examples.
39. Husserl [1], I, § 41.
40. Kant [2], § 63.
41. Cf. Section 7.56.
42. Lask [1], (p. 120): “Dann kommt man immer, wie jetzt rekapitiuliert werden mag, zu folgenden Substitutionen: Sein ist Kategorie, Kategorie gilt, also Kategorie ist ein Gelten, folglich ist auch Sein ein Gelten.”
43. De Wulf [1], I, n. 187.
44. “Essentiae vero rerum aut sunt in ipsis rebus, aut sunt in intellectu; unde habent tres respectus: unus respectus essentiae est secundum quod ipsa est non relata ad aliquid tertium esse, nec ad id quod sequitur eam secundum quod ipsa est sic. Alius respectus est secundum quod est in his singularibus. Et alius secundum quod est in intellectu” (Aviceanna [1], Logica, f. 2b).
45. “At enim inquitum, hominem, et caetera huismodi, tribus modis esse posse, et tria quodammodo esse habere, unum in mente et cognitione nostra, quod nuncupant esse mentale, sive esse cognitum; alterum in singularibus et individuis suis, quod vocant esse existentiae, sive esse fundamentale; tertium, ut ipsi loquentur, in se et in natura, sive essentia sive quidditate sua, quod appellant esse essentiae, sive esse quidditatis . . .
. . . Nam ego quidem probe intelligo quid sit esse in mente et cognitione nostra, et quid sit esse in singularibus et individuis, sed quid sit esse in se, et in natura sive essentia sive quidditate sua prorsus non intelligo; ac nec eos quidem qui hunc tertium essendi modum finxerunt, satis arbitror intellextesse, quid comminiscerentur . . .” (Nizolius [1], Lib. I, cap. VII).
46. Avicenna [1], Logica, f. 12a, below.
47. For example: “Diffinitio enim equinitatis est praeter diffinitionem universalitatis.
Nec universalitas continetur in diffinitione equinitatis. Equinitas etenim habet
diffinitionem que non eget universalitate. Sed est cui accidit universalitas. Unde ipsa equiitas non est aliquid nisi equiitas tantum. Ipsa enim ex se nec est multa nec unum nec est existens in his sensibilibus nec in anima, nec est aliquid horum potentia vel effectu, ita ut hoc continetur intra essentiam equiitas" (Avicenna [1], Metaphysics, f. 86c, below).

48. Where animal is a predicate of man, and the latter a predicate of Socrates, i.e., where animal is a predicate of a predicate (cf. Section 4.3).

49. Caietanus [1], n. 75 (pp. 117–118), is a remarkable text for showing how all these historical motivations are at work, and actually come into conflict. An Aristotelian logician, who already employs the expression “predicate of predicate” for class-inclusion, and who also has some interest in higher predicates in the true sense, begins by having to remove an objection. As Caietanus says (commenting on Aquinas [3]): “In hac parte tertia capituli hucus talem objectionem ex supradictis excludere intendit: quia quod praedicatur de praedicato praedicatur et de subjecto; sed species praedicatur de homine, quod est praedicatum respectu Sortis: ergo species praedicatur de Sorte . . .”

50. Ibid.

51. This argument will be repeated down through the centuries; to appreciate its influence, it suffices to remember that it appears in Aquinas [3], p. 27 (cap. III): “. . . si enim communitas esset de intellectu hominis, tunc in quolibet invenitur humanitas invenit incommunitas, et hoc falsum est quia in Socrate non invenit communitas aliqua . . .” Perhaps already Alfarabi [1], p. 111.

De Wulf [2] (Chap. III, sect. III, § 5: “La théorie des universaux et le problème de l’individuation”) includes rich references to the “triplex respectus”, and in particular that the Avicennian argument “is an idea expressed many times in the Summa and Quodlibeta of Henry of Ghent.” Cf. Gomez Caffarena [1].


53. We give Gilson’s paraphrase: “Or non seulement il est indifférent à la nature qu’elle existe dans l’intellect ou dans un être particulier, donc qu’elle soit universelle ou singulière, mais même si on la prend telle qu’elle existe dans l’intellect, elle ne possède pas immédiatement et de soi l’universalité. Sans doute l’universalité lui appartient alors en vertu de notre manière de la concevoir, mais l’universalité ne fait pas pour cela partie de son concept premier; . . .” (Gilson [2], p. 450).


55. P. 163 note: “L’essence humaine est affirmable de plusieurs individus, mais cette propriété ne convient qu’à elle, et non aux individus où elle se réalise. On affirme des individus l’essence, et non l’affirmabilité”.

This is “Merkmal-Eigenschaft”.

56. Speaking of properties (essences), Albertus Magnus says: “Accipitur enim aliquando secundum quod est absoluta per intellectum a suis appellatis, sicut quando dicitur, homo praedicatur de pluribus: nihil enim est in appellatis ipsis quod de pluribus praedicetur; tale enim praedicatum contingit formae, ita quod non contingit appellatis (Albertus Magnus [1], Lib. 7, tract. 2, cap. 1, italics ours).

Why is it necessary to stress that a higher property is not a mark? See also Suarez [1], VI, sect. 2, 10. “Unitas universalis” and “unitas formalis” are characterized by the fact that the former does not “pass” to the individuals, while the latter does. Cf. ibid., VI, 3, 1. Leibniz [1], IV, p. 120 (“Defensio Trinitatis . . .”) regards the suppositiones as a device for avoiding the “falling down” of higher predicates: “Hoc principio adhibito, Scholasticorum taediosis circa suppositiones praecptis
carere possumus. V.g. “animal est genus, Petrus est animal, ergo Petrus est genus”. Respondeo; majorem non esse universalem, neque enim is qui est animal est genus” (italics ours). Again, genus is not a mark of animal. Incidentally, also the “suppositio naturalis” (cf. Petrus Hispanus [1], 6.04) should be understood within the context of the triplex respectus; otherwise it certainly appears unclear (cf. A. Church, in Runes [1], “suppositio personalis”).