# Derivative Terms

## I. Lesson

"Things are said to be named 'derivatively' which derive they name from some other name, but differ from it in termination."

-Aristotle, *Categories* (W.D. Ross, 1952)

In previous lessons, we have discussed equivocal and univocal terms. Aristotle distinguishes one final type of term: the derivative term. A derivative term is a term that derives its name from another term, and the two terms refer to different things. For instance,

"Thus the grammarian derives his name from the word 'grammar,' and the courageous man from the word 'courage.'"

-Aristotle, *Categories* (W.D. Ross, 1952)

The terms "grammarian" and grammar" refer to two different things, but the things are not entirely unrelated. "Grammar," in its most basic sense, refers to the proper structure of language. "Grammarian" refers to someone who studies grammar. In this way, the term "grammarian" is a derivative term, because it derives its name from the term "grammar." In the same way, "courageous man" and "courage" refer to different things. "Courage", in a prominent interpretation of Plato, refers to the virtue of knowing what not to fear. "Courageous man" refers to a man who has courage. Thus, "courageous man" is a derivative term, because it derives its name from "courage."

We can distinguish derivative terms from so-called "cognate" terms. For example, the German word "Vater" and the Latin word "pater" and the English word "father" are cognates. That is, they all derive from the same linguistic root. When we say that terms are cognates, however, we are not prioritizing any of the terms. But when we say that a term is derivative, this means that another term—the term from which it derives—has some kind of priority. For Aristotle, this priority is not merely linguistic. Rather, it is a priority that lies in the nature of things. For example: if there wasn't such a thing as grammar, there wouldn't be a grammarian. That is, grammar is prior to the grammarian. When we say that "grammarian is derivative from grammar," we don't just say that linguistically the word "grammarian" is formed in a way that presupposes that there already is the word "grammar." We mean that, in substance, grammar comes first: without grammar, there's no such field that someone could study, and hence without grammar, there is no grammarian.

## II. Examples

(1) Take, for instance, the terms "book" and "bookshelf." "Book" refers to a certain type of a piece of writing, while "bookshelf" refers to a type of shelf (or furniture) which holds

books. Thus, the term "bookshelf" is a derivative term, for it derives its name from the term "book."

(2) Another example is the pair of terms "blackboard" and "board." A board is simply a flat piece of material that can be used for a number of purposes. A blackboard is not simply a board that is black. Thus, we could not say that a blackboard is just a board with the property of blackness. Instead, "blackboard" refers to a plane (in the mathematical sense) on which chalk can be written (usually can be found in a classroom). While "blackboard" is not just a species under "board," it does derive from "board" in that it takes the form of a plane. Thus, "blackboard" is a derivative term that derives its name (partially) from "board".

## III. Exercises

### Exercise 1

Directions: for each of the following pairs of derivative terms, explain how one term in such a pair can be called "derivative."

Example: Love, Loving Brother

Answer: "Loving Brother" is a derivative term in that it derives its name from the term "love." A "loving brother" is simply a brother who has or shows the attribute of "love."

1.) Lawn, lawn mower
2.) Philosopher, Philosophy
3.) Sun, shine, sunshine
4.) Keyboard, key

### Exercise 2

Directions: For each of the following derivative terms, list a term or terms that the meaning of such a term derives.

Example: Mathematician

Answer: The term "Mathematician" is derivative because it derives its name from the term "Mathematics." A "Mathematician" refers to someone who academically studies "Mathematics."

1.) Book cover
2.) Angry man
3.) Triplane
4.) Lampstand

## IV. Conclusion

Derivative terms are important in logic because they can sometimes be confused with the genus of a certain species. Sometimes this is the case. For instance, "sunshine" is a specific type of "shine." In this way, an argument could be made that "sunshine" is a species under the genus of "shine." However, "sunshine" is certainly not a special case of "sun." Hence, one could not say that "sunshine" is a species under the genus of "sun." Understanding what can be categorized as a genus and a species properly is extremely important, as will be discussed in the lessons on valid syllogisms.

Answer key:

Exercise 1

1.) "Lawn mower" is a derivative term in that it derives its name from the term "lawn." A "lawn mower" refers to a piece of machinery that is used for cutting or trimming the grass of a "lawn."
2.) "Philosopher" is a derivative term in that it derives its name from the term "Philosophy." A "Philosopher" is someone who practices philosophy. (or to love knowledge in the Greek).
3.) "Sunshine" is a derivative term in that it derives its name from the terms "sun" and "shine." "Sunshine" is a type of "shine" (radiance of light) which comes from the "sun."
4.) "Keyboard" is a derivative term in that it derives its name from the terms "Key" and "board." A "Keyboard" is a "board" which uses "keys" to fulfill its function (one presses the keys on a board in order to produce a desired effect).

Exercise 2

1.) The term "book cover" is derivative because it derives its name from the terms "book" and "cover." A "books cover" refers to a "cover" than encases a "book."
2.) The term "angry man" is derivative because it derives its name from the term "Angry." An "angry man" refers to someone who has the emotion of "angriness"
3.) The term "triplane" is derivative because it derives its name from the term "plane." A "triplane" refers to a "plane" with three wings stacked upon one another.
4.) The term "lampstand" is derivative because it derives its name from the terms "lamp" and "stand." A "lampstand" refers to an object on which a "lamp" is propped up ("stand").