

Seminar: Properties and Predication

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A characteristic feature of properties that distinguishes them from other abstracta (e.g. numbers, letters, fictional characters) is that they can be predicated of things. One would therefore expect properties to play a role in the semantics of predicates, and that reflection on semantics might in turn shed light on the nature of properties. In this seminar we will look at different theories about predicates and predication that have been offered by philosophers and linguists. We will focus especially on Frege's concept/object distinction (including the attendant "concept horse problem"), the way Frege's ideas have come to be employed in contemporary linguistics, and nominalist theories of predication as proposed by e.g. Sellars and Davidson. Towards the end of the course we will turn our attention to the related question of the "unity of the proposition."

Course Requirements

Participants in the seminar should give a presentation on a reading at least once over the course of the semester (maybe twice). The presentation should aim to summarize and clarify the main line of argument in the reading, and raise some questions (of either a critical or clarificatory nature) to form the basis for a discussion. If you are presenting on a given week, you should meet with me the Friday before to discuss any questions you might have, and send out a written summary or handout (2 to 3 pages) for your presentation by Monday evening before the seminar.

Second, you are expected to write a term paper of a length (15–20 pages) and quality appropriate for a graduate seminar. Papers will be due on Friday, May 13, and should focus on a topic closely related to the material we've discussed in the seminar. You should plan to turn in a short (2 to 3 pages) paper proposal by April 15.

Tentative Schedule

Week 1 [1.20]

Introduction. Functions in Frege's *Begriffsschrift*.

- Reading: Frege (1879) §9–10

Week 2 [1.27]

Frege on functions and the concept/object distinction.

- Reading: Frege (1891), Frege (1892b), Frege (1892a)

Week 3 [2.3]

The Fregean approach in formal semantics.

- Reading: Heim and Kratzer (1998), §1.1–1.2, 2.1–2.5, 3.1–3.3, 4.1–4.2, Partee (1986b)

Week 4 [2.10]

What expressions count as predicates?

- Reading: Partee (1986b), Fara (2015)
- Supplementary reading: Partee (1986a), Mikkelsen (2005), Mikkelsen (2011), Fara (2001), Rieppel (2013)

Week 5 [2.17]

Some classic discussions of the concept horse problem.

- Reading: Dummett (1973) Ch. 7, Dudman (1976)

Week 6 [2.24]

Continuing on the concept horse problem.

- Reading: Wiggins (1984), Parsons (1986)

Week 7 [3.2]

Sellars' Tractarian "picture theory" of predication.

- Reading: Sellars (1962)
- Supplementary reading: Copi (1958), Bergmann (1960)

Week 8 [3.9]

Davidson's nominalism.

- Reading: Davidson (1967) p. 17–18, Davidson (2005) Ch. 4–7

Week 9 [3.23]

Continuing on Davidson's nominalism.

- Reading: Davidson (2005) Ch. 4–7, Burge (2007)

Week 10 [3.30]

Reference and ascription.

- Reading: Wright (1998), Liebesman (2015)
- Supplementary reading: Oliver (2005), Hale and Wright (2012), Rieppel (2015)

Week 11 [4.6]

Frege and nominalism.

- Reading: Furth (1993), Heck and May (2008) §1.1–1.2

Week 12 [4.13]

Frege and nominalism.

- Reading: Trueman (2015)

Week 13 [4.20]

The unity of the proposition.

- Reading: Linsky (1992), King (2009)
- Supplementary reading: Hylton (1984), Hylton (1990), King (2007), Gaskin (2008)

Week 14 [4.27]

More on the unity of the proposition.

- Reading: Eklund (2015), King et al. (2014) Ch. 3, 6
- Supplementary reading: Hylton (1984), Hylton (1990), King (2007), Gaskin (2008)

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