

Predication

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In the sentence ‘Tom sits’, the name distinguishes Tom from anyone else, whereas the predicate assimilates Tom, Theaetetus and anyone else to whom the predicate applies. The name marks out its bearer and the predicate groups together what it applies to. On that ground his name is used to trace back Tom, and the predicate is used to describe and classify what it applies to. In both cases the semantic link is a direct link between expressions and particulars. Here, I’ll explore the workings of predicative names along the direction just hinted at.

The analysis of predication has been less central to philosophical investigation than that of referential expressions. Some problems have concerned the unity of the sentence – what make us understand ‘The baby cries’ as a sentence rather than a list of words? Other problems have been what a predicate was taken to stand for, properties and relations, and the understanding of either at the ontological level. If a predicate refers to a property or a relation, yet predication, which is central to our understanding of predicates, applies it to one or more particulars. On the background hinted at these problems might be differently viewed.