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SUBJECTS AND PREDICABLES

A Study in
Subject-Predicate Asymmetry

by

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*The University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill*

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To the women in my life

Lily

Judith

Gretta

PREFACE

This was once a dissertation: *caveat lector*. I am specially grateful to Professor Romane L. Clark who supervised it, reading and responding with his usual incisiveness to innumerable fragments and drafts.

Friends, colleagues, teachers and critics have all had a hand in shaping the present piece. At Duke, Robert H. Grimm and Richard H. Severens left their mark by way of discussion on the early chapters. Footnote references throughout display my debt to Professor N. L. Wilson, but not my gratitude. At Calgary, discussions with Professors T. M. Penelhum and Stanley Munsat helped clarify the arguments of Chapters I-III. Chapter IV is simply my latest attempt to meet the successive and stimulating criticisms of Professors Nuel D. Belnap, Jr., Paul Benacerraf and Robert Binkley. For several years in Chapel Hill Professors E. M. Adams, Charles Chastain, E. M. Galligan, Jay F. Rosenberg and R. A. Smyth have explained to me the error of my ways and helped me correct some of them. I am grateful to them all.

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Chapel Hill, August 1, 1972

John Heintz

CONTENTS

Preface	VII
I. Introduction	1
II. Frege's Arguments and Contrasting Views	5
Frege's Arguments	5
Alternatives: Quine and Hall	15
III. Subject-Predicate Asymmetry: Two Contemporary Views	32
Strawson	35
Sellars	43
IV. Subject-Predicate Symmetry: Explaining Variables Away	57
Eliminating Predicates	58
Objections, Replies, and Semantic Asymmetry	66
Summary	75
V. Predicables	76
What Predicables Are Not	78
Identity	84
Conclusion	94
Glossary of Technical terms	96
Bibliography of Works Cited	99
Index	101

I

INTRODUCTION

The problem. Gottlob Frege believed that predicate-expressions refer. That is not unusual. He also held that predicate-expressions are not proper names. That, too, is a common view. He asserted that the entities referred to by predicate-expressions can not be named at all. This is unique.¹ What follows is an attempt to take Frege's view seriously: to develop his arguments, to explore the alternatives to his strange position, and to add something to our understanding of predication.

Frege's view may be illustrated by a paraphrase and an example. In the statement-making use of a subject-predicate sentence, not only is there an entity (the subject) referred to by means of the subject-expression, there is something predicated of the subject by the use of the predicate-expression. If someone utters, in order to make a statement, the sentence

(1) Peter is pious.

we may take him to be referring to someone, St. Peter, and predicating something, of him, piety. Frege's view accepts all of this illustration but the very last word. The word 'piety' is an abstract

¹ The main statement of Frege's view is found in his "Über Begriff und Gegenstand", *Vierteljahrsschrift für Wissenschaftliche Philosophie und Soziologie* XVI (1892), 192-205; translated as "On Concept and Object", in Peter Geach and Max Black, eds., *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952). Footnote references, unless otherwise indicated, are to the translations.

name, and Frege denies that any entity predicated of something else can be named.²

It is this last denial which distinguishes Frege's position from the traditional realist stance on the problem of universals. Realists agree with Frege that predicate-expressions have reference. Some in fact claim that predicate-expressions name what they ascribe; they would say that subject-expressions name particulars and predicates name (or designate) universals. One such view, Hall's, will be considered as an alternative to Frege in Chapter II. Nominalists traditionally deny that there are universals, or any other sort of predicable entity. They agree with Frege that predicate-expressions are not proper names, because they deny that there is anything which a predicate-expression can be used to predicate. One modern nominalist, Quine, is also represented in Chapter II. Frege falls between these two views, arguing with the realist that predicate-expressions have reference, denying, in company with the nominalist, that predicates are names. Chapter II below is devoted to relating the arguments in support of his view and meeting the criticisms of the traditional views.

Terminology. Readers familiar with Frege's writings will have noticed a greater departure from his terminology than mere translation should allow. Frege's word for what has been called a 'predicable entity' was '*Begriff*', literally, 'concept'. The word 'concept' refers to a mental entity or capacity, such as one's concept of justice, and this is what Frege explicitly denied.³ So the words 'predicable' and 'ascriptive' will be used throughout to avoid the misleading psychological connotation. A predicable

² The oddity of this view can hardly be overemphasized. There are, it is true, reasons for supposing that, in principle, *some* entities of a sort can not be named. For example, there will always be some numbers which are not given names; there are too many numbers. According to Frege, predicable entities are not the sort of entity which can be named at all. The only similar view is Hall's on facts. See Everett W. Hall, *What is Value?* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), chap. IV, 21-62.

³ "On Concept and Object", 42.