Philosophy Department

Colloquium Series

On Predicates, Extensions and Induction

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In first order logic (FoL) we use a very simple, straightforward treatment of names and predicates, which appeals simply to the extensions of those predicates. We begin with a domain, a collection of things that the language is used to describe. The meaning of a name is just an item belonging to the domain. The meaning of a predicate letter which 'holds of' some individual items in FoL is simply its extension, i.e. the collection of items that the predicate holds of. Similarly, the meaning of a relational predicate is the collection of tuples (ordered pairs, triples, etc.) of items which the relational predicate holds of, i.e. which it is true of.

Here the focus is on truth (with the help of its near-relative satisfaction, to help us deal with quantification); the connections between items belonging to the language and the items (individuals and extensions) are taken for granted (part, if you like, of the initial set-up), not something to be explained in any richer way. But we pay a high price for this simplicity. We will examine some strange puzzles that arise from this approach to the meanings of predicates and consider how a richer approach might help us to evade them.

University of Lethbridge

FIAT LUX

Faculty of Arts & Science

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