

Singular/General

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1 Modern logic takes the difference between singular and general terms very seriously. It insists that sentences with general subjects have a much more complex logical syntax than sentences with singular subjects (see for example [10], p. 66). This is partly because modern logic always treats general terms as predicates and never treats singular terms as anything but subjects. The insistence that the logic of singulars is different from the logic of general propositions is also partly due to modern logic's demand that the logical form of any sentence be a reflection of its truth conditions. 'Socrates is wise' is true just in case Socrates is wise. But 'Some philosopher is wise' is true just in case there is at least one thing which is such that it is a philosopher and it is wise. So the modern logician requires a great deal of semantic information to be reflected in syntax. But how does a logician decide how much semantic information should be so reflected? Surely not all. There's just too much. Just that which determines truth? 'John is a bachelor' has as one of its (necessary) truth conditions that John is a male. Yet the modern logician does not require this bit of semantic information to be revealed syntactically.

2 Traditional, pre-Fregean, logicians made no such demands on logical syntax. Traditional logic allowed for a uniform logical treatment of both singular and general terms. It took all propositions to be categorical. Thus the logical subject of any propositions, whether singular or general, must be a quantified expression. Since singulars in natural language have no explicit quantity, the traditional logician took their quantity to be implicit. (For a discussion of singulars in Aristotle's logic see [4]; for a comparison of traditional and modern views see [3], [6], [7], [11] and [18].)

Nonetheless, there was a price to be paid by traditional logic for this syntactical uniformity. The scholastic logicians generally treated singulars as implicitly universal (since singular subjects terms are distributed). Yet there are valid syllogisms (e.g., 'Socrates is a man. Socrates is wise. So some man is wise.') which would have an invalid form when the singular terms are formulated with