GEACH ON ATOMICITY AND SINGULAR PROPOSITIONS

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In a recent article we find this assessment of Frege's contribution to the theory of atomic propositions.

> When in his *Begriffsschrift*, Frege introduced quantifiers, he was thus compelled to make the subject-predicate form the unique form of his prime sentences. Frege is generally credited with having introduced, to get full quantification theory, the generalized subject-predicate form, that is one in which there is more than one subject. This is true. But, it is also true that he was making more than a generalization of something already existing. He was putting the subject-predicate form squarely at the basis of logic in its generalized (more than one subject) and in its simple (just one subject) version.[1]

I too share this estimate of the importance of Frege's innovations for the monadic case. Before Frege, there was no effective procedure for determining the logical analysis of expressions involving multiple generality. The Scholastics had introduced the doctrine of Supposito to help determine the truth conditions of such expressions, but the doctrine was so clumsy that it became apparent that it would not serve well. Furthermore, Frege's solution to the problem of multiple generality was not at all within the Scholastic tradition. In fact his analysis suggested a more radical departure from what, until then, had been regarded as the basic form of the proposition than just a different analysis of multiple generality might suggest. It required the 'atomicity' of the singular propositional form Fa, Rab, etc.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, I will assess Frege's discovery of the atomic proposition, since it seems to me that only when we see what the new analysis of the underlying propositional form of Frege's primitive propositions means for inference power can we fully understand Frege's achievement properly. Secondly, I will scrutinize an argument deployed against the traditional doctrine of singular propositions that represents a line of reasoning accepted by the vast majority of contemporary philosophers for a Fregean-like analysis of the primitive propositions of quantification theory. This is of interest for the following reason. No