Chapter 3

GENERAL WORDS

We are prone to distinguish in language two classes of words. One, having for its typical examples, such words as 'man', 'yellow', 'Indian', 'healthy', and the like, are called general words; while the other exemplified by expressions like 'Aristotle', 'India', 'this University', etc. are called singular words. The preliminary basis for isolating these two kinds of words from each other is, of course, an apparent difference in their semantic functioning. A singular word is said to apply to only <u>one</u> thing or individual. Contrarily, a general word is said to apply in the same sense to <u>many</u> things or individuals. This alleged peculiarity of the semantic behaviour of general words becomes however readily the source of a notorious problem, which is : How is it that the same word can apply in the same sense to things which are numerically distinct and diverse qualitatively? The official practice in answering this question is to invoke

the notion of similarity. That is, saying that a general word applies to many things because those things are similar. Whether or not this similarity hypothesis is at all called for, or is in fact inescapable, is indeed a major concern of ours to explore and examine. And we shall take up the matter in the next chapter. What, however, as a logical preliminary, is to occupy us here is something more basic. It is the consideration of whether there really are in our language general words, a class of words which cannot be assimilated to words called singular. For obviously, one cannot talk of a problem about general words or of the similarity hypothesis as a possible solution of it, unless already, there are good reasons for admitting general words in our language.

Our business now is, therefore, to see whether or not a case can be made out for the alleged existence and identity of general words; which, plainly enough, amounts to finding out a criterion or a set of criteria by which general words may be

marked off from singular words. Is there any such criterion or set of criteria?

What about the alleged disparity of semantic functioning which we have referred to above? Can't it count as the needed criterion? - one may ask. Prima facie, there appear to be points in favour of the claim. But the trouble is there are philosophers - we have specially in mind Johnson and Austin - who seem to think otherwise. They would reject the claim on grounds to some such effect as, e.g., the semantic functioning of any kind whatever is not an essential point at all about general words (Johnson)[1], or that it is odd to suppose that general words have semantic

1 Vide Logic, Part I, Dover Publications, New York (1964), p.97.
The general name has usually been differentiated by reference to number, and roughly defined as a name predicable of more than one object. In fact, however, there are general names such as 'integer between 3 and 4' or 'snake in Ireland' that are predicable of no object, while 'integer between 3 and 5' and 'pole-star' are general names predicable of only one object.

behaviour in the same way as singular words do (Austin).[2] These challenges will have to be examined by us, before we can finally decide on the efficacy of the semantic criterion, i.e. whether it can truly distinguish general words from singular words. And for this purpose we shall no doubt be required to find out the exact nature of the relation of general words to things. Before we undertake this work it would be worthwhile to explore the possibility of finding supplementary criteria elsewhere.

It is plain that the possible criteria, whatever they may precisely be, must consist in certain properties which would characterise only general words and not those which are singular. But a small initial question is wherein, exactly, in a general word,

2 Vide Philosophical Papers, Oxford University Press (1970), p.61.
"But this view that general names 'have denotation' in the same way that proper names do, is quite as odd as the view that proper names 'have connotation' in the same way that general names do ..."

should we look for them? For a general word, qua word, shows more than one face for us to view.

(a) Like all words which are written or uttered, general words, when written or uttered, become, for that reason, occurrences in the physical world.[3] As written words, they belong to the class of physical objects which are visible, e.g. 'the rainbow', 'that bird on the tree', etc.; while as uttered words they belong to the class of objects which are audible, e.g. 'that thud on the floor', 'the roar of a lion', 'a whisper', etc. But this physical side of the general words is only incidental to them, in the sense that they do not bear on their logical character as words, that is to say, do not determine their meaning. And so there is no point in scanning it for the criteria we are searching for. Nobody, as a matter of fact, has done so.

3 cf. An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, Chap.I, Penguin Books, Allen & Unwin, 1940.

(b) In the same way, we may also ignore two more aspects of general words. Insofar as they are words, general words, like words in general, may assume two roles in language. In the terminology of Karl Buhler,[4] they are respectively (i) role as *symptom*, and (ii) role as *signal*.

The former consists in the fact that, like other words, a general word may indicate to some extent what occurs in the mind of the person who utters it; while the latter may be said to stand for the effect it may produce on the person who hears it.

These two aspects of a general word, like its physical aspect, are also incidental. They may contribute at best to its psychological meaning. But they have nothing to do with the logical meaning of it. For, the mental states of persons uttering the same general word may well vary according to circum-

4 *Vide* Alf Ross, *Directive and Norms*, p.20.
The author refers to Karl Buhler's *Sprachtheorie* (1934), p.28.

stances. And so may its effects on those who happen to hear it.

So it seems pointless to go in for a search of what is to distinguish general words from singular words either in their roles as physical occurrences or in their roles as symptoms or signals. This implies that we have to fall back on other aspects of general words. One such aspect is already known to us. It is their semantic aspect, i.e. their relation to the objects they refer to. We shall no doubt make an exploration of it. But right now we shall occupy ourselves with two more facets which are *prima facie* distinguishable in a general word.

(i) One consists in the fact that, as parts of our discourse, the use of general words is governed by rules of grammar;

(ii) while the other in the fact that it is governed by the laws of logic.

The former constitutes the *grammatical* dimension of a general word and the latter the *logical* dimension of it.

The basic importance of these two dimensions for general words (as also words in general) is indeed undeniable. For it is because of these - semantic dimension apart - that the general words (also words in general) can assume sense for themselves by being used in sentences and give sense to the sentences in which they are used.

2. Johnson, for whom general words are not semantically distinguishable from singular words, suggests a cluster of grammatical concepts to distinguish them. They are called "applicatives or selectives" by him.

"... a general name is distinguished as that to which any applicative can be significantly prefixed."[5]

As per Johnson's list, the applicatives include (a) definite article 'the', (b) the indefinite articles 'a' and 'an', (c) demonstrative particles like 'this, 'that', (d) such words as 'all', 'some','every',

5 Vide Logic Part I, Dover Publication, New York (1921),p.97.

'any', etc. In addition to the applicatives he also speaks of (e) the use in the plural number, and (f)the numerical prefixes as distinctive of general words.

> And a further and connected characteristic of the general name is that it can always be used in the plural, or, in fact, with any numerical prefix;[6]

Johnson's formulation of the grammatical criteria of general words seems quite comprehensive, in the sense that subsequent logicians - e.g. Quine[7], Keynes[8], Stebbing[9] among others - who have employed them do not add anything new to Johnson's list. On the contrary, they have usually been satisfied with even less than what the list contains.

About the grammatical criteria one thing seems definite. They do not in all cases distinguish general words from singular words. Their application

6 Vide Ibid, p.98.
7 Vide Word and Object, New York (1960),pp.90-100.
8 Vide Formal Logic, London, p.12.
9 Vide Modern Introduction to Logic, New York, Herper & Row Publ.(1961), p.54.

is confined to nouns and pronouns. As a matter of fact, one may well feel that in drawing up the criteria the logicians concerned have had in their minds as model perhaps the distinction of proper names and common nouns (in some cases, perhaps also singular nouns and plural nouns[10]) which, generally speaking, are the grammatical counterparts of singular and general words respectively. Anyway, the range of general words is wider than nouns and pronouns. For, it covers, nouns and pronouns apart, adjectives (red, sweet, generous, etc.), words designating relations (under, above, aside, etc.), verbs (run, sing, write, etc.), and so on.

The restricted efficacy of the grammatical criteria above, i.e. their incapacity to identify all

10 Compare Quine saying, "... the dichotomy between singular terms and general terms, inconveniently similar in nomanclature to the grammatical one between singular and plural, is less superficial." Word and Object, New York (1960), p.90.

general words, may well count as a mark of inadequacy of the criteria themselves. However, this inadequacy, in the present context, does not seem to matter much. The criteria may be taken to have accomplished enough, if they just succeed in distinguishing only some words as general. For, in that case, there will be that possible problem about general words to which similarity hypothesis is alleged to be a possible solution.

We may now proceed to examine the working of the criteria listed above within their limited field.

(2.1) To begin with the criterion which says that general words can be used in the plural but singular words cannot be so used.

For Quine in particular, this criterion seems to assume a privileged position. And there is reason for that. For, a notable peculiarity of criterion is that it shows a kind of parallelism with the semantic criterion and, that way, tends to provide a grammatical justification for the latter;

because as per semantic criterion, as we know, a general word is supposed to designate more than one object, while a singular word only one.
Usual examples of general words and singular words would both support this criterion. Take general words, e.g. 'book', 'bag', 'bachelor', etc. They all admit plural endings : we do say 'books', 'bags', 'bachelors', and so on. Contrarily, singular words, e.g. pronouns like 'I', 'he', etc. or proper names like 'Ravindranath', 'Jawharlal', etc. are not normally used in the plural - we do not say 'Ravindranaths', 'Jawharlals'.

However, the criterion does not function as smoothly as one might expect. Firstly,we have difficulties over words like 'furniture', 'sheep', 'news', etc. Somantically, they are general words; yet they are not amenable to being made plural - we are debarred by rule from saying 'furnitures', 'sheeps', 'newses', and the like. We have difficulties also over those words called 'mass terms' by Quine. For example, 'water', 'wine', 'gold', etc. Though general semantically they too are impervious to being made plural by the addition of the particle '-s'.

Again, there arise some complications from the fact that, on occasions, certain ordinary general words tend to function in our language as 'mass terms'. For instance, the word 'apple' in Quine's example 'Put some apple in the salad',[11]

Finally, proper names which are singular words per excellence, may assume plural endings. Following Otto Jesperson[12] we may mention at least four cases where it so happens. (i) When a number of individuals have been arbitrarily designated by the same proper name, as for example, 'There are ten Williams in this village', 'I have not visited any of the Romes in America', etc. (ii) When we want to designate "people or things like the individual denoted by the name", for instance, 'We can't have many Ganthis in a century'. (iii) When proper names

11 Ibid, p.91. (Italics mine)
12 Vide Philosophy of Grammar, George Allen & Unwin, London (1924), p.69.

designate members of the same family, e.g. 'All the Nehrus are not great', 'It happened during the days of the Henrys', etc. (iv) When, "by metonomy", a proper name may stand for a work of the individual denoted by the name", e.g. 'I don't have all the Ravindranaths in my library'.

(2.b) Let us now switch over to the consideration of all the other grammatical concepts ('applicatives' in Johnson's language) which are said to distinguish general words. As listed above, they include (a) definite article ('the'), (b) indefinite articles ('a', 'an'), (c) demonstrative particles ('this', 'that'), (d) words like 'all', 'some', etc. They are all of them called 'articles' by Johnson, obviously, in an extended sense of the term; and we too may well use this name while referring to them below. For Johnson, the articles (which are co-extensive with his applicatives) are the all-important mark of general words.

He says :

> ... we may point out that universal characteristic of the general name is its connection with the article[13] - the use of the grammatical term 'article' being extended to include this, that, some, every, any, etc.[14]

and further,

> The consideration that to the general name any applicative can be prefixed, distinguishes it from the singular name, whether descriptive or proper.[15]

The article-criterion of general words and the plural-ending-criterion discussed above, are not to be construed as mutually exclusive. That is, it is not such that the general words which are distinguishable by one are not distinguishable by the other. They do, in fact, apply jointly. And mostly this is what is the case. Take, for instance, the general word 'book' which is amenable to plural ending. It may go equally well also with any of the articles in our list. One can say '*a* book' '*the* book', '*this* book', '*some* books', and so on.

13 Italics ours.
14 *Vide* Logic Part I, Dover Publications, New York, p.97.
15 *Vide Ibid*, p.99.

On occasions, again, the article-criterion may supplement in varying degrees the plural-ending-criterion, in the sense that it goes to cover up cases where the latter does not operate. Words like 'furniture', 'sheep', 'news', etc., on the one hand, and mass terms like 'water', 'wine', 'gold', etc. on the other - will illustrate the point. As already stated, none of these words take plural endings. Nonetheless, we can well say '_some_ furniture', '_this_ furniture', '_the_ furniture', and so on. In the same w way, we can also say '_some_ water', '_some_ wine', '_some_ gold', and so on.

To examine the workability of the article-criteria.

Quine[16] makes a distinction between definite and indefinite singular words, and among the instances of the latter he would sometimes include such phrases as '_a_ man', '_an_ ant', and the like. This, naturally, may raise a doubt as to whether the articles can

16 _Vide Word and Object_, New York (1960), p.112.

rightly be said to go with general words alone.

One way to avoid this small difficulty is to assume a position like this.[17] Well, phrases like 'a man', 'an ant', like 'one book', 'something', 'everything', etc., are not paradigm cases of singular words; they are singular only in a secondary sense, i.e. a sense which derives from the singularity which goes with what we call definite singular words, e.g. 'Caesar', (when I am speaking of a particular individual). Definite singular words are the true specimens of singular words : the singularity which goes with them is singularity in the primary sense.

Certain singular descriptive names, for example, 'the Prime Minister of India' also tend to occasion doubt, insofar as they are prefixed by 'the', But here, again, as pointed out by Johnson, the singula-

17 cf. Strawson, "Singular Terms and Predication", Philosophical Logic, ed. Strawson, Oxford University Press, p.69.

rity of the descriptive names is derivative, i.e. "secured through its reference to a proper name."[18]

But how far do the articles or applicatives demarcate general words from paradigm cases of singular words, i.e. definite singular words, proper names, etc.?

The articles are used with general words, which is true; and it is further true that they are not normally used before proper names or definite singular words (e.g. we do not generally say 'a Jawharlal Nehru' or 'the Jawharlal Nehru', or the like). To that extent they may be said to do their job. But numerous exceptions, which one discovers in language, tend to limit this success. To mention a few. (a) There are cases of proper names and definite singular words which take the article 'the' before them, e.g. 'The Ganges', 'The Green Park', 'The earth', and so on. (b) Likewise, we have instances of proper names and

18 Vide Logic Part I, Dover Publications, New York, p.30.

singular words with 'a', 'an', 'some', etc. used before them. We say, 'Calcutta is not a New York', 'He speaks like a Socrates', 'Some Mr. Khan is here', etc.

To wind up our survey of the grammatical criteria.

(a) The criteria, jointly, do not cover the entire range of words which are general on semantic consideration; they cover a cross-section of it.

(b) Within the limit of the cross-section, again, no single grammatical criterion will hold good universally,

(c) Nonetheless, a general word which is not distinguishable by one particular criterion may be distinguished by another; and that way, the grammatical criteria may be said to be mutually supplementary.

(d) What, however, is most important to note is this. The grammatical criteria, insofar as they hold of a part of the range of words which are general on semantic criterion, show a degree of

correspondence to the latter. This correspondence is unlikely to be a mere co-incidence. And in that sense, it provides a kind of justification for the semantic criterion.

3. Let us now consider another way of distinguishing general words from singular words which is sought to be correlated with their distinction based on semantic grounds. This distinction also is based on what may be called a grammatical criterion; since it involves consideration of the grammatical positions or roles of the two kinds of words in the sentences in which they are used. It is Quine, again, who is the principal exponent of this criterion. The criterion is : While a general word is capable of playing the role of a predicate in a sentence, a singular word is not capable of playing such a role. In Quine's language :

> It is by grammatical role that general and singular terms are properly to be distinguished...[19]

19 Vide Word and Object, New York (1960), p.96.

> The general term (unlike the singular term) is what is predicated, or occupies what grammarians call predicative position ...[20]

Interestingly enough, this grammatical criterion of Quine's shows two sides which, strictly speaking, are not grammatical. In a sense, they tend to contribute, at the logical level, a kind of deeper dimension to the contrast of general and singular words already marked out by the criterion. One of the two sides is that the general word, because of its predicative position in a sentence, can be true or false of the object to which the singular word refers, while we cannot say the converse of it, i.e. that the singular word is true or false of that to which the

20 Ibid. The portion in parenthesis is ours.

Geach and also Frege seem to maintain fundamentally the same positions as Quine. Frege says, "A proper name can never be in a predicative expression ... ("On Concept and Object", translation from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege, ed. Geach and Black, p.30); while Geach says, "The name of an object can ... be used as logical subject of an assertion about an object ... It cannot ... be a logical predicate."

general word refers. The second side, on the other hand, is that while the position of subject occupied by the singular word is also position accessible to quantifiers, the predicative position of the general word is not so.

Anyway, this new grammatical criterion, it is not difficult to see, has a special advantage over the earlier one. The earlier criterion, which involves the concepts of articles or "applicatives" or that of plural ending, we have seen, could be useful at best to identify those general words which fall within the range of nouns and pronouns; it does not apply to general words outside this limited range, i.e. to verbs, adjectives, substantives. But the new criterion can do justice to these, insofar as verbs, adjectives and substantives can well occupy the required predicative position in sentences, e.g. "She *sings*", "She is a *singer*", "She is *tall*", etc. As a matter of fact, the criterion tends to cover adjectives, verbs and substantives so well that Quine is inclined

even to view them "merely as variant forms"[21] of general words.

Thus in executing the common business of distinguishing general words from singular ones the new grammatical criterion is in a position to do something important which the earlier one could not. That way it is complementary to the latter. Nonetheless, there is a point on which the two criteria appear in a way to conflict with each other, that is, yield opposite results. The point in question is what has been referred to above as "mass terms", e.g. 'gold', 'sugar', 'water', etc. The mass terms, as we have seen earlier, do not admit of plural endings; nor do they take articles like 'a', 'an', 'the' as prefixes. In that sense, by the first criterion, more precisely, a part of it, they become branded as singular words. However, the new criterion tends to put them in the class of general words; because they can well occupy predicative positions in sentences

21 Ibid.

e.g. "The content of the glass is water", "Whatever glitters is not gold", etc.

The way to resolve this conflict, as suggested by Quine, is to recognise a kind of "ambivalence" as regards mass terms. That is, to admit that mass terms, predicatively used in a sentence, are to be treated as general, though they are to count as singular words when they happen to figure in subject-positions in sentences. But in what does a mass term in subject-position differ from itself in predicative position, so that it might be justified to call it a general word in the latter case and a singular word in the former? Does it assume different functions in the two positions? Quine's answer would be that a mass term in the subject position of a sentence refers to its objects "cumulatively";[22] on the other hand, used in the predicative position it makes a "divided reference"[23] to its objects, that is, refers to "each

22 Ibid, p.91.
23 Ibid, p.94.

portion of the stuff in question, excluding only the parts too small to count."[24] Thus take the word 'water' in its subject and predicative positions in the two sentences "Water is liquid" and "The liquid in the glass is water." In the former role, i.e. in the role of a singular word, it refers to whole of the stuff called water; in the other role, that is, in the role of a general word, it refers to each part of the stuff, the liquid in the glass.

The criterion of subject-position can by and large mark off general words. But at times it fails. And Quine himself is not unaware of that. Common nouns on semantic considerations are paradigm cases of general words, yet there are sentences in which they can occupy subject-positions which are supposed to be accessible only to singular words. Examples : 'A king had two queens', 'Some men were present', and so on.

But can we avoid such difficulties by recourse to

24 Ibid, p.98.

an amended version of Quine's criterion proposed by some philosophers? These philosophers include, among others, Nicholas Wolterstorff who follows Geach, (perhaps also Frege) in the matter. The amended version which proposes to read Quine's "subject" and "predicate" as 'logical subject' and 'logical predicate' respectively is this.

> Only singular terms can function as the logical subjects or sentences; general terms cannot.[25]

Can we, by treating the word 'king' in our example above as a logical subject, make it classifiable as an instance of singular word? What, however, is more basic is whether the word 'a king' above can at all function as a logical subject. Quine[26] is inclined to answer in the negative. His ground is that a logical subject is required to be the name of one definite thing or individual, while there is no

25 Vide On Universals : An Essay in Ontology, The University of Chicago Press, (1970), p.56.

26 Vide Word and Object, New York (1960), p.113.

one thing named by the word 'a king'. Wolterstorff,[27] on the other hand, maintains otherwise. He admits that 'a king' does not refer to one definite individual in the sense in which the name 'King Ashoka' does; however, it may be viewed as standing for the single thing, the class of kings, and, that way, as logical subject in Quine's sense.

But this position of Wolterstorff's does not have any particular appeal for us. For the single thing for which the name 'king Ashoka' stands is obviously not of the same kind as the supposed single thing called class of all things. The latter is not intelligible in the way the former is.

As a matter of fact, the amendment of Quine's criterion by substituting the concepts of 'logical subject' and 'logical predicate' for those of 'grammatical subject' and 'grammatical predicate', does not mark any improvement on it. For, in the

27 Vide On Universals : An Essay in Ontology, The University of Chicago Press (1970), p.49.

first place, it is not true that general words alone can function as logical predicates, as mentioned by Wolterstorff himself; contrary to the stipulation of the amended criterion, singular words, e.g. 'is identical with Venus'[28] also can figure as logical predidates.

Besides, in the definition of the singular word in terms of the logical subject there is, if we may say so, an amount of what is called begging the question. For the concept of singular word itself is invoked to define the notion of logical subject.

II

Thus, together, the grammatical criteria discussed above tend in a way to cover by and large the entire range of words which are classed, on semantic consideration, as general words. In this sense, the grammatical criteria may well be said

28 Vide Ibid.

to provide for a kind of external rationale for the semantic criterion. What, however, is going to be considered by us now is how far, if at all, the semantic criterion can be justified on its own strength. That is to say, we shall discuss whether it has any internal rationale, in other words, reasons within itself for accepting it.

As per semantic criterion, a general word differs from a singular word in that, unlike the latter which is correlated with only one object, it can be correlated with more than one. A convenient way to conduct our search for a possible justification of it within itself is to note at the very beginning the alleged difficulties of it, the major ones at least.

(a) On semantic criterion the general word is differentiated in terms of the concept of applying to more than one thing, in other words, by reference to number. Some logicians, Johnson[29] being one, find

29 Vide Logic, Part I, Dover Publications, New York.

a difficulty in it. For it is alleged that there is "nothing in the meaning of a general name which could determine the number of objects to which it is applicable."[30]

(i) Take expressions such as 'integer between 3 and 4', 'snake in Ireland', 'King of France', and the like. They are general names, though they would apply to no object whatever.

(ii) On the other hand, consider expressions like 'integer between 3 and 5', 'pole-star', 'natural satelite of the earth', &c etc., which also are general names, though they relate to only one object. And there is nothing in the expressions themselves which would explain the diversity of the two sets of expressions in respect of their semantic functioning.

(b) (i) Contrarily, a singular word, as for example, the proper name 'Caesar', may apply to more than one object, e.g. Julius Caesar, Octavius Caesar, or the

30 Vide Ibid, p.97.

dog called by that name; though, on semantic criterion, it is to apply to only one object.

(ii) In the same way, 'Pegasus' (Quine's example), a singular word, which, on semantic criterion, is to apply to one thing, does not, in fact, apply to any thing.

In the light of these difficulties it seems possible now for us to understand what one is to do if one is to find the required justification of the semantic criterion. The supposed semantic relation of general and singular words to their respective objects has so far been described in terms of such phrases as 'apply to', 'correlated with', and the like, which are deliberately vague. The thing for us to do now would be to see whether the semantic relation is amenable to interpretation in any precise terms which, plausible in itself, would, at the same time, solve all or at least some of the alleged difficulties above.

4. We may begin with J.S.Mill's interpretation.

According to Mill, a general word is applicable in the same sense to an indefinite number of things; while a singular word is applicable in the same sense to only one thing. To quote Mill :

> A general name is ... a name which is capable of being truly affirmed, in the same sense, of each of an indefinite number of things. An individual or singular name is a name which is only capable of being truly affirmed, in the same sense, of one thing.[31]

And the reason why it is so, is, according to Mill : (A general word) "expresses certain qualities, and, when we predicate it of those persons we assert that they all possess those qualities"; but a singular word is not conferred upon its object to indicate any qualities.[32]

Mill's position makes a claim to offer a kind of solution of the difficulty stated in (b) (i). That is, it purports to provide an explanation of why a singular name which happens to apply to many objects,

31 Vide A System of Logic, Longman's Green & Co, London (1965), p.17.
32 Vide Ibid.

does not have to be identified with a general name just on that ground. For, as quoted above, a singular word, unlike a general word, does not apply to the many objects in the same sense. The concept of 'does not apply in the same sense', however, tends to mean, for Mill, 'does not apply in any sense at all'.[33] Mill's position may be formulated alternately thus : While application of a general word is sense-based that of a singular word is not sense-based.

There is a certain inner discrepancy in Mill's interpretation which is not far to see. He speaks of a singular word as a word which does not apply to many objects in the same sense.

Continuing, he describes singular word also as a word which does not apply to its objects in any sense at all. But how are the two descriptions, namely, 'does not apply in the same sense' and 'does not apply in any sense' to be understood in

33 cf. Ibid.

reference to each other? For Mill, they seem to have the same meaning. But this is absurd. If a word doesn't apply in any sense then it just doesn't apply in any sense. To say that it does not apply in the same sense (or in some particular sense) would outrage speech. The idea of not being applicable in any sense excludes the idea of being applicable in the same sense or in a different sense or in any particular sense. To put the matter in another way, saying that a singular word applies to its objects in different senses is to presuppose that it has some senses, not that it does not have any sense.

Thus the two positions of Mill's, viz.,

(a) that a singular word does not apply to its objects in the same sense,

and(b) that a singular word does not apply to its objects in any sense whatever,

do, in fact, stand for very different positions which convey very different meanings.

But neither of the positions is without difficulties.

(b), that is, that a singular word does not apply in any sense, is not quite tenable. It seems necessary to grant that a singular word can assume some sense for itself. For, otherwise, what, in our eyes, tends to become unaccountable is the fact that in certain cases instances of the same grammatical sentence with the same singular word may assume very different senses. To mention a few examples.

(i) I have a headache (said by me),
I have a headache (said by my cousin),
I have a headache (said by my neighbour).

(ii) This is Elizabeth (a name of a girl),
This is Elizabeth (a name of a ship),
This is Elizabeth (a name of a queen).

(a), that is, that a singular word does not apply to its objects in the same sense, tends, on the other hand, to do away with its distinction from general words, and that way, it may be said to defeat its own purpose. For, as pointed out by Wolterstorff,

a general word, when it is an ambiguous (or paronymous) word, does have different senses and so, naturally, one can well say of it also that it is not applicalbe to its objects in the same sense. Thus, take the word 'healthy' which is a general word, though it may be applied to its objects in different senses. Such sentences as follows will illustrate this point, e.g.

(i) Her complexion is healthy,

The man is healthy,

This is a healthy food,

Walking is a healthy habit exercise; etc.

or (ii)This is a pen (writting equipment),

This is a pen (enclosure for cattles).

5. Thus Mill's interpretation is not relevant at all to the entire range of difficulties that arise from the semantic criterion; while it fails in respect of the small area (i.e. (b)(i)) it is specially designed to cover. So, we may turn to the consideration of a second interpretation

which would appear far more comprehensive in its scope and which would seem to have a far greater degree of plausibility. This interpretation is Quine's.

The distinctive feature of Quine's interpretation is his crucial use of two things which are :

(i) the concept of purporting to be true of as opposed to being actually true of,

and (ii) the distinction, he makes, between the concept of ambiguity and that of generality.

To be explicit, the alleged semantic relation of a general word to an indefinite number of things and that of a singular word to just one thing are understood by Quine respectively to mean :

(i) that a general word purports to be true of an indefinite number of things;

and (ii) that a singular word purports to be true of only one thing.

The meaning of the expression 'being true of' in Quine's formulation is not as clear as one might desire. It is apt to be construed in different ways.

To mention a few examples. By saying 'w is true of o' one may simply mean that w is the name of o either in the ordinary sense or in some special senses. Or one may also choose to mean by it that the assertion 'o is w' would be a true assertion. Similarly, following Wolterstorff,[34] one may further mean that 'w supposites[35] for o'. And so on.

Anyway, the concept of 'being true of' will not detain us. We need not go into the details of its explication; since what is crucial in Quine's

34 cf. On Universals : An Essay in Ontology, The University of Chacago Press, pp.53-55.

35 Supposition is a medeavel concept. Its elucidation, as quoted by Wolterstorff from William of Ockham, is as follows :

> "'Supposition' means taking the position, as it were, of something else. Thus, if a term stands in a proposition instead of something, in such a way (a) that we use the term for the thing, and (b) that the term (or its nominative case, if it occurs in an oblique case) is true of the thing (or of a demonstrative pronoun which points to the thing), then we say the term has suppositio for the thing.",
> Vide Ibid, pp.53-54.

interpretation is (i) above, i.e. the expression 'purport'. It is mainly this which, (combined with (ii)), enables him to get over the difficulties of the usual semantic criterion listed above. To explain this.

Take the general words 'integer between 3 and 4', 'King of France', 'snake in Ireland', etc. in (a)(i) above. Take also the singular words like 'Pegasus' in (b)(ii). The generality of the former set of words and the singularity of the latter, we have seen, are supposed to be impaired in the eyes of some logicians, because, in actuality, none of those words refer to anything at all, so that, as required, no word in the former set can be said to refer to more than one thing, just as no word in the latter set can be said to refer to any single thing. But this so-called difficulty causes little disturbance for Quine. The concept 'purport' tends to provide him with a way to get over it. That is, he argues that the words like 'integer between 3 and 4', 'King of France', 'snake in Ireland' are

general by semantic criterion itself, because they purport to be true of more than one thing, no matter that in actuality they are not true of anything at all. In the same way, 'Pegasus' also would count as a singular word according to Quine on semantic consideration, for although it is not true of anything, it purports to be so of one single thing.

In the same way, Quine would justify the generality of expressions like 'pole-star', 'natural satelite of the earth' in (a)(ii) above. He would say that, even though each of such words is, as a matter of fact, true of just one thing, yet it purports to be true of more than one thing.

But how is Quine to handle the difficulty in (b)(i), i.e. that a singular word, e.g. the proper name 'Caesar' or 'John', is true of more than one thing?

Here also, Quine might take recourse to the notion of 'purport'. That is, he might argue that though the singular name 'John' ir 'Caesar' is

used in practice to stand for more than one individual, yet each purports to refer to only one individual, and that way, it is a singular word. However, in actuality, Quine relies more on a supplementary course. To solve the difficulty he makes a distinction between the notion of generality and that of ambiguity which are apt to be confused. "... generality", Quine says, "is not to be confused with ambiguity."[36]

To explain the point. Take 'pen', a word which is ambiguous. It refers to more than one thing, a 'writing equipment'; also an 'enclosure for cattles'. In this, it simulates a general word, e.g. 'orange', which refers to more than one object. Yet a word with ambiguity and general word are very different. An ambiguous word refers to its more than one object by virtue of the fact that it has more than one sense; that way, it may be said to function as more than one word, notwithstanding that it is the same verbal shape or the same verbal noise. But

36 Vide Methods of Logic, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p.203.

contrarily, a word's generality is to consist in its capacity to refer to more than one thing in the same sense, in other words, qua the same word.

In the light of this distinction between general word and ambiguous word, the difficulty alleged to arise from singular words like 'Caesar', 'John', etc. seems to dissolve easily. For 'John', while it means our neighbour's son, has one sense; but it assumes another when it refers to, say, 'the old grocer'. Similarly, 'Caesar', meaning the Roman General, has a sense different from 'Caesar' which refers to our dog. The singular word 'Jones' is ambiguous in that it might be used in different contexts to name any of various persons, but it is still a singular word in that it purports in any particular context to name one and only one person.[37]

Thus the peculiarity of a proper name to designate more than one thing, according to Quine,

37 Ibid.

is to be understood after the model of an ambiguous word; it is no ground for denying the singularity of a proper name or for its assimilation into the class of general words.

Quine's major remedy for the alleged difficulties of the semantic criterion is his concept of 'purport'. The way it has been found so far to work is not unsatisfactory. However, there arise certain basic questions. For example, what is it that is there in a general word or elsewhere because of which it purports to stand for more than one thing? In the same way, what is there in a singular word itself or elsewhere because of which it tends to be true of just one object and not more? Such questions are not easy to answer. And this, very rightly, should make one a bit doubtful about the ultimate efficacy of the concept of purport, its capacity to do its job, i.e. to reconcile the alleged difficulties of the semantic criterion.

Quine himself also is not perhaps unaware of this weakness of his particular conceptual tool;

and that is perhaps the reason why he is inclined to give more credence to the grammatical criteria discussed above. He says :

> Such talk of purport is only a picturesque way of alluding to distinctive grammatical roles that singular and general terms play in sentences. It is by grammatical role that general and singular terms are properly to be distinguished.38

III

To wind up.

The common semantic ground for distinguishing general words does not, on ultimate analysis, appear as strong as one would desire. On the other hand, neither is it as weak as some are inclined to make it look. As a matter of fact, semantic consideration, combined with the grammatical peculiarities of their role in language, tend to mark off general words quite clearly as a class by itself, i.e. a sub-class of words which cannot be subsumed in any other co-ordinate sub-class.

38 Vide Word and Object, New York(1960), p.95.