



Vienna, December 29, 2020

Dear Organizers of the World Logic Day,

The International Federation of Modern Languages and Literatures/Federation Internationale des Langues and Litteratures Modernes (FILLM) is a member of the UNESCO group of academic organizations through its membership of the Conseil International de la Philosophie et des Sciences Humaines (CIPSH). FILLM is thus the official international body which represents the study of language and literature as research-based scholarly disciplines in universities and tertiary higher education institutions world-wide.

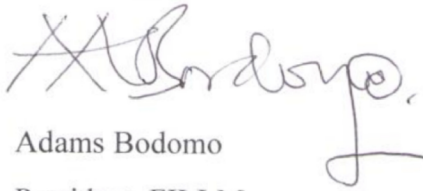
We write to enthusiastically support the concept of a UNESCO World Logic Day on January 14, 2021 and to contribute to activities marking this day. Logic is an essential ingredient in the analysis of languages and literatures and we are happy that this essential ingredient has been accorded prominence in terms of dedicating a whole day to the discussion of logic and demonstrating its importance in various disciplines.

As part of our contribution, FILLM Vice President, Professor Haun Saussy of the University of Chicago has sent in a two-page note and a three-minute video clip outlining the importance of logic to the study of languages and literatures.

This one contribution comes in before the deadline of December 30 but should other contributions come in from other members we will make this known to you the organizers of the World Logic Day.

On behalf of all members of FILM, I wish you a successful organization of this UNESCO World Logic Day on January 14, 2021.

Yours sincerely,



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For World Logic Day

Although everyone relies on logic, explicit formulation of its rules has long been the work of specialists. Perhaps it will not be inappropriate for me, as a literary humanist representing one of the organizations of literary, historical and rhetorical researchers under the UNESCO umbrella, to offer a sketch of the ways advances in logic affect our own disciplines.

The syllogistic logic whose terms are classes and types of objects is usually credited to Aristotle. It emerged from the art of rhetorical persuasion and extended to natural history, ethics, politics, law, poetics, and so forth. Its attention to the terms of discourse resulted in a mapping of ordinary language as a hierarchy of more and less inclusive terms. Whether in philosophy, natural history, or law, the business of logic in Aristotle's dispensation was to assign predicates to subjects with accuracy, not too loosely and not too tightly.

The two great modifications that were made to the Aristotelian model of logic were the attempt to work out a logic of relations and the reformulation of the logic of classes as a logic of sets and their members. Leibniz is the pivotal figure here. In writings published only some years after his death, he asserted the need for a logic of relations and experimented with notations for it. Much later, Cantor, Russell and other mathematicians took up that challenge.

For people in my line of work, there is not much call to use formal notation or truth tables. But the existence of logics that are not based on category-inclusion is inspiring to us. Sets can be messy; they can overlap; they can accommodate change; we didn't see that in the syllogistic. Logics of relation suggest that individuals are not best understood by putting them into labeled boxes, but rather that an individual is the nexus of multiple relationships which may bear different weightings at different times. (Socrates is always mortal, but he may forget that fact on occasion and behave as if being a citizen of Athens is more intrinsic to Socrates than being mortal.) This is not simply a return to empiricism. Were it not for

having developed on his own a style of thinking that treats the category and the species as incidental, and seeks to explain their existence as a momentary state of the behavior of populations existing in time and composed of individuals, Darwin could not have made his contributions to natural history. The finch is as it is because of its relation to the nuts it must crack with its beak; other nuts, other finches. The “natural kinds” from which most peoples started their reasoning about what is inherent, necessary, probable and provable have turned out to be a mere stepping stone to far more complex models of causality and being. As an interpreter and historian of the written past, I salute the logics of relation and of set membership for leading us all into a different, less deterministic, and more complex explanatory space.

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