Identity/Nonidentity in Emily Elizabeth Constance Jones (1848-1922)

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Identity / Nonidentity in Emily Elizabeth Constance Jones (1848–1922)

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According to E.E. Constance Jones, the most general form of an informative (or "significant") categorical proposition is given by '*S* is *P*' or '*S* is not *P*'. The proposition '*S* is *P*' asserts "Identity in Diversity" (Jones 1890: ix). The identity applies to the denomination (denotation, extension) of *S* and *P*, the diversity to their determination or intension (see *Intension/Extension*). '*S* is *P*' is *un*informative if it asserts the identity of both the denomination and the determination (Jones 1890: 128, note 1; Jones 1893-1894: 37-38).

The proposition's nonidentity form '*S* is not *P*' does not simply deny what the proposition '*S* is *P*' asserts. One does not use this form to assert the mere "diversity" of intension: one uses it to assert, in addition, the distinctness of the denomination. It thus asserts difference both in "signification" (or intension) *and* in "application" (or extension) (Jones 1892: 23).

Jones considers the Aristotelian propositions of the forms 'All *S* are *P*' , 'No *S* are *P*', 'Some *S* are *P*', 'Some *S* are not *P*' – which she calls 'class-propositions' – as a proper subset of her categorical propositions (Jones 1890: 198; Jones 1911b, pp. 25*ff*). She also takes her view of a significant categorical proposition to constitute a new law of thought (see *Law of Significant Assertion*), intending this law to replace the first of three fundamental laws of thought, viz. the Law of Identity ('*A* is *A*'), which according to Jones is uninformative and renders impossible any passage to an informative '*A* is *B*' (Jones 1911a, 1911b; *cf.* Ostertag 2011). Somewhat remarkably, however, she also regards the Law of Identity as "a necessary presupposition of all significant assertion [...] and even [...] of thought itself" (Jones 1890: 40).

The new law provides a straightforward formulation of the remaining two fundamental laws of thought, namely

'*S* is *P*' and '*S* is not *P*' cannot both be true (Law of Noncontradiction)

'*S* is *P*' and '*S* is not *P*' cannot both be false (Law of the Excluded Middle).

Moreover, the law suggests a classification of fallacies, dividing them into (a) those which identify what is different and (b) those which distinguish what is identical (Jones 1890: 178-195; Jones 1911b: 68).

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