University of Groningen

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Peijnenburg, Jeanne; Ostertag, Gary

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Law of Significant Assertion in Emily Elizabeth Constance Jones (1848–1922)

Gary Ostertag & Jeanne Peijnenburg
City University of New York & University of Groningen

The *Law of Significant Assertion* (Jones 1890, 1893–1894, 1911) was conceived as a solution to what we might call "the problem of the categorical proposition", which Jones encountered in the work of various philosophers, notably of Lotze (1888). For example, a categorical proposition like 'All lions are quadrupeds' asserts an identity between the class of lions and (a particular subclass of) quadrupeds. This raises a problem: merely asserting the numerical identity of two classes of entities leaves unexplained that 'All lions are quadrupeds' can add to our knowledge. It is equivalent to saying that lions are lions or that quadrupeds of a given class are quadrupeds of that same class (Frege 1892 makes a similar observation, but focuses on proper names).

Jones' solution is that in a categorical proposition like 'All S-things are P-things' we have "identity of denotation in diversity of intension" (Jones 1911: 1, 14) – this is her *law of significant assertion*. Although what makes the assertion that lions are quadrupeds true is indeed the aforementioned identity, which is trivial, what gives the assertion genuine content, according to Jones, is the fact that things conceived of in one manner ('a large tawny-colored cat that lives in prides') are the same as things conceived of in another ('an animal with four feet').

Russell (1905, 1911) was also concerned with so-called informative identities and developed the theory of descriptions to explain them. On this theory, 'Scott is the author of *Waverley*' is not, in fact, an identity sentence. Rather, it asserts that something is both uniquely author of *Waverley* and identical with Scott. Jones felt that this theory still presupposes her distinction between identity of denotation and diversity in intension (Jones 1911: 46–47). The debate between the two occurs in Russell (1911) and Jones (1910–11). See also Ostertag (2011) for discussion.

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