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978-1-107-62665-2 - A New Law of thought and its Logical Bearings

E. E. Constance Jones

Frontmatter

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**GIRTON COLLEGE STUDIES**

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A NEW  
LAW OF THOUGHT  
AND ITS LOGICAL BEARINGS

BY

E. E. CONSTANCE JONES

*Author of A Primer of Logic*

WITH A PREFACE BY  
PROFESSOR STOUT

“One of the greatest pains of human nature  
is the pain of a new idea.” BAGEHOT.

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at the University Press

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## PREFACE

TWO of the three fundamental Laws of Thought, which are traditionally regarded as the cardinal principles of Formal Logic, are concerned with the relation of propositions to each other. According to the Law of Contradiction, two propositions of the form “*A is B*” and “*A is not B*” cannot both be true. According to the Law of Excluded Middle, they cannot both be false. Now it is clear that if there is another principle which expresses the fundamental condition of the possibility of any proposition taken by itself, without reference to others, this also must be regarded as a fundamental Law of Thought, and as being logically prior to the Laws of Contradiction and Excluded Middle. It is the aim of Miss Jones in the following pages to show that there is such a Law, and to exhibit in detail its vital importance in the treatment of the whole range of topics with which Formal Logic deals. This Law of “Significant Assertion” is formulated as follows:—*Every Subject of Predication is an identity (of denotation) in diversity (of intension)*. In other words, every affirmative proposition asserts, and every negative proposition denies, the union of different attributes within the unity of the same thing. In every affirmative proposition, the subject-term designates something as characterised in one way, and the predicate

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designates the same thing as characterised in another way. This Law of Significant Assertion is substituted by Miss Jones for the traditional Law of Identity, as expressed in the formula "*A is A*." "*A is A*," if it has any significance at all, must, she holds, be taken as an attempt to express the essential nature of all predication; but so regarded it is plainly untenable; for to say "*A is A*" is merely to say "*A*" twice, and not to assert anything about "*A*." There is no proposition, unless what is characterised as "*A*" in the subject-term is also characterised as "*B*" in the predicate-term.

The service which Miss Jones has rendered to Logic in this little volume lies not so much in the mere enunciation of the "Law of Significant Assertion" as in her thorough and systematic application of it, so as to clear up special logical problems. By way of illustration, I may refer to her discussion of the doctrine of "the fourfold implication of propositions in Connotation and Denotation," and to her account of immediate inferences, and of the syllogism. As regards syllogistic inference, it may be worth while to refer to a point which Miss Jones has not expressly noticed. The Law of Significant Assertion supplies the most direct, simple and general vindication of the syllogism against the charge of *petitio principii*. The charge is based on the fact that the conclusion asserts of the same thing the same predicate which has already been ascribed to it in the major premiss. The straightforward reply is, that in the conclusion this predicate is brought into connexion with an attribute with which it has not been connected in either of the premisses. *A*

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remarks to *B*, "That woman in the corner is a scare-crow." *B* replies, "Sir, that woman is my wife." For *A*, it is a startling novelty, and no mere repetition, to discover that he has called *B*'s wife a scare-crow. The novelty is plainly due to a new synthesis of attributes with the same denotation, the combination of the attribute of being *B*'s wife with that of being the woman whom *A* has just called a scare-crow.

Miss Jones seems to have made out a good case for regarding the Law of Significant Assertion as a fundamental Law of Thought. But its claim to be the only justifiable rendering of the Law of Identity is not so clear. The best writers on Logic tend to interpret this law as expressing the immutability of truth. According to them, it means that the truth of a proposition is unaffected by variation of time, place and circumstances, or of the minds which apprehend it. Either this principle, or, if the pragmatists be right, its contradictory, seems to demand recognition as a fundamental law of thought, and it is certainly a principle of Identity. But it is of course no substitute for the Law of Significant Assertion. The question which of the two is the most appropriate interpretation of the cryptic formula "*A is A*" is of quite subordinate interest.

G. F. STOUT.

ST ANDREWS.

*March, 1911.*

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