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Peijnenburg, J.; Schaar, M.S. van der; Moland, L.; Stone, A.

### **Citation**

Peijnenburg, J., & Schaar, M. S. van der. (2023). E. E. Constance Jones and the law of significant assertion. In L. Moland & A. Stone (Eds.), *Oxford Handbooks Series*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197558898.013.20

Version: Publisher's Version

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3645965>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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available

The Oxford Handbook of American and British Women Philosophers in the Nineteenth Century

(In Progress)

Lydia Moland (ed.), Alison Stone (ed.)

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197558898.001.0001>

Published: 2023

Online ISBN: 9780197558898

Print ISBN: 9780197558898

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CHAPTER

## E. E. Constance Jones and the Law of Significant Assertion

Jeanne Peijnenburg, Maria van der Schaar

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197558898.013.20>

Published: 18 September 2023

### Abstract

Emily Elizabeth Constance Jones (1848–1922), a Cambridge logician and Mistress of Girton College, is especially known for her *law of significant assertion*, with which she tries to escape Hermann Lotze’s skepticism about categorical propositions. Her first formulation of it dates from 1890, and several philosophers have pointed out the similarities with Gottlob Frege’s use of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* in 1891 and 1892. This chapter argues that there are also important differences from Frege’s approach, and that Jones’s discovery relies on the traditional distinction between extension and intension. Although Bertrand Russell did not think highly of Jones’s views, he seems to have felt the pressure to discuss them in his paper “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description” of 1911, where his criticism resembles the way he criticized Frege in “On Denoting” of 1905. The chapter surmises that Russell’s argument against Jones may be questionable, since it is based on an assumption that Frege makes, but that Jones rejects.

**Keywords:** [Emily Elizabeth Constance Jones](#), [extension](#), [intension](#), [identity](#), [difference](#), [Bertrand Russell](#), [Gottlob Frege](#)

**Subject:** [History of Western Philosophy](#), [Feminist Philosophy](#), [Philosophy](#)

**Series:** [Oxford Handbooks](#)

**Collection:** [Oxford Handbooks Online](#)

## 1. Introduction

Emily Elizabeth Constance Jones (1848–1922) was the seventh Principal of Girton College and an active member of the British philosophical community between 1885 and 1922. Starting her career relatively late in life, she worked mainly in ethics and philosophy of logic. In ethics, she explained and extended the utilitarianism of her mentor Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900), detecting its difficulties and making attempts to solve them. She became Sidgwick’s literary executor in 1900, and one year later she brought out the sixth edition of Sidgwick’s major work, *The Methods of Ethics*.

Her main achievements, however, lie in philosophy of logic and pertain to the nature of the proposition—here understood in the traditional sense as a meaningful declarative sentence. In 1890 she was the first to argue that, in the categorical propositions ‘S is P’ and ‘S is not P,’ both the subject term and the predicate term always have denotation as well as connotation, even if they are proper names. This led to her “law of significant assertion,” which antedates a similar discovery of Gottlob Frege (1891, 1892). According to the law of significant assertion, the proposition ‘S is (not) P’ conveys information because it affirms (negates) an identity of denotation in diversity of connotation. Jones saw it as a rebuttal of Hermann Lotze’s skepticism about categorical propositions, on which ‘S is P’ is either trivially true (saying no more than ‘S is S’ or ‘P is P’) or simply false.

After her death, Jones’s work was largely ignored, until many decades later Mary Ellen Waithe and Samantha Cicero drew attention to it in a pioneering paper, which was followed by Gary Ostertag’s instructive entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Waithe and Cicero 1995; Ostertag 2011/2020). One reason for this long-term neglect undoubtedly has to do with the new developments in logic that had been gaining ground shortly before Jones retired, and for which she, like most philosophers of her generation, lacked the technical background to appreciate their merit. Another reason may have been the uncompromising nature of the new logicians, notably Bertrand Russell, who advocated a radical break with the old school, not infrequently mocking its representatives. Yet several aspects of Jones’s work are surprisingly modern, even though they often remain sketchy and not thought through. In an obituary in *Mind*, G. F. Stout sagaciously praises her “remarkable flashes of insight” (1922, 384), and Ostertag talks about “remarkably prescient” observations that even anticipate Kripkean views (2011/2020, 9).

In this chapter we will restrict ourselves to Jones’s work in philosophy of logic.<sup>1</sup> After a brief biographical sketch in section 2, we turn in section 3 to her most important contribution—namely, the “new law of thought,” hailed by F. C. S. Schiller as “a great discovery,” but sneered at by Russell in a letter to Ottoline Morrell (Schiller 1912, 246; Russell 1992, 470). In section 4 we discuss a few important differences between Jones’s work and that of Frege, while in section 5 we elaborate on the relations between Jones and Russell.

## 2. Biographical Details

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Constance Jones was born on February 19, 1848, the eldest of ten children, in Langstone Court, a remote mansion in Herefordshire, close to the Welsh border. Her mother was Emily Edith Oakley, her father John Jones, an adventurous country doctor and a justice of the peace for the county of Hereford.

When she was thirteen years old, her father took the entire family with personnel to South Africa, only to return four years later. Until then, Constance had been homeschooled, but in 1866, she and three of her sisters were sent to a small boarding school near Cheltenham. The structured and peaceful school atmosphere befitted her bookish and eager-to-learn nature, and made her feel that “the world was put right for me, and I was put right with the world” (Jones 1922, 44). She stayed in Cheltenham a little over a year, calling it later “one of the most telling years of my life” (35).

The following years in Langstone Court were by contrast “rather chaotic” (Jones 1922, 44).<sup>2</sup> She read John Stuart Mill’s *A System of Logic* and Henry Fawcett’s *Manual of Political Economy*, which she had borrowed from a fellow student of her eldest brother. This instilled in her the wish to go to college, a privilege accorded, however, only to her brothers (44). She therefore welcomed the opportunity to live with a widowed and childless paternal aunt in Newton Lodge, four miles south of Langstone Court, who was kind enough to finance her further studies.

In 1875, Jones enrolled at Girton, Cambridge’s first women’s college, which had just moved into new premises on Huntingdon Road. She read Moral Sciences under Henry Sidgwick, James Ward, and John

Neville Keynes. How much she enjoyed this period is clear from her jubilant recall many years later: “This was, indeed, something which was worth while to have lived for. ... I was in a magic world of thought ... a new heaven and a new earth” (Jones 1922, 54). Although she had to miss several terms and even postpone her examination because her aunt required her presence (49–50), in 1880 she became the second Girton student to receive a First Class Tripos (the first was Charlotte Angas Scott, later a mathematics professor and head of department at Bryn Mawr College).

For the next four years Jones stayed at Newton Lodge, where her youngest sister, Parnell, had now joined the household. At the request of Sidgwick and Ward, she translated the last 784 pages of Lotze’s *Mikrokosmos*, left unfinished after the original translator had died in March 1882.<sup>3</sup>

In 1884, Jones was delighted when Girton invited her back after her aunt’s death. For the next thirty-two years she stayed at Girton as a resident lecturer in Moral Sciences (1884–1916), librarian (1890–1903), vice mistress (1896–1903), and mistress (1903–1916). She became a member of the Aristotelian Society in 1892, and between 1899 and 1906 was “the first, second, and third woman” to lecture for the Cambridge Moral Sciences Club (Senechal 2012, 53; cf. Pitt 1981, 117–118). Among her publications are *Elements of Logic as a Science of Propositions* (1890), *An Introduction to General Logic* (1892), *A Primer of Logic* (1905), *A Primer of Ethics* (1909), *A New Law of Thought and Its Logical Bearings* (1911), and many articles and reviews for *Mind*, the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, the *International Journal of Ethics*, and *The Cambridge Review*. Although Jones was by nature more a scholar than an administrator, her adaptability and high sense of duty enabled her to steer the college out of its financial difficulties to prosperity (Stephen 1933, 83–84; Ostertag 2011/2020, 4; Janssen-Lauret, In press, 13–14).

After her retirement in 1916, she moved with Parnell to a house in Weston-Super-Mare. There she worked on an autobiography and, at the suggestion of John McTaggart, a translation of G. W. F. Hegel’s *Wissenschaft der Logik*. Both were unfinished when she died on April 17, 1922.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. The Law of Significant Assertion

Jones saw her *law of significant assertion* as a solution to a problem that, in her view, was most clearly identified by Hermann Lotze (1817–1881). In his *Logic*, Lotze asks himself how exactly *S* and *P* are connected in the categorical proposition ‘*S* is *P*.’ After having considered several possibilities, he concludes that ‘*S* is *P*’ expresses the complete identity of *S* and *P* (Lotze [1874.] 1989a, sec. 51). This, however, deprives ‘*S* is *P*’ of all significance. It now coincides with the “barren” law of identity, saying no more than that ‘*S* is *S*’ and ‘*P* is *P*.’ As he puts it:

every predicate *P* which differs in any way whatever from *S* ... is entirely irreconcilable with it; every judgment of the form, ‘*S* is *P*,’ is impossible, and in the strictest sense we cannot get further than saying, ‘*S* is *S*’ and ‘*P* is *P*.’

(Lotze 1884, p. 60, sec. 55)

Jones agrees with Lotze that the ‘is’ in ‘*S* is *P*’ expresses identity. Yet she refuses to accept his skeptical conclusion that ‘*S* is *P*’ cannot be a significant assertion. Her major tool for finding a solution is to extend the traditional distinction between intension and extension.<sup>5</sup> In the influential Port-Royal Logic of 1662, this distinction had been restricted to general terms or ‘ideas.’ The intension (*comprehension*) of an idea is formed by the attributes which constitute the idea; the intension of ‘triangle,’ for example, includes the attributes of being a figure and consisting of three lines. The extension (*étendue*) is formed by the objects (*les sujets*) to which the term applies: the individual triangles.<sup>6</sup> Mill had argued that the distinction also applies to singular terms (‘my mastiff,’ ‘the father of Socrates’), albeit not to proper names. Irrespective of

whether they name something real (Napoleon) or imaginary (Ulysses), proper names only have denotation, not connotation (Mill [1843] 1874, p. 36, bk. 1, chap. 2, sec. 5). Jones goes further. Noting that sentences like ‘Tully is Cicero’ and ‘Courage is Valour’ can be informative, she maintains that all terms occurring in a subject or predicate position have both connotation and denotation, including proper names. Unfortunately, she does not explain in detail what the intensions of proper names look like, saying only that “circumstances are conceivable in which [this view] may be useful or new” (Jones 1893, 447).

Jones (1906–1907) then argues that Lotze’s problem arises because he takes *S* and *P* in connotation only: “[Lotze] defines categorical judgement as expressing ... a relation ... between the ... contents ... of two ideas” (91).<sup>7</sup> As a result, ‘*S* is *P*’ merely states that the intension of *S* is the same as the intension of *P*:

After an elaborate discussion, [Lotze] arrives ... at the statement that “the impossible judgment *S* is *P* resolves itself into three others, *S* is *S*, *P* is *P*, *S* is not *P*.” *S* is *P* “taken just as it stands” is “a contradictory and self-destructive form of expression.” Quite so, if *S* and *P* are taken in connotation only.

(Jones 1908b, 387, n.1; cf. Jones 1893, 450; Lotze 1884, 59, 89)

Much as Frege had attacked the nineteenth-century *Inhaltslogiker*, so Jones charges Lotze with “a thorough-going conceptualism” (Jones 1908b, cf. 1893–1894, 42; Lotze [1874] 1989a, sec. 36). And since she realizes that ‘*S* is *P*’ likewise loses its significance if *S* and *P* are taken in denotation only (Jones 1908b, 386; 1893, 452), she unwittingly echoes Frege’s criticism of George Boole as well. Jones stresses that both *S* and *P* have extension as well as intension, regardless of whether they involve general terms, definite descriptions, or proper names. Thus she arrives at her law of significant assertion, according to which ‘*S* is (not) *P*’ affirms (denies) the identity of the extensions of *S* and *P*, while the intensions are different: “A significant Categorical proposition ... may be defined as ... A Proposition which affirms (or negates) Identity of Denomination in Diversity of Determination” (Jones 1890, 46).<sup>8</sup> As Stout phrases it in the preface to Jones’s book of 1911, ‘*S* is *P*’ affirms “the union of different attributes [the intensions of *S* and *P*] within the unity of the same thing” (Jones 1911b, v). This rather rigid conception concerning the form of elementary propositions forces Jones to the position that the predicate term *P* is implicitly quantified (1911a, 44).

Jones presents her law of significant assertion as “a new law of logic,” which should replace the old law of identity, ‘*A* is *A*.’ It lies, however, at a deeper level than the identity law. While she understands the latter to be a logical truth about all objects, Jones’s new law has a transcendental status: it gives the conditions for the possibility of asserting something by means of a categorical proposition, “conditions without which knowledge itself seems impossible [and] could not be communicated” (1911b, 17). Given that we have knowledge and are able to communicate it, the law must be true. Jones calls her law “a kind of guiding principle” (1893–1894, 44), “a prior principle, explaining and justifying the *S* is *P* proposition itself” (1911b, 11). It captures her view that assertion is essential to logic, and as such declares ‘*S* is *S*’ not to be a genuine proposition, even though formally, it looks as much like a proposition as ‘*S* is *P*.’ The law of significant assertion is neither a logical law nor a meta-principle for forming a logical system, such as the principle of bivalence in classical logic. Rather, it is a condition for the possibility of logic as a science of logical laws and of propositions as the primary truth bearers (Jones 1890, 1–3).

Jones’s approach falls squarely within nineteenth-century logic: her logic teacher was Neville Keynes, and her frame of reference consisted of books by Mill, Jevons, Hamilton, Venn, De Morgan, Boole, Bradley, and Bain. Yet this should not blind us to those aspects of her work that are more germane to the twentieth-century analytic tradition. Her striking clarity of language, nonmetaphysical approach, and problem-driven outlook stand in stark contrast to the orotund wordiness with which some of her contemporaries expounded their metaphysical constructions. She clearly distinguishes between an *assertion* and *what is asserted*, where the former is made by a speaker who utters a sentence (‘The door is open’), and the latter is an objective

matter of fact (the door being open) that may or may not obtain (Jones 1911b, 70). Jones is a staunch and very early defender of the objectivity of logic. Already in her first book she emphasizes “the necessity of treating Logic as a non-psychological Science” (Jones 1890, vi), declaring: “Logic is *objective*, for it relates to *objects* of thought; *universal*, for it applies to *all* objects” (2). This is not quite the objective conception of logic that we know from Frege, as we will see in section 4. Nevertheless, her idea that the object of thought is independent of any mental process is exceptional in a time when logic was commonly seen as being about acts of reasoning and providing laws of thought. An unsigned review of her first book in *Science* may serve as illustration:

This book is a very ambitious, but ... very unsuccessful, attempt to reconstruct the science of logic. The author takes the ground that logic is an objective science, and not a branch of psychology, ... denying altogether that it is a science of reasoning.

(*Science* 1890, 178)

The latter is undoubtedly an exaggeration. Although Jones (1890) is breaking new ground by calling logic objective, she also writes: “As concerned with objects known, [logic] implies a knower” (2). Her interest in reasoning subjects is clear from her treatment of judgment and inference in terms of speaker and hearer. When a speaker has asserted the premises *M is P* and *S is M*, a hearer is entitled to conclude *S is P* (Jones 1911b, 22–23). The conclusion may be drawn mechanically, but the hearer may also be consciously aware of the fact that the inference is valid (Jones 1908a, 533–534). This concern for the different roles of hearer and speaker is quite unusual for her time and predates later developments in dialogical logic initiated by Paul Lorenzen, Kuno Lorenz, and Jaakko Hintikka (see, further, Jones 1911a, 42–43; 1911b, 58–60, 74–75; and 1908a, 534).

Jones considers logic as being “at bottom consistent with Common-sense” and even as “nothing but Common Sense” (Jones 1893, 454, n2; 1922, 72). Common sense also characterizes her own writings—a salient feature that sets her apart from many of her contemporaries, and which sits well with her “candour and straight-forward simplicity” (Stout 1922, 384). In philosophy, the use of common sense has typically a credit and a debit side: it may show that the emperor has no clothes, but it also might make us miss important subtleties. Both sides can be found in Jones’s work. Sometimes Jones sees right through an apparently convincing argument and exposes it in its true light; but sometimes she just appears to miss the point.<sup>9</sup>

## 4. Jones versus Frege

At first, it might seem that Jones’s distinction between intension and extension is the same as the one that Frege made between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. In his paper “Über Sinn und Bedeutung,” Frege raises the question why the sentence ‘*a = b*’ can be informative while ‘*a = a*’ is not. His answer resembles Jones’s identity-in-diversity view: if ‘*a = b*’ is true, then each of the two signs ‘*a*’ and ‘*b*’ refers to the same object, but corresponds to different ways in which the object is given to us; they have the same *Bedeutung*, but a different *Sinn* (Frege 1892, 26, 27; cf. Frege 1891, 14). Thus the question how identity judgments can be ‘significant’ (Jones) or have ‘cognitive value’ (Frege) seems to receive the same answer in both cases. What is more, Jones herself claims that her distinction is the same as Frege’s:

Prof. Frege’s general Analysis of Categoricals (published in 1892) ... is the same as mine. ... I could not feel sure that *any one* (until I became aware of Frege) did accept *precisely* my analysis.

(Jones 1915a, 61)<sup>10</sup>

Yet the two distinctions differ in important aspects. Frege's *Bedeutung* is not the same as Jones's extension, and his *Sinn* is not the same as Jones's intension.

The difference between *Bedeutung* and extension concerns both singular and nonsingular terms. For Jones, every singular term has an intension and an extension. Even empty terms like 'Ulysses' and 'the hunchback of Notre Dame' have extensions: the imaginary objects Ulysses and the hunchback of Notre Dame, which exist in a particular "Region of Supposition" or "Universe of Discourse" (Jones 1893, 453–455; 1893–1894, 39; 1910, 382; 1911b, 62–63). Frege's view is different. Although he stresses that in logic we need a *Bedeutung* for all our expressions, natural language allows for singular terms without a reference. 'Ulysses' might lack a reference, but this does not prevent us from understanding the story of the Odyssey, because we do grasp the sense of the name (Frege 1892, 32). When it comes to terms like 'Ulysses' or 'the round square,' Jones seems closer to Meinong (1904) and the early Russell ([1903] 1937): each singular term refers to an object, whether this object is actual, possible, or even impossible.

Regarding nonsingular terms, the translation of Frege's *Bedeutung* as 'reference' is not very helpful. To get the meaning of 'Bedeutung' here, we rather have to understand nonsingular terms as being essentially part of a sentence. For Frege, the *Bedeutung* of a sentence is the truth value of the thought that is expressed. The *Bedeutung* of an expression that is part of the sentence is its contribution to this truth value. In this sense, the *Bedeutung* of a sentence as a whole has priority over those of expressions occurring in the sentence. This goes for all partial expressions, but especially for predicates and logical terms such as negation and the existential quantifier. By contrast, Jones's notion of extension does not apply to sentences—nor does her notion of intension. Extension and intension pertain solely to subject and predicate terms. Furthermore, in contrast with Frege, Jones does not develop a semantics for logical expressions.

A striking difference between Jones and Frege concerns the semantics of general terms or predicate expressions. For Jones, their extension is simply a class, "the things to which the term applies" (Jones 1911b, 71, also see 12). These things "must exist in some sense or other," either in the actual world or in some universe of discourse, else we could not talk about them (Jones 1890, 87). For Frege, on the other hand, the *Bedeutung* of a one-place or many-place predicate expression is a concept or relation. The *Bedeutung* of the term 'gold,' more precisely, '... is golden,' is the concept "gold." Non-technically speaking, it is a property; technically, it is a function that gives for every golden thing the *true*; otherwise, it gives the *false* (Frege 1891, 15). The concept thus determines the extension (*Begriffsumfang*) of golden things, but cannot be identified with it. Extensions are objects, not concepts, and different concepts may determine the same extension (Frege 1895, 128, 129, 134; cf. 1891, 16).

Frege's notion of concept is objective, and should not be understood either subjectively or epistemically. Epistemic issues Frege captures by the *Sinn* of a term, which contains *die Art des Gegebenseins*: the way the *Bedeutung* is given to us. But although *Sinn* is primarily an epistemic notion, it is objective as well: it does not depend on time, space, language, or individual acts of thinking and judging. It is, however, not completely independent of reason (*Vernunft, Geist*). As Hans Sluga has shown, Frege's *Sinn* can be seen as broadening Lotze's notion of *Geltung*, which likewise is both objective and epistemic (Sluga 1980, 52–54). Lotze and Frege acknowledge a realm of *Geltung* or *Sinn*, separate from the empirical world, which is essential to their account of the objectivity of science and logic. It is this realm of reason that forms the foundation of Frege's and Lotze's anti-psychologism in logic.

Jones, too, endorses anti-psychologism in logic, as we saw in section 3, but of a different kind. Her intensions do not, like Fregean *Sinne*, reside in a realm of reason. They do not form a world of objective meanings, senses of expressions that are independent of the empirical world. Rather, they are objective properties of things in the empirical world, or of things existing in a region of supposition. As she writes: "Intension of a term means the properties of the things to which the term applies" (Jones 1911b, 71). Both Frege's *Sinne* and Jones's intensions are objective, but for a different reason. The former are objective

because they constitute a realm separate from the empirical world, the latter because they are properties in the actual or in an imaginary world. While Frege accounts for the objectivity of logic in terms of *Sinne* that impart the *Bedeutung*, Jones's account is in terms of properties, relations and individuals.

For Frege, we always think about an object through a *Sinn*; we only know things through the way they are given to us. This is precisely why *Sinn* plays such a central role for Frege in epistemic questions. Jones, by contrast, maintains that we may know the extension of a term, without knowing its intension (1911b, 13). Apparently, we may have some kind of epistemic access to the extension, without knowing anything about it. This further indicates how far Frege's *Sinn* is from Jones's notion of intension. Intensions are properties of things in the world; *Sinne* contain the ways in which objects, concepts, or relations are given to us.

Both Jones and Frege are indebted to Lotze when they raise the problem of how identity judgments can be informative. Already in his *Begriffsschrift* (1879), Frege defends a position similar to that of Lotze (see also Gabriel 1989, 12–35; Sluga 1980, 57). After having discussed the Kantian question how judgments such as ' $7 + 5 = 12$ ' can be both a priori and synthetic in the sense that they amplify our knowledge (Lotze [1874] 1989b, sec. 353), Lotze argues that ' $7 + 5$ ' and ' $4^2 - 2^2$ ' have the same content or value, but give us different ways to reach it. This explains the epistemic 'fruitfulness' of arithmetical judgments, but not why our knowledge of them is objective. To account for the latter point, Frege introduces his notion of *Sinn*, which is richer than Lotze's *Geltung*.

Like Frege's *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, Jones's use of intension and extension is a response to Lotze's problem. But as we have seen, there are important differences. Jones's distinction stands in the Port-Royal tradition, with which she must have been familiar through Mill's work. Frege's distinction, on the other hand, deviates from this tradition in important ways— notably, in its allowance for a special realm of reason (*Geltung*, *Sinn*), which is alien to Jones's approach.

## 5. Encounter with Russell

Bertrand Russell entered Trinity College in 1890 at age eighteen, reading first Mathematics and then Moral Sciences. Jones was forty-two, lecturing at Girton, and had just published her first book. Russell must have heard about Jones and her work at an early stage, for the two moved in similar circles. Russell's teachers were Ward and Stout, the former being Jones's erstwhile supervisor, the latter Jones's lifelong supporter and editor of *Mind* from 1892 until 1920. Both Russell and Jones were active in the Moral Sciences Club and the Aristotelian Society, and more than once, their papers appeared in the same issue of *Mind* or the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*.

Whereas for Jones, a proposition is a declarative sentence together with its meaning, for Russell, it is only the latter—an abstract entity. In *The Principles of Mathematics*, he argues that a sentence can guide us to the corresponding proposition, since the grammatical structure of the former reflects the logical structure of the latter, albeit in an imperfect and distorted way (Russell [1903] 1937, sec. 46). He is, however, reluctant to consider the constituents of a proposition as Fregean *Sinne* or *meanings* that denote the entities that the propositions are about (sec. 476). In 1903, Russell already dislikes the idea of an intermediate layer of meanings that refer to entities outside our minds. As he sees it, when we utter a sentence like 'Caesar conquered Gaul,' we are talking about Caesar, not about some idea of Caesar, or the meaning of 'Caesar.' This leads Russell to the view that the constituents in a proposition *are* the entities that the proposition is about, and thus that Caesar himself is contained in the proposition expressed by 'Caesar conquered Gaul.' This view is, of course, highly problematic, as Russell himself acknowledges. In 1903 he tries to solve these problems with his denoting phrases ('a woman,' 'the present king'), which express denoting concepts—that is, the constituents in a proposition that denote the entities the proposition is about. Ironically, denoting concepts have all the features of meanings, so Frege's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*

seems to return via the back door. In “On Denoting” Russell tries to reject Frege’s distinction in a different way (Russell 1905). Ordinary sentences no longer guide us to the logical structure of propositions, for this structure is now captured by sentences that draw on the protocol of a formal language. In this language, denoting phrases are analyzed away, so denoting concepts disappear as constituents of a proposition, and variables are introduced to “represent” the denotations, as Russell sometimes loosely puts it (1910–1911, 125).

Jones discusses “On Denoting” in her “Mr Russell’s Objections to Frege’s Analysis of Propositions” of 1910. Taking her own distinction between intension and denotation to be synonymous with Frege’s *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, she defends it against Russell’s criticism (Jones 1910, 382). On December 2, 1910, she delves more deeply into the matter when she presents a paper at the Moral Sciences Club, which would appear in print a month later (1911a). Russell reacts to Jones in the MSC meeting of March 3, 1911, by reading a paper that would become one of his most cited articles—namely, “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description” (Russell 1910–1911; Pitt 1981, 113). It is the first time that Russell refers to Jones in public.

Russell argues that “every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted” (1910–1911, 117). That is, we are in direct contact with those constituents, without the need for an intermediate level. Examples of such constituents are sense data, but also universals: we are acquainted with a particular yellow spot, but also with the universal *yellow*. We are, however, *not* acquainted with physical objects or with other persons. These things we only know by description, which is fully reducible to what we know by acquaintance. According to Russell, all philosophers who believe the distinction between meaning and denotation to be fundamental, and who take “identity of denotation” as a phrase that is not further analyzable, will fail to understand this. He sees Jones as a case in point.

Interestingly, Russell then attacks Jones with a regress argument that is very similar to the one he used in Russell (1905) to criticize Frege. In 1905 it appears as the notorious Gray’s elegy argument, but in 1910–1911 it is somewhat less intricate.<sup>11</sup> Consider the proposition ‘Scott is the author of Waverley.’ Here the meaning of ‘the author of Waverley’ is relevant. For if only denotation were relevant, ‘Scott is the author of Marmion’ would mean the same as ‘Scott is the author of Waverley,’ which is obviously not so.

Thus if we are to say, as Miss Jones does, that ‘Scott is the author of Waverley’ asserts an identity of denotation, we must regard the denotation of ‘the author of Waverley’ as the denotation of what is *meant* by ‘the author of Waverley.’ Let us call the meaning of ‘the author of Waverley’ *M*.

(Russell 1910–1911, 124)

On Jones’s theory, Russell argues, we go from ‘Scott is the author of Waverley’ to ‘Scott is the denotation of ‘the author of Waverley’ to ‘Scott is the denotation of what is *meant* by ‘the author of Waverley’ to ‘Scott is the denotation of *M*.’ However,

‘[t]he denotation of *M*,’ like ‘the author of Waverley,’ has both meaning and denotation, on the theory we are examining. If we call its meaning *M\**, our proposition becomes ‘Scott is the denotation of *M\**.’ But this leads at once to an endless regress (124).

Even if this regress is vicious, does the argument tell against Jones? That is not so clear. As he had done in attacking Frege’s theory, Russell assumes that on Jones’s theory, too, “the meaning denotes the denotation” (Russell 1905, 486). Without that assumption, it seems, his regress will not get off the ground. But while the assumption may be justified in Frege’s case, it is questionable whether it applies to that of Jones. The first thing to note is that, from an epistemological point of view, the phrase ‘meaning denotes the denotation’ is ambiguous. Does it say that all denotation is given through meaning, so that we cannot know the denotation without knowing the meaning? Or does it say that meaning implies denotation, so that

we cannot know the meaning without also knowing the denotation? Interestingly, Jones denies both. She holds that we may know the extension of a term without knowing its intension:

I know that metal in extension denotes gold, silver, copper, iron, lead, tin, mercury aluminium, etc., and know these when I see them, but I am not able to give a satisfactory statement of the intension which they have in common .... I may know ... all the inhabitants of a country parish and be able to greet them correctly by name when I meet them, but may be entirely unable to give a recognisable description of any of them.

(Jones 1911b, 13)

We may also know the intension of a term without knowing its extension:

I may have full descriptive knowledge of a person or plant or precious stone, and yet not be able to recognise the person or plant or jewel though it may much concern me to do so. I may even know much more about a person than his ordinary acquaintances ... and yet not know him when I meet him. (13)

In both cases, Jones is talking about general as well as singular terms, thereby deviating from the Port-Royal tradition, according to which the denotation of general terms is always mediated by the connotation.

In a reaction to Russell's criticism, Jones explicitly rejects the idea that meaning determines the denotation, but her argument does not involve the above quotations. Rather, she writes:

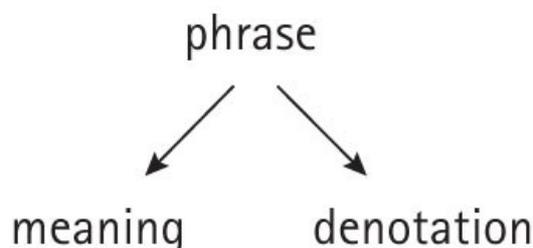
Mr. Russell explains my meaning to be that the denotation of *the author of Waverley* is the denotation of what is *meant* by *the author of Waverley*. But I do not accept this. Meaning, intension of *author*, is *authorship*; denotation of *author* is *person of whom authorship is an attribute*.

(Jones 1910–1911, 183)

Here Jones dismisses Russell's interpretation that, on her account, a phrase like 'the author of Waverley' expresses a meaning, which in turn determines the denotation:

phrase → meaning → denotation

Instead, she argues that 'the author of Waverley' expresses a meaning (*authorship*) and refers to a denotation (the person who wrote Waverley):



It is doubtful whether this difference cuts much ice.<sup>12</sup> Yet the point remains that Jones denies that meaning denotes denotation.

There is no indication that Russell took particular notice of all the differences between Frege and Jones that we spelled out in the previous section. On the contrary, the fact that he uses the same regress argument against both of them indicates that he places Jones's distinction between connotation and denotation on a

par with Frege's *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. Then why is it that, whereas his references to Frege are abundant, it is not until March 1911 that he mentions Jones's work, presumably under pressure as well?<sup>13</sup> About the answers we can only speculate. True, Jones seems to have embodied everything that Russell loathed. The old Aristotelian logic that forms the very foundation of Jones's work, Russell repudiates as "trivial nonsense" and "solemn humbug" that "put thought in fetters" (1914, 127, 144). Moreover, while Russell was an unmitigated atheist, Jones was deeply religious, albeit in an open-minded and tolerant way, typically ruling Girton "by example, not diktat" (Senechal 2012, 49, 53). Dora Black, who studied at Girton and later married Russell, remembers Jones as an "exceedingly ladylike" Victorian don (D. Russell 1975, 35); and Jones indeed held Victorian values dear that Russell, with characteristic *esprit*, had ostentatiously abandoned. Last but not least, there was a big difference between Russell and Jones regarding politics. This became especially manifest during World War I: while Russell was vigorously campaigning for pacifism, Jones gave an interview to the Lincolnshire Star (1915) about how "the Girton girl" could do her part in the war and thereafter.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, all these differences do not explain Russell's disregard of Jones. There are many examples of Russell crossing swords with philosophical, religious, or political antagonists (see also Ostertag 2011/2020, 18). Why not Jones? It seems clear that Russell found her work to be too conventional and to stand in the way of a new logic. Perhaps he saw her identity-in-diversity view and her distinction between connotation and denotation as being little different from traditional ideas. In this he may have been right, as we have seen. But then it is puzzling that, apparently, he considered her approach substantial enough to be criticized with the same regress argument that he had employed against Frege.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

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To summarize, Constance Jones was Mistress of Girton College and a prominent member of the British philosophical community around 1900, working mostly in logic. After her death in 1922, Jones's contributions fell into oblivion until Waithe and Cicero (1995) and Gary Ostertag (2011/2020) drew attention to them. Although Jones's work on logic is firmly anchored in nineteenth-century syllogistics, it foreshadows twentieth-century analytic philosophy in its remarkable clarity of language, problem-driven approach, and in its claim that logic is objective.

Jones's main discovery is the law of significant assertion, according to which ' $S$  is  $P$ ' is significant if and only if the subject term  $S$  and the predicate term  $P$  have the same extension and different intensions. Several philosophers, including Jones herself, have stressed the similarities between this idea and Frege's use of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. In this chapter, however, we have concentrated on the differences, notably between Frege's *Sinn* and Jones's notion of intension, arguing that Jones's approach is closer to the Port-Royal tradition. In addition, we discussed the fact that Russell in 1911 criticized Jones by means of a regress argument that is similar to the one he used in 1905 against Frege. We surmised that the argument may be effective in the case of Frege, but that it is doubtful whether it works against Jones.

## Acknowledgments

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We gratefully acknowledge the help of Frank Bowles, André De Tienne, Richard Jones, Gary Ostertag, Trevor Pearce, Matilda Watson, and Hannah Westall.

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## Notes

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- 1 Her ethical work is set down in Jones (1894, 1894–1895, 1895a, 1895b, 1901, 1903–1904, 1917–1918). Ostertag (2011/2020, sec. 7) and Ostertag and Favia (2021) discuss Jones's approach to Sidgwick's problem of how to reconcile in practical reason two principles—namely, self-interest and duty to others.
- 2 Richard C. B. Jones (b. 1953), grandson of Constance's youngest sibling, Richard E. Jones (1860–1937), recalls a family story about "much drunken rowdiness" at Langstone, although it is not clear when exactly that took place (R. Jones 2021). He writes that in 1881 the house was home to ten adults (Constance's parents, six of their children, and two servants), which, even for a spacious manor house like Langstone, is a lot of people.
- 3 The original translator was Elizabeth Hamilton, daughter of the logician William Hamilton, not to be confused with the Elizabeth Hamilton who lived from 1758 to 1816, and who is the subject of chapter 1 in this volume, authored by Claire Grogan.
- 4 Her autobiography (Jones 1922) was published by Parnell. The Hegel translation, of which she drafted the first fifty pages, was completed by W. H. Johnston and L. G. Struthers and appeared in 1929.
- 5 Instead of "intension" and "extension," Jones also uses "connotation, signification, determination, whatness" and "denotation, denomination, thatness." Here we will use the terms interchangeably, ignoring the small differences of meaning to which she sometimes refers.
- 6 Arnauld and Nicole ([1662] 1993, 59; part 1, chap. 6; English translation, pp. 39–40). In the Port-Royal Logic the extension includes the different subspecies of a general idea; furthermore, no conceptual distinction is made between the genus-species relation and the species-object relation. Generally speaking, these two points are not part of the tradition following the Port-Royal Logic.
- 7 Jones believes that Mill, despite coming close to a correct analysis, likewise "placed disproportionate stress on connotation" (Jones 1911a, 49; see also 1908a, 531).
- 8 In her early work, Jones states that comparable ideas were defended by Mansel, Mill, De Morgan, Jevons, Venn (Jones 1893–1894, 35), and Bradley and Bosanquet (Jones 1890, 49–50). The latter two may have been inspired by Hegel's ideas on identity and difference in *The Science of Logic*, notably, pt. 1, bk. 2, sec. 1, chap. 2, A. ("The Identity"), annotation 2. Later, when Jones is in her sixties and has learned about Frege, she repeatedly states that what she meant was most accurately expressed by him. We come back to Frege in the next section.

- 9 An example of the former is her observation that a supposedly devastating argument by Russell hinges on an ambiguity (Waithe and Cicero 1995, 42; Ostertag 2011/2020, 30). An illustration of the latter is her treatment of Lewis Carroll's barbershop paradox (Jones 1894, 436–438). This paradox involves an argument that seems right but is in fact wrong, and Jones thinks she has solved it by rewriting the argument “in a series of propositions asserting identity-in-diversity” (1911b, 53; see also 1905). However, this rewriting only tells us what we already know—namely, *that* the argument is wrong, not *why* it is wrong. As was noticed by both Russell and W. E. Johnson, it is wrong because of the false assumption that  $\neg C \rightarrow (\neg A \rightarrow B)$  and  $\neg C \rightarrow (\neg A \rightarrow \neg B)$  are incompatible, and that therefore *C* must be true.
- 10 She makes similar remarks in Jones (1911a, 49); (1911b, 1, 12); (1922, 72).
- 11 The similarity between the two regress arguments is often acknowledged, but not the fact that in 1905 the target is Frege, whereas in 1910–1911 it is Jones. Apparently, of the many people who studied “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description,” few, if any, took the trouble to look into the views of the “Miss Jones” who is discussed there. Worse, sometimes for “Jones” one simply reads “Frege,” even though Frege's name does not appear in Russell's paper (for example, Blackburn and Code 1978, 74, n.1).
- 12 Moreover, as Gary Ostertag (pers. comm.) noted, even if the meaning of “author” were *authorship* and its denotation the set of persons of whom authorship is an attribute, it would not follow that the denotation is not determined by the meaning.
- 13 A number of people had remarked that Frege's distinction was similar to that of Jones. Russell's former student Philip Jourdain had brought up the resemblance in a letter to Russell of August 28, 1909; for Russell's evasive reply, see Waithe and Cicero (1995, 40); and Ostertag (2011/2020, 18). Two years later, Augusta Klein referred to “a theory expressed first by Miss Constance Jones ... and, a little later, by Prof. Frege,” declaring: “An affirmative categorical proposition, says Prof. Frege, asserts identity of *Bedeutung* with difference of *Sinn*; and Miss Jones has long maintained that it asserts identity of Application with difference of Intension” (1911, 521).
- 14 In February 1915, Russell and Jones engaged in a controversy over the war in *The Cambridge Review*. Sharing the majority view that the war would be short, Russell published “Can England and Germany Be Reconciled after the War?” on February 10 (Russell 1915). He lambasts the arrogance of both the German and English rulers, in whom pride and lust for world dominion have destroyed humanity, and advocates the establishment of an international navy. In a letter to the editor, Jones takes issue with Russell's criticism of the English leaders, arguing that aspiration after peace “should be in no way mixed up with insinuations imputing dishonesty or incompetence to our Government” (Jones 1915b, 201). She challenges Russell to bring his proposal about an international navy “into the sphere of practical politics,” and even seems to accuse him in veiled terms of being unpatriotic: “It looks as though an international navy were suggested for the especial hampering of England” (1915b, 201–202). Russell's reply to Jones appeared in *The Cambridge Review* of February 24 (Russell 1988, 85).