

**MR3526225** 03-02 03A05 03A10

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★**Frank Ramsey and the realistic spirit.**

History of Analytic Philosophy.

*Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2015. xv+270 pp. ISBN 978-1-137-35107-4*

Frank P. Ramsey was certainly one of the most gifted thinkers of the 20th century. He was interested in a wide variety of fields, including politics, economics, literature, and, of course, mathematics and philosophy. Were it not for his untimely death at the age of only 26, Ramsey very likely would have become a central figure in 20th-century philosophy, on a par with the likes of M. A. E. Dummett, W. V. O. Quine, or Ludwig Wittgenstein. Since he published only a handful of articles on diverse issues in philosophy, mathematics, mathematical logic, and economics, Ramsey's substantial influence on a variety of discussions, particularly in analytic philosophy, is all the more remarkable. It therefore seems justified to ask whether his philosophical *oeuvre* contains some kind of *leitmotiv*. In this book, the author aims to do just that and to provide a narrative that is supposed to “uncover a systematicity in [Ramsey's] work [that] will contribute towards a reawakening of interest in this great philosopher” (p. 237).

The first chapter of the book is mainly concerned with Ramsey's “General propositions and causality” (GP&C) from 1929 [in *The foundations of mathematics and other logical essays*, 237–255, Kegan Paul, London, 1931; reprint, Int. Libr. Psychol. Philos. Sci. Method, Littlefield/Adams, Paterson, NJ, 1960; [MR0120155](#)]. Ramsey's article deals with the interpretation of what he calls ‘variable hypotheticals’, essentially generalizations over infinite domains. But the author's main goal in this chapter is to elucidate what he thinks is the key to a proper understanding of Ramsey's fundamental philosophical outlook, namely its ‘realistic spirit’. It is hard to pin down what exactly is meant by this term. Indeed, GP&C is the only occasion where Ramsey himself mentions it. In contrast to contemporary usage, the term is explicitly contrasted with certain forms of realism which “must be rejected by the realistic spirit” (GP&C, cited on p. 15). According to the author, Ramsey thinks that “philosophy seeks to clarify our thought and our language, to turn us into better speakers and thinkers” (p. 24). Philosophizing in the ‘realistic spirit’ is opposed to (some forms of) realism because of the latter's tendency to postulate entities “which go beyond what is required to account for the philosophical data” (p. 35). Methodologically speaking, philosophy in the ‘realistic spirit’ is concerned with giving “explicatory definitions” (p. 24) which respect a “parsimonious attitude to ontology” (p. 35). In the following chapters, the author tries to further elaborate on this and to identify specific themes in Ramsey's work where the ‘realistic spirit’ makes its presence felt.

In Chapters 2 and 3, the author discusses the empiricist (G. Berkeley and B. A. W. Russell) and pragmatist (C. S. Peirce) influences on Ramsey's thinking. The third chapter contains an extensive discussion of Ramsey's views on logic, probabilistic reasoning, and rationality vis-à-vis Peirce's views, emphasizing Ramsey's criticism of Peirce that some of his idealizations are ‘unrealistic’.

The remainder of the book is almost exclusively concerned with Ramsey's views in relation to those of Wittgenstein. In Chapter 4, the author discusses some of the basic ideas contained in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (TLP) [English translation, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1922; JFM 48.1128.13] and the way in which

they shaped Ramsey's thinking. Based on this, the author extends his discussion to Ramsey's views on truth, meaning, belief, and representation in Chapters 5 and 6. Specific attention is paid to Ramsey's theory of judgement, which was meant to improve on conceptions held by G. F. L. Frege, Russell, and, of course, Wittgenstein.

In Chapters 7, 8, and 9, the author discusses Ramsey's views on the foundations of logic and mathematics, specifically his plan to develop a "Tractarian logicism", which the author describes as an "ultimately unwholesome hybrid of the logicism of *Principia* [A. N. Whitehead and B. Russell, *Principia mathematica. Vol. I*, second edition, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 1925; JFM 51.0046.06] and the logical insights of *TLP*" (p. 173). For scholars interested in the philosophical significance of some of the technical ideas contained in Wittgenstein's *TLP* (in particular, concerning quantification and identity), as well as Ramsey's take on these ideas, these will probably be the most insightful chapters. Chapter 8 contains a discussion of Ramsey's engagement with the *Entscheidungsproblem*. The author suggests that "the resources required for establishing a positive answer to the *Entscheidungsproblem* for even a relatively modest class of sentences can have come only as a sharp shock" (p. 213) for Ramsey. According to the author, this shock might (at least in part) be responsible for Ramsey's eventual dismissal of some of the core Tractarian doctrines and his turn to finitism. The final chapter is devoted to identifying Ramsey's specific influence on the 'second Wittgenstein', an influence that was explicitly acknowledged by Wittgenstein himself. The focus here is on Wittgenstein's earlier conception of generality (universally quantified propositions as infinite conjunctions) and his implicit "commitment to the coherence of the notion of an infinite process or operation which is nonetheless completed" (p. 223), which Ramsey couldn't reconcile with the 'realistic spirit' and which was rejected by the later Wittgenstein (p. 225). The author concludes the book by discussing "admittedly speculatively" (p. 230) an outlook on Ramsey's possible influence on the later Wittgenstein's considerations concerning normativity and rule-following.

The book is a welcome contribution to the history of analytic philosophy, a field that has been thriving in recent times. Obviously the author is very knowledgeable in the history of the analytic tradition. The book is written in a clear and concise style, which is all the more remarkable given its content, which tends to be elusive at times. It is full of interesting discussions, and the author is careful in paying attention to details. It should be noted that the book is not an introduction to Ramsey's work, and a certain amount of familiarity with central concepts and doctrines of Ramsey himself as well as those of others (especially Russell, Frege, and Wittgenstein) is assumed.

One minor point of criticism concerns the somewhat excessive space that is given to Wittgenstein. Given the influence that Ramsey and Wittgenstein had on each other, and given Wittgenstein's influence on the subsequent development of analytic philosophy, it is understandable that his views occupy considerable room in a book on Ramsey. But it seems to me that the author might have overdone it a bit. Instead, he maybe could have used the space to point out connections to contemporary discussions. However, in light of the stated aims of the book, this should not even be taken as a criticism proper, but more as an expression of personal taste on the reviewer's part. In any case, this point should not distract from the great achievement which this book is. It is an excellent contribution to the history of analytic philosophy, and I recommend it to everyone interested in this field.

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