

his discussion of mystical states, are more sophisticated and more cautious than has previously been recognized. Although in identifying his own 'over-beliefs' James clearly inclines toward the religious hypothesis, his aim in the closing chapters of *Varieties* is not to validate this hypothesis but to offer 'a theoretical explanation of how individuals might subjectively experience a presence that they take to be an external power, when such is not necessarily the case' (62). Taves contends that James' attention to similarities between religious and non-religious phenomena, his avoidance of descriptive reductionism, and his appreciation of the fragmentary nature of selfhood are features of his thought from which contemporary theorists of religion can still learn. Together with the other essays collected here, hers is likely to generate continuing interest in James' seminal study.

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Nils-Eric Sahlin, ed.

Ramsey's Ontology.

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Theses regarding the ultimate nature of things constituted an essential starting point on the basis of which Frank Ramsey formulated his ideas, and an integral part of his worldview. An at least general knowledge of such theses is thus one key element to a proper understanding of the contributions he made to a vast range of subjects. However, not much can be found in the literature that fosters the study of Ramsey's ontological positions. This collection of essays goes some way towards filling this gap. It is surely not a comprehensive overview of Ramsey's ontology, but it offers some interesting interpretative suggestions and critical analyses.

The starting point, and the theme around which most of the collection revolves, is Ramsey's criticism of the distinction between particulars and universals as an unwarranted ontological conclusion derived from linguistic practice, which he formulated in his 'Universals' (1925). This doesn't come as a surprise, since this is one of the most renowned of Ramsey's essays, and perhaps the only one that has an overtly ontological 'flavour'.

In the first contribution, Maurin and Sahlin examine this paper and, following a suggestion of Mellor's, claim that Ramsey's argument is best understood as a means to avoid Bradley's classical 'relation regress' (the reader is offered here a useful analysis of what distinguishes vicious from

non-vicious infinite regresses.) By denying any intrinsic difference between universals and particulars, that is, Ramsey allegedly avoids an apparently inevitable proliferation of intermediate entities that the existence of such a distinction would entail. This, Maurin and Sahlin maintain, implies that 'Universals' must be interpreted as suggesting a fact ontology, that is, that *'the world is a world of facts'* (13).

However, Maurin and Sahlin go on to argue, a fact ontology fails to steer clear of Bradley's regress, for as soon as we try to distinguish between the internal constituents of facts and/or between facts, the 'infiltration' of an infinite series of relations immediately occurs again. Indeed, if there is anything like the regress formulated by Bradley, it points towards the necessity of a conception of reality as a Parmenidean unchangeable 'One' (27).

In his complex and rich paper, Hochberg goes back one step and criticizes Ramsey's very attempt to deflate the ontological distinction between particulars and universals. He focuses on the fact that, throughout his analysis, Ramsey appears to assume the concept of 'predicable', that is, of what can be predicated of something else as its subject (32), so implicitly employing exactly the distinction he intends to reject. Not only does one have to *acknowledge an intrinsic asymmetry between what is predicable and what is not*: being predicable is simply not a purely linguistic feature. It coincides with the ontological asymmetry between what is repeatable ('multiply instantiable'), and what is not (39). Curiously, Hochberg doesn't say much on the crucial ontological notion of multiple instantiability, preferring to focus on the — prevalently linguistic — concept of predicability.

In a more sympathetic article, McBride defends Ramsey's argument from the allegedly lethal objection, first formulated by Aristotle, to the effect that only qualities can be negated, i.e., only properties have equally real contraries. He first distinguishes an ontological and a weaker, merely linguistic, interpretation of Ramsey's thesis, and shows that the Aristotelian 'dictum' is certainly ineffective, by itself, against the former, which is nevertheless what Ramsey really aimed to convey. Moreover, McBride convincingly argues that in its weaker version too Ramsey's thesis can be secured against Aristotle-like criticisms. He shows that Dummett misinterprets Ramsey's arguments, failing to correctly understand the basic point formulated in 'Universals': namely, that there is no reason to claim that names are less incomplete than predicates and, if they are not, then ontology remains underdetermined by language, and it is consequently perfectly possible to formulate a language in which subjects can in fact be negated (70). Also Geach, who appears to offer clear-cut logical arguments against the possibility of negating subjects, is shown to only demonstrate that one cannot negate subjects and accept conjunctive predicates at the same time (80); which of these two things to presuppose and make an integral part of one's language-structure, though, remains an open choice.

In his contribution, Koslow comments on an unpublished paper read by Ramsey in 1922, in which two basic interconnected ideas are presented — first, that the world is simple and there are no complexes, and second that

truth is an incomplete symbol. To provide support to the first claim, Ramsey argues against the existence of complex properties, complex propositions (as they appear, most notably, in probability calculus) and complex beliefs. More importantly, he denies that there are facts (91): facts too are complexes that can be reduced to more elementary parts (i.e., subjects instantiating properties or relations holding between individuals). This constitutes the bridge from the simplicity thesis to Ramsey's other central conclusion in the paper, namely that regarding truth: since there are no facts, truth cannot be correspondence between these and propositions, and the most plausible way of understanding it is as an incomplete symbol which is different from, but equivalent to, the identity function.

It is worth noting that Koslow's reconstruction, based as it is on the claim that facts do not exist as primitive entities, appears to directly contradict Maurin and Sahlin's interpretation of 'Universals' as relying upon (or naturally tending towards) a fact ontology. Despite the latter's claim that this shouldn't worry us, for 'at different times of his life, Ramsey tried our different positions' (13), the reader is left wondering whether this is really the case or, instead, a more consistent position can be attributed to Ramsey. It would certainly be interesting to know more about this issue.

In the last short piece, Sahlin and Kasá Palmé discuss Ramsey's well-known suggestion that scientific theories should be formulated as sentences in which the unobservable entities appear as existentially bound variables (the so-called 'Ramsey-sentences'). They clarify that, despite the use they are sometimes put to (as ways to avoid realist commitment to unobservables), Ramsey-sentences were not so intended by Ramsey, who was rather an opponent of reductive empiricism, and actually brought them into play with a view to specifying the sort of ontological commitment beyond what we are directly acquainted with that theories force upon us. The core of the paper is then devoted to showing that in dynamical contexts, based upon 'experimental semantics', there is no unique way of 'Ramseifying' a theory.

Overall, *Ramsey's Ontology* certainly provides some stimulating discussions of central themes of the Cambridge philosopher's ontological views. However, a good amount of previous knowledge is assumed, and on some issues (most patently, whether or not Ramsey endorsed a fact ontology), suggestions are given that go in opposite directions. Considering this, and also the book's limited length, the collection would have certainly benefited from a short critical introduction offering some background to the material and defining some sort of 'guiding thread' for the reader to follow. At any rate, *Ramsey's Ontology* does represent an interesting initial step towards a better knowledge of both an author and an area of philosophy that deserve more attention.

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