

REVIEW

FRANK PLUMPTON RAMSEY

Notes on Philosophy, Probability and Mathematics

Edited by Maria Carla Galavotti

Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1991

E.J. Lowe

Department of Philosophy

University of Durham

This is an edited volume of notes, nearly all of them hitherto unpublished, taken from the collection of F.P. Ramsey's manuscripts held in the Hillman Library of the University of Pittsburgh. In all it includes 84 items, together with an Appendix consisting of a letter from Wittgenstein to Ramsey and two drafts of a reply to it by Ramsey. (Wittgenstein's letter concerns the view of identity expressed by Ramsey in 'The Foundations of Mathematics' and is dated 2 July 1927; it has been published in full before, in L. Wittgenstein, *Briefe*, edited by B. McGuinness and G.H. von Wright (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp [1980]).) The items are not printed in chronological order (partly because the exact dates of some of them are unknown): rather, they have been loosely organised by the editor on a thematic basis. Thus, for example, items 48 to 54 concern the philosophy of mathematics and items 68 to 77 concern induction and probability. Grouped together at the end, as items 78 to 84, are seven papers which Ramsey read to the Apostles Society in Cambridge. One of these, an imaginary conversation with John Stuart Mill, is particularly charming. Some of the items are much more finished than others. Many of them lack titles. They vary considerably in length, from a few lines to several pages. The collection is preceded by a useful introduction by the editor, putting the various items into their philosophical and historical context and identifying which of them have been published elsewhere.

Of course, Ramsey's most important papers, both of those published during his own lifetime and of those found amongst his manuscripts after his death, have already been published in other collections, first of all in *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays*, edited by R.B. Braithwaite (London, Kegan Paul [1931]), and subsequently in two volumes edited by D. H. Mellor: *Foundations: Essays in Philosophy, Logic, Mathematics and Economics* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul [1978]) and *Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press [1990]). The contents of

these three volumes differ in minor respects, helpfully detailed by the editor of the present volume in her introduction. Undoubtedly, the present collection is a useful extension to Ramsey's work available in print, though it will probably be of more value to historians of philosophy than to philosophers interested in Ramsey's ideas purely for their own sake. The editor freely acknowledges that '[t]hose who approach these notes expecting to discover radically new aspects of Ramsey's philosophy will be disappointed' (p. 26). Nils-Eric Sahlin, in his *The Philosophy of F.P. Ramsey* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press [1990]), expresses doubt as to whether Ramsey himself would have agreed to publish much of the material contained in the Pittsburgh collection, apart from the papers that have already been published by Braithwaite and Mellor. Even so, there are undoubtedly some hitherto hidden minor gems in the present volume. Reading it through from start to finish forcibly bears in upon one the poignancy of Ramsey's early death and the tragic loss to philosophy of his penetrating intellect. The editorial standard is high, with Ramsey's crossings out and corrections carefully recorded. Very usefully, full bibliographic details are given of works referred to by Ramsey. There seem to be very few typographical errors. My only criticism concerns the index, which is of names only; a subject index would have been quite useful.