

MARÍA J. FRÁPOLLI (ed.) F. P. Ramsey: Critical Reassessments. London and New York: Continuum, 2005. x + 262pp. £65.00. ISBN 0-8264-7600-7.

Reviewed by

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In her preface to this collection of 11 new essays on Ramsey, Frápolli clarifies the non-historical orientation of the volume: ‘Our way of honoring Ramsey has been to think with him and, wherever possible, to go beyond that, putting his ideas to work and seeing how far they can reach’ (ix). This certainly makes sense for the topics of many of these essays, building as they do on Ramsey’s rich contributions to economics and reliabilist epistemology as well as on his suggestive proposals about truth, pragmatism and the content of scientific theories. Unfortunately, such an orientation leads to mixed results for the four essays that squarely focus on Ramsey’s philosophy of logic and mathematics. Here Ramsey’s contemporary significance is more debatable and the most fertile mathematical innovation that Ramsey offered, namely ‘Ramsey theory’, is not noted by the contributors to this volume.¹

Ulrich Majer’s ‘Ramsey’s Removal of Russell’s ‘Axiom of Reducibility’ in the Light of Hilbert’s Critique of Russell’s Logicism’ argues that Hilbert would not have considered Ramsey’s strategy for eliminating the axiom of reducibility from *Principia Mathematica* to be successful. This conclusion is based on a helpful summary of Hilbert’s serious study and eventual disillusionment with *Principia* by the summer of 1920. Hilbert complained that the axiom of reducibility was an abandonment of the

¹ An accessible discussion of the logical significance of Ramsey theory is offered by G. Boolos, J. Burgess and R. Jeffrey, *Computability and Logic* (Fourth edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ch. 26.

logician foundational strategy and Majer argues that similar misgivings would have applied to Ramsey's approach in 'Foundations of Mathematics'. While this is no doubt correct, what is missing from Majer's essay is any discussion of the broader interactions between the Hilbert school and Russellian approaches to foundations, most notably in the work of Behmann.²

Gabriel Sandu's 'Ramsey and the Notion of Arbitrary Function' is also somewhat unsatisfying, although for different reasons. Sandu builds on his widely criticized proposal that Frege lacked the modern concepts of arbitrary functions and sets by tracing how Ramsey was able to articulate such a concept in opposition to Russell's supposedly 'definabilist style' (247) in *Principia*. Even though Ramsey criticizes Russell's notion of class as being overly limited for just this reason, it is not at all clear that Ramsey is right and Sandu does not do enough to clarify these charges. A final frustration is that Sandu rejects Ramsey's analysis of the axiom of infinity, but also explicitly denies that he will discuss the key presupposition of this analysis, i.e. Ramsey's view of identity.

Colin Howson is more successful in 'Ramsey's Big Idea' in explaining how Ramsey's conception of probability is linked to his philosophy of logic. Reacting to the failures of Keynes' attempt to interpret probability in terms of logical relations of partial entailment, Ramsey 'believed that there was an authentically logical interpretation of the laws of probability ... [as] *consistency constraints on the distribution of partial belief*' (145). Howson is clearly sympathetic with this influential 'big idea', and rounds out his essay by suggesting an amendment that abandons Ramsey's restrictive behaviorist approach to psychological states.

² P. Mancosu, 'The Russellian Influence on Hilbert and His School', *Synthese* 137 (2003), 59-101.

The last essay that I will discuss is Hans-Johann Glock's 'Ramsey and Wittgenstein: Mutual Influences'. While it is fairly obvious that Wittgenstein influenced Ramsey, it is less clear how discussions with Ramsey and Ramsey's writings may have affected Wittgenstein's own thinking about logical and mathematical topics. Glock recounts the somewhat acrimonious nature of their personal interactions and Ramsey's attempt to refashion Tractarian doctrines about tautologies, identity and general propositions into an adequate philosophy of mathematics. Interestingly enough, it appears that both Ramsey's and Wittgenstein's conception of mathematics changed dramatically in 1929-1930, where Glock suggests a shared flirtation with finitism. Still, it remains unclear exactly what or whom initiated this shift.

While the discussions of Ramsey's work on logic and mathematics in this volume are not the final word, then, they do at least highlight the need for a thorough reevaluation of Ramsey's place in the history of twentieth century philosophy of logic and mathematics.