HISTORY OF ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

FRANK RAMSEY AND THE REALISTIC SPIRIT

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Seriors Editors' Foreword

During the first half of the 20th century, analytic philosophy gradually established itself as the dominant tradition in the English-speaking world, and over the last few decades, it has taken firm root in many other parts of the world. There has been increasing debate over just what 'analytic philosophy' means, as the movement has ramified into the complex tradition that we know today, but the influence of the concerns, ideas and methods of early analytic philosophy on contemporary thought is indisputable. All this has led to greater self-consciousness among analytic philosophers about the nature and origins of their tradition, and scholarly interest in its historical development and philosophical foundations has blossomed in recent years, with the result that the history of analytic philosophy is now recognised as a major field of philosophy in its own right.

The main aim of the series in which the present book appears, the first series of its kind, is to create a venue for work on the history of analytic philosophy, consolidating the area as a major field of philosophy and promoting further research and debate. The 'history of analytic philosophy' is understood broadly as covering the period from the last three decades of the 19th century to the start of the 21st century, beginning with the work of Frege, Russell, Moore and Wittgenstein, who are generally regarded as its main founders, and the influences upon them, and going right up to the most recent developments. In allowing the 'history' to extend to the present, the aim is to encourage engagement with contemporary debates in philosophy – for example, in showing how the concerns of early analytic philosophy relate to current concerns. In focusing on analytic philosophy, the aim is not to exclude comparisons with other – earlier or contemporary – traditions or consideration of figures or themes that some might regard as marginal to the analytic tradition but which also throw light on analytic philosophy. Indeed, a further aim of the series is to deepen our understanding of the broader context in which analytic philosophy developed, by looking, for example, at the roots of analytic philosophy in neo-Kantianism or British idealism, or the connections between analytic

philosophy and phenomenology, or by discussing the work of philosophers who were important in the development of analytic philosophy but who are now often forgotten.

Frank P. Ramsey (1903–1930) was a mathematician and philosopher whose brilliance easily rivalled that of Russell and Wittgenstein, whose ideas, in particular, he sought to clarify, correct and extend in his own creative work. Had he not tragically died at the early age of just 26, he may well have made an even greater contribution to the development of analytic philosophy than any of its four acknowledged main founders. Born in Cambridge, Ramsey entered Trinity College in 1920 to read mathematics and became a fellow of King's College in 1924. He helped C.K. Ogden translate Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and published an insightful review of it in Mind in 1923. He subsequently wrote a number of papers in mathematics, logic, philosophy and economics that have proved seminal in their respective fields. A collection of his papers was published, posthumously, in 1931 (The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays), and a revised edition, with both additions and deletions, appeared in 1978 (Foundations: Essays in Philosophy, Logic, Mathematics and Economics).

In the present book, Steven Methven offers an account of Ramsey's work in philosophy, logic and mathematics. Ramsey's papers are rich in ideas, but his early death meant that their significance has only gradually been appreciated as others have developed them. The wide range of fields to which he contributed has also meant that there has been little work on the connections between his ideas or on any underlying methodology or guiding philosophical outlook. It is this, in particular, that Methven seeks to redress. As the title of the book reflects, what informs Ramsey's approach, on Methven's account, is its 'realistic spirit', understood as distinct from – and indeed, as countering – the impulse to offer 'realist' theories in philosophy. 'Realist' theories posit the existence of something in an attempt at philosophical explanation; examples that Methven discusses are Platonist views about causal laws or universals and the conception of logical inference and determinacy of sense found in Wittgenstein's Tractatus. Such views are not false but nonsensical, according to Ramsey, and the work of philosophy is thus one of clarification, aimed at diagnosing and dispelling the nonsensical claims. In this, Ramsey was clearly influenced by Wittgenstein; where he departs from Wittgenstein is in applying this

methodology in criticising some of Wittgenstein's particular views. Ramsey was sceptical of the 'mysticism' of the Tractatus, and he thought that there were indeed things that could be said – and not just shown – in dispelling nonsense.

The realistic spirit, Methven argues, was present in embryonic form in Ramsey's earliest work, despite some 'realist' tendencies, and gradually asserted itself during the course of his thinking. What emerges from Methven's account, with exemplary clarity and insightfulness, is Ramsey's deep engagement with Wittgenstein's philosophy, from his first attempts to make sense of the Tractatus to his last papers, written when Wittgenstein had returned to Cambridge. A 'realistic' account, as Methven describes it at the end of Chapter 2, is 'one which dispenses with myth and metaphor, and which instead places human beings – finite, fallible and yet extraordinarily functional – at its heart'. This suggests not only how Ramsey may have influenced the development of Wittgenstein's later philosophy but also why his ideas are no less fruitful and relevant today.

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List of Abbreviations

Page references to Ramsey's work are taken from *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays*, ed. R.B. Braithwaite, 1931. Page references for papers which do not appear in that volume, namely 'Law and Causality' and 'Epilogue', are to Mellor's *F.P. Ramsey: Philosophical Papers*, 1990. I have used both the Ogden and the Pears and McGuinness translations of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. I used only the 3rd edition (2001) of the 1953 Anscombe translation of *Philosophical Investigations*. Where I make reference to Ramsey's notes, I cite the archive number of the Ramsey collection at the Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh (I use the prefix *HL*) and, where possible, the relevant page of *Notes on Philosophy, Probability and Mathematics*, ed. M.C. Galavotti (cited as Ramsey 1991a). Dates below indicate the year of publication, unless the article was unpublished, in which case the date is italicised and refers to the year of composition.

Ramsey

CN	'Critical Notice of L. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*', 1923
Ep.	'Epilogue, an Address to the Apostles', *1925*
FC	'Further Considerations: Reasonable Degree of Belief', *1928*
F&P	'Facts and Propositions', 1927
FoM	'The Foundations of Mathematics', 1925
GP&C	'General Propositions and Causality', *1929*
L&C	'Law and Causality: Universals of Law and Fact', *1928*
ML	'Mathematical Logic', 1926
PFL	'A Problem of Formal Logic', 1928
Ph.	'Philosophy', *1929*
T&P	'Truth and Probability', 1926
Th.	'Theories', *1928*

Un. ‘Universals’, 1925

Wittgenstein

PI *Philosophical Investigations*
PR *Philosophical Remarks*
TLP *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

Introduction

> *Variable hypotheticals have formal analogies to other propositions which make us take them sometimes as facts about universals, sometimes as infinite conjunctions. The analogies are misleading, difficult though they are to escape, and emotionally satisfactory as they prove to different types of mind. But these forms of 'realism' must be rejected by the realistic spirit.*

Ramsey wrote the above passage in 1929, the final year of his short life, in a draft article with the title 'General Propositions and Causality' (*GP&C*). It is often thought that Ramsey's philosophical outlook underwent radical changes in the six years between completing his first published article, his rightly famous 'Critical Notice of L. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosphicus*' (*CN*), and his work on what Braithwaite called the Last Papers. The standard story is that, prior to 1929, Ramsey was thoroughly immersed in a Tractarian philosophy and very much involved in working out and working through the consequences of Wittgenstein's view. Then, in the year in which Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge, and to philosophy, Ramsey underwent a conversion that entailed the wholesale rejection of that earlier view and instead embraced, in some or other form, finitism.[1]

I do not think that the standard story is correct. It has, I suppose, gained traction as a result of the fact that very few people have attempted to find something systematic in Ramsey's philosophy. While Ramsey's influence on 20th century philosophy has been impressive, especially given the shortness of his life, it has emerged from, in general, selective readings of his work. This is not a criticism; the seeds of ideas which now enjoy philosophical prominence, such as functionalism, dispositionalism about belief, the suppositional view of conditionals, Ramsey sentences, prosententialism and theoretical instrumentalism, amongst others, are certainly to be found throughout his writing. Indeed, so rich is

his writing, and so amenable to interpretation, that Davidson once used the phrase 'the Ramsey effect', of which one is a victim when, having developed an apparently new idea in philosophy, one discovers that Ramsey thought of it first (Hahn 1999, p.32).

These ideas, however, are not generally presented as developed views in Ramsey's work but occur in the context of discussions in which the focus is often elsewhere. Perhaps the most striking example of this is the attribution to Ramsey of dispositionalist or pragmatist accounts of belief that focus upon his brief discussion of 'chicken beliefs' in 'Facts and Propositions'. Ramsey indeed sketches an account of belief which individuates content in terms of action and desire in reference to chickens, but immediately thereafter he stresses that that is not the case in which he is interested. Rather, the phenomenon for which he wishes to account is that of beliefs 'which are expressed in words, or possibly other images and symbols, consciously asserted or denied; for these beliefs, in my view, are the most proper subject for logical criticism' (*F&P*, p. 144). The view that he puts forward in respect of these beliefs is not one that can be straightforwardly described in either dispositionalist or pragmatist terms.

When I began, several years ago, to work seriously through Ramsey's thought, a picture began to emerge which, while not enjoying the sharpest focus, was grand, rather than miniature, in scale. In the foreground was Ramsey's deep interest in the *Tractatus* (*TLP*), his great understanding of both the insights and shortcomings of the theory of thought, language and logic presented by Wittgenstein, and his desire to improve upon it, and to attempt 'its further development' (1923b). But in the background, and present in even his very earliest work, is a suspicion of the esoteric, the abstract, the mystical and the mysterious. It is this background motif which is the task of this book to explore, the development of which I shall claim can be traced throughout Ramsey's work but which receives a name only in the final year of his life: the realistic spirit.

This book attempts, then, to tell a different story to the standard one, a story that traces through several of Ramsey's writings a commitment to *realistic* philosophy. A consequence of realistic philosophy is a suspicion of the claims of certain kinds of realism and a resistance to the beguiling simplicity of the realist outlook. The passage with which I began contains a criticism of the realist

who, one might say, holds as an article of faith that the relationship between mind, language and world will conform to the picture which is most comforting to a philosopher who takes himself to be shipmate to the natural scientist. Ramsey's criticisms of such an unreflective commitment take the form of questions about what a realist in some or other realm could possibly *mean* by the theories she espouses, for the realistic spirit rejects such views not as *false* but as *meaningless*: as nonsense.

Ramsey's writing is both brilliant and difficult, the difficulty arising from his unwillingness to spell out the details of an argument or to elaborate upon the justification he takes certain claims to enjoy, and the brilliance arising from the dynamism of his thought and the startling insights and connections made therein. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Last Papers, which thrum with the energy of a mind both re-engaged with familiar problems and reaching, unfettered by the need to elaborate, towards novel solutions. Doubtless, this vigour was partly inspired by Wittgenstein's return to Cambridge in 1929, his philosophical instincts reawakened by his brief engagements with members of the Vienna Circle and a growing dissatisfaction with his earlier work.[2] The two met almost daily, and while one can only imagine the content of their discussions, some of it is almost certainly reflected in the writing that came out of that time: Ramsey's Last Papers, his unfinished manuscript on truth, and Wittgenstein's own selection of notes which later became *Philosophical Remarks*. There is simply no telling now in which direction influence travelled between the two, nor is it an especially interesting or even very clear question, as though influence were, like water, the kind of thing that flows only in one direction, from higher ground to lower.[3]

Because the Last Papers contain the only explicit formulations of Ramsey's later conception of philosophy, the structure of this book proceeds, initially at least, non-chronologically. The motivation for this is simple: since my aim is to show the development of a certain view from Ramsey's earliest thought onwards, I had better have something to say about what that view is, and so I had better start, as it were, at the end of the story. Part I (The Realistic Spirit) thus aspires to present a characterisation of the philosophical outlook with which I shall be concerned, based in general upon the Last Papers. Before summarising its content, I wish to issue three notes of caution.

The first is this: readers seeking an account of the realistic spirit terminating in necessary and sufficient conditions or a rigidly delineated exposition in some other form must anticipate disappointment. Ramsey's characterisation of the philosophical project in the Last Papers is highly impressionistic, and while I have done my best to clarify and expand upon the brief remarks that he makes, it is not possible, nor perhaps desirable, except by the artificial imposition of 'rigour' upon this aspect of his thought, to offer more than a partial description of his conception of philosophy. Thus, I present a number of *general* methodological commitments and restrictions that I take Ramsey to have explicitly endorsed in his later years, and then I illustrate them by way of discussion of *particular* theories that he takes to resolve *particular* problems. I should also like to be clear that, while I find there to be many attractions in Ramsey's characterisation of philosophy done in the realistic spirit, I do not, in general, endorse the partial theories that he suggests and which he takes to have emerged from that way of doing philosophy. As the focus of this book is exegetical, I have as much as possible avoided criticising the views while expounding them (although I have not always been able to resist), reserving my own objections for the final chapter (Chapter 9).

The second concerns the reading of *TLP* that I attribute to Ramsey, a reading which is distinctly non-resolute.[4] Cora Diamond has written that

> what [Ramsey] says about Wittgenstein is always worth taking seriously, far more than anything said by anyone else who was in contact with Wittgenstein in the years before 1930. (2011, p. 336)

I agree with this sentiment entirely. Since the interpretation of *TLP* that I attribute to Ramsey is based wholly upon what he has to say about it, both in his earlier work and in the Last Papers, and since I take the realistic spirit to be concerned with, in part, resolving concerns arising out of that interpretation, there is, I think, much we can learn from Ramsey about both his and Wittgenstein's philosophical development, which arose from critical reflection upon its themes. Whether that reading is in fact the best available reading of *TLP*, I do not adjudicate, since doing so would involve, for instance, giving an account of what might constitute a *best reading*, and such considerations would necessarily take me too far

afield. But however one wishes to understand *TLP*, one simply cannot understand Ramsey without familiarity with that text; further, understanding Ramsey is a prerequisite for a proper appreciation of some of the sources both of Wittgenstein's dissatisfactions with his earlier views and of at least parts of the new philosophical method that takes form in his later work.

The final note concerns terminology. In many ways, the term *realistic* as used by Ramsey is exactly right for describing the philosophical outlook that he wishes to endorse. It is thus unfortunate that it is so easily confused for another term, *realism*, with which it is explicitly contrasted. The right way to think about what it is to be *realistic* is along the lines of the way in which that term is used to describe fiction, films or painting. In that use, it characterises both a certain absence – namely the absence of fantasy – and a certain presence – namely the presence of features which make the work, in some or other way, *true to the facts of our lives*.[5] These facts may concern our cognitive and physical finitude, the limits of our conceptual capacities, our existence as creatures of nature and our lived experience of the world. The criticism of various forms of realism that Ramsey presses is that they are false to the facts of our lives as a result of their containing elements of fantasy, elements that deny or ignore one or more of these features of our existence. Throughout this book, I shall use the terms *realistic spirit* and *realistic* to refer either to Ramsey's general philosophical outlook or to particular theories developed according to this outlook, and I shall use the terms *realism* and *realist* to refer to views which accord, more or less, with the usual philosophical understanding of realism.

The idea of the realistic spirit as a constraint on, or an attitude with which one conducts, philosophical activity such that it issues in theories which are only 'such as we can understand' is potentially attractive, though thoroughly underspecified (*Ph.*, p. 269). In Chapter 1, I begin the work of characterising the realistic spirit and of exploring some claims and arguments made by Ramsey in his Last Papers. What emerges is a series of semi-articulated methodological norms, in particular that philosophical theories must be of some use in clarifying our thought, that they must involve self-conscious reflection upon our own experience of the target phenomenon and that they must avoid scholasticism, 'the essence of which is treating what is vague as if it were precise and trying to fit

symbol as well as what Wittgenstein says in those most frustrating and beguiling sections that deal with solipsism and the metaphysical subject. Ramsey replaces the distinction between a sign and a symbol with that between a token and a type, borrowing this terminology from Peirce. Now, there is, or so I argue, an important relation between Wittgenstein's sign-symbol distinction, his account of sense and his discussion of solipsism. It is the unrealistic nature of that relation, and its 'mystical implications' to which Ramsey objects (though not explicitly), which is why he discards talk of signs and symbols in favour of talk of tokens and types (*CN*, p. 274).

TLP, read at face value, presents a logically atomist theory of linguistic representation:[7] what makes linguistic representation possible is the sharing of logical form between the representer – a proposition – and the represented – a possible fact. And the sharing of that form is made possible, first, by the elements of a proposition – names – standing for elements of the fact – objects – and, second, by the elements of the proposition being arranged in a manner which is just the manner in which the objects are capable of being arranged. What this means is that a proposition is a fact, not a list of names, because it is the components of the proposition plus their arrangement which represents – *pictures* – that things are a certain way.

> But it is clear that '*A* believes that *p*', '*A* thinks *p*', '*A* says *p*', are of the form '"*p*" says *p*': and here we have no co-ordination of a fact and an object, but a co-ordination of facts by means of a co-ordination of their objects. (*TLP* 5.542)

That is, an analysis of '"*p*" says *p*' would reveal that what is substituted for the first '*p*' contains elements correlated with the objects of the fact that it represents and such that '*p*' says *p* as a result of their being a 'co-ordination' of the two facts, the representing fact and the fact it represents, by the component elements of each being appropriately co-ordinated. Now there is a question to be asked about what kind of entity we are attempting to talk about when we perform a substitution into the schema to replace the first '*p*'. Are we to understand it as a *sign* or a *symbol*, where the distinction is between its being something physical, such as a series of sound waves or a string of marks, and its being

something non-physical, such as the meaning of a series of sound waves or a string of marks? If the latter – that is, if the first '*p*' is a *symbol* – then the expression '"*p*" says *p*' is, by the lights of *TLP*, nonsense. That the *symbol* '*p*' does say *p* is, in some way, ineffably the case, as the meaning of a symbol is an essential property of that symbol: were it to mean something else, it would be a *different* symbol. So such an expression would be an attempt to express a non-logical necessity.

If, however, we think of the first '*p*' as ranging over *signs*, then it is not a necessary truth that some sign means what it does mean, so that '"*p*" says *p*' is a proposition with a sense. In which case, it is open to further analysis, namely in the terms that I have already stated, viz. the co-ordination of two facts by the co-ordination of their objects. But on one view of what a sign is, if the first '*p*' is a *sign*, an analysis (or, perhaps better, *decomposition* of the sign) will yield not *names* but only simpler signs, because *names*, like symbols, are meaningful, and a sign is only a name when it has a reference. So, on the one hand, we have a characterisation of '"*p*" says *p*' on which it is nonsense and another on which it yields no semantic theory at all but only falsehoods.[8]

Wittgenstein almost certainly did not intend the latter route, and it is debatable, but possible, that he intended the former, so that propositional attitude reports are nonsense. On that view, the semantic theory of *TLP* is built on the existence of unstateable relations of reference that hold between signs and their referents, relations in virtue of which such signs become symbols – names – and in virtue of which one fact – a proposition – can represent another.

Ramsey, however, pursues a strategy much closer to the second, so that propositional attitude reports are not nonsense. On his view, cleansed of the sign-symbol distinction, a proposition is a type of which propositional-sign tokens – inscriptions, utterances and so forth – are tokens. A proposition is the type of propositional-sign tokens which share a sense. That means that the notion of a propositional-sign token having a sense is prior to that of a proposition, just as tokens of the letter '*A*' are prior to the letter-type *A*: there is no untokened type of the 27th letter of the alphabet. So, for Ramsey, the first '*p*' in '"*p*" says *p*' ranges over propositional-sign tokens which have a sense. An analysis of '"*p*" says *p*' would thus constitute an account of what it is for that *token* to have the

sense that it does. However, as I pointed out above, a theory which conceives of the first '*p*' as *merely* a sign is a theory with a new gap: lest every instance of the schema '"*p*" says *p*' be false, there will have to be an account of how the particular sign that was substituted for the first '*p*' can come to mean anything at all. Ramsey begins to give that account in 'Facts and Propositions', and I discuss it in Chapter 6.

Before that, however, Chapter 5 examines Ramsey's response in the 'Critical Notice' to what he calls the mystical elements of *TLP*. My aim is to find the best characterisation of Ramsey's understanding of nonsense, and I argue that it falls between the two dominant families of readings, engendering as it does commitments to theses from both camps. In particular, Ramsey's approach to Tractarian nonsense is to defuse its mystical connotations by explaining what he understands by 'clarity', and how *TLP* presents a conception of philosophy as a clarifying activity. What this amounts to, for Ramsey, is explaining the root cause of, and eliminating the effects of, a certain kind of logical confusion – namely confusing the logical role of a description with the logical role of a name – and succumbing to the temptation to substitute one for another. Because Ramsey sees the first '*p*' in '"*p*" says *p*' as having *propositional-signs* (and not propositions) as its substitution instances, he thinks that there are genuine philosophical propositions, propositions which give an analysis – and thus explain the significance – of a range of such substitution instances. Most notably, these include propositional attitude reports.

Chapter 6 is concerned largely with adumbrating what I take to be key features of Ramsey's view in 'Facts and Propositions', a view which is intended to answer the shortcoming identified in *TLP*, with which I end Chapter 4. There are two parts to Ramsey's view: first, that a belief consists of a 'feeling' of belief or disbelief towards a content and, second, the content itself. I argue that Ramsey holds a representationalist view of belief contents, one that privileges first-person access to belief contents in some contexts. I discuss the relationship between the representationalist component of his view and his assertion that belief contents may be individuated and identified in terms of their causal effects. I argue that, in keeping with the realistic spirit, his account of the relation between a mental propositional-sign token and its sense must turn on the presence of a form of common knowledge amongst a community of speakers – in

particular, knowledge of how other individuals will respond within the context of certain kinds of training and knowledge of psychological laws that govern the relationship between individuals' beliefs, desires and actions. This, once again, makes reference to parts of Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, as well as to the idea of a form of life, as it occurs in the later work of Wittgenstein. Finally, I defend the view that, for Ramsey, it is the existence of a range of 'simple' judgements, identified and individuated in terms of their causal role, shared between a community of 'like-minded' beings, which grounds the basic representational elements of thought and, ultimately, language. I end by considering some objections.

The aim of Part II is to show that, as early as 1923 and as late as 1927, there is in Ramsey's thought a commitment to philosophising realistically, illustrated by his attempt to resolve certain unrealistic features of *TLP*. I begin Part III (Mathematics) with a discussion of 'Foundations of Mathematics' (*FoM*), written in 1925. This article presents confounding evidence for the view that Ramsey was all along committed, at least to a degree, to realistic philosophy in that there Ramsey is concerned to defend a highly platonistic conception of mathematical reality in order to defend mathematical practice from 'the Bolshevik menace of Brouwer and Weyl' (*FoM* p. 56). In Chapter 7, I explicate the view he puts forward there, focusing on the idea of a propositional function in extension which Ramsey introduces in order to give an interpretation of the identity symbol as it occurs in *Principia*. I call the theory that he articulates Tractarian logicism, and I argue that it arises from a tension in his thought between, on the one hand, the preservation of mathematical practice and, on the other, a commitment to those components of *TLP* that he did regard as realistic, namely its account of the nature of laws of logic. I end by arguing that Tractarian logicism is ultimately a failure.

As I noted at the beginning of this introduction, it is sometimes thought that Ramsey underwent a sudden conversion to finitism in the latter years of his life. I think that this is incorrect. In Chapter 8, I consider two facets of Ramsey's interactions with Hilbert. The first concerns Hilbert's treatment of quantification over infinite domains and the highly Tractarian criticisms that Ramsey made of it, both in print and in his notes. These criticisms reveal an ongoing commitment to the logic of the *TLP* until as late as 1927. The

second concerns Ramsey's engagement with Hilbert's *Entscheidungsproblem*. In 1928, Ramsey developed a decision procedure for one class of first-order sentences, but in so doing he relied on mathematical reasoning, particularly concerning infinite domains, which extends far beyond the account of formal logic contained in *TLP*, and in particular, it extends beyond a property of that account which I call *transparency*. It is my hypothesis that, in engaging with the decision problem and resolving it in the manner in which he did for one class of sentences, Ramsey saw that there was something wrong with the Tractarian treatment of quantification, and I hypothesise also that it was this insight which ultimately led to his wholesale conversion to the realistic spirit.

The book ends with Part IV (Influence), in which I attempt to show some of the ways in which we can see Ramsey's thought at work in the later philosophy of Wittgenstein. Chapter 9 has two sections, both of which are concerned with the treatment of variable hypotheticals in *GP&C*, which was discussed in Chapter 1. In the first section, I criticise a reading of that view that was presented by Holton and Price, one on which they take Ramsey to be committed to a global scepticism about propositions. I contrast their view with what I take to be the correct way to understand Ramsey's misgivings about the Tractarian treatment of quantification. That my reading is correct is evinced, I think, by considerations that Wittgenstein explored in *Philosophical Remarks*.

In the second section, however, I address, very speculatively, what I take to be quite wrong with Ramsey's view and the theory of meaning associated with it, and I make some connections to Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations. What renders Ramsey's view unstable is a combination of his particular view that understanding of certain expressions is constituted by the grasp of rules exemplified by psychological laws and a general commitment of the realistic spirit, namely that philosophy should be a normative activity. Nonetheless, I argue, there is reason to think that this tension in his thought played some part in the development of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. If I am right, then Ramsey's import to the philosophy that came after him has not yet begun to be measured.[9]

It is not, however, immediately clear what Ramsey means by the term ‘realism’. Why, for instance, does he take both a theory of variable hypotheticals that implicates facts about universals and one that involves infinite conjunctions to be forms of realism? While the former view may be described as involving positive claims about the existence and mind-independence of universals, thus satisfying the traditional description, the latter view is not so readily amenable to such characterisation. What Ramsey finds problematic in the second view is its apparent commitment to an ‘infinite collection’, such a notion being ‘really nonsense’ (loc. cit.). Ramsey is not denying the coherence of there being, for instance, infinitely many numbers, propositions or objects (‘there may be an infinite totality’) but rather the idea that there could be such a thing as a completed yet infinite process, such as collecting together infinitely many numbers, propositions or objects (this topic is picked up again in Chapter 8 and Chapter 9). The ‘realism’ he detects in the infinite conjunction account is that it is a theory which seeks to explicate our everyday use of variable hypotheticals in terms of a process – the conjoining together of infinitely many conjuncts – of which we can make no *real* sense.

It is not, thus, realism *tout court* that the realistic spirit rejects, but only ‘forms of “realism”’ such as the two mentioned here. What these forms of realism have in common is that they are dependent for their putative explanatory worth – in their accounting for our ordinary practices of saying, inferring and doing this or that – upon entities (such as relations between universals), activities (such as completed infinite processes) or, as I shall argue in Chapter 2, perspectives which, upon closer inspection, turn out to be such that we ‘can understand nothing’ of them (loc. cit.).

The range and extent of the realisms to which Ramsey might have objected is not readily determinable. Rather than attempting to provide such a determination, I shall instead, in the course of this chapter, try to spell out what I take to be certain methodological commitments expressed in *GP&C*, as well as others of the Late Papers, that may be taken to characterise the realistic spirit. In the next sections, I shall argue that while Ramsey’s account of variable hypotheticals may appear to reveal a connection between philosophising realistically and a *sui generis* commitment to ontological parsimony, that is not the correct way to understand him. After all, for Ramsey, a philosopher who embraces the realistic

spirit must come to see various forms of realism not as *false*, but as *incomprehensible*. For this reason, I shall argue that his commitment to parsimony, to whatever degree it ultimately amounts, stems rather from a particular conception of philosophy on which its aim is usefulness. What is meant by 'useful' is made clearer by looking at three contrasts that Ramsey makes in 'Philosophy' (*Ph.*) and in his criticism of the Tractarian conception of logical inference. It is the aspiration that philosophy be useful which puts it at odds, for Ramsey, with a number of manifestations of realism.

1.1 Realism and the realistic

In *GP&C*, Ramsey aims to account for a species of generalisation that he calls a *variable hypothetical*. These are universal generalisations for which no domain restriction, implicit or explicit, is present. In particular, Ramsey is interested in law-like generalisations, such as 'All men are mortal' and 'Arsenic is poisonous', which are of this kind, but which also appear to posit a connection between the properties in question that goes beyond the merely accidental. Compare these examples with the kind of universal generalisation that Ramsey thinks can be accounted for by a conjunction of particular propositions, such as 'Everyone in Cambridge voted'.

In the latter case, once we have settled what is to count as Cambridge (i.e. delineated a border and specified a particular time), the generalisation will be equivalent to, but not synonymous with, the conjunction of a finite series of particular propositions: for example 'Lorna voted and Rob voted and ... '. [2] This is, more or less, the view of *TLP*, except that there Wittgenstein extends the treatment to all generalisations, independently of considerations of domain size.[3] But, as we shall see, it is this thought – the extension of a treatment of a class of sentence from one case to a superficially similar but radically different case – that Ramsey holds to be incompatible with the realistic spirit.

Ramsey's view is that statements of the former kind are not truth-functional; indeed, they are not truth-apt at all. Rather, they constitute 'rules for judging: "If I meet a Φ, I shall regard it as a Ψ."' (*GP&C*, p. 241). That is, to assert that such-and-such is a law is to express that one has adopted a certain habit of judging.

Apparent disagreement as to which law-like statements are true is disagreement about which rules of judgement that the parties endorse. As such, disagreement over which generalisation ought to be endorsed is never a disagreement about a matter of fact but instead disagreement about the ways in which the antagonists order their cognitive lives on the basis of their singular experience.[4]

Towards the end of the paper, Ramsey considers two alternative views that see variable hypotheticals as statements of fact: the *Tractarian* view, in which such generalisations are infinite conjunctions,[5] and what I shall call the *Platonic* view, in which statements of law have as their truth-conditions the existence of relations between universals. Ramsey describes both of these views as *meaningless*, and not merely false.

> But may there not be something which might be called real connections of universals? I cannot deny it, for I can understand nothing by such a phrase; what we call causal laws I find to be nothing of the sort. So too there may be an infinite totality, but what seem to be propositions about it are again variable hypotheticals, and 'infinite collection' is really nonsense. (*GP&C*, p. 252)

Thus, writes Ramsey,

> both these forms of 'realism' must be rejected by the realistic spirit.

Now Ramsey has an explanation for why these views are sometimes seen to be satisfactory: variable hypotheticals *beguile* by their surface similarity to other propositions, and our desire for univocal treatments tempts us into views with maximal generality. But

> the analogies are misleading, difficult though they are to escape, and emotionally satisfactory as they prove to different types of mind.

So here is a starting point from which we can begin to characterise the realistic spirit, namely that someone who does philosophy realistically will be constantly on guard against *easy* or *beguiling* pictures, analogies and metaphors.

Ramsey goes on to give an example that is supposed to explain why one should wish to take a realist (note: not *realistic*) view of some range of phenomena.[6] We are asked to consider a society of humans who have never eaten strawberries, because they have always held that strawberries cause stomach-ache. Since, *ex hypothesi*, none has ever eaten a strawberry, nor ever will, each of their beliefs 'If I eat a strawberry, I get ill' is, taken as a material conditional, vacuously true. Clearly, that does not correctly characterise the content of their belief, and so an alternative account is required.

In attempting to provide that account, the *realist* temptation amongst us strawberry-eaters is to say that there is something wrong with what that society thinks because, or so we shall say, we know that if they had eaten a strawberry, they would not have been ill. It is, so we say, a *fact* that if they had eaten a strawberry, they would not have been ill.

But this is where we, and our invocation of facts, and not they, are wrong, claims Ramsey. What is a fact is that we have in the past eaten strawberries without becoming ill, but that no more entails that had they eaten them they would not have become ill than it entails that we shall not become ill if we eat them in the future. This is not an argument that culminates in scepticism about induction or counterfactual reasoning: Ramsey's claim is not that our having enjoyed strawberries in the past is insufficient evidence for inferring that we will continue to enjoy them in the future. Our so inferring is not an *epistemic* failing, and it may, indeed, be just the thing that we ought to infer given the laws governing the consumption of strawberries that we have come to accept. Nor is it incorrect, given those laws, to infer that the strawberry abstainers wouldn't have become ill had they eaten the strawberries. Rather, the failure arises from the involvement of a certain kind of pretence, namely that of holding that what didn't happen but could have happened, or what will happen but hasn't, is a *fact* which either succeeds or fails in rendering our statements true or false and which we could somehow come to know.

The question concerns the relation between counterfactuals and statements of law. If a statement of law such as 'Strawberries do not make humans ill' is considered to be a statement of fact, analysed in accordance with either of the realist theories that Ramsey rejects, then so too must be the counterfactuals which attend them. On

system of variable hypotheticals by which we 'meet the future' (*GP&C*, p. 241). That is, if there were some statement of law upon which we agreed (or even disagreed) regarding the distribution of aces in a well-shuffled pack, which settled 'our expectation, as to the outcome of any state of affairs whenever or wherever it may occur' (*GP&C*, p. 247), then we would have something to say, either in agreement or disagreement, about how things *would* have turned out had he shuffled and about how things *will* turn out if he shuffles on the next round.

On Ramsey's view, a counterfactual is (correctly) assertible just in case a future-looking conditional either is assertible under similar conditions or was assertible prior to the state of affairs that the counterfactual concerns. And both are assertible only if there is a related variable hypothetical to which the speaker would assent. That is, assent to a statement of law explains why one would be prepared to assert any of this range of conditional statements. These connections are plausible. Consider, for instance, a case where *S* says to her audience 'If you shuffle that pack, the first card you draw will be an ace'. The audience is likely to ask her why she thinks what she thinks, to which the only adequate response is that she offer up a law-like statement which justifies the prediction. 'I have a hunch' or 'Because I want it to' will not succeed in furnishing her statement with a rational justification. Of course, there could be a disagreement about the status of the law statement, but on Ramsey's view, that is not a disagreement about the truth of the statement but about whether or not one should adopt it as a rule of judgement, and it is therefore also a disagreement about which counterfactuals and future-looking conditionals one ought to be prepared to assert.

The realist impulse is to explain these connections in terms of the truth-conditions of the various statements; when I assert the counterfactual, I do so, *ceteris paribus*,[8] because I have understood it by grasping the conditions under which it would be true, and I assert it because I take those conditions to obtain. Likewise, when I assert a law statement, I do so because I have grasped the way in which the universe must be in order for it to be true and take it to be that way.

But what reason is there, other than the satisfaction of that impulse, to hold that we know what we *mean* when we say that a relationship exists between universals Φ–ness and Ψ–ness or when

> whether there is or is not something *x*, and you are shown that the presence or absence of *x could* make no difference of the sort you wanted it to make, this is puzzling in a way an unnecessarily risky hypothesis would not be; it shows that you were in some unclarity about the distinction that you were trying to explain to yourself, and that you had in a sense substituted a fantasy for the real difference. You *knew* what ought to be, what *had* to be, the basis of the distinction, and so you did not look to see how the distinction actually is made, what that is like. (loc. cit.)

Consider again the case of statements of law and their attendant counterfactuals. While each of the realist theories that Ramsey considers holds that there is an independent reality which determines the truth or falsity of instances of those sentences, note that that putative reality can make no difference to the ways in which we actually infer and can make no difference to which claims some speaker is or is not inclined to make. After all, our practices of enquiry which ground our assent or dissent from those claims are wholly isolated from the natures of those posited realities. How does one get oneself into the position of asserting a law statement? By intuiting patterns within one's singular experience and inferring a generalisation according to a certain psychological law. How does one get oneself into the position of asserting a counterfactual? By considering the law statements relevant to the singular experience in question to which one would assent. The realist's posits are beyond the reach of actual enquiry and are, as such, idle wheels whose purpose is to secure a respectability for those claims that the realist imagines they do not have independently of a reality that they are supposed to describe. That is, realists take themselves, in Diamond's words, to *know* what ought to be, what *has* to be, and so ignore what *is*, namely the relationships between what we assert, what we deny and how we enquire into those things. But our judgements, based upon our methods of enquiry, come first and remain untouched by the realist's theory. Nobody ever asked a philosopher to determine whether a law statement or a counterfactual is true. Nobody ever walked out of the laboratory of ordinary life to consider relations between universals or infinite conjunctions in order to decide for themselves the status of some law statement or counterfactual. No realist *qua* realist (as opposed to *qua* scientist, teacher, etc.) has ever *corrected* such a judgement,