Ramsey On Saying And Whistling: A Discordant Note

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1. INTRODUCTION

In his late paper 'General Propositions and Causality', Ramsey argues that unrestricted universal generalisations such as 'All men are mortal' are not genuine propositions.[1] About this, as about much else in that paper, Ramsey had recently changed his mind. A few years earlier, both in 'Facts and Propositions' and in 'Mathematical Logic', he had argued that such generalisations are equivalent to infinite conjunctions.[2] But by 1929 his ideas about infinity had changed, and it was concerns about the infinite character of unrestricted generalisations which led him to his new view.

In our view, Ramsey's late position is highly unstable, in a way which is interesting both philosophically and historically. For the issues about infinity are essentially those underlying Wittgenstein's 'rule following considerations'. On the face of it, if they show that generalisations are not genuine propositions, they show that none of our claims are genuine propositions. This connection between Ramsey's view of generalisations and the rule following considerations is certainly causal, as well as logical. In 1929 Wittgenstein had just returned to Cambridge, and it is well known that this year marked a turning point—indeed, a U-turning point—in his philosophical development. It is well known, too, that lengthy philosophical discussions with Ramsey formed a major part of Wittgenstein's intellectual life at this stage. It is also clear that Wittgenstein's preoccupations at that time had a lot to do with the recent influence of Brouwer on his thinking, and especially his thinking about infinity. Finally, it is well known that Ramsey, too, enjoyed at least a partial conversion to such ideas—'General Propositions and Causality' is very much a product of that conversion.

But some things remain unclear about these influences and interactions. For one thing, what was the direction of influence between Ramsey and Wittgenstein? Was it perhaps Ramsey who first saw the significance of what became the rule following considerations, for example? In our view, the fact that Ramsey didn't appreciate the instability to which we here draw attention suggests that it was not. Had Ramsey been

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[1] 'General Propositions and Causality' in his *Philosophical Papers*, ed. D. H. Mellor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) pp. 145–63. All reference to Ramsey's published works are to the reprints in that volume.

[2] 'Facts and Propositions' pp. 48–51; 'Mathematical Logic', pp. 236ff.

aware of the rule following considerations, we think, the position advocated in ‘General Propositions and Causality’ could hardly have seemed satisfactory.

Another thing which has been unclear is the nature of Ramsey’s late conversion, and this too we hope to clarify. As it turns out, the influence of Hilbert seems greater than that of Brouwer—Ramsey’s view is more formalist than intuitionist. And the instability of his position reflects an interesting general problem for formalist views, and their analogues elsewhere in philosophy.

Thus we suggest that ‘General Propositions and Causality’ is an unstable product of a partial conversion, completion of which would have required a grasp of what we now call the rule following considerations. While one can only speculate about what Ramsey would have made of a fuller conversion, such speculation is neither uninteresting nor necessarily uninformed. Among other things, some of what Ramsey does say about how we might live with the conclusion that generalisations are not propositions provides an indication as to how he might have presented the more radical conclusion that nothing is a proposition (in the assumed sense). In other words, they give us some indication as to how Ramsey’s eminently practical pragmatism might have glossed what we now think of as Wittgensteinian or Kripkensteinian conclusions.

Our first aim is to demonstrate the instability of Ramsey’s distinction between universal generalisations and (what he thinks of as) genuinely propositional claims. Our case involves two strands (which we take up separately):

1. We argue that the same considerations concerning infinity come up everywhere, due to the ‘infinite’ character of our grasp of concepts. So pressure to treat universal generalisations as nonpropositional generalises to all cases. Thus Ramsey’s ‘sceptical problem’ turns out to be global, and not (as he himself thought) confined to the case of generalisations.

2. We argue that Ramsey’s positive account of what universal judgements are—viz., that they are dispositional—is also applicable to other judgements, in virtue, ultimately, of the dispositional character of grasp of a concept (i.e. acquisition of a habit to apply a term in certain cases). In a sense, then, Ramsey’s ‘sceptical solution’ also turns out to be universal. At any rate, his positive account of the nature of universal generalisations doesn’t provide a basis for distinguishing them from other propositions, once the sceptical problem itself is seen to be global.

The first task is therefore to understand Ramsey’s reasons for denying that universally quantified sentences are equivalent to conjunctions.

2. RAMSEY ON WHY GENERALISATIONS ARE NOT PROPOSITIONS

The first argument Ramsey gives in 'General Propositions and Causality' is the consideration that a universally quantified sentence can be written out, whereas an infinite conjunction cannot. If we treat universally quantified sentences as expressing propositions we will be forced to see them as equivalent to conjunctions which, since they are infinite, 'we cannot express for lack of symbolic power'. But that is no good: 'what we can't say we can't say, and we can't whistle it either'.

Is this argument convincing? At first sight, apparently not, for consider an analogy. What do you get if you divide one by three? If you try saying the result as a decimal expansion you will never stop: 0.33333... However, that doesn't mean that you can't say it, only that you need to express it in a different way: as the fraction 1/3. Or consider a slightly more complicated example. What is the ratio of the diameter of a circle to its circumference? If you try saying that as a decimal expansion you will never stop; and any ratio of finite numbers will be inaccurate. But we can still say it, because we have a term purpose-built for the job, namely 'π'.

So the fact that you can't write out an infinite conjunction but can write out a universal generalization doesn't show that the two are not equivalent. It could be that the universal generalization is the way that you express an infinite conjunction, just as π is the way of expressing a certain irrational number. As we might put it:: What we can't say in one form of words we can sometimes whistle in another. Or, in the King James version: Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one should investigate the possibility of other modes of expression.

These are fairly elementary points, which should make us wonder whether we have understood what Ramsey was getting at. One possibility is this. Sometimes when Ramsey talked about the use of words, he seemed to mean not simply the utterances themselves but also the whole mental state that is involved in accepting them.[3] Perhaps then Ramsey's point should be understood as the contention that we cannot ever come to accept infinite conjunctions, since we cannot ever grasp them. In contrast, we can grasp universal generalizations. This makes the point very similar to the two other

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[3]Thus in 'Facts and Propositions' he speaks of the mental factors in belief as consisting in 'words, spoken aloud or to oneself or merely imagined'. (p. 40) We follow Loar in thinking that the best way to understand this is not just as the words themselves, but as 'the whole state of affairs of one's accepting such and such a sentence'. See Brian Loar, 'Ramsey's Theory of Belief and Truth in H. Mellor (ed.) *Prosects for Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 55.

arguments that Ramsey marshals against the idea that universals are conjunctions.[4] So let us turn to them.

(i) The first argument is initially presented as an argument about *use:* an infinite conjunction is never used in its entirety. He then glosses the idea by saying that an infinite conjunction 'goes beyond what we know or want':

> A belief of the primary sort is a map of neighbouring space by which we steer. It remains such a map however much we complicate it or fill in details. But if we professedly extend it to infinity, it is no longer a map. We cannot take it in or steer by it. Our journey is over before we need its remoter parts.[5]

At first glance this seems to run together two quite different points. On the one hand there is the claim that infinite conjunctions would not be useful to us, that we would have no need of them. On the other there is the claim that we could not take them in. Moreover, the first of these claims might appear to fall well short of the conclusion that it is supposed to support. The world is sadly full of useless objects, so we can't in general move from (a) the claim that, on a certain conception of its nature, an object wouldn't be useful to us, to (b) the conclusion that it doesn't have such a nature. However, on Ramsey's pragmatic account of belief, there is no fallacy here, and no equivocation. In 'Facts and Propositions' he holds in general that 'the meaning of a sentence is to be defined by reference to the actions to which asserting it would lead'. More specifically: 'any set of actions for whose utility *p* is a necessary and sufficient condition might be called a belief that *p*'.[6] So there could not be a belief that could not

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[4] Note that Ramsey still does not endorse Russell's argument for thinking that universals cannot be conjunctions, namely that the former do, whilst the latter do not, contain the information that the objects listed are *all* the objects. Ramsey had dismissed this argument in 'Facts and Propositions' on the grounds that this information is logically true, and hence does not add anything to the proposition expressed. There is a real question whether Ramsey's argument is valid: it rests on some modal principles which it is doubtful that his opponents would have accepted (for discussion see Allen Hazen, 'A Fallacy in Ramsey', *Mind* 95 (1986) pp. 496-8). But even if it is valid, it raises a number of difficult questions about the identity criteria for propositions, in particular whether propositions should be individuated by necessary equivalence or by *a priori* equivalence. But we shan't pursue these questions here.

[5] 'General Propositions and Causality', p. 146

[6] 'Facts and Propositions', pp. 51, 40. Note that the latter quotation comes from a passage in which Ramsey is discussing beliefs which are not expressed in language.

be used, a belief that would never issue in any action. Moreover, and for the same reasons, there could be nothing that would constitute understanding a belief that could not be used.

(ii) Ramsey's second argument concerns the grounds on which we can come to believe universal generalizations, and hence the degree of confidence that we can have in it. How could we have grounds for believing an infinite conjunction?

> The relevant degree of certainty is the certainty of the particular case, or of a finite set of particular cases; not of an infinite number which we never use, and of which we couldn't be at all certain.[7]

It is interesting to compare these two arguments with Dummett's 'manifestation' and 'acquisition' arguments, which Dummett takes to provide the main case for his species of verificationism. Dummett's arguments concern the meaning of terms, rather than the status of universal judgements, but their basic character is very similar to the above arguments of Ramsey. Dummett argues that the meaning of a word cannot go beyond what could be manifested in its use, on pain of indeterminacy, redundancy and inaccessibility. Differences of meaning beyond the limits of use would be both ineffectual, in the sense that they would make no difference in our linguistic practices, and inaccessible, in the sense that they couldn't be conveyed from speaker to speaker. Given then that novices can acquire a grasp of the meaning of a new term, meaning cannot transcend use.

Famously, Dummett is influenced in these arguments by intuitionistic concerns.[8] Was Ramsey similarly influenced by intuitionism? Russell, for one, thought that he was,

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However, the same dispositional account applies in essence to beliefs which are expressed in language; it is simply that there the account needs to complicated in various ways to accommodate the role of the words in the mind of the speaker. (Note, for instance, these comments of Ramsey's on the attitude of linguistic belief: 'To say that feeling belief towards a sentence expresses such an attitude is to say that it has certain properties which vary with the attitude, i.e. with which possibilities are knocked out and which, so to speak, are left in. Very roughly the thinker will act in disregard of the possibilities rejected, but how to explain this accurately I do not know.' p. 46) In saying this we seem to be in disagreement with John Skorupski who takes Ramsey to be proposing a picture theory of belief in these sections. See 'Ramsey on belief' in *Prospects for Pragmatism*, op. cit.

[7] 'General Propositions and Causality', p. 146

[8] See especially 'The Philosophical Basis of Intuitionist Logic' in *Truth and Other Enigmas* (London: Duckworth 1978), pp. 215–47, at pp. 216-7. To say that Dummett

arguing that Ramsey's last papers showed 'a tendency towards the views of Brouwer'.[9] However, our suggestion here will be that the primary influence was not intuitionism but formalism. Intuitionism represents one possible answer to the worry that we cannot understand universal quantifiers as classically conceived: the answer that comes from reconstruing their content in a form which we can understand. Formalism provides an alternative answer: don't try to give them a meaning at all, but treat them as meaningless methods of manipulating that which does have a meaning. (A useful comparison here is with reductionist and instrumentalist forms of phenomenalism about theoretical terms. Reductionists are comparable to intuitionists, in reconstruing the content of such terms in phenomenal language. Instrumentalists are like formalists, in seeking a nondescriptive function for theoretical discourse.) As we shall see, Ramsey's approach had more in common with the latter approach than the former.

We'll come back to these issues in a moment. Before that, we want to say some more about why Ramsey's position is unstable—why nothing should really counts as a proposition, by the standards Ramsey applies to generalisations.

3. WHY NOTHING IS A PROPOSITION, BY THESE LIGHTS

As we noted, Dummett takes the manifestation and acquisition arguments to apply to the meaning of all terms, rather than simply to that of universal quantifiers (and related logical machinery). Dummett's basic thought is something like this. Any term at all has an infinite range of potential uses—an infinite number of different applications. Take the predicate '... is red', for example. There is a potential infinity of sentences of the form '*x* is red'. If meaning were a matter of truth conditions, the meaning of '... is red' would depend on some fact about this infinite class—basically, on which members of this class were the true ones, and which the false ones. Essentially, the meaning of '... is red' would be given by a list of all the red things (perhaps a list extending to non-actual red things). But the idea that the meaning of '... is red' is fixed by such a list is incompatible with the manifestation and acquisition requirements on meaning. Therefore, Dummett concludes, meaning cannot be a matter of truth conditions.

Our present interest is not in Dummett's alternative proposal about meaning, but in the observation that the problem stems from the fact that infinities and open-endedness

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is influenced by intuitionists is not to deny that he is also departs from them in many ways. See the brief discussion of this in A. W. Moore, *The Infinite* (London: Routledge, 1990) pp. 141–2.

[9] *Mind*, 40 (1931)

occur in language at a very basic level. Plausibly, no term at all is such that grasp of it doesn't involve an open-ended skill. (Proper names might seem to be an exception, but these too surely have an open-ended range of possible applications. 'Familiar' objects present themselves in novel ways from time to time, and need to be re-identified as the bearer of the name in question.) *So for no normal term at all can a grasp of its meaning amount to grasp of a list*. The required list is always infinite, and hence largely inaccessible to creatures like us.

We want to emphasise two points about this conclusion. First, it does seem to amount simply to extending to linguistic terms at large the kind of concerns Ramsey has about universal generalisations. In both cases, the concern is precisely that an infinite list (in one case of conjuncts, in the other of true instances of the application of a term) goes beyond what human language users could use or survey. Second, the issue concerned is that at the heart of the so-called rule following considerations. (Dummett, for one, is very much influenced by Wittgenstein, in recognising that grasp of meaning cannot amount to grasp of an infinite totality.)

Given this connection, it seems reasonable to infer that the rule following considerations had not occurred to Ramsey, at least when he wrote 'General Propositions and Causality' in 1929. It may seem uncharitable to Ramsey to suggest that Ramsey's position in that paper is highly unstable. But it would be far more uncharitable to suggest that Ramsey was aware of what makes it unstable (viz., the rule following considerations) and simply failed to draw the obvious conclusion.

In any case, we haven't yet ruled out the possibility that Ramsey has alternative grounds for a distinction between generalisations and other kinds of statements, in terms related to his positive account of what we do with generalisations. Perhaps the real work takes place on the positive side of the account. It is to that side that we now turn.

4. RAMSEY'S POSITIVE STORY, AND A SCHOLARLY DIGRESSION

How should we understand universal generalizations, if not as propositions? Ramsey says that they are 'variable hypotheticals', and that these 'are not judgements but rules for judging "If I meet a ϕ, I shall regard it as a ψ."'[10] In other words, in committing ourselves to a universal generalisation we adopt a habit of forming beliefs in a certain way. As Ramsey puts it:

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10 'General Propositions and Causality', p. 149

> To believe that all men are mortal—what is it? Partly to say so, partly to believe in regard to any x that turns up that if he is a man he is mortal. The general belief consists in
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> (a) A general enunciation
>
> (b) A habit of singular belief
>
> These are, of course, connected, the habit resulting from the enunciation according to a psychological law which makes the meaning of 'all'.[11]

In contemporary jargon, we may say that Ramsey's view is thus that to accept a generalisation is to acquire a disposition—to become disposed to adopt a belief of one sort, whenever one adopts a belief of another sort. He goes on to say that, since they are not judgements, universal sentences cannot be negated. They can, however, be disagreed with, in the sense that one can fail to have the disposition concerned.

Where does Ramsey get these views from? Both Majer and Sahlin have pointed to the influence of the Swiss mathematician Hermann Weyl.[12] In his 1920 lectures 'Über die neue Grundlagenkrise der Mathematik', with which Ramsey was very familiar, Weyl gives a account of universal quantifiers that is very close to that later given by Ramsey.[13] After characterizing existential statements as 'abstracts of judgements' rather than judgements proper, he says

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[11] Ibid. pp. 148–9.

[12] Ulrich Majer, 'Ramsey's Conception of Theories: An Intuitionistic Approach' *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 6 (1989) pp. 233–58; and 'Ramsey's Theory of Truth and the Truth of Theories, *Theoria* 57, (1991), pp. 162–95; Nils-Eric Sahlin '"He is no good for my work": On the Philosophical Relations between Ramsey and Wittgenstein', in M. Sintonen (ed.) *Knowledge and Inquiry: Essays on Jaakko Hintikka's Epistemology and Philosophy of Science, Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities* 51 (1997), pp. 61-84.

[13] *Mathematische Zeitschrift* 10 (1921), pp. 39–79; reprinted in H Weyl, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, Vol II, ed. K. Chandrasekharan, (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1968), pp. 143–80 (page references are to the reprint). Apparently Ramsey copied the relevant passages out, in a manuscript that is now in the Ramsey collection in Pittsburgh (see Sahlin, p.73). Ramsey discusses Weyl's position in some length in 'Mathematical Logic', pp. 228-33.

> Neither is the generalization "Every number has a value E"—for example "For every number m, m+1 = 1+m"—a real judgement, but rather an instruction for judgement.'[14]

He goes on to say that since they are not judgements, neither existentials nor universals can be negated. This is his rationale for rejecting excluded middle for quantified judgments, since its instances cannot be meaningfully formulated.[15]

In this paper Weyl represents himself as a follower of Brouwer; and when describing intuitionism in his later *Philosophie der Mathematik und Naturwissenschaft* this is the position he gives.[16] So it is tempting to think that in apparently following Weyl, Ramsey was taking a step towards intuitionism. But in giving this account of the quantifiers, Weyl is in fact far from the intuitionist mainstream. Brouwer and his followers didn't deny that quantified statements, as intuitionistically construed, expressed propositions; nor did they deny that they could be negated. Of course they rejected the classical construal of the quantifiers; but this they thought should be abandoned. The intuitionists thus had no place for Weyl's halfway house of quantified sentences that had a useful role but did not express propositions. In contrast the kind of approach favoured by Weyl in 1920, and later by Ramsey, is very much in line with formalist thinking. Quantified sentences are thought of as devices, strictly meaningless in themselves, that allow for the manipulation of meaningful sentences.[17] (Again, compare reductionism and instrumentalism about theoretical terms.)

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[14]'Über die neue Grundlagenkrise der Mathematik', p. 157

[15]Ibid. p. 158

[16]*Philosophie der Mathematik und Naturwissenschaft: Handbuch der Philosophie 5* (Munich and Berlin: R. Oldenburg, 1927). English translation: *Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949) See section 9. Ramsey had read this work, as the Pittsburgh notes make clear.

[17]In addition, Weyl's reasons for rejecting excluded middle were quite different from Brouwer's. Weyl seems to have accepted it for the propositional calculus. His reason for rejecting it for the predicate calculus, as we have seen, was that quantified sentences, not being meaningful, cannot be meaningfully negated; and hence that no instance of excluded middle is meaningful. Now it is not even clear that this should be regarded as a rejection of excluded middle, which is surely only meant to apply to meaningful sentences. We do not count as rejecting it if we merely refuse to accept 'Either og ur blig or not og ur blig' on the grounds that 'Og ur blig' is meaningless.

Ramsey was well aware that Weyl's view of quantifiers differed from Brouwer's and was in fact much closer to Hilbert's.[18] He was well aware too that Weyl's commitment to intuitionism was short-lived, and that by 1928 he was describing himself as a follower of Hilbert.[19] More important for our interests, are some notes made in August 1929. Under the heading 'The Infinite in Theories' Ramsey writes:

> Taken formally an infinite theory asserts whatever may follow from it; this has, however, no clear meaning unless we know how to decide whether a given primary proposition does or does not follow ...
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> ... if the principle is unbounded, the theory must have the status of a general prop, which is perhaps not a judgement but a fount of judgements, or rule for judging.
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> The essential thing about the theory is that it is a way of saying something in the primary system, and it must be simple and agreeable. These can both be secured by representing the primary system as part of a wider structure, but this is not essential and if the wider structure is infinite it is not really conceivable but only a way of talking? ...
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> It is obvious that mathematics does not require the existence of an infinite number of things. We say at once that imaginary things will do, i.e. theoretical secondary terms. But there are no imaginary things, they are just words, and mathematicians and physicists who use the infinite are just manipulating symbols with some analogy to propositions.[20]

These passages are clearly of a very formalist tenor, and in them Ramsey gives the same account of universal judgements that he gives in 'General Propositions and Causality'.

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[18] 'Mathematical Logic', p. 233

[19] H. Weyl 'Discussionsbemerkungen zu dem zweiten Hilbertschen Vortrag über die Grundlagen der Mathematik' reprinted in *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, Vol III pp. 147–9; English translation in *From Frege to Godel: A Sourcebook in Mathematical Logic* ed J van Heijenoort (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 480–4. Ramsey's unpublished notes show that he had read this lecture; see his *Notes on Philosophy, Probability and Mathematics* ed. Maria Carla Galavotti, (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1991), p. 235. Ramsey there complains that 'Weyl always seems to confuse method with interpretation e.g. he says in last paper in Hamburg that if Hilbert triumphs this will be a decisive blow to phenomenalism. But only to the phenomenalist method which no one now believes in; Hilbert is altogether on the side of a phenomenalist interpretation.' We take it that in Ramsey's eyes Hilbert maintained the phenomenalist view that the only thing that is meaningful is the phenomenally given; whilst denying that the only method for usefully manipulating this itself involves use of the phenomenally given.

[20] *Notes on Philosophy, Probability and Mathematics* ,pp. 235–6.

We take this as good evidence that Ramsey was motivated primarily by formalist rather than intuitionist concerns.

That said, the point should not be exaggerated. Despite the controversy between Brouwer and Hilbert, the distinction between formalism and intuitionism was not altogether clear in 1929; indeed the formal differences only really became clear in the light of subsequent work by Heyting and Gödel and Gentzen.[21] There are, moreover, a few passages in which Ramsey sounds a distinctly intuitionist note.[22] What we should rather say is that, given our contemporary understanding of the difference between formalism and intuitionism, Ramsey's position was primarily formalist.

5. WHY THE POSITIVE STORY DOESN'T STABILISE RAMSEY'S VIEW

We have seen that Ramsey takes universal beliefs to be dispositions to form other beliefs. But according to Ramsey *all* beliefs are dispositions. Where, then, is his basis for a distinction between those dispositions which are genuine judgements, and those which are not? He tells us that 'a belief of the primary sort is a map of neighbouring space by which we steer', but surely the use of maps is itself dispositional.[23] To use a map as a guide is simply to become disposed to respond in certain ways to certain stimuli: 'If that's the Post Office, I'll turn left.' (More precisely, a map is a kind of complex disposition. In combination with other maps and our desires, it generates a set of dispositions. And they needn't be dispositions to action: 'If that's the Post Office, then the yellow building is the Town Hall.')

So what is the distinction between universal beliefs and beliefs of the primary sort? It is hard to see that there is any radical difference in functional terms, by Ramsey's own

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[21] A. Heyting, 'Die formalen Reglen der intuitionistischen Logik' *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, physikalisch-mathematische Klasse* (1930) pp. 42–56; 'Die formalen Reglen der intuitionistischen Mathematik', ibid pp. 57–71, 158–69; K. Gödel, Zur intuitionistischen Arithmetik und Zahlentheorie', *Ergebnisse eines mathematischen Kolloquiums* 4 (1933) pp. 34–8, English translation in *Collected Works*, Vol I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) pp. 287–95; G Gentzen, 'Über das Verhältnis zwischen intuitionistischer und klassischer Arithmetik' (1933), unpublished at the time, English translation in M. Szabo (ed.) *The Collected Papers of Gerhard Gentzen* (Amsterdam: North Holland 1969) pp. 53–67.

[22] Thus in 'General Propositions and Causality' he argues that the use of excluded middle in mathematical proofs 'is now recognized as fallacious'. p. 147

[23] We note that David Armstrong—that well known dispositionalist about belief—underlined this sentence in his copy of Ramsey, and marked it 'V.G.'

lights. It might perhaps be suggested that there is a distinction of level: Beliefs of the primary sort are dispositions to act on desires, while universal beliefs are dispositions to act on other beliefs (to act by forming further beliefs). But why should this distinction make all the difference as to what should be counted as a belief? Moreover, even this distinction will not really stand up. Beliefs of the primary sort can themselves be dispositions to form new beliefs on the basis of other beliefs: the belief that Martha is dangerous will itself amount to a disposition to form the belief that a dangerous person is approaching given the belief that this is Martha approaching.

Even more telling is a point which links these considerations to the fact which undermines Ramsey's negative distinction, viz. that the grasp of any ordinary concept involves the same kind of open-endedness as that of generalisations. Our grasp of a concept surely manifests itself as a disposition—the disposition to apply the term in certain circumstances. Indeed, the complex disposition corresponding to holding a belief ('using a map', in Ramsey's account) depends on simpler dispositions of this kind. Grasp of concepts is like grasp of the map's key. To use a map we need to know what its symbols signify—we need to have adopted a practice which takes us from things in the world to symbols on the map and back again. And these are dispositions. So it seems that here, too, there is no boundary between universal judgements and others.

At times, Ramsey himself seems perfectly happy to acknowledge that habit or disposition goes all the way down, in this sense. 'All belief involves habit', he says at one point.[24] So does he himself think that there is the material here for a distinction between genuine judgements and others? Or is it rather that he thinks the distinction is drawn somewhere else, and that the story about the psychological role of universal judgements just meets an obligation incurred elsewhere (viz., to explain how such things function, given that they are not genuine judgements, and hence can't be dealt with under the wing of a more general account)?

The most charitable story seems to be the latter. Not having noticed what became the rule following considerations, Ramsey thought that the problems of infinity were confined to unrestricted generalisations. Against that background, he took it that he had a basis for a deep distinction between such generalisations and other judgements—a basis invulnerable to the observation that in some ways generalisations are like real

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[24] 'Law and Causality', p. 150. See also pp. 159-60, where he says that variable hypotheticals involve causality no more and no less then ordinary beliefs; for it belongs to the sense of any belief that we deduce from it, and act on it in a certain way, and this notion involves causality just as much as does the variable hypothetical.

judgements, given that the latter, too, are dispositional. Thinking that there was a clear distinction on the negative side, he had no reason (or at least no immediate reason) to insist that there be one on the positive side.

However, it is interesting to note Ramsey's own earlier sensitivity to the question as to whether there is a genuine distinction. This is from 'Mathematical Logic' (1926):

> It is possible that the whole assertion that general and existential propositions cannot express genuine judgements or knowledge is purely verbal; that it is merely being decided to emphasize the difference between individual and general propositions by refusing to use the words judgement or knowledge in connection with the latter. This, however, would be a pity, for all our natural associations to the words judgement and knowledge fit general and existential propositions as well as they do individual ones; for in either case we can feel greater or lesser degrees of conviction about the matter; and in either case we can be in some sense right or wrong. And the suggestion which is implied, that general and existential knowledge exists simply for the sake of individual knowledge, seems to me entirely false. In theorizing what we principally admire is generality, and in ordinary life it may be quite sufficient to know the existential proposition that there is a bull somewhere in a certain field, and there may be no further advantage in knowing that it is this bull and here in the field, instead of a bull somewhere. (pp. 235–6)

Ramsey here rejects the idea that what is at stake is merely a verbal matter, and appeals to the way in which we use generalisations (treat them as true, etc.) both against the idea that it is a matter of choice and in favour of the view that they are genuine propositions. Three years later he has changed his mind on the status of generalisations, and (as we shall see below) has interesting things to say about how to explain what he earlier took to be evidence to the contrary. He has not changed his mind about whether there is a substantial issue at stake, but this passage makes it clear that this was not because he had never contemplated the possibility that there might not be such an issue.

It is hard to believe that Ramsey himself would not have soon been struck by the lack of any substantial distinction in functional terms. The appropriate conclusion seems to be that formalism (understood as the doctrine that the infinite part of the theory is strictly meaningless, but nonetheless useful) gets no grip, once we move to a functionalist account of belief. And isn't this what we should expect? Analogously, what scope is there for the view that theories are mere instruments, if all judgement is to be understood in utilitarian terms—if belief in general is nothing more than a tool for getting us around a hostile environment?

6. KRIPKENSTEINIAN RAMSIFICATIONS

Given the importance Ramsey had earlier attached to the fact that we treat general judgements as if they were propositional (e.g., in taking them to be right and wrong) it is not surprising that when he does change his mind, he devotes much effort to *explaining* such features of ordinary usage. He now says:

> Many sentences express cognitive attitudes without being propositions:; and the difference between saying yes and no to them is not the difference between saying yes or no to a proposition. ... In order therefore to understand the variable hypothetical and its rightness or wrongness we must consider the different possible attitudes to it; if we know what these are and involve we can proceed easily to explain the meaning of saying that such an attitude is right or wrong, for this is simply having such an attitude oneself and thinking that one's neighbour has the same or a different one.[25]

We might compare Ramsey to a quasi-realist, in Blackburn's sense. He wants to be noncognitivist about generalisations, but recognises the importance of explaining why, for at least some purposes, such claims do avail themselves of the machinery available to genuine judgements—why they are described as true and false, for example.

What would Ramsey have made of the realisation that the considerations which led him to deny that generalisations were genuine propositions are actually global in character—that his position in 'General Propositions and Causality' is unstable in the way we have urged? One possibility is that he would have retreated to his former position. However, a more interesting and we think more plausible possibility is that his developing pragmatism would have led him forward—led him to acknowledge that there are no genuine propositions, in the sense that he had earlier taken for granted.

Had he taken this path, he would certainly have asked globally the kind of questions he does ask with respect to generalisations: Why do we treat the judgements concerned as propositional in character? Why do we take them to be true and false, for example? What does agreement and disagreement amount to? In effect, this would be the perspective of a global quasi-realist—someone who begins with quasi-realism, and then concludes that there is nothing that should not be understood in this way.

We close with two notes about the relevance of this non-actual Ramsey-extension ('Ramsey*', let's call him) to recent debates. First, the questions posed by Ramsey* seem to be just those questions that need to be addressed to defend a dispositionalist approach to rule following. As Kripke makes clear, there's a puzzle as to how dispositions can give rise to norms. (To paraphrase Wittgenstein: 'If what's right is what

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[25]General Propositions and Causality', p. 146

seems right, that just means we can't talk about right.') Ramsey*'s approach is to explain the phenomenology—to explain what normative notions such as truth and falsity are doing in conjunction with a practice founded on such dispositions. After all, this is just what Ramsey himself does for the case of generalisations. As the passage just quoted indicates, his approach is distinctly deflationary. The notions of rightness and wrongness simply express agreement or disagreement with "one's neighbour", as Ramsey puts it—in other words, with another speaker.[26]

It is far from clear that such an account is adequate. After all, how could it explain the difference between attitudes with respect to which we do apply the notions right and wrong those with respect to which we don't. (There are many attitudes with respect to which I may differ from my neighbour, without regarding him as wrong.) However, what interests us for the present is not the adequacy of Ramsey's account, but the philosophical stance is embodies. Clearly, Ramsey thinks the task of philosophy in this case is simply to explain the use of the notions concerned—he thinks that that's what explaining their meaning amounts to, in this case.

Second, it seems unlikely that Ramsey* had much time for Kripkenstein's own 'sceptical solution', which turns on a kind of local noncognitivism about content. Having been led to his own global view—global quasi-realism, as we called it—by the recognition that the problems first identified in generalisations infect every bit of language via meaning, it is hardly likely that Ramsey* found it plausible that they could then be confined again, by Kripkenstein's kind of local noncognitivism about meaning ascriptions. More likely, surely, that he recognised that there is no sterile field to be had, and that the mistake is to hang on to a view of language which makes the features first identified in the case of generalisations seem deviant or abnormal. More likely, then, that Ramsey* came to endorse with increasing confidence this modest suggestion first made by Ramsey himself: 'I think perhaps it is true that the theory of general and existential judgements is the clue to everything.'[27]

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[26]The account thus seems to anticipate Strawson's early performative account of truth, in *Analysis*, 1949.

[27]'Causal Qualities', p. 138.