

REVIEWS

Nils-Eric Sahlin, *The Philosophy of F.P. Ramsey*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990.

Reviewed by

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There is a continued interest in the work of Frank Plumpton Ramsey (1903–1930). Although that interest is perhaps magnified by the romantic allure of a career cut short at the age of 26, Ramsey's contributions to probability, the theory of truth, combinatorics, and the philosophy of mathematics were substantial. This book is written by an admirer of Ramsey and is intended to 'convey a feeling of the remarkable originality and depth of Ramsey's thought' (p. 10). The author's failure in this respect can be traced partly to a lack of context for Ramsey's work and partly to incessant verbal infelicities that interfere with the discussion. This note reviews only the chapter devoted to logic and mathematics (pp. 159–180), but the same criticisms can be levelled against other parts of the text as well.

As Sahlin notes, Ramsey's reputation as a contributor to formal logic rests on his criticisms of *Principia Mathematica*¹ and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*,² the title given by Braithwaite to the posthumous collection of Ramsey's papers (*The Foundations of Mathematics*) and the strength of his work in that area. Sahlin's chapter discusses briefly the paradoxes and the theory of types (ramified and otherwise) and Ramsey's attitude toward axioms and mathematical propositions. It is characteristic of Sahlin's style that it is frequently hard to tell when he is trying to paraphrase Ramsey and when he is trying to supply commentary. The critical apparatus for the chapter is limited in size and ignores almost all historical work on logic. For convenience of reference, Sahlin gives page

¹*The foundations of mathematics*, Proceedings of the London Mathematical Society (2) 25 (1926), 338–384. Reprinted in F.P. Ramsey, *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays*, R.B. Braithwaite (editor), (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul/New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1931), 1–61.

²*Critical notice of L. Wittgenstein's 'Tractatus Logico-philosophicus'*, Mind 32 (1923), 465–478. Reprinted in F.P. Ramsey, *The Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays*, R.B. Braithwaite (editor), (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul/New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1931), 270–286.