

BOOK REVIEWS

Candlish, Stewart 2007: *The Russell/Bradley Dispute and Its Significance for Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (Palgrave MacMillan; London)

I have long harboured the suspicion that the tale behind most metaphysical traditions should rightfully be told as a history of connections between misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and mistaken false conceptions. So it comes as no surprise to find that there is absolutely nothing in this latest work from Stewart Candlish that might dissuade me from this general suspicion.

In Candlish's focus is a metaphysical dispute that played out between two of the leading figures in British philosophy during the opening decades of the twentieth-century. In the blue corner stands representative Francis Herbert Bradley, wielding the weapons and defences of a Monistic, Absolute Idealism: and in the red corner stands representative Bertrand Arthur William Russell, brandishing the chainmail and cudgels of a Pluralistic Realism. Signifying the beginning of the descent into historical obscurity of the philosophical tradition known as 'British Idealism' and its subsequent supplantation in British philosophy by the (often despised) 'Analytic Program', the eventual outcome of this dispute is now widely regarded as having profoundly shaped the direction and development of most subsequent English-language philosophy. Is it any wonder, then, that the common, 'stereotypic' view of how this displacement came about has it that Russell and his ilk simply 'won' the dispute due to their superior analytic arguments? After all, history is nearly always written by the victors, and victors can usually write whatever they like.

But it is precisely this simplistic, stereotypic analysis of the Russell/Bradley dispute that Candlish sets squarely in his sights in this sometimes difficult, sometimes challenging, yet ultimately rewarding book. Candlish's central contention is that Bradley's apparent defeat (along with the subsequent trashing of his reputation and his consignment to the dust-bin of history) was not so much a result of his opponents' superior metaphysical arguments as it was the result of the effects of their rhetoric and propaganda, in combination with the external historical circumstances. Eschewing the standard, stereotypical themes, Candlish instead constructs his analysis of the dispute around a set of 'idiosyncratic' themes chosen specifically to help capture and reflect the dialectic interplay between the two principle protagonists. By also embedding this analysis in a comprehensive and impressive knowledge of the original texts, Candlish is then able to reassess the events and standard conceptions to produce significantly new and important insights for both camps in relation to the central philosophical issues around which the dispute revolved: e.g., the nature and unity of

the proposition, the correct account of truth, as well as the status of (internal/external) relations.

So there is much to like about this book, no matter which side of the disagreement you might ultimately favour. For those interested in understanding the origin, rise and eventual dominance of English-language philosophy by the ‘analytic schools’, this book provides an original and invaluable alternative perspective that no serious scholar of philosophy can afford to overlook. However, for those whose primary interest lies in Russell’s work, this book will also prove an invaluable resource, as Candlish’s nuanced and subtle exposition of some of the lesser known aspects of Russell’s views should provide reason for even a dedicated Russellian to pause and ponder. Similarly, those whose primary interest is in understanding Bradley’s version of Idealism should also find Candlish’s original insights in relation to some of the common misconceptions concerning Bradley’s position (e.g., that he was a Hegelian) especially helpful. What is not to like about this book, however, is the dense and sometimes difficult language in which it is couched. To be fair, perhaps this is merely a constraint forced upon the author by the necessity to employ the language of the era in which the dispute occurred, and certainly those who take to the idiom and style of the Victorian epoch with ease might find the writing ‘as clear and precise as it is fluid and engaging’ (as one dust-jacket reviewer opined). On the other hand, those who find such language nigh-on impenetrable - like me - will need all the patience and persistence at their disposal to glean the gems contained within. But have no fear, there is no doubt that such perseverance is worth the effort!

Yet even if it served none of purposes just mentioned, in the end this book deserves to be read as an original, important and valuable contribution to our understanding of philosophy; if for no other reason than it stands as a poignant and sharp reminder to all philosophers and historians of the immense value to be found in re-reading the *original sources*.

Brian Evans,

The University of Queensland

Hyde, Dominic 2008: *Vagueness, Logic, and Ontology*
(Ashgate; London)

What would it mean to claim that vagueness is not just semantic, or in language, but ontological, or in the world? In *Vagueness, Logic, and Ontology*, Dominic Hyde develops and defends a theory of ontological vagueness.

The first chapter is a user-friendly overview of the phenomenon vagueness. Hyde distinguishes vagueness from related phenomena like ambiguity and meaninglessness, distinguishes among various types of vagueness, and states the sorites argument in several forms. Although the chapter is chiefly a summary of previous work, it contains a few original insights. Hyde's definition of a borderline case in terms of speaker abilities is an improvement over theoretically loaded accounts that define vagueness in terms of truth. And his recursive definition of vagueness, which builds on work by Rolf (1980 and 1981) provides a method for tracing vagueness in complex expressions to vagueness in one or more of their parts.

Chapter 2 is a detailed and sympathetic discussion of Bertrand Russell's representationalism. For Russell and his fellow representationalists, vagueness is akin to ambiguity; vague representations denote many things. 'Everest' is vague because there are many precise hunks of rock that might count as its referent; 'tall' is vague because there are many precise sets of people that might count as its extension. Russell claims that vague language is logically incoherent, and should be replaced with precise scientific language

Hyde argues in chapter 3 that the project of purging vagueness from language looks unpromising. Even if scientific language is precise, it's unlikely that vague facts either reduce to or supervene on scientific ones. Chapter 4 criticizes an alternative representationalist strategy--admitting vague terms as legitimate, and jettisoning classical logic for a super- or subvaluationist logic. Hyde catalogues the weaknesses of super- and subvaluationist logics (non-truth-functionality, misleading claims about the existence of sharp cutoff points, and failures of common classical inference patterns), and concludes that their costs outweigh their benefits.

In chapters 5, defends ontological vagueness. His central claim is that being indeterminately F (where F stands in for any property) is not a property, but the possession of a property to an indeterminate degree. This claim lets him escape from arguments that vague identity statements, vague existence, and vague composition are incoherent (including the famous Evans argument).

In chapters 6 and 7, Hyde argues for a three-valued, truth-functional logic of vagueness based on the Lucasiewicz logic L_3 . L_3 avoids the problems associated

with supervaluationist logic, but it seems to give the wrong answers when used to count vaguely individuated objects. Hyde advances a disjunctive account of vague counting: 'there are n F s' has both an unadorned reading (on which it means that there are n F s) and an adorned reading (on which it means that n things are determinately F). He shows that the adorned reading gives the intuitively right answer in some cases, while the unadorned reading gives the intuitively right answer in others. Hyde's discussion of vague counting, while intriguing, is weak in spots. Although he points to some pragmatic reasons for preferring the adorned reading in some cases and the unadorned reading in others, he gives no general rules for choosing between them. And Hyde's account of quantifier restriction seems insufficiently general--it's not clear how we should evaluate 'half of all F s are G s' where F and G are vague.

Despite these worries about vague counting, *Vagueness, Logic, and Ontology* is generally persuasive, clear, and engaging. At \$99.95 from Amazon (over .4 cents a page), it's not a steal, but it's well worth checking out of your university library.

Rachael Briggs,
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Bibliography

- Rolf, B 1980, 'A Theory of Vagueness', *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, vol. 9, pp. 69-83.
Rolf, B 1981, *Topics On Vagueness*, PhD thesis, Lund.