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Paradoxes. R. M. SAINSBURY. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Pp. vii, 163.

This enjoyable book presents a potpourri of paradoxes with the purpose of showing how they connect to serious philosophical issues. The main paradoxes are Zeno's, the sorites, Newcomb's problem, the paradoxes of confirmation, the surprise examination, and the paradoxes of self-reference. A final chapter defends the assumption that contradictions are unacceptable and an appendix throws in sixteen minor paradoxes. Along the way, R. M. Sainsbury peppers the reader with helpful queries and provocative asides.

Sainsbury has not selected his topics in accordance with an overarching plan. Each section is well organized and there is continuity between most of the sections but the chapters are only loosely related. One gets the impression that much of each chapter developed independently of the rest, driven by

the author's intrinsic interest in the problem at hand. So the reader feels he is randomly touring orderly but disparate islands. This happy-go-lucky itinerary is responsible for several of the book's virtues. The topics come off as a representative sample of paradoxes. And since Sainsbury convincingly connects each paradox with a host of deep questions, the reader is persuaded that paradoxes solidly connect with philosophical issues. Lastly, the unconstrained format lets the joy of speculation shine through.

There are also several drawbacks to this casual approach. The level of the discussion jumps from elementary to advanced and then back down again. Often it is difficult for the reader to tell when he is getting the received wisdom and when he is getting the author's opinion. Sainsbury also fails to signal his turns from the exposition of facts to the presentation of views he later refutes. These flaws are evident in his otherwise strong chapter on the paradox of the heap. Although sorites arguments can be positive or negative, Sainsbury's examples are all positive.

Positive version of the heap paradox:

1. A collection of one million grains of sand is a heap.
2. If a collection of n grains of sand is a heap, then so is a collection of $n - 1$ grains.
3. A collection of one grain of sand is a heap.

Negative version of the heap paradox:

1. A collection of one grain of sand is not a heap.
2. If a collection of n grains of sand is not a heap, then neither is a collection of $n + 1$ grains.
3. A collection of one million grains of sand is not a heap.

Positive sorites arguments bloat the extension of a vague predicate while negative sorites arguments shrivel it. Given the logical analogy between the two and their conflict with each other, both arguments are highly suspect. However, it is

notoriously difficult to pinpoint the fallacy. An important first step in appreciating the force of the paradox is to distinguish vagueness from related phenomena and to draw distinctions between kinds of vagueness. Sainsbury's performance of this delicate operation is instructive but his subtle lessons are mixed too freely with elementary points. His footnotes reflect this ambivalence about the identity of his audience. Footnote four: "Show that each of the words in the list is vague by briefly sketching a borderline case. Can you think of any words that are not vague?". Footnote six, in contrast, requests a fully accurate definition of the supervaluationist's central concept of a sharpening (after pointing out a counterexample to the text's definition). This is a formidable problem; no one has solved it.

Now for my complaint about received wisdom.

Sainsbury begins with a nice, careful distinction between vagueness, ambiguity, and relativity -- preliminaries that even philosophers of language will find edifying. The "Just the facts" tone continues into his explanation of why the conclusion of the paradox cannot be accepted. By calling this

position a "nonstarter", Sainsbury makes it seem as if no competent philosopher would adopt it. But many philosophers regard negative sorites arguments as sound. Carnap thought sorites arguments force us to precisify all of our vague predicates. Peter Unger, Samuel Wheeler, and Mark Heller have agreed that the sorites demonstrates that there are no ordinary things (that vague predicates such as 'flower', 'chair', and 'philosopher' are empty). I agree with Sainsbury that these nihilists are wildly mistaken but he should at least signal that they are out there. One might ask, why should Sainsbury acknowledge their existence when they refuse to acknowledge ours? Well, Sainsbury does devote a full chapter to the question of whether contradictions are acceptable. If he is going to take repudiators of the law of contradiction seriously, then the mad-dog metaphysicians deserve at least a footnote.

Nor does Sainsbury mention the possibility of simply rejecting the second premise of the sorites argument -- without the razzle dazzle of deviant logics. This omission is a shame because students are drawn to this natural solution. If the

easy way out is an illusion, they should know why. Filling this gap in their understanding would also motivate the more complicated approaches of supervenience and many-valued logic. The omission is also lamentable because a number of contemporary philosophers defend the student's naive solution: James Cargile, Richmond Campbell, Israel Scheffler, David White, and me.

When Sainsbury turns to supervenience, he does not shift his expository tone. So it looks like we are just getting more facts. As I first read this section, I recall growing indignant about the way the author was slipping supervenience into the mouths of unsuspecting readers as if it were approved by the FDA. Someone ought to set the record straight! But wait! There's Sainsbury himself giving the business to the supervenienceists nine pages later!

The higgledy-piggledy format is also tilted toward a piecemeal approach to puzzle solving. Sainsbury is quick to draw connections between particular paradoxes (Newcomb's problem and the Prisoner's dilemma, the Raven paradox and Goodman's new riddle of induction, the self-referential

paradoxes) but he does not look for larger patterns. There is a long tradition of thinkers who viewed paradoxes holistically, as many signs of a master cognitive flaw. For example, Kant diagnosed the antinomies as symptoms of our drive to apply generalizations appropriate only for phenomena to noumenal reality. Perhaps these lumpers are overgeneralizing. But a balanced treatment would let them share the floor with the splitters.

Another way to strengthen the connection with mainstream philosophy would be through a discussion of the various roles that have been proposed for paradoxes. Recall Bertrand Russell's advice to stock puzzles as tests of philosophical theories. Wittgenstein operated under the assumption that philosophy is composed of its problems -- once these knots of the understanding are untied, philosophy vanishes. Roderick Chisholm, and more recently Nicholas Rescher, have demonstrated the motivational and classification power of paradoxes. On page 1, Sainsbury defines a paradox as "an apparently unacceptable conclusion derived by apparently acceptable reasoning from apparently

acceptable premises". But the light shed by paradox shines brightest when 'paradox' is defined as a set of individually plausible but jointly inconsistent propositions. Now our reaction to a paradox is readily explicable. To escape the pain of contradiction, we must reject a member of this set. Each rejection constitutes a philosophical position. For instance, Chisholm is able to classify three ethical positions as rival resolutions of the following paradox:

1. We have knowledge of certain ethical facts.
2. Experience and reason do not yield such knowledge.
3. There is no source of knowledge other than experience and reason.

The sceptic denies (1), the naturalist rejects (2), while the intuitionist argues against (3). Rescher gives the following illustration:

1. We do sometimes have rational beliefs.

2. To have a rational belief we must have good reasons that warrant its acceptance.

3. A good reason for a rationally held belief must itself be (pre)warranted -- it cannot afford a good reason for something if we do not have in hand a good reason for accepting it itself.

4. A good reason for a belief must be less problematic than the belief itself.

5. We do not obtain a good reason if the regress of warranting reasons is nonterminating -- that is, goes on ad infinitum.

Sceptics deny the first proposition and Rescher dubs the deniers of the second "irrationalists". Coherentists claim that cyclic chains of warrant are possible and so deny (3) while foundationalists present self-evident truths as counterexamples to (4). Rescher describes the rejection of the final proposition as "regress-acceptance". As he concludes "An interesting web of epistemological theories can be spun out

through the relatively simple exercise of working one's way out of the aporetic inconsistency of the preceding cluster."

Notice that the set-based definition gives us a lower count of paradoxes than the argument-based definition. Corresponding to a set with n members will be n arguments with the properties Sainsbury deems sufficient for paradox. For the negation of any member of the set is the conclusion of an argument containing the remaining members as premises. Since members of the original set are jointly inconsistent, the argument will be valid. And since the members are individually plausible, the audience will also find each premise of the argument persuasive. So which definition counts better? Ordinary usage, parsimony, and taxonomic unity favor the set-based definition.

Although Sainsbury would have reaped extra benefits from a different definition of 'paradox', his book achieves its goals of showing that paradoxes are fun and philosophically important. It does this in a competent, concise, cheerful way, so most problem-oriented philosophers will enjoy the ride even if it is bumpy. The book also has the best pedagogical

potential of its genre. Many teachers have schemed about ways to jump-start their students into controlled, philosophical reasoning. Paradoxes look like the solution because many of them feature concrete situations whose significance can be appreciated with little background. Unfortunately, teachers have lacked a text that would give the student a substantive follow-up to the class presentation. Sainsbury's book fills this gap.

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