

Trope neglect

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Kevin Mulligan has blazed a path in the history of analytic philosophy, showing us that the familiar cartoon histories of philosophical superheroes and super-villains won't do: that there are many other contributing characters, often who haven't written in English, whose roles have been neglected and underestimated, and once this is appreciated new possibilities open up for investigation. One of his recurrent concerns has been to educate the rest of us about the intellectual fruits that an appreciation of trope theory, especially with regard to the philosophy of perception, promises to bear. In the present paper I pursue a project which, from the point of view of Kevin's work, is, no doubt, relatively parochial but that I hope will still be of interest to him: namely, to come to an understanding of how one trope proselyte, G.F. Stout, and another apostate, G.E. Moore, contrived to talk past one another in a famous exchange in Durham in July 1923 ("Are The Characteristics of Particular Things Universal of Particular?"). The result was to mislead a generation of British philosophers and lead to their subsequent neglect of trope theory. I suggest that the failure of Stout and Moore to communicate arose from a deeper disagreement—that they failed to make explicit—about the nature of tropes, a disagreement that emerges in their earlier discussions about perception.