

# INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

SEBASTIAN SUNDAY GRÈVE  
JULIUS SCHÖNHERR

*Peking University | Spring  
Semester 2024*

## Course

Introduction to Philosophy (哲学导论), Spring Semester 2024

## Teachers

Sebastian SUNDAY GRÈVE, coordinator ([ssg@pku.edu.cn](mailto:ssg@pku.edu.cn)) (by appointment)

Julius SCHÖNHERR ([schoenherrjulius@gmail.com](mailto:schoenherrjulius@gmail.com)) (office hours: Wednesdays 15:00–17:00)

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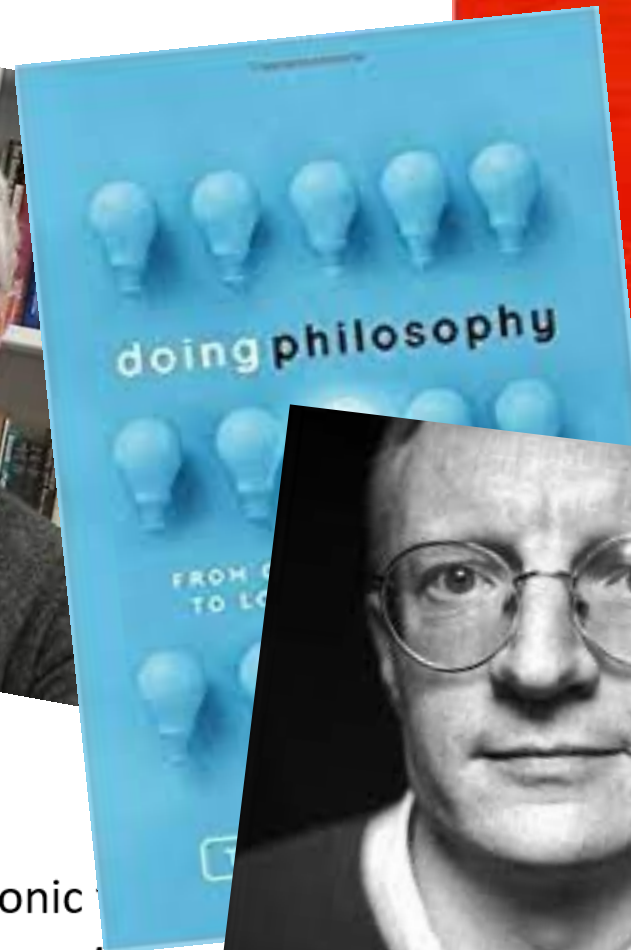
王睿里 WANG Ruili ([2201210991@stu.pku.edu.cn](mailto:2201210991@stu.pku.edu.cn))

## Locations

Lectures: Weeks 1–16, Tuesdays, 15:10–17:00, room tba

Discussion (required for 3 credits): Weeks 1–16, times to be determined, rooms tba





Michael Beaney  
**ANALYTIC  
PHILOSOPHY**  
A Very Short Introduction

OXFORD

## Optional background reading

[In alphabetical order. All readings will be made available in electronic format.]

Beaney, Michael. 2017. *Analytic Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Russell, Bertrand. 1912. *The Problems of Philosophy*. Williams and Norgate (Oxford UP, 1967).

Williamson, Timothy. 2018. *Doing Philosophy: From Common Curiosity to Logical Reasoning*. OUP.

## Writing advice for the 500-word essay

[This advice mainly concerns essays in philosophy, but much of it applies equally to the writing of other kinds of text.]

It is essential that your essay presents an argument in support of an answer to the question it addresses, and that this argument is briefly defended against one or more possible objections.

Clarity and precision are ideals generally worth striving for. Here 'clarity' means that any intelligent person who has never before heard about the issues you are addressing can understand your essay. And 'precision' means that no advanced philosopher can reasonably complain that the terms of your argument are vague or not well defined.

The following four principles may be derived from these ideals.

- (1) Restrict the scope of your essay to offering just an interesting part or version of an answer to merely an interesting part or version of the question (trying to offer a comprehensive philosophical treatment of anything in a short essay tends to be a hopeless undertaking).
- (2) Reduce the number of specialist terms to a minimum (because each one requires an explanation when it is first introduced).
- (3) Prioritise rigour—technical repetition, schematism, etc.—over beauty (for example, continue to use the same word rather than varying it for purely aesthetic reasons).
- (4) Give many examples (any claim that is not absolutely obvious should ideally be accompanied by an example, but you do not have so many words available, so choose your examples wisely).

Improving one's philosophical writing takes time and effort. It is generally advisable to finish a first draft early, and revise it later with at least a few days in between.

Please feel free to approach the teachers with any writing-related questions anytime. You may also benefit from reading Michael Huemer's writing guide (<https://www.owl232.net/writing.htm>).

# Schedule of topics

- 1: Introduction: what is analytic philosophy?
- 2: Philosophical paradoxes
- 3: Science and philosophy
- 4: AI ethics
- 5: Dualism
- 6: Physicalism
- 7: Consciousness
- 8: Intentionality
- 9: The self
- 10: The analysis of knowledge
- 11: Truth
- 12: Nietzsche vs Socrates
- 13: Scepticism
- 14: Naming and necessity

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## 2 PHILOSOPHICAL PARADOXES

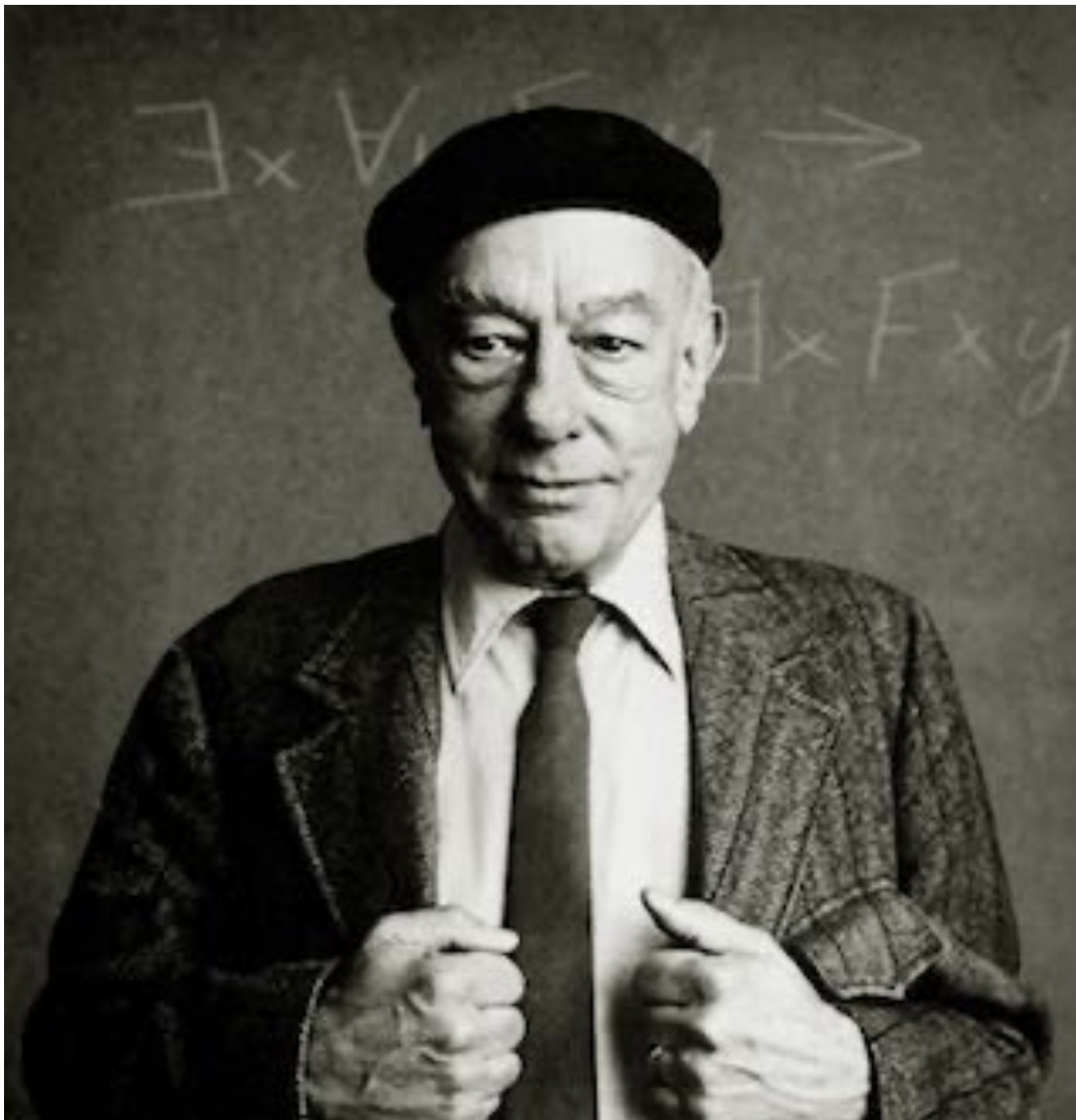
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W. V. O. Quine  
(1908 – 2000)



The point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it.

Russell, 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism', 1918



Thus what we directly see and feel is merely 'appearance', which we believe to be a sign of some 'reality' behind. But if the reality is not what appears, have we any means of knowing whether there is any reality at all? And if so, have we any means of finding out what it is like?

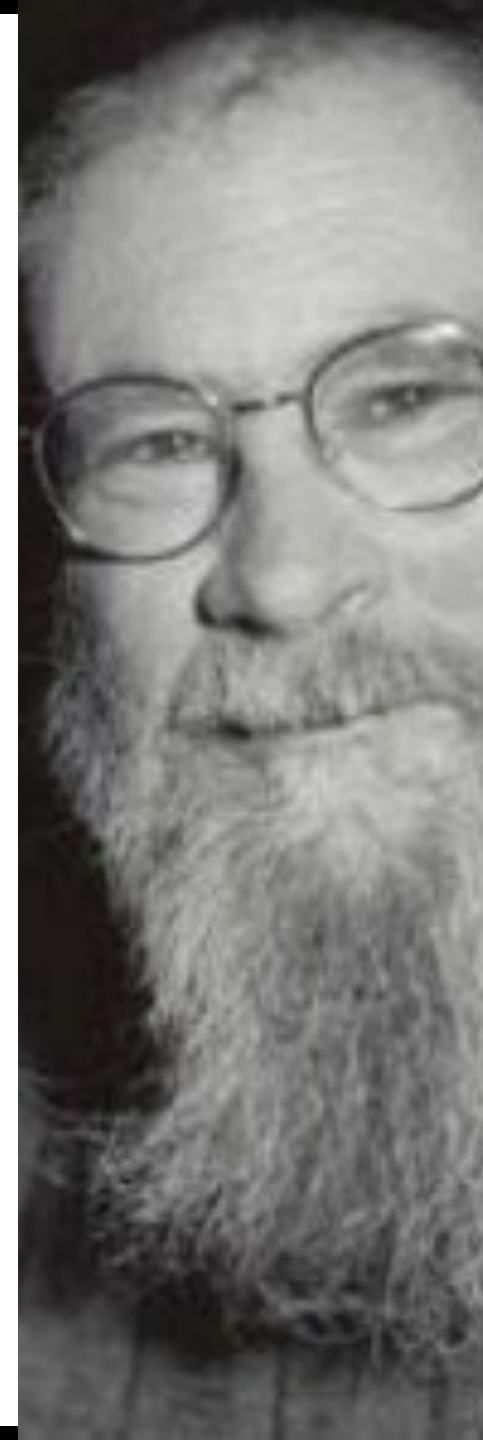
Such questions are bewildering, and it is difficult to know that even the strangest hypotheses may not be true. Thus our familiar table, which has roused but the slightest thoughts in us hitherto, has become a problem full of surprising possibilities. The one thing we know about it is that it is not what it seems. Beyond this modest result, so far, we have the most complete liberty of conjecture. Leibniz tells us it is a community of souls; Berkeley tells us it is an idea in the mind of God; sober science, scarcely less wonderful, tells us it is a vast collection of electric charges in violent motion.

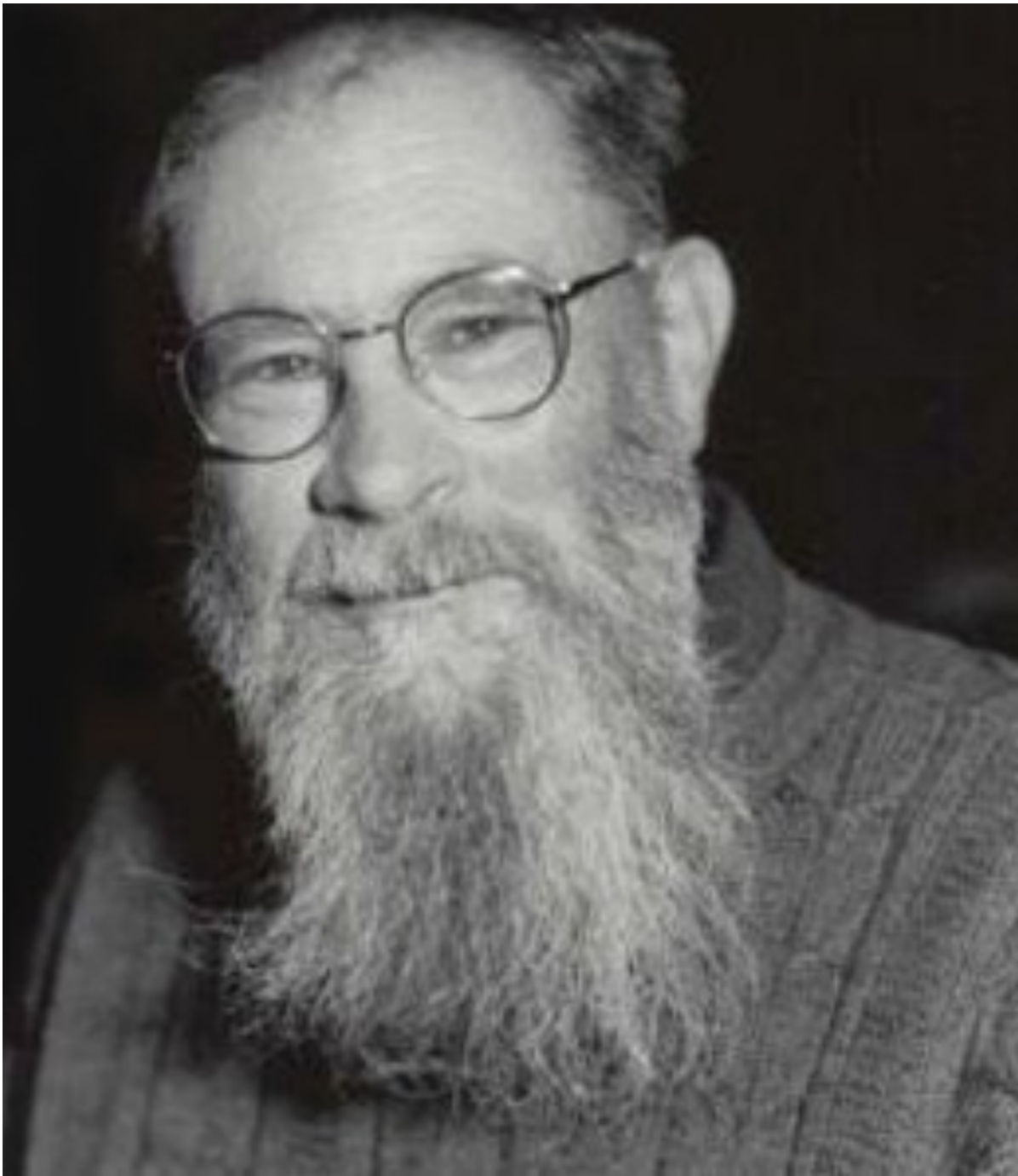
Among these surprising possibilities, doubt suggests that perhaps there is no table at all. Philosophy, if it cannot *answer* so many questions as we could wish, has at least the power of *asking* questions which increase the interest of the world, and show the strangeness and wonder lying just below the surface even in the commonest things of daily life.



If the paradox-monger is good at his work, we stand to learn something.

Lewis, 'Putnam's Paradox', 1984





David K. Lewis  
(1941 – 2001)

‘What Are Philosophical Paradoxes?’

# Examples

## Paradox of Analysis

- 1) For any ' $A = B$ ', either ' $A$ ' and ' $B$ ' have the same meaning or not.
- 2) So, ' $A = B$ ' is either trivial or incorrect.

## Moore's Paradox

- ❖ It is possible that it is raining and I do not believe it is raining; yet I cannot truly assert that this is actually so.

## Russell's Paradox

- 1) For every predicate, there is a set which consists of all and only those objects that satisfy the predicate. (Naïve Comprehension)
- 2) But not for the predicate 'is a set which contains all and only those sets that do not contain themselves'!
- 3) So, Naïve Comprehension is false.

## Barber Paradox

- ❖ There can exist no barber who shaves all and only those who do not shave themselves.

## Liar Paradox

- ❖ 'This statement is a lie.'

## Paradox of Omnipotence

- ❖ 'Can God create a stone too heavy for him to lift?'

## Paradox of Inference

- 1) 'If A, B and C (if A and B, then Z), why Z?'
- 2) 'Because of D (if A, B and C, then Z)?'
- 3) 'Etc.' etc.

Exactly

*What is a paradox?*

‘What Are Philosophical Paradoxes?’

*What makes it philosophical?*



# Excursus: What, exactly, are philosophical paradoxes? (1 of 2)

not  
exam-  
relevant

## *The nature of paradox*

- W. V. O. Quine: 'A paradox is just any conclusion that at first sounds absurd but that has an argument to sustain it.' (1962, 1)
- Recent criticism [see e.g. Lycan 2010]
  - 1) 'False identification of a paradox on the basis of one's own (subjective) preference for a way of resolving it!'
  - 2) 'False identification of a paradox on the basis of one's own (subjective) epistemic attitude, specifically on the basis of how plausible one finds individual propositions!'

➤ (Alt. def.) Paradox = inconsistent set of individually plausible propositions
- Possible defence of Quine (and rejection of alternative)
  - 1) Correct resolution of a given paradox also reveals its true nature
  - 2) Heliocentrism vs geocentrism, before and after Copernican Revolution



# Excursus: What, exactly, are philosophical paradoxes? (2 of 2)

not  
exam-  
relevant

## *Philosophical vs non-philosophical paradoxes*

### Scientific (non-philosophical) paradoxes

- Examples: Black Hole Information Paradox, Easterlin Paradox, Einstein–Podolsky–Rosen Paradox, French Paradox, *Helianthus Paradoxus* (paradoxical sunflower), Hispanic Paradox, Lek Paradox, Olbers' Paradox, Paradox of the Plankton, Paradoxical Embolism, *Pseudis Paradoxa* (paradoxical frog), *Pulsus Paradoxus* (paradoxical pulse), Twin Paradox

### Children's paradoxes

- For example, the fact that you cannot reach the end of a rainbow

### Philosophical paradoxes

#### 1) Object vs subject (compare psychology)

- Philosophers are most interested in cases that tend to be found paradoxical by even the most intelligent subjects

#### 2) Generality

- Philosophers are most interested in cases that only require a minimal amount of common knowledge to be found paradoxical (i.e. max. intuitive)



## The Sorites Paradox (AKA the Heap, the Bald Man) [see Clark]

10,000 grains suitably arranged make a heap. But, at no point can you convert a collection of grains that is a heap into one that is not, simply by removing a single grain. So it follows that a single grain makes a heap. For if we keep removing grains over and over again, say 9,999 times, at no point does it cease to be a heap. Yet we obviously know that a single grain is not a heap.



## The Sorites Paradox (AKA the Heap, the Bald Man) [see Clark]

### Argument II

- 1) A pile of 10,000 grains is a heap.
- 2) For any number  $n > 1$ : if a collection of  $n$  grains is a heap, so is a set
- 3) So one grain is a heap.

### Compare this argument:

- 1) A temperature of  $5^{\circ}\text{C}$  is above freezing point.
- 2) For any (whole number)  $n$ : if  $n^{\circ}\text{C}$  is above freezing point, so is  $(n-1)$
- 3) So a temperature of  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$  is above freezing point.

- The second premise is false because of the sharp cut-off point at 0
- But there seems to be no sharp cut-off point for heaps.



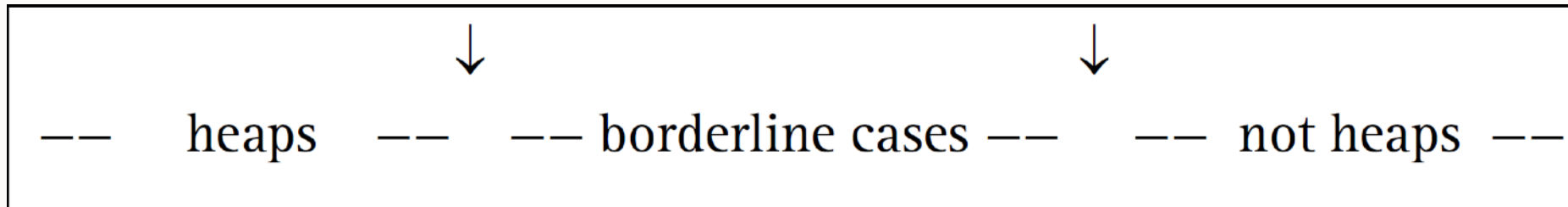
## The Sorites Paradox (AKA the Heap, the Bald Man) [see Clark]

### *Proposed solutions*

- Epistemicism ('there exist sharp cut-off points; vagueness is ignorance')
- Degrees of truth ('truth comes in degrees')
- Supervaluationism ('vagueness requires higher-order truth values')

### *The problem of higher-order vagueness*

❖ 'Are there sharp cut-off points between heaps and borderline cases?'



➤ Q. Do anti-epistemicists have less motivation to be precise and discover exact truths?

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

Sebastian SUNDAY GRÈVE



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