Vagueness, lecture 6: Ontic vagueness.

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1. Vague objects

- Tye [1990] proposes that there are vague objects in the world.

  – E.g. Mount Everest.

- Something x is a *borderline F* iff x is such that there is no determinate fact of the matter about whether x is an F.

- A concrete object o is *vague* iff

  (a) o has borderline spatio-temporal parts, and

  (b) there is no determinate fact of the matter about whether there are objects that are neither parts, borderline parts, or non-parts of o.

- This should put you in mind of Tye [1994]'s account of vagueness.

- Abstract objects and properties can be vague too.

  – E.g. the set of tall men.
  – E.g. the property of tallness.

- As can properties: property P is *vague* if

  (a) it could have borderline instances, and

  (b) there is no determinate fact of the matter about whether there could be objects that are neither instances, borderline instances, or non-instances.

2. Alternative characterisations

2.1. IDENTITY AND INDETERMINATENESS

- First alternative: we can characterise vague objects as ones whose identity is indeterminate.

- One reading of this view would be that (for some vague object o) there is no determinate fact of the matter about whether o is identical to o.

- Tye doesn't actually offer an argument against this view; he just says "surely we can all agree that this latter assertion is false, whatever o may be."

    – *What should one argue?*

    – *Is this view defensible, despite what Tye says?*

- Instead, the view must be that o is vague if there is an object o' such that it is not determinate whether o is identical with o'.

- But according to Tye, this doesn't guarantee that o is vague.

    – *Why is this?*

2.2. Imprecision

- Second alternative: vague objects are ones which can be made more precise.

- Works ok for vague sets.

- But what about vague concepts?

- Tye seems to takes higher-order vagueness to be constitutive of genuine vagueness.

    – *Does he have an argument for this? What is it?*

2.3. Vagueness primarily in concepts or properties

- Third alternative: the vagueness of concrete objects and sets is to be understood purely in terms of the vagueness of the appropriate concepts or properties.

- But vague properties can have extensions which are (contingently) non-vague.

    – *What do you make of this argument?*

- Contra this view, Tye claims that proper names (e.g. 'Everest') can be vague just as predicates (e.g. 'is tall') can be.

    – The claim that these terms are vague is to be understood as the claim that their *meanings* are vague.

3. A precise world?

- Tye seems to think that the claim that the world is in itself precise is prima facie implausible.

- Supervaluationism (e.g. as presented by Fine [1975]) seems to avoid the need for vague objects.

- But it doesn't by itself entail that there are no vague objects.

- In fact, Tye argues that supervaluationism is actually committed to the existence of vague objects!

- *What do you make of his argument to this effect?*

- Epistemicism (e.g. as presented by Williamson [1994]) also aims to avoid the need for vague objects.

  - Tye adopts an attitude of incredulity to this view.

  - *Is there actually any argument here, or is it just a brute appeal to intuition?*

4. Sorites objections to vague objects

- Tye thinks that sorites arguments don't show that vague objects don't exist.

- His response is that we shouldn't accept classical logic for vague statements.

- Again his preferred framework is Kleene's three-valued logic, as in his later paper [Tye 1994].

  - *Is Tye right that the objections based on the alleged circularity of his framework fail?*

  - *Does his approach also avoid paradoxes induced by higher-order vagueness?*

5. Identity objections to vague objects

- Tye then discusses Evans [1978]'s argument that there are no vague objects, which goes via the notion of identity.

  - *Evans's argument is short but somewhat cryptic. Can we unpack it a bit?*

- Tye claims that

  > [O]ne can grant that the argument demonstrates that identity statements (in which the identity sign is flanked by rigid names) cannot be indefinite in truth-value without admitting that such statements cannot be vague. To say that an identity statement is vague, on my view, is to say that it has a vague meaning. This will be the case, I maintain, if either of the singular terms flanking the identity sign is vague. But the vagueness of 'a' or 'b' in 'a = b' does not require that 'a = b' might be indefinite in truth-value.
  >
  > [Tye 1990, p. 556]

- *What do we make of Tye's argument here?*

- *Is Tye's claim that the supervaluationist is blocked from responding to Evans's argument in the same way? Can they respond in some other way?*

References

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