

The orthodoxy that vagueness is all a matter of thought and language has long been held in place by the belief that there is no real alternative. The idea that ordinary objects might really be vague has seemed too mysterious to take seriously. In part, this is because it has been thought that vague objects could not be fully present or have determinate identities. I shall show that there is no good reason to think so.

The misconception that vague objects cannot be fully present seems to be rooted in the notion that, if things are to have questionable parts, then composition must be vague, in the sense that there is sometimes no matter of fact whether some things make up a whole. Classically, a part of a whole is something that composes with some other things to make up this whole. So, one might think, if ever there is no matter of fact whether one thing is a part of another, that must be because there is no matter of fact whether the questionable part and some other things compose to make it up. But then, one might think, there can be no matter of fact whether something, the composition of the questionable part and these other things, exists. Now this idea is genuinely mysterious. How can something neither quite be nor not be there? Must we imagine that the presence of vague objects is somehow a matter of degree, like the intensity of a beam of light?

There is no need, for such thinking is mistaken. In fact, there can be vague objects though composition is precise. Imagine a vague cloud that has as its questionable part a wisp of water vapor on the edge. Suppose that, largely overlapping with this cloud, there is a collection of water droplets -- cloud-minor -- that is just like the cloud except that the wisp of vapor is a definite non-part of it. Since the wisp is a questionable part of the cloud, we can suppose furthermore that there is no matter of fact whether the wisp composes with cloud-minor to make up the cloud. The crucial point is that they can still compose to make up something. Their composition just has to be something other than the cloud: it has to be something of which the wisp is not a questionable part, but rather a definite part. The suggestion is that questionable parthood need not restrict composition at all, and the abstract vague world of section 6 bears it out. Some things within this world have questionable parts, but there is always a matter of fact whether any given things compose since they always do. Composition is completely unrestricted, and nothing has any sort of shady presence.

A second misunderstanding about vague objects has been the idea that there can be no saying which of them are which, or how many there are. Their very identities must be vague. This idea led Russell to reject the hypothesis that there are vague objects with the remark that "things are what they are, and there is an end of it" (op. cit., p. 62), and it led Gareth Evans to argue more fully that since the identities of things are always definite, the hypothesis that there are "objects about which it is a fact that they have fuzzy boundaries" is incoherent. I shall show that the argument from definite identities is inconclusive.

I shall not call into question what I take to be the insight at the center of both Russell's remark and Evans's argument, namely, that there is always a fact of the matter whether any given things are identical. That there might sometimes be no fact of this matter really is hard to imagine. Things are identical to themselves but different from other things, and it is hard to see how, somehow between itself and everything else, there can be anything left for a vague object to be indefinitely identical to. Talk about vague objects with indefinite identities really does not appear to be talk about anything at all.

For a long time, the suspicion has lingered that the idea of vague objects has something to do with idealism. I shall argue that ordinary material objects can be vague and, although my argument does not require it, to ward off suspicion that some sort of idealism is involved, we shall rule out indefinite

identities from the start. This is, of course, not to say that identity statements are always either true or false. They will still have truth-value gaps, as they must, when singular terms do not determinately denote. The main problem with the argument from definite identities is just that there is no reason to think that things with fuzzy boundaries must have indefinite identities. Strangely, Evans did not even try to show that they must; perhaps it did not occur to him that having a fuzzy boundary and having an indefinite identity might be different things. However this may be, the omission hides a crucial difficulty with his argument, which comes to light as soon as we try to complete it. To establish that fuzzy boundaries make for indefinite identities, someone might reason as follows. Comparing a vague cat Tibbles to a precise Tibbles-candidate, we see that they exactly agree as far as the definite parts and non-parts of Tibbles are concerned. So any difference between them must be among the questionable whiskers and hairs. But then, since there is no saying whether these are parts of Tibbles, there is no saying whether there is any difference at all between Tibbles and the candidate. In other words, there is no matter of fact whether Tibbles and the candidate are one and the same.

This reasoning overlooks something. If vagueness is a real characteristic of things, in particular of cats, then the possible differences between Tibbles and the Tibbles-candidate are not confined to the questionable whiskers and hairs. In fact, there is an obvious difference between them after all: Tibbles is vague but the candidate is not vague. There can be no question whether they are identical, for they definitely are two different things, not one, and nothing in between.

In summary, Russell was right that things are what they are. Things are identical to themselves, different from other things, and indefinitely identical to nothing. Still, the world might be vague since, for all anyone has said, also things without sharp boundaries can have definite identities. Also they can be "what they are." We have no good reason to think that, since identities are definite, the world must be precise.

Úkoly:

1. Charakterizujte text.
2. Zařadte problematiku v rámci ontologie.
3. Charakterizujte základní pozice v této problematice.
4. Shrňte základní teze a argumenty.
5. Okomentujte a zhodnoťte argumenty.