

BOOK REVIEWS

In chapter 7, Mele presents the Zygote Argument, which is based on a case of “engineering in utero” (188). Diana, who is a goddess in a deterministic universe, creates a zygote with exactly the right characteristics and in exactly the right circumstances so that the person into whom the zygote eventually develops will at some future time perform some desired action. Readers are invited to have the intuition that the person who developed from the zygote, Ernie, does not freely perform and is not morally responsible for performing the action Diana engineered him to perform. But given that there is no relevant difference between Ernie’s development and the way any of us would develop in an ordinary deterministic world, it follows that determinism is equally threatening to freedom and moral responsibility.

Of course, the Zygote Argument probably won’t convince a committed compatibilist, but it does do a nice job of cleanly capturing a fundamental disagreement between compatibilists and incompatibilists over this question: could someone else also be morally responsible for your morally responsible actions? It’s an interesting question why intuitions diverge so sharply on this issue, and the Zygote Argument does a nice job of making that question salient.

Given Mele’s agnostic autonomism, one might initially think that his theories would be, as “best-of-both-worlds” solutions tend to be, equally unappealing to both sides. But Mele is a sincere agnostic who feels the strength of all the arguments, and so does not attempt any sort of foolish reconciliation. Far from pleasing no one, the truth is just the opposite: both compatibilists and incompatibilists can claim Mele as an ally, and a valuable one at that.

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Stewart Shapiro, *Vagueness in Context*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. xiv + 226 pp.

Stewart Shapiro’s book develops a contextualist approach to vagueness. It’s chock-full of ideas and arguments, laid out in wonderfully limpid prose. Anyone working on vagueness (or the other topics it touches on—see below) will want to read it.

Many thanks to Stewart Shapiro for very helpful correspondence.

BOOK REVIEWS

According to Shapiro, vague terms have borderline cases: there are objects to which the term neither determinately applies nor determinately does not apply. A term determinately applies in a context if and only if the term's meaning and the nonlinguistic facts determine that they do. The nonlinguistic facts include the "external" context: "comparison class, paradigm cases, contrasting cases, etc." (33). But *external*-context-sensitivity is not what's central to Shapiro's contextualism. Even if one fixes the external context, vague terms' (anti)extensions exhibit sensitivity to *internal* context: the decisions of competent speakers. According to Shapiro's *open texture* thesis, for each borderline case, there is some circumstance in which a speaker, consistently with the term's meaning and the nonlinguistic facts, can judge it to fall into the term's extension and some circumstance in which the speaker can judge it to fall into the term's antiextension: he or she can "go either way." Moreover, borderline sentences are Euthyphronically *judgment-dependent*: a competent speaker's judging a borderline case to fall into a term's (anti)extension makes it so. For Shapiro, then, a sentence can be true but indeterminate: a case left unsettled by meaning and the nonlinguistic facts (and thus indeterminate, or borderline) may be made true by a competent speaker's judgment. Importantly, among the nonlinguistic facts that constrain speakers' judgments (at least in the cases Shapiro cares about) is a principle of *tolerance*: for all x and y , if x and y differ marginally in the relevant respect (henceforth, Mxy), then if one competently judges that Bx , one cannot competently judge y in any other manner in the same (total) context.¹ This does not require that one judge that By : one might not consider the matter at all. So long as *some* borderline case remains unresolved, the inductive sorites premise—for all x and y , if Mxy , then, if Bx , then By —is neither true nor false. If we consider a borderline case and judge it one way or the other regarding B , then tolerance and consistency require that some *other* borderline case be unresolved (even if in a previous context it *was* resolved).

Shapiro lays out this view of vagueness in chapter 1 without directly arguing for its main claims. The hope is that they constitute an attractive package relative to leading rivals, the pros and cons of which are for the most part assumed to be familiar to readers. Following a chapter on the role of formal languages in modeling natural languages, chapters 3 and 4 develop a detailed model theory that embodies Shapiro's view of vagueness, and thus provides guidance for understanding the logic of languages containing vague

1. Shapiro doesn't claim that tolerance is part of a vague term's *meaning*. He allows that a speaker may sometimes draw a sharp boundary for current purposes without being semantically incompetent or changing the meaning of the term. But he is concerned with situations in which tolerance is "in force." (It would be consistent with his view to maintain that tolerance is a semantic default: in force unless reasonably overridden by current needs.)

BOOK REVIEWS

terms. Chapter 5 considers higher-order vagueness and how the model theory might be modified to accommodate it. Chapter 6 extends the view to handle vague singular terms. Chapter 7 discusses whether vagueness is a linguistic phenomenon and whether vague discourse is objective. Finally, an appendix takes up Waismann's views on open texture and analyticity.

Shapiro's book is rich, and there is much to argue about. I limit myself to tensions between *tolerance* and both *open texture* and Shapiro's definition of determinacy. For critical discussion of other aspects of Shapiro's views, see Eklund 2006, Keefe 2007, and Sorensen 2008.

Open texture requires that borderline cases *can* go either way, but *tolerance* requires that borderline cases sufficiently similar to determinate cases *cannot* go either way. Suppose *c* is determinately *B*, a competent speaker correctly judges that *Bc*, *c'* is borderline *B*, and *Mcc'*. Then, by *tolerance*, the speaker cannot judge that *not-Bc'*. Moreover, assuming external context is held fixed, there is *no* context in which a speaker could competently judge that *not-Bc'*. (Suppose otherwise. Then, given *tolerance*, the speaker could *not* competently judge that *Bc*. But *c* is determinately *B*—that is, made true by the meaning of *B* and the nonlinguistic facts—and a speaker is competent with respect to *B* if his or her judgments regarding *B*-ness are consistent with *B*'s meaning and the nonlinguistic facts. So, no matter the internal context, a speaker *can* competently judge that *Bc*.) But that there is *no* context in which a speaker could competently judge that *not-Bc'* conflicts with its being a borderline case. For, according to *open texture*, if *c'* is borderline *B*, then there is some internal context in which one *can* judge that *not-Bc'*.

One might reply that this argument's suppositions are questionable when there is higher-order vagueness. Shapiro is officially unsure whether there *is* any (so-called) higher-order vagueness.² But suppose there is. The thought, then, is that nothing in Shapiro's model theory guarantees that there is a determinate case and a borderline case that differ marginally. But does anything guarantee that there will *not* be, for some vague predicate? Even if a large number of higher-order-vague cases intervene between *c* and *c'* along the comparative-*B*-ness-dimension, the number of intervening cases does not settle whether *Mcc'*. (If the domain, ordered by comparative-*B*-ness, is dense, there will *always* be a nonfinite number of intervening cases.) Shapiro should agree that this reply shoulders the burden: he argues that, given the limits of human discrimination (and the role of judgment-dependence), "for all practical purposes, most . . . higher-order borders are sharp" (127).

2. Shapiro denies that there is higher-order vagueness *if* one means a further species of vagueness for a predicate beyond its having borderline cases. What he is officially unsure of is whether such complex predicates as 'satisfies the application conditions of *B* as determined by the thoughts and practices of competent speakers' are vague. Henceforth, I suppress the 'so-called.'

BOOK REVIEWS

In any event, we can run a version of the argument where *c*' is *higher-order* borderline. Suppose *c*' is borderline-borderline. Shapiro argues (135) that, if there is higher-order vagueness, it has its source in the vagueness of 'competent speaker'. He thus accommodates higher-order vagueness by defining determinacy in terms of competence—it's determinate that *P* just in case *P* and it's not competent to judge that not-*P*—and by allowing that claims concerning competence and thus determinacy can be neither true nor false. Shapiro argues further (155) that there are penumbral connections among claims concerning what's competent with respect to *B*-judgments and claims concerning *B*-ness. In particular, for any *x*, if it is true, or made true by a competent speaker's judgment concerning competence, that it's not competent to judge that *Bx*, then not-*Bx*. Now, it's because 'competent speaker' is vague that it's neither true nor false that it's not competent to judge that *Bc*'. So, by *open texture*, there is an internal context in which the vagueness of 'competence' is resolved so that it's not competent to judge that *Bc*'. But then, by the penumbral connection, not-*Bc*', and so it's competent to judge that not-*Bc*'. But this is again incompatible with *tolerance*'s demand that it *not* be competent to judge that not-*Bc*' in any internal context. And if we suppose rather that *c*' is *n*th-order borderline ($n > 2$), we can reach the same conclusion by repeated use of the penumbral connection.

Moreover, having introduced Shapiro's definition of determinacy, we can now note the tension between *it* and *tolerance*. Return to our supposition that *c*' is borderline *B*. Since *Mcc*', it's not competent to judge that not-*Bc*'. But now suppose that in some internal context a competent speaker resolves *c*' by judging *Bc*'. It follows from the definition that it is determinate that *Bc*' and thus that *c*' is *not* borderline. If we lack reason to think there *cannot* be a borderline case that differs marginally from a determinate case, we must reject the definition.

An alternative reply runs as follows. We assumed that *open texture* requires that there are circumstances in which a competent speaker can judge a borderline case either way even when *tolerance* is in force. But it might suffice for openness that there are circumstances in which *tolerance* is *not* in force and a competent speaker can judge either way. Then, even if *Mcc*', one can competently judge that not-*Bc*' because *B*'s meaning and the relevant nonlinguistic facts need not preclude one's drawing a sharp boundary for current purposes.³

A problem, however, is that, at least in some cases, considering what would be the case were *tolerance* not in force may involve considering what would be the case were the relevant nonlinguistic facts *different*. Recall that the relevant nonlinguistic facts include whatever constitutes external context.

3. Thanks to Stewart Shapiro for suggesting this reply, which may not express his own considered view.

BOOK REVIEWS

Suppose we draw a sharp boundary for current purposes: circumstances are such that we must sort the balls exhaustively into two bins, so we select #134 as our last red ball, even though it differs marginally from #135. Arguably, the relevant comparison class thereby becomes something like *what matches or is redder than #134*. To argue that dropping *tolerance* never affects external context, one would have to tell us much more than Shapiro does about what external context is, how it is determined, and what determines whether *tolerance* is in force.⁴

Finally, one might abandon *open texture*'s claim that "unsettled entails open" (10), restricting it to cases not marginally different from a determinate case. This significantly modifies the account's "main thesis" (44), but in a way that retains its character. Perhaps *resolvability* then becomes the *fundamental* feature of borderline cases, with openness a further feature only some happen to have. But Shapiro could maintain that there is sufficient openness for it to be central to a complete account of vagueness.⁵ Be that as it may, even if this is the best reply to the tension between *tolerance* and *open texture*, the concession leaves untouched the tension between *tolerance* and the definition of determinacy. The definition is not obviously amenable to concessive restriction and cannot be abandoned unless some other account of higher-order vagueness is put in its place—or unless Shapiro is willing to deny categorically the existence of higher-order vagueness after all.

Shapiro's book has many attractions, and one learns an enormous amount from working through it. It's less obvious how attractive the position it puts forward is in the end. But that's so with all extant views of vagueness.

4. One can distinguish *tolerance*'s not being in force from someone's having actually exercised the option of drawing a sharp boundary. But, still, that *tolerance* is no longer in force may suffice to alter external context. Pending clarification and argument to the contrary, it's plausible to think that whether *tolerance* is in force and what the external context is are both determined by current interests and purposes.

5. There's no standard sense in which *most* borderline cases are open since, even for one sorites series, there can be uncountably many that aren't. Claiming that borderline cases are *generically* open would require some independent grasp of an "(ab)normal" borderline case. And it's unclear that all predicates or sorites series must have *some* open borderline cases: in principle, some might have borderline cases *each* of which differs marginally from a determinate case. More controversially, there could be a predicate or series each of whose borderline cases differs marginally *both* from something determinately B and from something determinately not-B. If that were so, then none of its borderline cases would be even *resolvable* if tolerance were in force. It might be objected that differing marginally from a determinate B suffices for not differing marginally from something determinately not-B—and vice versa. To assess this, we would need to know more about what counts as differing marginally. Shapiro at one point characterizes a sorites series as one where "it is at least *prima facie* plausible that for each $i < n$, if Pa_i , then Pa_{i+1} " (3).

BOOK REVIEWS

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Penelope Mackie, *How Things Might Have Been: Individuals, Kinds, and Essential Properties*.

Oxford: Clarendon, 2006. xii + 212 pp.

This book offers insightful discussions on topics that have long been central to the metaphysics of modality. It is written with laudable clarity and designed to satisfy both expert and less expert readers.

Mackie defends here, with a Lewisian methodology, a rather unorthodox and controversial essentialist view about individuals that she labels "Minimalist Essentialism" (ME) and also "Fairly Extreme Haecceitism" (166). According to ME, essential properties are minimal both in terms of quantity and in terms of the constraints they impose on how things might have been. In relation to its title, the book argues that things might have been in far more ways than we usually believe—although Aristotle could not have been a number, he could have been a poached egg (155).

Theories on the metaphysics of modality can be ordered by strength in terms of their consequences as regards the existence of essential properties. The strongest theories in this spectrum are those committed to *individual essences*; that is, essential properties that are also unique to the individual that possesses them (18). Following them, there are theories that, while not committed to individual essences, are nonetheless committed to nontrivial essential properties such as, for instance, those derived from principles like Necessity of Origin (37). In a weaker position there is Sortal Essentialism. ME is a rather weak thesis: although it entails the existence of some essential properties, it entails very few of them. ME is therefore somewhat stronger than (Extreme) Extreme Haecceitism (EEH), understood as a thesis that denies