

of counterfactuals to the contrary, C appears to be false, since snow's being green is only one of a number of possible ways in which 'Snow is green' might be made true; another is a change in the way the word 'green' is used in English, say a change that rendered it synonymous with what we now mean by 'white'. Someone who used the word 'green' in this non-standard way, someone with an English 'idiolect' different from those of normal English speakers, could utter a true sentence in uttering 'Snow is green' without altering the colour of snow.

To cut a moderately long and well-articulated story short, David contends that one cannot hold onto such apparently unexceptionable truisms as that the truth-value of a sentence depends upon both *what the sentence says* and *how things stand* without relying upon notions to which the true disquotationalist cannot appeal on pain of abandoning the radically deflationary claims that motivated the theory in the first place; notions, that is, such as 'representation', 'state of affairs', and a 'relation to reality'.

Correspondence and Disquotation does leave us with some hard unanswered questions, and it is not free of rough edges. It is silent, for example, on the issue of the relationship between the disquotational theory effectively drubbed by Mr David, and other varieties of deflationary theory. This silence is disappointing in "an essay intended as a contribution to the debate between substantivism and deflationism" (p. 4), and it substantially weakens the case that has been made for David's bold closing conclusion that "the failure of disquotationalism should lead to approval for the correspondence theory of sentence-truth, assuming one wishes to preserve the simple idea that 'Snow is white' is true just in case snow is white" (p. 188). The assumption made here, that correspondence theorists and disquotationalists are uniquely able to do justice to Tarski's famous schema, is false; Peircean pragmatists, at least, are as intent as any on preserving the 'simple idea' enshrined in the T-schema. David's use of Tarski in fact seems almost deliberately to skirt a number of well-known thorny issues; for example the relationship between formal and natural language, and the pertinence of Tarski's work to the sorts of point at issue between competing *philosophical* views of truth. Questions and quibbles of this sort, though, arise mainly at the margins of Mr David's present work, and should not be allowed to detract from the high quality of its main body.

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Vagueness

By TIMOTHY WILLIAMSON

Routledge, 1994. xiv + 326 pp. £35.00

This is a marvellous book. Not for a long time have I read anything which was at the same time so easy and pleasant to read and so stimulating. The book builds slowly to a defence of a view which many philosophers will find hard to believe, that the phenomenon of vagueness is primarily epistemic. Williamson sometimes expresses this in a deliberately outrageous way: there

is a number of hairs at which a man ceases to be bald, there is a shade at which blue turns to green, but we have no way of knowing where these turning points are. Later in this review I will return to the question of whether this is in fact the conclusion that Williamson's analysis leads to.

The early chapters of the book are historical. They trace the evolution of philosophical concern with vagueness and with the sorites paradox from Eubulides (who seems to have invented a good proportion of the conundrums that still keep philosophy going) to Russell. One of the functions of these chapters is to bring out how Stoic writers used sorites paradoxes in arguments for epistemic conclusions, in particular for the conclusion that suspension of judgement is the rational response to some questions. Another is to make clear that mathematical induction is not an essential requirement for the paradoxes. The discussion of Peirce and Russell serves to distinguish the meaning of 'vague' that raises the questions at issue from other senses with which Peirce and Russell sometimes confused it. In particular vagueness has to get separated from ambiguity. The discussion becomes more contemporary in feel with a discussion of writers like Körner, in which the assimilation of degrees to which an object can fall under a predicate to degrees to which a sentence can fall under the predicate 'true' is fairly definitively demolished. A discussion of supervaluation, focussing in particular on Fine, argues persuasively that supervaluational approaches cannot handle higher order vagueness.

A chapter on 'nihilism', the least zingy of the book, argues against desperate possibilities like accepting that all men are bald, or that no vague assertion makes sense. The next chapter centres on an extremely sharp and tidy argument against abandoning bivalence. The argument should inhibit philosophers inclined to part with bivalence on topics other than vagueness, too: it is sure to be influential. It assumes a metalanguage into which a vague utterance *u* can be translated as *P*, and a characterisation of bivalence as 'if *u* says that *P* then either *u* is true or *u* is false'. It then uses Tarski-like schemata to derive from the denial of bivalence the consequence 'Not: either *P* or not *P*'. By De Morgan's law this entails '*P* and not not *P*'. Which premise should a defender of truth value gaps resist? Possibly the assumption that a vague utterance can be translated into the metalanguage. But compare: exactly the same argument could be given where *u* says that Hamlet had blue eyes or that this is a koala (where the speaker says or does nothing to back up the word translated as 'this'). In both cases the utterance can be translated into the metalanguage. And in both cases an epistemic solution is extremely hard to believe: it is incredible that 'Hamlet has blue eyes' or 'this is a koala' (ostention withheld) are simply true or simply false, though we have no way of knowing which. My own reaction to the argument is that it cuts through fashionable flim flam distinguishing between, for example, excluded middle and bivalence, to reveal a basic dilemma. And one, at any rate, of the previously innocent looking characters that then appears suspect is in fact De Morgan. Consider a bit of verbal junk like 'I am a jumbacious jabberwock'. It is easy to take 'Not (I am a jumbacious jabberwock & I am

not a jumbacious jabberwock)' as true. But the truth of 'Either I am a jumbacious jabberwock or I am not' seems a slippery and more puzzling thing.

Williamson's sense that excluded middle and bivalence are equally unproblematic for vague sentences is tied to a theme that runs through several chapters, of the pointlessness of trying to analyse away vagueness in a precise metalanguage. Only in a vague metalanguage can one give the right truth condition for '*a* is red', i.e. that it is true if *a* is red. Notice though that even in a vague metalanguage one can note that some words are vague. Vague words don't become just like any other, and saying of a red-orange leaf, 'Well, either it is true that it is red or it is false' is just as puzzling or sensible as before semantic ascent. It is relevant here that a metalanguage can be vague in two intuitively different ways. It can contain words whose extensions are not appropriately fixed by the patterns of usage, conventions, or meanings behind them. Or the usage, conventions and meanings can themselves be indeterminate in various ways. Williamson does not distinguish between these. (He speaks very little about meaning, only enough to say that it supervenes on patterns of usage about which speakers have imperfect knowledge, and he does not mention linguistic conventions at all.) Most vagueness obviously involves both factors, but need not mean that all wobbly extensions trace down directly to wobbly usage or meaning. To the extent that we recognise words as vague and expect one another to hesitate over borderline cases we are operating fairly definite conventions that generate less definite extensions.

Finally Williamson is in a position to explain how vagueness can be produced by ignorance. The central idea is the imprecision of our knowledge of the usage that makes meaning that determines extension. (I shall say 'convention', though he does not.) Although the use of 'red' may be governed by a convention which entails that this stone is not red, our status as subjects and co-authors of the convention does not tell us enough to deduce that it withholds 'red' from this stone. So 'this stone is red' is a borderline case due to our ignorance: we do not know whether the convention forces or withholds the predicate. (I have the impression that another premise is at work too: that a sentence is false unless facts and meaning force it to be true. But Williamson is not explicit about this.)

At this point we need and get an analysis of inexact knowledge. Knowledge that *a* is *P* is inexact when having it guarantees that something very similar to *a* would also be *P*. When knowledge is inexact you don't have to be spot on to be right. A sharp and extremely helpful analysis of inexact knowledge and margins for error, in the second last chapter and an appendix, establishes that where knowledge is inexact knowing that *p* does not entail knowing that one knows that *p*, and that failure to realise this opens the door to sorites type arguments. These sections are harder going than most of the rest of the book, but well worth working through. They should be of interest to philosophers working on conditional theories of knowledge and on scepticism as well as to philosophers of language. Vagueness is a form of inexact knowledge. As Williamson says, "What distinguishes vagueness as a source of inexactness is that the margin of error principles to which it gives rise advert to small differences in meaning, not to small differences in the objects under

discussion". Accepting this is not to accept the ignorance theory of vagueness. But it gives one an understanding of how ignorance can give rise to some of the consequences of vagueness and how our knowledge of linguistic conventions could be exact enough to allow us to speak to one another and yet inexact enough that we do not know precisely what they include and exclude.

Williamson's analysis does not go beyond this point. The intellectual effort in the last quarter of the book is directed at inexact knowledge, with vagueness as just one illustration. A final chapter is a nice discussion of vague facts without very focussed conclusions. It does not resolve nagging doubts from the argument so far. Two things seem to be lacking. The first is a less tantalising account of how ignorance of linguistic conventions leads to vagueness. Williamson sometimes writes as if whenever a vague word is used there is a single unambiguous convention which determines its precise extension (but we cannot know precisely what it is.) In many cases this is terribly implausible. Conventions supervene on the intentions and patterns of usage of speakers. But which speakers, which patterns, and which intentions? It is hard to believe that the convention is not usually a blobby thing fixing one extension if construed one way and another if another. Terms are usually used in a conversation involving two or more people, and local temporary conventions wobble the extension in one way or another. To know these conventions speakers must know the intentions and expectations of their interlocutors. They obviously cannot know them precisely. But this imprecise knowledge is also constitutive of the content of the conventions, so to the extent that we do not know quite what we are agreeing our agreement is not a determinate thing.

The other thing that seems missing is a real intuition-shifting defusing of the sorites. Take 'poisoned induction': if *a* is P and *b* is minimally different from *a* then *b* is P. Williamson in effect wants to replace this with the less problematic fact that very often we cannot know that *a* is P and minimally different *b* is not P. But without more explanation that in some sense makes the situation even more puzzling. Are there threshold objects *a* such that the truth '*a* is P and minimally different *b* is not P' is in principle unknowable by us?

The worry about sorites and the worry about convention are linked. The meaning of 'red' entails that something the colour of fire trucks is red and something the colour of grass is not, but it also entails that people in conversation can decide of many things between fire trucks and grass that they are or are not red, for as long as the conversation lasts. (The global character allows a local content.) Moreover if we begin a conversation about a fire truck then the meaning of 'red' entails that something just a little yellower than that colour would also count as red. It entails it via facts about what we know about each other's knowledge of the meaning, which Williamson's picture could help unravel. In particular a two-person KK failure will help stave off sorites. (It is mutual knowledge that shade 1 is red. I know that you know that shade 2 would also be red. But I don't know that you know that I know that shade 2 would also be red.) So the global meaning of a vague word can allow local variations of meaning, and the fact that it

allows these lies behind the intuition that the context-unspecified meaning says neither Yes nor No to some objects. (Compare vagueness to nonsense: jumbaceous jabberwocks. No local convention could entail that I am and am not a jumbaceous jabberwock, and any such convention could assign 'jumbaceous jabberwock' a meaning either including or excluding me. So when we hesitate to assert 'I am a jumbaceous jabberwock or I am not' while not hesitating to assert 'Not (I am not a jumbaceous jabberwock and I am)', we are taking ' p or/and q ' in the sense of 'the immediate conventions governing this utterance determine that p or/and they determine that q (given the facts)'. But the disjunction and the negated conjunction are not then equivalent.) I mean these remarks to show, against Williamson, that an ignorance interpretation could countenance truth value gaps, and that alternative or more fundamental ignorance-based explanations of the appeal of the sorites are possible.

I obviously do not think this book is the last word on this old subject. It isn't meant to be. In a way it is the first word on a new subject. It is the first worked out ignorance theory and opens up many thoughts about knowledge, exactness, and linguistic convention. Read it.

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ETHICS

The Least Worst Death: Essays in Bioethics at the End of Life

By MARGARET PABST BATTIN

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Is there anything more that can be usefully said about ethical decisions at the end of life? Euthanasia, assisted suicide, withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment: these issues have been so exhaustively discussed and dissected—in courtrooms and classrooms, on hospital wards and the television news, by physicians and metaphysicians—that one is sorely tempted to say: I doubt it.

That judgement might be premature, however. For all the sound and fury, the issues certainly have not gone away. *The Least Worst Death* is a collection of 15 essays written by Margaret Pabst Battin from 1977 to 1992, all of them on ethical decisions surrounding death. With the exception of the introduction, all of the essays have been previously published, most in prominent bioethics journals such as *The Hastings Center Report* and *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*. Given the way that the debate over these issues has evolved over the past 15 years, and the prominent intellectual role in that evolution that Battin has played, many of the issues discussed here will be well known to scholars in bioethics. Nonetheless, it is hard to imagine them discussed in a more lucid, clear-headed fashion. The familiar topics are all here—slippery slopes, living wills, the distribution of scarce resources, withdrawing and withholding treatment—as well as few relatively unfamiliar ones, such as euthanasia in Alzheimer's Disease and the role of altruism in medicine. Philosophers who are well-rehearsed in the conceptual aspects of the debate