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Horwich, Paul (4-LNDUC)

**Stephen Schiffer's theory of vagueness. Comment: "Vagueness and partial belief" [in *Skepticism* (Oviedo, 1999), 220–257, Blackwell, Boston, MA, 2000; MR1799215 (2002b:03016a)] by S. Schiffer.** With a reply by Schiffer.

*Skepticism* (Oviedo, 1999), 271–281, 326–330, *Philos. Issues*, 10, Blackwell, Boston, MA, 2000.

Schiffer's paper proposes a theory of vagueness, based on the conception that vagueness is neither a semantic nor an epistemic notion but rather a psychological notion. In the paper a new kind of partial belief, vagueness-related partial belief (VPB), is introduced and distinguished from the standard partial belief. Vagueness-related partial beliefs are stipulatively defined as those partial beliefs that cannot under any suitable idealization be identified with subjective probability. This notion of partial belief is applied to solve the two sub-problems that constitute the problem of vagueness: the sorites paradox and the problem of explicating the notion of a borderline case.

The paper has the following sections: (1) Two kinds of partial belief; (2) VPB\* and the notion of a borderline case; (3) The essence of vagueness and pleonastic properties; (4) VPB\* and the sorites paradox; (5) Unhappy-face solutions; and (6) Further questions.

A sound knowledge of the logico linguistic intricacies of the contemporary debate on vagueness is required in order to follow the details of this proposal at its best.

The commentary by García-Carpintero is a rejoinder to Schiffer's argument against accounts of vagueness (typically relying on supervaluationist techniques) based on indirect discourse. According to the author Schiffer, under the ambiguity of "proposition", confuses states of affairs and thoughts, when he insists that the defender of vagueness as semantic indecision (VSI) is committed to interpret any ascription of belief as attributing to the subject the expression of one of a range of precise thoughts.

García-Carpintero claims that "the point at stake is whether speakers have beliefs with the distinguishing conceptual roles of Schiffer's VPBs (or others similar) as a result of their sensitivity to the semantic peculiarities of the contents of those beliefs, as explained by VSI, or this is rather a brute unexplainable fact".

The volume includes a short reply of Schiffer.

According to Horwich, Schiffer's approach to vagueness "looks strikingly coherent and it succeeds in accommodating the intuition that vague predicates do not have sharp boundaries." He has only one reservation, but a substantial one: "I think it is ad hoc and awkward to give up, or to suspend, classical logic (and, hence, bivalence and the probability calculus); moreover, I don't think there is any need to take such an unattractive step." In the rest of this brief comment Horwich develops his criticism in two parts, arguing (1) that the suspension of classical logic is undesirable; and (2) that it is unnecessary.

In his reply, Schiffer deals with Horwich's objections, concluding that Horwich's response does not really answer the problem with which he was concerned. "The problem wasn't about our deductive abilities; it was that we found it incredible that the use of 'bald' could determine it to mean the property of having fewer than 3,832 hairs on one's scalp, and I don't see that Horwich has made that seemingly incredible feature of his theory credible."

{For the entire collection see MR1799214 (2002b:03009)}

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