

# Preface

Fuzzy boundaries of material objects such as stars, mountains, and furry animals; imprecise properties and relations such as baldness, tallness, love, and hate; and the gradually changing colors of the sky at the sunset – vagueness is all around us. But, traditionally, the source of vagueness has been attributed to the imprecision in our representational faculty – our perception, language, etc. According to the traditional view, the material world itself is crisp and precise, with all the sharp edges, but we experience vagueness because of lack of precision in our representation of the world. In this respect, vagueness is like the monster you thought you saw in the dark corner of the street. Something unreal.

This view of vagueness, however, is now being challenged. The new view, onticism, sets forth the idea that vagueness exists in the world itself instead of, or in addition to, our representation. Vagueness is real. Furthermore, even though traditionally people talk more often about vague *properties* such as tallness and baldness, according to onticism, there are also vague *objects* or vague *individuals* in the world, such as mountains and cats. This vagueness might be created by indeterminacy in quantum mechanics, or it might be created by the vagueness in the part-whole relation between larger objects and their smaller constituents, i.e., vagueness about which smaller objects (e.g., molecules) are part of the larger objects (e.g., cats) in question. Or it might be created by something else (especially in the case of vagueness in abstract or nonmaterial objects). Whatever the cause, according to onticism, there are vague objects in the world. So we do not have to deny either the existence or the fuzziness of such objects as mountains and cats.

The once-seminal idea of ontic vagueness had fallen into disrepute when Gareth Evans gave a negative answer to the title question of his famous paper, “Can There Be Vague Objects?” in 1978. Evans argued that if there were a vague material object with fuzzy boundaries, its identity ought to be vague; in particular, if we compare a putative vague object, say *a*, with its precise counterpart, *b*, another object which coincides with *a* except for *a*’s vague parts, it should be vague whether *a* is identical with *b*. But that is impossible, Evans contended, because *a* has the property *being definitely identical with a* whereas *b* does not have the property; so *a* and *b* must be

definitely distinct, after all. Thus, the very idea of vague object is incoherent. Many people have given up on the possibility of ontic vagueness because of this simple but cogent argument.

Evans's argument, however, has proved to be not iron clad; indeed, far from it. Among other things, it relies on the unchallenged assumption that a vague object must have vague identity. Is this assumption really correct? Can't we make sense of the idea that vague objects can exist without vague identity? This question invites us to reflect on the very concepts of vague object and vague identity and their relations. Some people also think that a vague object must have vague existence: it must exist not entirely but partially. Whether these ideas are correct or not depends on how we use the relevant concepts. What, really, does it mean to say that an object is vague, that it has vague identity, or that it has vague existence? And under what interpretation, if any, does it make sense to say so? Finally, if those claims, or at least some of them, can indeed be made sense of, are they actually true in some cases?

The chapters in this volume address these and other questions pertaining to ontic vagueness. Some defend ontic vagueness; others argue against it. The topics they discuss are diverse, ranging from quantum indeterminacy to mereology to personal identity to phenomenal qualities to tolerant logic. Some chapters raise and answer such questions as "How should we count vague objects?" "How should we apply abstraction principles to vague properties?" and "Does linguistic vagueness, taken as a species of ontic vagueness, exist in the word-sense relation or the sense-reference relation?" All of the chapters included in this volume are new and are written specifically for this occasion. The manuscript of each chapter was anonymously refereed by at least one external expert on the subject. Many of the essays that were accepted were revised in response to the referees' comments. The whole book was refereed by a reviewer chosen by Springer.

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