More vagueness

13 November, 2006

Responses to sorites puzzle

Accept conclusion (nihilism)

Truth value gaps (supervaluationism)

Degree theories

Responses to sorites puzzle

Accept conclusion (nihilism)

Truth value gaps (supervaluationism)

Degree theories

Epistemic view

Final Paper

1500-2500 words, 6-10 pages

Dates: 8 Dec (recommended), 2 Jan (ultimate)

Encouraged to think of your own topic

Topic suggestions

Epistemic view

Is that heap?

Yes, that is a heap.

No, that is not a heap.

Epistemic view

Is that man bald?

Yes, that man is bald.

No, that man is not bald.

Terminology

Epistemic

Epistemicism

Epistemology = Theory of Knowledge

Epistemic view

Is Timothy Williamson thin?

Yes, he is thin.

No, he is not thin.

Epistemicist accepts bivalence

Bivalence: any sentence is either true or false.

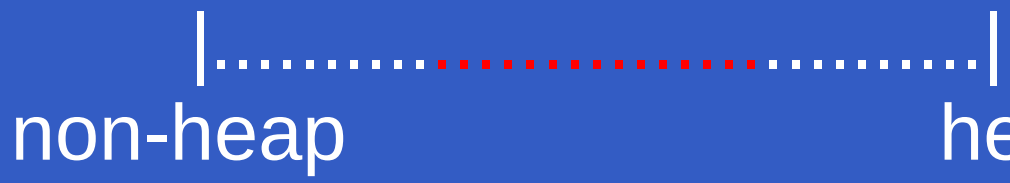
Either “TW is thin" is true, or it is false.

Epistemic view

Either “Timothy Williamson is thin" is true, or it is false.

But what about cases in the penumbra? (borderline cases)

Penumbra



Vagueness as ignorance

Suppose “TW is thin” is a case in the penumbra.

Either “TW is thin" is true,
or it is false.

But you cannot know which. You cannot know whether “TW is thin” is true, or it is false.

Epistemic view

Bivalence
(there is a sharp boundary)

Ignorance
(you cannot know where the boundary is)

How solve sorites puzzle

1 grain of sand is not a heap.

If 1 grain of sand is not a heap,
then 2 grains of sand is not a heap.

If 2 grains of sand is not a heap,
then 3 grains of sand is not a heap.

Heaps

....

If 999,999 grains of sand is not a heap,
then 1,000,000 grains of sand is not a heap.

So, 1,000,000 grains of sand is not a heap

How solve sorites puzzle

Exactly one premise is false.

But we can’t know which one.

Defense of epistemic view

Other views inadequate

Argument for bivalence

Explain source of ignorance

Source of ignorance

Why can’t we know, in a penumbral case, whether or not something is a heap?

Why can’t we know, in a penumbral case, whether or not someone is bald?

Why can’t we know, in a penumbral case, whether or not someone is a child?

Inexact knowledge

I am in a stadium full of people.

I know there are more than 1 thousand people.

I know there are less than 1 million people.

Can I know, just by looking, that there are 32,768 people there?

Inexact knowledge

I am in a stadium full of people.

I know there are more than 1 thousand people.

I know there are less than 1 million people.

Can I know, just by looking, that there are 32,768 people there?

It seems not. My visual abilities are not so acute.

Inexact knowledge

Suppose, just by looking around, I come to believe that there are 32,768 people there.

I don’t know that there are 32,768 people there.

Inexact knowledge

Suppose, just by looking around, I come to believe that there are 32,768 people there.

I don’t know that there are 32,768 people there.

It was just a lucky guess. I could have easily been mistaken. There could have been 32,769 people there, and I still would have believed that there are 32,768 people there.

Margins for error

If you know that p, then you would not easily be mistaken.

Margins for error

If you know that p, then you would not easily be mistaken.

Suppose John is not bald, but one hair from the sharp boundary. If he had one hair less he would be bald. You can’t know that John is not bald. For you would easily be mistaken.

Defense of epistemic view

Other views inadequate

Argument for bivalence

Explain source of ignorance

Argument for bivalence

Rejecting bivalence leads to contradiction

Obvious facts about truth

If “Snow is white” is true, then snow is white.

If snow is white, then “Snow is white” is true.

Obvious facts about truth

If “Snow is white” is true, then snow is white.

If snow is white, then “Snow is white” is true.

“Snow is white” is true if and only if snow is white.

Slightly less obvious fact about truth

If “Snow is white” is false, then snow is not white.

If snow is not white, then “Snow is white” is false.

Slightly less obvious fact about truth

If “Snow is white” is false, then snow is not white.

If snow is not white, then “Snow is white” is false.

“Snow is white” is false if and only if snow is not white.

Facts about truth

“Snow is white” is true if and only if snow is white.

“Snow is white” is false if and only if snow is not white.

For bivalence

Assume bivalence for vague sentences is false.

...

Contradiction.

Therefore: bivalence for vague sentences is true.

Step by step

Not: “TW is thin” is true or “TW is thin” is false.

Facts about truth

“Snow is white” is true if and only if snow is white.

“Snow is white” is false if and only if snow is not white.

Step by step

Assume Not: “TW is thin” is true or “TW is thin” is false.

Not: TW is thin or TW is not thin.

Step by step

Assume Not: “TW is thin” is true or “TW is thin” is false.

Not: TW is thin or TW is not thin.

TW is not thin and TW is not not thin.

Step by step

Assume Not: “TW is thin” is true or “TW is thin” is false.

Not: TW is thin or TW is not thin.

TW is not thin and TW is not not thin.

Contradiction.

Technicalities

See Chapter 7 for more detail

Propositions, Sentences, Utterances

Argument for bivalence

Rejecting bivalence leads to contradiction

So accept bivalence

Defense of epistemic view

Other views inadequate

Argument for bivalence

Explain source of ignorance

Objection

How can “heap” or “bald” determine a sharp boundary?

I have learned these words. But I couldn’t have learned these words if they have determine a sharp boundary. So these words do not determine a sharp boundary.