

## **Vagueness and disagreement**

The aim of the project is to investigate and explain the types of disagreement that may occur in conversations concerning vague properties. Vague predicates (like “tall”, “red”, “rich” etc.) have clear cases (i.e. such objects to which they clearly apply) and borderline cases (i.e. objects which are such that it is indeterminate whether the predicate applies to them or not). My view is that disagreement concerning clear cases of vague predicates is canonical, while disagreement concerning borderline cases of such predicates may be deemed faultless. (A and B disagree canonically if what A is saying contradicts what B is saying and only one of them can be right. A and B disagree faultlessly if it appears that what A is saying contradicts what B is saying but at the same time both A and B can be right).

In general, if Anne says: “Philip is tall” and Betty says “Philip is not tall”, their exchange looks like a disagreement, but it may be elucidated in two ways (I’m assuming here that they are talking about the same Philip, they both know how tall Philip is and are thinking about the same comparison class, e.g. 6-graders). If Philip is a clear case of a tall 6-grader, then their disagreement is canonical and one of them must be wrong. However, if Philip is a borderline case, their disagreement seems faultless and impossible to resolve; none of the speakers is clearly wrong. I’d like to find a satisfactory explanation of how it is possible that such two types of disagreement over vague properties may occur. Any such explanation will have to be framed within an adequate theory of vagueness. Thus, my ultimate goal is to formulate such a theory of vagueness that on the one hand is capable of solving the paradox of the heap (which is the main challenge for any theorist dealing with vagueness) and on the other provides a plausible account of disagreements over ascriptions of vague properties to given objects.

Faultless disagreement is mainly associated with disputes involving predicates of personal taste (such as “tasty” and “fun”) and other so-called perspectival predicates (like aesthetic predicates). In recent years this kind of disagreement has been widely discussed in the literature. A growing number of philosophers and linguists observe that such disagreement may also arise in connection with vague predicates like “tall” and “red”. I take faultless disagreement to be an important characteristic of the usage of such vague predicates and think that any adequate theory of vagueness has to make room for it.

In the course of my research I intend to explore the nature of disagreement, and in particular of disagreement over subjective matters. I’d like to analyse the similarities and differences between typical vague predicates like “tall” or “rich” on the one hand and predicates of personal taste and aesthetic predicates on the other. I intend to investigate the possibility that the content and/or the illocutionary force of utterances concerning clear cases are not the same as those concerning borderline cases. The main result of my project will be an adequate theory of vagueness (i.e. such theory that resolves the paradox of the heap) which accounts for both the disagreement concerning clear cases and for the disagreement concerning borderline cases.

Vagueness is a fascinating phenomenon. Virtually all predicates that we use in our everyday talk are vague and yet we still know very little of the semantics of such predicates. The main characteristics of vague predicates are borderline cases and tolerance (which is insensitivity to marginal changes: e.g. losing one hair will not make a bald man out of a non-bald one). As I have already mentioned, in my view another important feature of vague terms is the possibility of faultless disagreement concerning borderline cases. It seems to me that there is an important difference between those of our utterances that concern cases that we take to be clear cases of a given predicate and those that concern cases that we take to be borderline. This difference results in two types of disagreement concerning those cases. I hope that my project will allow to elucidate that difference and – in consequence – will help in explaining the phenomenon of faultless disagreement.