

Vague objects

This report is based on Michael Morreau's paper *What vague objects are like*. To begin with, we must explain what Morreau means by vague. It is not that an object has mysterious unknown qualities or that it does not have a determined identity, but rather that it may or may not be a part of another object. The author wants to show that all objects can be considered vague or to have vague parts.

The first part in showing that there can be vague objects is to address composition; the way in which an object has parts. The error that people do when thinking about composition is, according to Morreau, that if there is no clear distinction whether or not e.g. a whisker is a part of a cat, we can not be sure that the questioned whisker is in fact involved in the cat's composition at all and that we might even question the existence of the cat. What is erroneous about this is that even though an object has questionable parts, the object and the parts can still make up something. It just might not be the same object as the one where the questionable part is a definitive part. Morreau uses the term "fuzzy boundaries" to talk about questionable parts.

The issue of vague objects having vague identities is also something that needs to be focused on. For an object to have a vague identity in this sense can be that it is impossible to distinguish it from some other object. To explain his stance on vague identities, Morreau uses an example of two cats, one vague and one precisely defined (where the first has questionable parts and the second does not). Because of the fact that it is not possible to say whether or not the questionable parts are actually a part of the first cat, it would be impossible to know if the two cats are identical. According to Morreau, this is not a good example since the fact that one cat is vague and the other is not means that they are different. This leads Morreau to say that vague objects can exist even though identities are definite.

When talking about vague objects, Morreau mainly uses organisms as an example. Organisms have functional parts. These are parts that have a use, and that is why they are a part of the organism. Most important in this is that organisms have temporary functional parts, such as whiskers on a cat. By gaining and losing temporary functional parts continuously, organisms can be seen as vague. There is no one distinct moment when a whisker, for example, has become so loose that it can no longer serve its purpose for a cat sensing its surroundings. From the time it becomes loose to the time it eventually falls off, the whisker is a questionable part of the cat.

Morreau goes on to describe a set of functions with which it is possible to "sharpen" fuzzy edges in a way that enables one to see a vague object as a precise one. He then uses this to show that the world as we know it can have vague objects in it without us having to necessarily view the world with any change in mereology, the study of relations between parts and wholes.

References

Morreau, Michael (2002). What vague objects are like. *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 99, No. 7, pp 333-361.