

Forthcoming in *dialectica*.

Is ‘Everything’ Precise?

Dan LÓPEZ DE SA[†]

ABSTRACT

There are certain metaphysically interesting arguments “from vagueness,” for unrestricted mereological composition and for four-dimensionalism, which involve a claim to the effect that idioms for unrestricted quantification are precise. An elaboration of Lewis’ argument for this claim, which assumes the view of vagueness as semantic indecision, is presented. It is argued that the argument also works according to other views on the nature of vagueness, which also require for an expression to be vague that there are different admissible alternatives of the relevant sort, such as epistemicism, as defended by Williamson. Recent attempts to resist the argument are discussed and rejected.

Vagueness is semantic indecision. But not all language is vague. The truth-functional connectives aren’t, for instance. Nor are the words for identity and difference, and for the partial identity or overlap. Nor are the idioms of quantification, so long as they are unrestricted. How could any of these things be vague? What would be the alternatives between which we haven’t chosen?

David LEWIS (1986, 213)

Some time ago David Lewis (1986) offered an argument for unrestricted mereological composition, and more recently Theodore Sider (2001) has presented a related one for four-dimensionalism. Both arguments are sometimes referred to as arguments “from vagueness,” as they involve, among a number of other things, a certain key claim involving vagueness. This can be stated thus:

(*) ‘everything’ is precise, provided it (determinately) expresses absolutely unrestricted quantification.

These arguments might well fail for other reasons; my concern here is whether they fail due to the endorsement of something like (*). More in particular, my aim is to argue that some of the main views about the nature of vagueness, versions of the view of vagueness as semantic indecision and of epistemicism, do indeed validate (*).

I will briefly rehearse the arguments, as well as some objections to them, in section one. In section two I submit the argument in favor of (*), which takes for granted the view of vagueness as semantic indecision assumed by both Lewis and Sider, and in section three I explore how it extends by including other views about the nature of vagueness, notably the sort of epistemicism advocated by Timothy Williamson (1994). In the main section, section four, I consider certain recent objections to the argument, and find fault with them. I conclude with some considerations regarding the coherence of quantifying over absolutely everything.

[†] *Arché*—The AHRC Research Centre for the Philosophy of Logic, Language, Mathematics and Mind (University of St Andrews) and *LOGOS*—Grup de Recerca en Lògica, Llenguatge i Cognició (Universitat de Barcelona); e-mail: dlds@st-andrews.ac.uk.

1. Arguments from vagueness

A sum (or fusion) of some things is something such that anything overlaps the sum if and only if it overlaps some of those things—one thing overlaps another if there is something that is part of both (see Lewis 1986, 69). There is clearly something that is the sum of my head, torso and limbs: my body. But is there something that is the sum of the right half of my left shoe plus the Moon plus the sum of all Her Majesty's ear-rings?

We are happy enough with mereological sums of things that contrast with their surroundings more than they do with one another; and that are adjacent, stick together, and act jointly. We are more reluctant to affirm the existence of mereological sums of things that are disparate and scattered and go their separate ways. A typical problem case is a fleet: the ships contrast with their surroundings more than with one another, they act jointly, but they are not adjacent nor do they stick together. (Lewis 1986, 211)

The argument from vagueness aims to establish that, this initial reluctance notwithstanding, mereological composition is *unrestricted*: *whenever* there are some things, no matter how disparate and unrelated, there is something that is a sum of them or, as it is also said, composition takes place:

The trouble with restricted composition is as follows. It is a vague matter whether a given class satisfies our intuitive *desiderata* for composition. ... The question whether composition takes place in a given case, whether a given class of things does or does not have a mereological sum, can be stated in a part of language where nothing is vague. Therefore it cannot have a vague answer. There is such a thing as the sum, or there isn't. It cannot be said that, because the *desiderata* for composition are satisfied to a borderline degree, there sort of is, and sort of isn't. What is this thing such that it sort of is, and sort of isn't, that there is any such thing? No restriction on composition can be vague. But unless it is vague, it cannot fit the intuitive *desiderata*. So no restriction on composition can serve the intuitions that motivate it. So restriction would be gratuitous. Composition is unrestricted. (Lewis 1986, 212-3)

The argument makes three claims about vagueness: (i) whether intuitively composition takes place may be a vague matter; (ii) the question of whether composition takes place can be stated in a part of language where nothing is vague and hence a restriction on composition cannot be vague; and (iii) unless the restriction on composition is vague, it cannot serve the intuitions that motivate it, and so it would be gratuitous. To the best of my knowledge, (i) has not been challenged, (ii) has been the main focus of recent discussion and is also in part the topic of this paper. In a recent paper, Daniel Nolan (2006) has challenged (iii). He points out that non-vague distinctions might fit vague intuitive criteria, in so far as the latter do not give relevant necessary and jointly sufficient conditions. They may consist instead in some (vague) sufficient conditions for one of the terms of the distinction, and some (vague) sufficient conditions for the other, which do not jointly cover all the ground. For what it is worth, I think that the general point is right, but that it does not affect the present argument.¹ Whether my view is right is nei-

¹ For Nolan's general point to be applicable in the present case, the following would be required: that not only are we, as Lewis says, *more reluctant* to accept the existence of gerrymandered sums than we are regarding more natural ones, but rather we do have strong intuitions against such existence. I tend to think that this is at best debatable: the *lack* of intuitions in favor of composition occurring in some cases does not amount to the presence of intuitions *against* it. The fact that people resist—or just make fun of—those weird cases when first told about them (emphasized by Hirsch 2004) seems to me to be nicely explainable by the pragmatics of restricted quantifiers (see Lewis 1986 and Sider 2004 for elaboration, and Markosian 2005 for opposition.)

ther here nor there, however, given that as I said my aim is to explore whether the argument fails in virtue of endorsing something like (*).

Sider has more recently (2001) offered a related argument “from vagueness” in favor of four-dimensionalism, *4D* for short. This has generated a considerable amount of criticism. It has been emphasized that the argument from vagueness by itself is insufficient for *4D*, as it does not affect brutalism (Markosian 2004 and, arguably, Merricks 2005, see also the discussion in Balashov 2005) or mereological essentialism (Varzi 2005)—both points were, however, already acknowledged in Sider 2001. Perhaps more importantly, the proper conclusion of the argument—(say) *universalism*—has been argued to be neutral between (appropriately liberal versions of) *3D* and *4D* (Koslicki 2003, Lowe 2005, Miller 2005a).² Whatever the case, the argument does involve claim (*), which constitutes my focus here.

2. *Everything*

So, is ‘everything’ precise?

The only intelligible account of vagueness locates it in our thought and language. The reason it’s vague where the outback begins is not that there’s this thing, the outback, with imprecise borders; rather there are many things, with different borders, and nobody has been fool enough to try to enforce a choice of one of them as the official referent of the word ‘outback.’ Vagueness is semantic indecision. But not all language is vague. The truth-functional connectives aren’t, for instance. Nor are the words for identity and difference, and for the partial identity or overlap. Nor are the idioms of quantification, so long as they are unrestricted. How could any of these things be vague? What would be the alternatives between which we haven’t chosen? (Lewis 1986, 213)

The last two rhetorical questions, How could any of these things be vague? What would be the alternatives between which we haven’t chosen?, constitute Lewis’ characteristically concise formulation of the argument in favor of (*).³

One way of elaborating on it is the following. Assume the antecedent of (*)—that it is possible to quantify over absolutely everything, and that ‘everything’ does (determinately) that. According to the view of vagueness as semantic indecision, if ‘everything’ is vague there should be different admissible alternative semantic values between which there is semantic indecision. On the one hand, that the alternatives are *different* requires that it is (determinately) true that there is something such that ‘everything’ ranges over, according to one, but does not according to the other. But on the other hand, that the alternatives are both *admissible* requires that this last statement, ‘there is something

² This is indeed to be expected, if one takes to be justified the recent worries about there really being a substantial difference between the views (Sidelle 2002, McCall & Lowe 2003, Miller 2005b), as I myself also tend to do.

³ As I said above, I am here only concerned with the argument regarding idioms for unrestricted quantification being precise. For what it is worth, I also find the corresponding arguments regarding the rest of expressions Lewis mentions, including ‘is part of,’ equally compelling, and I hope to elaborate on this elsewhere. Sider seems to find the latter more debatable, but he argues that the argument for unrestricted composition also works if the claim about ‘is part of’ is replaced by the assumptions that there are possible “finite” worlds—worlds in which only finitely many (concrete) things exist—and that if it could be indeterminate whether composition takes place at all, then it could be indeterminate whether a composition takes place with respect to a finite world. This is so because in the latter case there would be a numerical sentence asserting that there are exactly some (particular number of) (concrete) things, which would contain only logical (‘is part of’-free) vocabulary but which would be indeterminate. (See Sider 2001, 126-7.)

such that ‘everything’ ranges over it according to one, but does not according to the other,’ is not (determinately) true.⁴

It will sharpen the argument to consider a more specific proposal about the semantic value of ‘everything.’ Consider first the case of ‘is bald.’ Suppose that ‘is bald’ is symbolized in quantificational logic by B and that truth-conditions for atomic sentences containing it are given by the clause below (where A is an arbitrary assignment).

[B] Bx is true under A iff $A(x)$ is bald.

According to the view of vagueness as semantic indecision, if ‘is bald’ is vague there should be alternatives between which there is semantic indecision. Let ‘is bald₁’ and ‘is bald₂’ both admissibly precisify ‘is bald.’ I take this to imply that neither of the following is (determinately) true nor (determinately) false:

[B₁] Bx is true under A iff $A(x)$ is bald₁.

[B₂] Bx is true under A iff $A(x)$ is bald₂.

Now [B₁] and [B₂] being different requires it being (determinately) true that there is someone who is bald₁ but not bald₂ or it being (determinately) true that there is someone who is bald₂ but not bald₁. [B₁] and [B₂] being both admissible make it the case that those in question would be borderline cases of bald people, of which ‘is bald’ would be neither (determinately) truly predicable, nor (determinately) falsely so.⁵

Consider now ‘everything.’ Following Williamson (2003, 418), let ‘Everything Fs’ be symbolized in quantificational logic as $\forall x\alpha$, where variable ‘ x ’ occurs in name position in the formula α , to be understood as ‘ x Fs.’ Truth-conditions for universally quantified formulas are stated thus. (For any assignment A , variable x and thing d , let $A[x/d]$ be the assignment just like A , except that it assigns d to x .)

[\forall] $\forall x\alpha$ is true under A iff everything d is such that α is true under $A[x/d]$;

where ‘everything’ in the clause is to be read unrestrictedly.

According to the view of vagueness as semantic indecision, if ‘everything’ is vague there should be alternatives between which there is semantic indecision. Let ‘everything₁’ and ‘everything₂’ both admissibly precisify ‘everything.’⁶ Again I take it to imply that neither of the following is (determinately) true nor (determinately) false:

[\forall_1] $\forall x\alpha$ is true under A iff everything₁ d is such that α is true under $A[x/d]$;

[\forall_2] $\forall x\alpha$ is true under A iff everything₂ d is such that α is true under $A[x/d]$.

⁴ According to more traditional versions of the view of vagueness as semantic indecision, truth (falsity) is truth (falsity) according to all admissible sharpenings, so that there is no gap between truth (falsity) and *determinate* truth (falsity). This is not so according to some non-standard versions of it nor, more importantly, when ‘determinately’ receives an epistemic reading, of the sort discussed in section 3.

⁵ I am assuming, if only for convenience, that semantic values of predicates are extensions, and accordingly that vagueness with respect to them is extensional.

⁶ And thus, due to the relevant penumbral connections, let ‘something₁’ and ‘something₂’ both admissibly precisify ‘something,’ ‘thing₁’ and ‘thing₂’ both admissibly precisify ‘thing,’ and so on.

Now $[\forall_1]$ and $[\forall_2]$ being different requires either that it is (determinately) true (i) that there is something₁ that is not a thing₂ or that it is (determinately) true (ii) that there is something₂ that is not a thing₁. But a crucial disanalogy with the considered case of ‘is bald’ arises. What is required to be true by $[\forall_1]$ and $[\forall_2]$ being different in turn crucially involves (unrestricted) quantification: (i) that *there is* something₁ that is not a thing₂, (ii) that *there is* something₂ that is not a thing₁. (i) or (ii) being (determinately) true thus require that they be true according to all admissible precisifications of the quantifier, i.e. they be true according to both $[\forall_1]$ and $[\forall_2]$. But this is not so. (i) is not (determinately) true, as ‘there is₂ something₁ that is not a thing₂’ is false; and (ii) is not (determinately) true either, as ‘there is₁ something₂ that is not a thing₁’ is false.

In other words, if ‘everything’ were vague, and vagueness required different admissible alternative candidates for semantic values between which there is semantic indecision, then the alternative candidates being different would require something that is precluded by the different candidates being admissible. Hence ‘everything’ cannot be vague, assuming a view of vagueness as semantic indecision.

The recent critical attention to Lewis’ argument I will be concerned with in section 4 has been generated by Sider’s recent elaboration of it. Although my elaboration is heavily indebted to his, it is instructive to compare the details. Sider’s presentation of the argument in favor of (*) in his book is the following:

Imagine there were two expressions, \forall_1 and \forall_2 , which allegedly expressed precisifications of the unrestricted quantifier. \forall_1 and \forall_2 will need to differ in extension if they are to make any difference to the kinds of sentences under consideration ...⁷ merely intensional difference will not do. Thus, there must be some thing, x , that is in the extension of one, but not in the extension of the other, of \forall_1 and \forall_2 . But in that case, whichever of \forall_1 and \forall_2 lacks x in its extension will fail to be an acceptable precisification of the unrestricted quantifier. It is quite clearly a restricted quantifier since there is something $-x-$ that fails to be in its extension. (Sider 2001, 128-9)

As it stands, the formulation is open to the charge that the last statement is only true according to one of the two precisifications, precisely the one ranging over x , and hence not (determinately) true. Sider considers such a charge, and claims in response that “it is hard to understand what these precisifications are supposed to be” (Sider 2001, 129), that to make sense of them as expressions of different “conceptual schemes” would violate the book’s presupposition that “existence of things is univocal, not relative to conceptual schemes or linguistic frameworks.” (Sider 2001, 130). It seems to me that this way of elaborating the argument makes it look weaker than it actually is, as I will discuss at the end of section 4—needlessly so, as illustrated by the alternative elaboration I have presented: assuming ‘everything’ to be vague for *reductio*, precisifications being admissible makes not (determinately) true things whose truth is required by precisifications being different.⁸

⁷ Namely, numerical sentences of the sort of ‘there are n (concrete) things,’ see above footnote 3.

⁸ It might be that the elaboration I submitted is closer to Sider’s more recent presentation of the argument, on one understanding of the contention that “assuming *one* bit of language—the quantificational bit—to be non-vague, one can give non-vague descriptions of precisifications of the *rest* of the language, which *can* be taken to be vague.” (Sider 2003, 139-40)

3. *Vagueness*

Both Lewis and Sider assume a view of vagueness as semantic indecision. But for the argument for (*) to hold the only relevant feature seems to be that vagueness requires (determinately) different admissible *candidates*, regardless of the specific view about the relation between these and the semantics of the relevant expression, so that the candidates being admissible makes not (determinately) true things whose (determinate) truth is required by the candidates being different.

Epistemicism, as defended by Williamson, is one such structurally analogous view about the nature of vagueness. As he himself emphasizes:

[F]or the supervaluationist, definiteness is truth under all sharpenings of the language compatible with what the speakers have already fixed about its semantics ('admissible sharpenings'); for the epistemicist, definiteness is truth under all sharp interpretations of the language indiscriminable from the right one. In both cases, we hold everything precise constant as we vary the interpretation. (Williamson 1999, 128)

The notion of *determinately* thus receives a corresponding epistemic interpretation. These different conceptions of the relations between expressions and candidate entities and of the notion of determinacy are certainly crucial in so far as the nature of vagueness is concerned. But they are not crucial with respect to the argument we are considering, as this depends merely on the structural features mentioned above, on which the two views do not differ.

By contrast, the argument might be ineffective for one who thinks that vagueness sometimes results in expressions (or concepts) determinately referring to entities that are themselves vague (and which do not represent things being a certain way)—at least, for some versions of the view. According to this view of vagueness *in rebus* 'everything' might be vague in virtue of it being a vague matter whether a given object exists: it might sometimes be indeterminate whether something exists without there being something such that it is indeterminate whether it exists (see Hawley 2002 on this issue.). In my view, a defender of restricted mereological composition—who does not challenge the coherence of quantifying over absolutely everything—should hold a view of this sort. The main problem with the view is, however, that one can doubt that there be a correct conception of what a vague object would be, to echo Lewis's apt phrase.⁹ In any case, this is a view of vagueness that might block the argument for the precision of 'everything' we are concerned with.

There might be other ways of preventing the argument getting off the ground. Notice that the argument exploits the fact that the difference between the alternative candidates is a determinate difference. This is true with respect to epistemicism as defended by Williamson. There might be room for a different kind of epistemic view that rejects this, and appeals instead to a characteristically "metaphysical kind" of ignorance (see Varzi 2005, 493). Or it might be claimed that it could after all be in the spirit of the view of vagueness as semantic indecision that in basic, radical, cases such as idioms for absolutely unrestricted quantification, vagueness might result from other, unusual, sources.

⁹ See Lewis 1993, 170. Notice that both Lewis's and Sider's arguments "from vagueness" we are considering *assume* the view of view of vagueness as semantic indecision, and hence are not aimed against the view of vagueness *in rebus*.

Be this as it may, the argument for (*) is to be understood from now on as conditionalized on views about the nature of vagueness that require, for an expression to be vague, that there be different admissible alternative candidates of the envisaged sort, like the different candidates for semantic value between which there is the semantic indecision assumed by Lewis and Sider, or the indiscriminable interpretations of the epistemicist view as defended by Williamson. And many views on vagueness do indeed fall under its scope (see Sider 2003, Nolan 2005).

4. Resisting the argument?

I have just considered some possibilities for denying (*) which are compatible with the conditional argument in the previous sections: if vagueness requires different admissible alternative candidates of the envisaged sort, then (*) holds. In recent discussion, mainly in the context of discussing Sider's 2001 version of it, this conditionalized claim has been opposed. It has been claimed that one can assume a view of the nature of vagueness of the sort assumed by Lewis and Sider, but deny that 'everything' is precise, after all. As I argue below, I find these objections faulty.

In her discussion of the argument, Kathrin Koslicki says:

In the context of a discussion over whether composition could ever be vague, one cannot take for granted that mereological vocabulary is never vague. But, in the same context, one also cannot take for granted that no numerical sentence of the form 'there are n concrete objects' (for some finite value of ' n ') is ever indeterminate in truth value, since that is merely a re-statement of what is at issue. (Koslicki 2003, 119-20)

Here Koslicki seems to be objecting that Lewis and Sider just *take for granted* precisely what was at stake. As we have seen, however, this is not so: both Lewis and Sider offer an *argument* for the relevant claim about precision. Lewis' presentation is perhaps too condensed—"How could any of these things be vague? What would be the alternatives between which we haven't chosen?" (Lewis 1986, 213)—and Sider's original elaboration invited the criticism we have seen at the end of section 2. But they do not merely *assume* what they are arguing for: that given their view on the nature of vagueness, which Koslicki is also ready to grant for the sake of the discussion, 'everything' is precise.¹⁰ They explicitly *argue for* it by contending that if 'everything' were vague, this would require incompatible things—or so I have proposed to elaborate the argument—in a way that it does not beg any question at issue.

Maybe what Koslicki thinks is inappropriately being taken for granted is not that 'everything' is precise, but rather that 'thing' or 'object' is also precise. Thus, the thought might be, 'There are n objects' could be indeterminate in truth value compatibly with quantifiers being precise, in as much as it is the vagueness of 'bald', and not of 'there is', what accounts for the indeterminacy of 'There are n bald men.'¹¹

¹⁰ Provided it does (determinately) express absolutely unrestricted quantification. See the concluding remarks below.

¹¹ Concerning the contention that if a statement is made of expressions each of which is ("semantically") precise, then any remaining indeterminacy is to be attributed to ontological vagueness, Koslicki says: "For notice that the thesis endorsed by [the defender of restricted composition]—that a sentence like ['There are n objects'] can sometimes be indeterminate in truth-value—does not by itself commit its proponent to ontological vagueness any more than does the parallel claim about bald men: to agree that a sentence of the form 'There are n bald men' can sometimes be indeterminate in truth-value, by itself, is

I think, however, that this line of thought would fall short of appreciating the absolute generality of quantifying over absolutely everything. There is a sense of ‘thing’ such that one quantifies over absolutely everything if and only if one quantifies over absolutely *every thing*—and this is the sense relevant for our present discussion (and the one I have been tacitly using so far). In this sense, you cannot defend that everything does so and so by admitting that a purported counterexample does so and so but denying that it is a thing. For, as Williamson puts it (2003, 420), if the word ‘it’ refers at all, it refers to a thing in the relevant sense; if ‘it’ does not refer, nothing has been denied to be a thing. There might well be an enriched, “sparse” sense of ‘thing’ or ‘object’ in which there is something such that it is indeterminate whether it is a thing or an object, in this sense. But then quantifying over absolutely everything is not quantifying over absolutely every thing or every object, in this enriched, “sparse” sense. Now certainly ‘There are n objects’ can be indeterminate in truth-value compatibly with the precision of ‘there are’ in virtue of the vagueness of ‘object,’ expressing this enriched, “sparse” notion—if, for instance, it is indeterminate whether things like the sum of the right half of my left shoe plus the Moon plus the sum of all Her Majesty’s ear-rings or fleet are objects according to the enriched sense. But this is something that the defender of unrestricted mereological composition such as Lewis can easily agree with. When we speak about absolutely everything, however, everything is a thing, in the relevant sense. Hence the argument for the precision of ‘everything,’ and thus for the precision of ‘thing,’—in the sense in which one quantifies over absolutely everything if and only if one quantifies over absolutely every thing—does not inappropriately presuppose what was at issue.

One related but different thought is the following. The enriched, “sparse” conception of objects is, for reasons like those mentioned, plausibly going to be vague, and correspondingly there might be an enriched vague notion of *existence*: it might be indeterminate whether a thing exists in this enriched sense if it is indeterminate if the thing is an object, in the enriched sense. This is my way of interpreting André Gallois’ invocation of Meinong (which he does not elaborate further):

[I]f vagueness results from different precisifications of a predicate yielding different truth values assignments, and ‘there exists’ ranges over everything that exists, what could the different precisifications of ‘there exists’ be? ... Meinong to the rescue. Suppose different precisifications of ‘there exists’ correspond to different ways of dividing up the things that *there are* rather than the things that exist.” (Gallois 2004, 652)

But this line of thought suffers from the same limitation as the one we have just considered. For it seems not to appreciate the absolute generality of quantifying over absolutely everything: if there are things over which ‘there exists’ does not range, then ‘there exists’ does not range over absolutely everything, and the argument for the precision of idioms for the latter remains unchallenged. One might think a defender of unrestricted composition should find little comfort in the view that there are things like the sum of the right half of my left shoe plus the Moon plus the sum of all Her Majesty’s ear-rings just in the same sense as that in which there are round squares. But it is important to note that it would *not* be in the same sense according to the proposal we are considering.

not yet to endorse a particular theory of vagueness, such as the theory that there is vagueness in the world.” (Koslicki 2003, 131) This analogy with ‘bald’ here does seem to suggest that Koslicki thinks that ‘everything’ might be precise while ‘thing’ or ‘object’ being vague.

Round squares do not exist according to any of the precisifications of ‘exist,’ whereas the sum does according to some but not all of them. Hence things like the sum of the right half of my left shoe plus the Moon plus the sum of all Her Majesty’s ear-rings exist just in the sense in which fleets exist—or any thing, for that matter, provided that we are talking about absolutely everything.

So far we have seen that (*) is indeed compatible with noting that there might be enriched notions of ‘object’ and ‘existence’ which are vague: quantifying over all objects or all that exists, in the enriched senses, is not quantifying over absolutely everything. The argument for (*)—that idioms for unrestricted quantifications are precise, provided that vagueness requires there being different admissible candidates of the considered sort—is not put in jeopardy by any of these observations.

Achille Varzi (2005) has recently claimed that one might reject the argument (*), by contending that there may be nothing wrong about the thought that unrestricted quantifiers admit multiple precisifications, after all. Varzi refers to Sider’s earlier presentation of it I have rehearsed at the end of section 2. As we saw there, that presentation might suggest that the problem with the envisaged thought is merely that “it is hard to understand what these precisifications are supposed to be” (Sider 2001, 129). To this, Varzi rejoins that there are supervaluationist models with variable domain of quantification across precisifications (2005, 494) and that, anyway, some philosophers (including arguably Hirsch 2002) might sympathize with a sort of relativism resulting from cashing out the vagueness of the quantifiers in terms of competing conceptual schemes:

Different precisifications would correspond to different conceptual schemes—different models of the world. But unless one takes this to mean that all quantification is restricted insofar as each conceptual scheme is partial—a claim that would leave no room for the sort of quantification that deserves a place in the logical vocabulary—the consequence of this would be a radical form of relativism according to which what there is depends on what we think and how we talk. (Varzi 2005, 495)

As we saw in section 3, however, the argument for (*) actually only depends on structural features involved in the claim that vagueness requires different admissible alternative candidates, and not on specific views about the nature of these candidates. And as argued in section 2, these features were those making it the case that there being *different* candidates was incompatible with all of them being *admissible*, as the former would require, whereas the latter precludes, certain things being (determinately) true. These were in turn, in a nutshell, that that there is something such that ‘everything’ ranges over, according to one, but does not according to the other. Therefore, conceiving of the candidates as “alternative conceptual schemes” or “competing models of the world” does not affect the argument for (*) at all—*provided* that these differ, but are all admissible, in the envisaged manner. For it should be true that there is something according to one that is not according to the other, if they are to be different—but if both are admissible it would not be true that there is something according to one that is not according to the other.

It has been suggested to me that maybe it is precisely this envisaged manner of differing while being all of them admissible that the thought about “alternative conceptual schemes” or “competing models of the world” might be meant to be an alternative to. Maybe these might differ while being all of them admissible in a way that is not stateable as the envisaged manner presupposes. If this is the thought, then, it may perfectly well be that it provides a way of refusing the argument for (*). As the defenders of the argument emphasize, it only works by conditionalizing on substantive—though, accord-

ing to many, plausible—views on the nature of vagueness. These include the features mentioned connecting the admissibility of the different candidates and (determinate) truth that the argument for (*) exploits, which are shared by some of the main theories about vagueness, including the view of vagueness as semantic indecision assumed by Lewis and Sider, and epistemicism as defended by Williamson. We saw at the end of section 3 that there are possible alternative views on vagueness, notably including the view of vagueness *in rebus*, that do not fall under the scope of the argument, and thus can maintain the vagueness of ‘everything.’ It might be that there are ways of elaborating the thought about “alternative conceptual schemes” or “competing models of the world” that do not fall under the scope either. All these, of course, do not challenge the argument for (*), given its explicit, substantive—though, according to many, plausible—assumptions.

5. Conclusion

There are certain metaphysically interesting arguments “from vagueness,” which involve a claim to the effect that idioms for unrestricted quantifications are precise. I have presented an elaboration of Lewis’ argument for this claim, which assumes the view of vagueness as semantic indecision. I have claimed that the argument also covers other views on the nature of vagueness which also require, for an expression to be vague, that there be different admissible alternatives of the relevant sort, including epistemicism as defended by Williamson. Finally I have argued that recent attempts to resist the argument do not succeed.

All these things, of course, take for granted the *coherence* of the notion of quantifying over absolutely everything without any restriction whatsoever. This coherence has been vigorously defended in recent work by Williamson (2003, 2006), but has also been claimed to suffer from difficulties. To name a few, it might be argued that it leads to a paradox, if an account of validity requires quantifying over things that are interpretations (see Williamson 2003 for details and for his solution), and it might be argued that practices of nominalization require, in each context, that the domain is extensible in a certain way incompatible with the coherence of quantifying over absolutely everything, and that these practices are legitimate (see Glanzberg 2004). More relevantly for the topic of this paper, it might be argued that, precisely in virtue of the correctness of the argument for (*), any reason for there being indeterminacy in ‘thing’, if such there be, would provide indirect evidence against the coherence of quantifying over absolutely everything (see Hellman 2006).

I have not argued here for the coherence of quantifying over absolutely everything. My claim has been that, provided that it is coherent, idioms for it need be precise—assuming certain views about the nature of vagueness. I take arguments for unrestricted composition or for 4D *if* it is coherent to quantify over absolutely everything to be interesting enough.*

* Thanks to the participants of the *LOGOS* workshop on everything (Barcelona 2003), to the audience at the Philosophy Society (Birmingham 2005), and to the members of the *Arché* for very stimulating discussion on this topic. I am especially indebted for criticisms and suggestions to Elizabeth Barnes, Darragh Byrne, Marta Campdelacreu, Ross Cameron, Kit Fine, Manuel García-Carpintero, Frank Jackson, Carrie Jenkins, Daniel Nolan, Mark Sainsbury, Gabriel Uzquiano, Aquille Varzi, Robbie Williams, Timothy Williamson, Crispin Wright, Elia Zardini, and anonymous referees for this journal. Research has been

REFERENCES

- BALASHOV, Y. 2005, 'On Vagueness, 4D and Diachronic Universalism,' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83, 523-31
- GALOIS, A. 2004, 'Comments on Ted Sider: *Four Dimensionalism*,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 68, 648-57
- GLANZBERG, M. 2004, 'Quantification and Realism,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 69, 541
- HAWLEY, K. 2002, 'Vagueness and Existence,' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 102, 125-40
- HELLMAN, G. 2006, 'Against "Absolutely Everything"!,' in RAYO, A. and G. UZQUIANO (eds.), *Absolute Generality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming
- HIRSCH, E. 2002, 'Quantifier Variance and Realism,' *Philosophical Issues* 12, 51- 73
- HIRSCH, E. 2004, 'Comments on Theodore Sider's *Four Dimensionalism*,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 68, 658-64
- KOSLICKI, K. 2003, 'The Crooked Path from Vagueness to Four-Dimensionalism,' *Philosophical Studies* 114, 107-34
- LEWIS, D. 1986, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Oxford: Blackwell
- LEWIS, D. 1993, 'Many, but Almost One,' reprinted in *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 (q. v.)
- LOWE, J. 2005, 'Vagueness and endurance,' *Analysis* 65, 104-112
- MARKOSIAN, N. 2004, 'Two Arguments from Sider's *Four-Dimensionalism*,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 68 , 665-73
- MARKOSIAN, N. 2005, 'Restricted Composition,' in J. HAWTHORNE, T. SIDER and D. ZIMMERMAN (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*, Oxford: Blackwell
- MCCALL, S. and J. LOWE 2003, '3D/4D Equivalence, the Twins Paradox and Absolute Time,' *Analysis* 63, 110-14
- MERRICKS, T. 2005, 'Composition and Vagueness,' *Mind* 114, 615-37
- MILLER, K. 2005a, 'Blocking the Path from Vagueness to Four Dimensionalism,' *Ratio* 18, 317-31
- MILLER, K. 2005b, 'The Metaphysical Equivalence of Three and Four Dimensionalism,' *Erkenntnis* 62, 91-117
- NOLAN, D. 2006, 'Vagueness, Multiplicity and Parts,' *Noûs*, forthcoming
- SIDELLE, A. 2002, 'Is There a True Metaphysics of Material Objects?' *Philosophical Issues* 12, 118- 45
- SIDER, T. 2001, *Four Dimensionalism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press
- SIDER, T. 2003, 'Against Vague Existence,' *Philosophical Studies* 114, 135-46
- SIDER, T. 2004, 'Replies to Gallois, Hirsch and Markosian,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 68, 674-87
- VARZI, A. 2005, 'Change, Temporal Parts, and the Argument from Vagueness,' *dialectica* 59, 485-98
- WILLIAMSON, T. 1994, *Vagueness*, London & New York: Routledge
- WILLIAMSON, T. 2003, 'Everything,' *Philosophical Perspectives* 17, 415-65
- WILLIAMSON, T. 2006, 'Absolute Identity and Absolute Generality,' in RAYO, A. and G. UZQUIANO (eds.), *Absolute Generality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming

funded by the research projects HUM2004-05609-C02-01 (MEC) and BFF2002-10164 (ESF), and the grant MEC EX2004-1159 (MEC).