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# **RAMPANT NON-FACTUALISM: A METAPHYSICAL FRAMEWORK AND ITS TREATMENT OF VAGUENESS**

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**Abstract:** Rampant non-factualism is the view that all non-fundamental matters are non-factual, in a sense inspired by Kit Fine (2001). The first half of this paper argues that if we take non-factualism seriously for any matters, such as morality, then we should take rampant non-factualism seriously. The second half of the paper argues that rampant non-factualism makes possible an attractive theory of vagueness. We can give non-factualist accounts of non-fundamental matters that nicely characterize the vagueness they manifest (if any). I suggest that such non-factualist theories dissolve philosophical puzzlement about vagueness. In particular, the approach implies that philosophers should not try to say which of the sorites-paradox-forming claims are true; we should not try to solve the sorites paradox in that sense.

Keywords: vagueness; metaphysics; non-factualism.

## **1. Introduction**

Does every suggested solution to the sorites vex you, rather than soothe? Consider an n-step sorites series running from a patch that's clearly red to a patch that clearly isn't. Let's use '1' to refer to the first patch in the series, and 'R' to predicate redness. Let's use a function symbol, "'", such that for all x in the series, x' is the immediate successor

of  $x$ . Use ‘ $n$ ’ to abbreviate ‘ $1''''$ ’ for  $n-1$  applications of the successor function. Clearly  $R_1$ , and clearly  $\neg R_n$ . There is a compelling, classically valid argument from the premises that  $R_1$  and  $\neg R_n$ , for the conclusion that  $\exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')$ .<sup>1</sup> But surely that conclusion is false: there is no red patch next to a patch that isn’t red, no sharp cut-off at which the patches cease to be red. We’re in the mire.

A ‘utopian’ solution to the paradox tells us which premises and inferences to accept in the argument for a cut-off. Some utopian accounts say that there is a cut-off and try to explain away the appearance to the contrary; such views include epistemicism, supervaluationism, and some contextualist theories. Other utopian accounts reject a compelling, classically valid inference in the argument for a cut-off. Dialethic accounts say there are cut-offs and also that there aren’t—a true contradiction. Nihilism rejects the premise that  $R_1$ , asserting that things never have vague properties.<sup>2</sup>

I’m afraid I am not comfortable with any of these utopian solutions; they all seem to have significant costs. If you feel the same way, I invite you to spend an hour

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<sup>1</sup> My set-up of the paradox builds on Wright (2001: 63). A sketch of the argument: suppose for reductio that  $\forall x \neg (Rx \& \neg Rx')$ . So  $\neg (R_1 \& \neg R_1')$ .  $R_1$ , and so  $R_1'$ . But  $\neg (R_1' \& \neg R_1'')$ , and so  $R_1''$ . And so on, till  $R_1''''$  for  $n-1$  applications of the successor function. That is,  $R_n$ , contradicting a premise. By reductio,  $\neg \forall x \neg (Rx \& \neg Rx')$ ; and so  $\exists x (Rx \& \neg Rx')$ .

<sup>2</sup> What follows is merely a suggestive sample of references. Williamson (1994) defends epistemicism. Supervaluationists include Fine (1975) and Keefe (2000). Åkerman (2012) surveys contextualist theories. Views that revise classical logic include Field’s three-valued logic (2003) and Wright’s intuitionist logic (2001, 2003). Weber, Ripley, Priest, Hyde & Colyvan (2014) defend a dialethic solution, and provide references to their separate work on the topic (n. 1). Braun & Sider (2007) are nihilists.

or two flirting with a different approach. Maybe we can tame the paradox without giving a utopian solution. Maybe the Gordian Knot is to be cut, not untied.

This paper argues that ‘rampant non-factualism’ makes possible an attractive theory of vagueness, which includes a non-utopian treatment of the sorites paradox. Rampant non-factualism is the view that all non-fundamental matters are non-factual. On the Kit-Fine-inspired account I favour, a non-factualist theory for a matter,  $p$ , explains in other terms what makes judgements that  $p$  ‘correct’—or rather ‘acceptable’—in a particular sense. For example, non-factualist expressivism about morality says that what makes moral judgements ‘acceptable’ is that they faithfully reflect the judge’s moral likes and dislikes. For ‘factual’ matters, what makes a judgement that  $p$  acceptable is: that  $p$ . The first half of this paper (§§2–5) introduces non-factualism, and argues that if we take non-factualism seriously for any matters, then we should take rampant non-factualism seriously.

The second half of the paper (§§5–10) explains how rampant non-factualism makes a nice treatment of vagueness possible. We can give non-factualist theories that say the following three nice things about how certain matters manifest vagueness: (i) there are matters for which either verdict is acceptable; (ii) there are matters for which suspending judgement is acceptable (glossing the intuition that one does not thereby ‘miss out on a hidden fact of the matter’); and (iii) there is no acceptable response to instances of the sorites paradox. As I will explain, this approach makes the difficult questions about the truth in borderline cases, and whether sorites series contain sharp cut-offs, lose their philosophical kick (§10). On this approach, philosophers should be content not to try to solve the sorites paradox (in the utopian sense). This is a major benefit, assuming that there are significant costs to every utopian option.

I focus on articulating rampant non-factualism and the treatment of vagueness it makes possible. I won't try to show that this is the only attractive approach to vagueness. Philosophers write plenty of articles knocking their colleagues' theories of vagueness; no gap in the literature needs plugging here.

I introduce the rampant non-factualist treatment of vagueness by generalizing from a Fine-inspired formulation of expressivism about morality. For many readers, that's the easiest way to understand the view, and see that it is intellectually respectable. I don't need you to immediately accept expressivism thus formulated; I just want you to get into the swing of non-factualism.

## **2. Finean non-factualism about a matter**

This section characterizes non-factualism about a matter. My account develops an idea of Kit Fine's (2001: 1–5, 21–25), so I call it 'Finean non-factualism'. Our working example will be Finean expressivism about morality. Officially, I'll define non-factualism about a specific matter, such as whether it is morally wrong for Sally to kick Oscar. I hope you'll indulge talk of non-factualism about general 'subject-matters', such as ethics. Nominalized talk about 'matters' is needed to state generalizations about factualism and non-factualism. Please don't read more into it than you would into talk of non-factualism about whether it is wrong for Sally to kick Oscar. (We could talk of non-factualism about a 'content' or 'proposition', but I thought it best to avoid those philosophically allusive labels.)

Let's put Finean expressivism in some intellectual context (Fine 2001: 1–5). In the bad old days, expressivists said that there are no moral beliefs, only likes and dislikes; moral utterances express those non-cognitive attitudes, and hence are neither true nor false. But it seems obvious that some moral utterances are true and some are

false, and that people have beliefs about what's right or wrong. To be plausible, expressivism must not deny such platitudes (Fine 2001: 5). In particular, expressivists should be 'minimalists' about truth, treating 'it is true that it is wrong for Sally to kick Oscar' in the same way they treat 'it is wrong for Sally to kick Oscar'—a benevolent person can properly say either of those things. Simon Blackburn (1993) calls non-factualist views that are thus compatible with common-sense 'quasi-realist'.

Quasi-realist expressivism does not deny that moral talk is truth-apt, or that there are moral beliefs.<sup>3</sup> The quasi-realist endorses the common-sense usage of ordinary words like 'true' and 'believes', just as her factualist opponent does. But then how are we to formulate expressivism, distinguishing it from factualism? James Dreier (2004) terms this 'the problem of creeping minimalism in meta-ethics'. We should expect a solution to this problem to introduce an unfamiliar notion. The quasi-realist expressivist and the moral factualist agree on every claim framed using ordinary notions, so their disagreement must concern claims framed using extra-ordinary notions.

I am not going to survey the ways philosophers have tried to formulate quasi-realist expressivism (for which see Sinclair 2009). I will just describe a Fine-inspired solution to the problem of creeping minimalism (Fine 2001: 22–4). I say it is 'Fine-inspired' because the proposal differs in some ways from his official view, as footnotes 4 and 5 describe.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This point is endorsed by Blackburn (1993: 3–6; 2010) and Gibbard (2003: 18–20, 62–3, 182–3).

<sup>4</sup> Unlike Fine, I take the following proposal to *define* the difference between factualism and non-factualism about a matter. Fine defines factualism about  $p$  as the view that  $p$  is either a fact-in-reality or is grounded in the facts-in-reality (Fine 2001: 28). Non-factualism thus

‘Finean non-factualism’ about a matter is a claim about what makes judgements about the matter ‘correct’ in a particular theoretical sense—a sense that’s distinct from the judgement’s being true.

For a *factual* matter,  $p$ , either it is ‘correct’ for any person  $J$  to judge that  $p$  because  $p$ , or it is ‘incorrect’ for any person  $J$  to judge that  $p$  because *not- $p$* .

For a *non-factual* matter,  $p$ , whether it is ‘correct’ for a person  $J$  to judge that  $p$  is determined by something other than whether  $p$ .

To illustrate the contrast: maybe it is ‘correct’ for Janet to judge that there is an electron at point  $x$  because there is an electron at point  $x$ ; but it is ‘correct’ for Janet to judge that it is morally wrong for Sally to kick Oscar because Janet dislikes (in the peculiarly moral fashion) anyone’s acting in that way. That’s factualism about the physical matter and non-factualism about the moral one.

People make judgements about moral matters, such as whether it is wrong for Sally to kick Oscar. We can disagree about moral questions by making contrary judgements. This is common ground between moral factualists and non-factualists. Nor, on my proposal, must factualists and non-factualists disagree about what makes it the case that a judgement is about what’s morally wrong.<sup>5</sup> Factualism and non-

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defined is only plausible given suitable accounts of belief and ‘correctness’, says Fine (see footnote 5 and the main text respectively).

<sup>5</sup> Fine adds to the explanatory burden on non-factualism I describe (Fine 2001: 22–4). He also requires the non-factualist to say in virtue of what people have beliefs about the subject-matter, without invoking the allegedly non-factual elements. For example, the expressivist must say in virtue of what people have beliefs about which acts are wrong, without invoking

factualism disagree about what makes token judgements legitimate or correct in a particular sense. (We'll refine the following hand-waving gloss in §§4–5.) Factual judgements are legitimate when they correspond to a fact 'out there in reality'. But according to expressivism, there are no moral facts 'out there in reality'. That does not mean that our moral judgements are radically defective and need to be given up. Moral judgements are not in the business of trying to reflect a 'moral fact out there in reality'; that's not their job. So what is their job? According to expressivism, what makes a moral judgement legitimate or correct is that it reflects the judge's moral likes and dislikes, not that it reflects a moral fact. That is a paradigmatically non-factualist claim, according to the Finean definition.<sup>6</sup>

It is essential to Fine's idea that we distinguish his theoretical notion of 'correct' judgement from the sense in which a judgement is correct iff it is true.

Of course, the obvious standard of correctness [for a judgement about a non-factual matter] will be nonfactual; for the correctness of the judgement that abortion is wrong, say, will simply amount to abortion's being wrong.... But this nonfactual standard of correctness lives in the shadow, as it were, of a

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moral wrongness. That strikes me as neither necessary nor sufficient for defending non-factualism. It is not necessary, because one can think that facts about what people believe are fundamental, and do not hold in virtue of anything else, and yet still be a non-factualist about morality. It is not sufficient, as one can give a functionalist account of what it is to believe something to be wrong, without mentioning wrongness itself, yet be a mad-dog realist about wrongness. (Dreier 2004 discusses Fine's formulation of non-factualism, but focuses on the element I've argued is mistaken.)

<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere (Jackson 2016) I argue that Finean expressivism gets to the heart of a certain kind of relativism—better than truth-relativism for example.



factual standard.<sup>7</sup> ... So for the expressivist, for example, the factual standard of correctness for a judgement might be that it faithfully reflects one's (possibly implicit) commitments; while for the mathematical formalist, it could be that the judgement is in accordance with the rules of the game. (Fine 2001: 23)

Fine employs two notions of 'correct' judgement in this passage. In the first sense that appears, a judgement is 'correct' if it is true and 'incorrect' if false. Truth and falsity, in this ordinary sense, are 'minimal': *it is true that p* is equivalent to *p*, and *it is false that p* is equivalent to *not-p*. Factualism and non-factualism are distinguished using the second notion of correctness. The relevant notion is central to metaphysical theorizing, according to Fine, so I will label it *metaphysical* correctness. Metaphysical correctness is not truth, as expressivists can grant that a moral judgement reflects the judge's commitments and so is metaphysically correct, while disagreeing with it and thinking it false. If it is metaphysically correct for Janet to judge that it is wrong for Sally to kick Oscar, and James believes it isn't wrong, then it is metaphysically correct for Janet to judge that James's belief is false. That's how minimal falsity works. This also shows Finean expressivism is hospitable to disagreement about moral matters. (I say more about disagreement in my (2016).)

How are we to elucidate the notion of metaphysical correctness and with it Finean non-factualism? As Fine (2001) and Theodore Sider (2011: 8–10) argue, we shouldn't try to define metaphysical notions in more familiar terms. Like all theoretical notions, theoretical notions in metaphysics are explained by explaining the theories in which they appear. Hopefully you feel the pull of my initial contrast

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<sup>7</sup> Fine says it is a factual matter whether a judgement meets this second standard of correctness. I think it isn't a factual matter (see §5).

between factualist and expressivist theories of morality. You thereby have some grasp of metaphysical correctness. A tighter grasp comes by building a more powerful and detailed theory using the notion, which I'll do in what follows. A philosopher might insist—at the end of the paper—that she just doesn't understand the theory I've proposed. That shouldn't deter those of us who sympathize with Finean expressivism or the other elusive thoughts I'll gloss about reality and about vagueness. It is quite normal for philosophers to disagree deeply and to pursue competing research programmes.

### **3. The truth about non-factual matters**

How should we think of the *truth* about non-factual matters? For example, how should expressivists think of the truth about moral matters? It should be familiar that Blackburn–Gibbard-style expressivism sharply separates ethical from meta-ethical questions. One would not expect an expressivist *theory* to say whether it is wrong for Sally to kick Oscar. The theory is silent on such questions, and even on whether there is a truth of the matter. Blackburn writes (2010: 297–8): “Perfectly good questions...*for first-order ethicists*... [are questions for which] as theorists of the nature of ethics, we should not be in the business of urging or denying [an answer].” Finean expressivism also takes the questions of the non-factual subject-matter (namely ethics) to be irrelevant to the subject-matter's metaphysics. According to Finean expressivism, the *complete* metaphysical theory for ethics does not say which ethical claims are true. If pressed on the ethical question, the benevolent expressivist *theorist* will affirm that it is morally wrong for Sally to kick Oscar, while objecting that the subject-matter has been changed.

Whether a given moral judgement is true is an ethical question, not a meta-ethical one. Suppose a cruel person thinks it is not morally wrong for Sally to kick Oscar. Her judgement is false and in that sense incorrect, because it is morally wrong for Sally to kick Oscar (say I). That ethical matter is irrelevant to meta-ethics, where the relevant point is that the cruel person's judgement reflects her commitments and hence is metaphysically correct. The expressivist must sharply separate meta-ethics from ethics. For if it were relevant to the metaphysics of ethics that it is wrong for Sally to kick Oscar, that fact would make it metaphysical correct for anyone to judge that it is so, contrary to expressivism.

A great many issues will be irrelevant to theorizing about any particular subject. One can't object that the theory of general relativity is incomplete because it doesn't say whether Caesar ate eggs for breakfast on the morning he crossed the Rubicon. We should all agree that a theory of the metaphysics of ethics need not and should not address whether Caesar ate eggs for breakfast that morning. We should also agree that an expressivist theory of the metaphysics of ethics need not and should not address ethical questions.

The idea can also be glossed using Carnap's evocative terminology of 'internal' and 'external' questions (Carnap 1950).<sup>8</sup> Ethical questions are 'internal' to that subject-matter; we only do metaphysics when we address 'external' questions about ethics. According to Finean non-factualists, it is an external question what makes ethical judgements metaphysically correct.<sup>9</sup> I explain the distinction between the

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<sup>8</sup> Price (2011 chapter 13) and Blatti & Lapointe (eds. 2016) are part of the resurging interest in Carnap-inspired metaphysics.

<sup>9</sup> Finean non-factualists say what makes ethical judgements metaphysically correct. In Carnap's set-up this loosely corresponds to what 'linguistic framework rules' govern ethical

internal and external questions as that between two non-overlapping subject-matters: ethics and its metaphysics.

I've discussed expressivism about morality, but the point generalizes to all non-factualist theories, as follows:

(THE IRRELEVANCE OF TRUTH) On a non-factualist approach to the metaphysics for  $p$ , whether  $p$  is true or false is irrelevant to the metaphysical theory for  $p$ .

That is, a non-factualist theory for  $p$  won't address whether  $p$  is true. This moral about non-factualism will be crucial to the proposed approach to vagueness; specifically, to depriving the hard questions about borderline cases and sharp cut-offs of their philosophical urgency (§10).

Let's note a corollary. Plausibly, it is wrong for Sally to kick Oscar *in virtue of the fact that* it would cause him pain. If the expressivist theory is to be silent on whether it is wrong to kick him, it must also be silent on such claims about whether certain non-moral truths *make it* wrong. The above 'in virtue of' claim is not itself part of the expressivist metaphysical theory; rather it is a *moral* claim to be treated expressivistically. (Blackburn makes this point, 2010: 297–300.) The point generalizes

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discourse. (Among the differences: Carnap's 'rules' govern how answers are confirmed, whereas there's nothing epistemic about metaphysical correctness.) Contra Carnap, I think there is also an external question as to whether moral thought corresponds to any 'facts out there in reality'—according to expressivists, it doesn't (§4). Whether it is profitable for us to engage in moral thought and talk is another external question.

to all non-factual matters: what the truth of the matter holds in virtue of is an ‘internal’ question, irrelevant to the matter’s metaphysics.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. Introducing rampant non-factualism

One might assume that non-factualism is only plausible for some subject-matters, such as morality and deliciousness. But according to rampant non-factualism, all non-fundamental matters, such as those concerning tables and cities, should be given a non-factualist metaphysics.

(RAMPANT NON-FACTUALISM) For every matter,  $p$ , either  $p$  is non-factual, or it is a fundamental fact whether  $p$ .<sup>11</sup>

In other words, only fundamental matters are factual. To see why rampant non-factualism is not absurd, let’s compare it with a seemingly natural metaphysics for tables and cities—Fine’s ‘reductionism’ (2001: 26).

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<sup>10</sup> Fine agrees that according to expressivism, ordinary claims about what makes something morally wrong are moral claims and not metaphysical ones (2001: 19). He distinguishes his notion of grounds, used to give metaphysical theories, from the ordinary sense in which it is wrong for Sally to kick Oscar *in virtue of the fact that* it would cause him pain. If moral truths are grounded in naturalistic truths, and naturalistic truths are factual, then moral truths are factual too, given Fine’s definition (see footnote 4). So according to Fine, expressivists must deny that ordinary claims about what moral truths hold in virtue of are claims about grounds.

<sup>11</sup> This formulation of rampant non-factualism does not presume that there are fundamental facts about what is not the case. If there aren’t, then those matters would need a non-factualist treatment.

Finean reductionism about a subject-matter says that the relevant facts are not fundamental, but they are *grounded* in the fundamental facts.<sup>12</sup> For example, reductionism about tables says that while the facts about tables are not fundamental, they are grounded in fundamental facts, say about the positions of basic particles. The facts about tables then make judgements about tables metaphysically correct or incorrect, so those matters count as factual by my definition. Rampant non-factualism eliminates Fine's category of 'reducible' matters: every matter is either non-factual or fundamental.

To see that rampant non-factualism is not crazy, notice that for every reductionist account, which grounds the truth of a matter in the fundamental facts (either directly or indirectly), there is a parallel non-factualist account that appeals to the same explanantia. When the reductionist says that  $p$  is grounded in its being the case that  $Q, R, S,$  and  $T$ , the parallel non-factualist account says that for all judges  $J$ , what makes it metaphysically correct for  $J$  to judge that  $p$  is that  $Q, R, S,$  and  $T$ . (The non-factualist theories thus generated are a starting-point, not the last word.)

For example, when Fine's reductionist says that the existence of a table here is grounded in the arrangement of particles table-wise in the relevant region, the rampant non-factualist might say:

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<sup>12</sup> I explain at the end of this section why I'm talking about 'fundamental' facts, rather than using Fine's terminology of 'facts-in-reality'. Fine develops his (2001) views about grounding in more detail in his (2012). Grounding has been the most enthusiastically embraced part of Fine's (2001) framework—see Clark & Liggins (2012) and Raven (2015) for reviews. Intuitive instances of grounding are not straightforwardly identified: see footnote 10 and objection two addressed in this section.

For all J, what makes it metaphysically correct for J to judge that there's a table here is that: particles are arranged table-wise in the relevant region. (The arrangement of particles also makes it incorrect to judge that there isn't a table here.)

When Fine's reductionist says that London buses being of specific shade *s* grounds the fact that they are red, the rampant non-factualist might say:

For all J, what makes it metaphysically correct for J to judge that London buses are red is that: they are of specific shade *s*. (The shade of London buses also makes it incorrect to judge that London buses aren't red, or that they are blue, and so on.)

Again, the rampant non-factualist can give a metaphysical theory of cities of the following form:

For all J, what makes it metaphysically correct for J to judge that New York is a city is that: [whatever underlying truths Fine's reductionist invokes, say about people, buildings, or particles].

I see no reason why, if *p* itself is not what makes it metaphysically correct to judge that *p*, *only facts about the judge J* could make it metaphysically correct for J to judge that *p*. Expressivist theories are a special case in this respect. It may seem strange to call the above account of tables 'non-factualist', and 'not reductionist', but let's stick to Fine's labels.

The above non-factualist account of redness does not explain the acceptability of judgements directly in terms of the fundamental facts. A non-factualist account should illuminate what we are up to in thinking and talking about a subject-matter; that cannot usually be done by appealing directly to the fundamental. For example, the point of judging things to be red is to divide the spectrum of precise shades into manageable chunks. THE IRRELEVANCE OF TRUTH places no barrier to using precise shades in the non-factualist account of vague colour categories, and giving a separate non-factualist treatment of shades.

Let's rebut three objections to rampant non-factualism. First: morality is relative, according to Finean expressivism; but relativism about tables and cities is silly. How does rampant non-factualism avoid collapsing the metaphysical difference between morality and tables? In reply, let's define:

A matter,  $p$ , is *relative* iff: whether it is metaphysically correct for a person  $J$  to judge that  $p$  depends on facts about  $J$  (*qua* judge of whether  $p$ <sup>13</sup>).

Roughly: relativism about  $p$  says that it can be metaphysically correct for  $J_1$  to judge that  $p$ , but incorrect for  $J_2$  to do so. Finean expressivism about morality is relativistic; the above non-factualist account of tables is not. Non-factualism about a matter does not entail relativism about it.

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<sup>13</sup> Whether it is metaphysically correct for Janet to judge that Janet is wearing a hat depends on facts about Janet. That shouldn't entail relativism about whether she is wearing a hat. Whether it is metaphysically correct for Bert to judge that Janet is wearing a hat depends in the same way on the facts about Janet. So: whether it is metaphysically correct for Janet to judge that she is wearing a hat does not depend on facts about Janet *qua* judge of that matter.



Second objection: surely the truths about tables and cities hold in virtue of the fundamental facts. So those matters are ‘reducible’ (it is alleged), and they are factual. I reply by reminding you of the corollary to THE IRRELEVANCE OF TRUTH that we saw in §3. Expressivism about morality does not *deny* that kicking people is wrong in virtue of the pain it causes. Rather, the non-factualist approach takes it to be an ethical matter, one that’s irrelevant to the metaphysics of morality, just like it’s being true that kicking people is wrong. Thus non-factualist expressivism about morality is compatible with judging that kicking people is wrong in virtue of the pain it causes. According to rampant non-factualism, the same goes for all questions about what the non-fundamental facts hold in virtue of. For example, it is irrelevant to the metaphysics for tables and cities whether the truths about those things hold in virtue of certain fundamental facts. In Carnap’s terminology (§3), the latter questions are ‘internal’, not metaphysical.

Third objection: suppose it is a fundamental fact that spatial points  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are separated by a distance of 1.5m. Then surely *it is a fact that*  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are separated by less than 2m, goes the complaint. But I am proposing non-factualism about the latter question, and hence (it is alleged) must say it is not a fact. Notice that this objection applies equally to non-factualism about morality. It is a fact that it is wrong for Sally to kick Oscar; but surely—it is alleged—non-factualism is the view that it isn’t a fact.

The short answer is that ‘non-factualism’ is a technical term I inherit from Fine, though it is somewhat of a misnomer for a quasi-realist view. In the ordinary, minimal sense of ‘fact’, *it is a fact that*  $p$  is equivalent to  $p$ . Non-factualism about  $p$  doesn’t deny that *it is a fact that*  $p$ —it is silent on that question. A non-factualist account explains what makes it metaphysically correct to judge that  $p$ ; the same conditions

make it metaphysically correct to judge that *it is a fact that p*. It is metaphysically correct for anyone to judge that *it is a fact that  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are separated by less than 2m*, and incorrect for anyone to deny it, because  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are separated by 1.5m. (This non-factualist account also shows the matter to be non-relative: whether it is metaphysically correct for J to judge that  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are separated by less than 2m does not depend on facts about J.)

A longer answer says that there is a metaphysically loaded sense of ‘fact’ in which a non-factualist account of morality entails that there are no moral ‘facts’. I doubt non-factualism is intelligible without invoking such a notion. I introduced non-factualism in §2 by saying that if there are no moral facts ‘out there in reality’, then we need to explain what makes moral judgements legitimate in a non-factualist way. Conversely, if there are moral facts ‘out there in reality’, then the legitimacy of our moral judgements is straightforwardly explained in the factualist manner. A grasp of non-factualism goes hand in hand with a grasp of the notion of a fact-in-reality.<sup>14</sup>

We should distinguish the notion of a fact-in-reality from that of a fundamental fact. Rampant non-factualism says that the fundamental facts are the

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<sup>14</sup> Huw Price’s *Global Expressivism* (2011) describes the functions of parts of our vocabulary, and never says the function is simply to state the relevant facts. Thus Price’s approach is inhospitable to the notion of a fact-in-reality. Relatedly, he does not explain the ‘function’ of some vocabulary by saying how it is used metaphysically correctly. So as I think he must, Price rejects the putative ‘bifurcation’ between factualism and non-factualism as nonsense, aligning himself with the Wittgensteinian anti-metaphysical tradition (e.g. 2011 chapter 11, §§ 6 & 11). By contrast, my approach embraces metaphysical notions rather than repudiating them. My conception of non-factualism invites the thought that for some matters, it is metaphysically correct to judge that *p* because *p*; those are the facts-in-reality. So my non-factualism is ‘rampant’ but not ‘global’.

only facts-in-reality, but that's a substantive thesis. It's coherent to think that judgements about tables are factual, answering to 'facts out there in reality' about tables, facts that are grounded in the fundamental facts. It's coherent, but false according to rampant non-factualism. To formulate—and deny—the view that reality-out-there is structured, composed of non-fundamental facts-in-reality grounded in the fundamental facts, we need both the notion of a fact-in-reality and that of a fundamental fact. Unfortunately, Fine (2001, 2009) runs the two notions together. He introduces a combined notion by saying that the “facts-in-reality” are what’s “fundamentally” the case, and that they constitute “the intrinsic structure of reality” (Fine 2001: 26). But that automatically rules out the view that Reality consists of certain non-fundamental facts as well as the fundamental ones. Moreover, it's puzzling to me how there could be no facts-in-reality about tables, and yet our judgements about tables are to be understood metaphysically as answering to facts about tables, as Fine's reductionist factualist says. That is, I only grasp non-factualism and the notion of a fact-in-reality if we equate factual matters with the facts-in-reality, contra Fine.

### **5. Non-factualist theories of vague matters, and the metaphysical status of non-factualist theorizing**

The difference between factualist reductionism about tables and non-factualism might not seem game-changing. The factualist says that the existence of tables is grounded in the arrangement of particles (say), and what makes it metaphysically correct for anyone to judge that there are tables is *that there are tables*. The non-factualist says that what makes it metaphysically correct for anyone to judge the there are tables is that particles are arranged in a certain way. Why get excited about replacing factualism

about tables with non-factualism?—Because with a bit more work, rampant non-factualism can give an attractive treatment of vagueness. This treatment is not available to factualists about vague matters. As a result, I think we have good reason to be excited about rampant non-factualism, and maybe even accept the view.

The rest of this paper explains how, with its ideology suitably enriched, rampant non-factualism makes possible an attractive treatment of vagueness. The enriched theory evaluates judgements in a more fine-grained way than simply as being metaphysically correct or incorrect. We evaluate how good judgements are, and whether they are good enough or ‘metaphysically acceptable’. We also evaluate the occurrent attitude of suspending judgement, and combinations of occurrent attitudes. I will explain these extensions of the ideology as we go along. The effect is that non-factualist accounts of vague matters can say the following three nice things. Firstly, there are some questions for which either verdict is metaphysically acceptable (§6). Secondly, there are questions for which suspending judgement is metaphysically acceptable, glossing the intuition that one does not thereby ‘miss out on a hidden fact of the matter’ (§7). Thirdly, a sorites paradox poses a question to which no response is metaphysically acceptable (§§8–10). The claims that capture the vagueness in a matter are part of a particular non-factualist account of that matter; they do not follow merely from the fact that the matter is non-factual.

The proposal is to give non-factualist theories, with certain features, for all matters concerning the instantiation of vague properties. Strictly speaking, that doesn’t entail that all non-fundamental matters are non-factual. However, rampant non-factualism is the only principled view in which to embed the account of vagueness. Suppose we’ve given non-factualist accounts for all instances of vague properties, including clear cases such as that New York is a city. We can easily give

non-factualist theories for non-fundamental matters that do not involve vague properties or relations, such as that points  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are separated by less than  $2m$ . These non-factualist theories display why the relevant properties are precise: all instances of the property are treated as clear cases, not manifesting any vagueness. Why resist? It would be unmotivated and ad hoc to refuse this unified approach to non-fundamental matters. So non-factualism about all vague matters is best paired with rampant non-factualism. With these niceties noted, we can refer to the proposal as *the rampant non-factualist account of vagueness*.

Before we get into the details of the account of vagueness, let me address the metaphysical status of non-factualist theories themselves.<sup>15</sup> This will cast the theorizing to follow in a sympathetic light. The metaphysical acceptability of judgements is not the kind of thing the fundamental facts concern. So rampant non-factualism implies that non-factualist metaphysical theorizing is itself a non-factual subject-matter.<sup>16</sup> Should matters about metaphysical acceptability be given a relativist or non-relativist non-factualist account? I favour relativist expressivism about metaphysical acceptability. Let me paint a picture of what we are up to when we theorize about which judgements are metaphysically acceptable.

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<sup>15</sup> When it is a fact-in-reality that  $p$ , what makes it metaphysically acceptable to judge that  $\langle$ it is a fact-in-reality that  $p \rangle$  is that:  $p$ . This is a non-factualist account, but shows the matter to be perfectly objective. This is the right combination: if only fundamental facts are facts-in-reality, and there are no fundamental facts about fundamentality itself, then it won't be a fact-in-reality that it is a fact-in-reality that  $p$ .

<sup>16</sup> Metaphysical acceptability is vague. As the general approach dictates, vagueness in what it is metaphysically acceptable to judge to be red is to be understood by giving a certain kind of non-factualist account of those matters.

Metaphysicians examining a subject-matter ask whether it consists of ‘facts out there in reality’. If it does, then being in accord with such a fact-in-reality makes a judgement legitimate—‘metaphysically acceptable’ in my terminology. But suppose one thinks there are no facts-in-reality about tables, or what’s morally wrong. We can distinguish two reactions. The ‘mirroring’ is horrified, and resolves to stop making the relevant judgements. In her view, those judgements are illegitimate—they are all metaphysically unacceptable, because legitimate judgements must ‘mirror’ the facts-in-reality. By contrast, the non-mirroring is perfectly relaxed. She resolves to continue making the relevant judgements, which she takes to be legitimate though there are no facts-in-reality concerning the subject-matter. The non-mirroring should explain what makes the judgements metaphysically acceptable. That is, the non-mirroring should give a non-factualist account of the subject-matter. What are we to make of this disagreement? According to expressivism about whether it is metaphysically acceptable to judge that there are tables, the judgements of the mirroring and the non-mirroring on that matter are both metaphysically acceptable, because those judgements reflect the emotional reactions and commitments of the respective judges. When there is no fact-in-reality as to whether  $p$ , one’s emotional reaction, and one’s commitment to continuing or ceasing to make the relevant judgements, determine whether it is metaphysically acceptable for one to judge that  $\langle$ it is metaphysically acceptable for a given person  $J$  to judge that  $p\rangle$ . But when it is a fact-in-reality that  $p$ ,  $p$  makes affirming that  $\langle$ it is metaphysically acceptable for everyone to judge that  $p\rangle$  the only acceptable attitude. When it is a fact-in-reality that  $p$ , one misuses the concept of metaphysical acceptability if one judges that  $\langle$ it is metaphysically unacceptable to judge that  $p\rangle$ . When there is no fact-in-reality as to whether  $p$ , one’s hand is not so forced.

How does expressivism about metaphysical acceptability view the rampant non-factualist theory of vagueness? In particular, how does it view the claim that there is no acceptable response to the sorites paradox (§9)? Grant that ordinary ways of thinking make us susceptible to the sorites paradox; we can distinguish two reactions among non-mirrorers. The ‘utopian’ temperament cannot tolerate the potential for confusion, and so will only endorse reformed ways of thinking that avoid the paradox. The ‘pragmatist’ temperament endorses our ordinary ways of thinking because they are generally useful, tolerating our occasional confusion about the sorites. Contemporary work on the sorites is utopian in spirit; my proposal shows the pragmatist alternative is intelligible.

Don’t be disturbed that I espouse a relativist, expressivist metaphysics for central claims of this paper (about which attitudes are metaphysically acceptable). It is no more relevant than finding out that a paper in normative ethics was written by an expressivist about morality. In fact, expressivism about metaphysical acceptability rebuts the worry that I’m just saying whatever I feel like about which attitudes are metaphysically acceptable. I confess to tailoring my non-factualist theories to reflect my commitment to continue judging in the ordinary ways; but expressivism about metaphysical acceptability says it is metaphysically acceptable for me to do so.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> I’ve just stated that expressivism about metaphysical acceptability says what it is metaphysically acceptable for me to judge; but doesn’t that conflict with THE IRRELEVANCE OF TRUTH? No. Expressivism about metaphysical acceptability is just a schema for generating non-factualist theories for specific matters about what’s metaphysically acceptable. No instance of the schema violates THE IRRELEVANCE OF TRUTH.

## 6. The permissiveness intuition

Quentin shows Agatha and Daniel his car. It's half-way between paradigmatic red and paradigmatic orange. Quentin says, "Is my car red? Write your answer on a piece of paper without conferring." Agatha writes down, "Yes, it is." Daniel writes down, "No, it isn't." Agatha Affirms and Daniel Denies that the car is red in the same sense, namely Quentin's. (Denying a claim is just affirming its negation, or so I'll assume.)

Intuitively, both their answers are acceptable. They are acceptable representations of the colour of Quentin's car; they adequately fit its shade. Crispin Wright emphasizes this 'permissiveness intuition': "[I am] impressed by the datum that ... one is *entitled*, if one is so moved, to a verdict in the borderline area." (Wright 2017: 194; cf. 1992: 144; 2003: 94.) Mark Richard agrees: "Competent users of phrases such as 'rich for an American' or 'rich enough to buy a Lexus' can and do differ about what it is to be rich for an American, rich enough to buy a Lexus. ... The fact is that we don't think that there is only one correct way to use a vague phrase like 'rich for an American'." (Richard 2004: 225.) Tim Maudlin also endorses the permissiveness intuition. He calls cases on which one can go either way "benign borderline cases" (2008: 146–7).

Plausibly, this permissiveness appears in cases where other markers of vagueness are absent. Suppose one thinks that two is not an unusually large number children for an academic to have, but three is (Weatherson 2010: 80). One is not susceptible to a sorites paradox for the property of being an unusually large number of children for an academic. One does not suspend judgement on any question about what numbers have that property. Yet one can permit others to disagree about whether three is an unusually large number of children, on the grounds that it is vague *how* unusual three offspring must be in order for it to be unusual.



Not all philosophers take the permissiveness intuition seriously. I discuss it first because it provides a natural way to build up to the account of the sorites. I will show that rampant non-factualism easily accommodates the permissiveness intuition. I will briefly criticize some other strategies, but the real argument for the rampant non-factualist treatment of the permissiveness intuition is that it is part of the best unified approach to our three of manifestations of vagueness.

Grant that Agatha was permitted to go either way, as was Daniel. In what sense is it ‘acceptable’ for them to make either judgement? Acceptability is not truth; for their attitudes are both acceptable but they are not both true, as they are contradictory. A simple contextualist strategy can’t save the idea that both judgments are acceptable in the sense of being true. Contextualism says that the words Quentin used could be used on another occasion to ask a different question. That’s irrelevant—Agatha and Daniel address the one question Quentin actually asked.<sup>18</sup>

Nor is the intuition simply that Agatha and Daniel’s judgements are both epistemically justified. The intuition is that Agatha and Daniel’s disagreement differs from a disagreement over a clear case, such as whether I have three coins in my pocket. A belief about a clear case can be epistemically justified yet simply wrong. Such a belief is a poor representation of how things are; it fails to adequately fit reality. By contrast, Agatha and Daniel’s judgements are acceptable reflections of the shade of Quentin’s car. The intuition concerns how well those judgements answer to the underlying reality; it does not concern the epistemic status of the judgements. The intuition would be the same if Agatha and Daniel had not seen the car, but had come to their judgements by flipping a coin. Both their judgements would be epistemically unjustified, but both would be an acceptable fit for reality.

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<sup>18</sup> Åkerman (2012) surveys contextualist theories.

I doubt we can understand the permissiveness intuition by claiming that the relevant content or utterance is neither determinately true nor determinately false.<sup>19</sup> For then both attitudes plausibly go beyond what the world licenses. If the matter is indeterminate, then suspending judgement seems to be the only acceptable attitude (Wright 2001: 70; 2003: 92–3). For example, suppose a certain interpretation of quantum mechanics is correct, and it is indeterminate whether an electron is at point  $x$ . Then one should neither affirm nor deny that it is at point  $x$ . Moreover, the strategy under consideration feels wrong: it increases the number of candidate answers to a question (adding ‘indeterminate’ as a third option), when we want to explain how a question permits several of the candidate answers.

One might reply that the world licenses affirming that  $p$  iff:  $p$  is true. If  $p$  is indeterminate, then it is indeterminate whether the world licenses affirming that  $p$ , and indeterminate whether the world licenses denying it. This falls short of endorsing the intuition that both verdicts are licensed. Moreover, given the law of non-contradiction, it follows that: it is not the case that the world licenses both verdicts. On this view, Agatha and Daniel’s judgements are not both acceptable.

What about rampant non-factualism? To my ear, it would be odd to say that Agatha and Daniel’s judgements are both metaphysically *correct*: there can be multiple permissible courses of action, but not multiple correct ones. Moreover, it wouldn’t do justice to our ambivalence on matters such as whether Quentin’s car is red (Wright

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<sup>19</sup> Views according to which some contents or utterances are neither determinately true nor determinately false include: supervaluationism (Fine 1975, Keefe 2000), three-valued logic (Field 2003), and Barnes’ ‘ontic’ approach (2010). Similar considerations apply to the view that truth is a matter of degree (between 0 and 1), and it is true to degree 0.5 that Quentin’s car is red.

2001: 69–70; Schiffer 2003: 204–5, 225). But if we enrich the ideology employed, rampant non-factualism can take the permissiveness intuition at face value. Instead of primarily evaluating whether a judgement is metaphysically *correct*, we evaluate how good or bad it is, in the metaphysically relevant sense. We describe degrees of goodness and badness qualitatively not numerically, and say that some attitudes are better than others. For example, the further we move down a sorites series from paradigmatic red to paradigmatic orange, the less good it becomes to judge that the shades are red. Let's say that a judgement is metaphysically *acceptable* if it is good enough.<sup>20</sup>

Let me explain why it is natural for non-factualists to ascribe degrees of goodness. Truth (in the ordinary 'minimal' sense) does not come in degrees. There is a sense in which a judgement is 'correct' iff it is true; correctness in that sense is not tied to a scale of degrees of goodness. But as our early discussion of expressivism showed, non-factualist theories are stated using a different notion of correctness, one that's not tied to truth (§§2–3). So we are free to associate metaphysical correctness with a scale of degrees of goodness, like correctness in etiquette, morality, and so forth. Evaluation on this scale is compelling in 'borderline' cases: as we move from paradigmatically red shades to paradigmatically orange ones, it becomes *less good* to judge that the shades are red. According to a natural non-factualist account, judgements about what's red answer to the precise shade of the object; how well they do so is obviously a matter of degree. Expressivism about metaphysical correctness (§5) makes it particularly natural to ascribe degrees of goodness: one's evaluations should reflect one's degree of enthusiasm for the relevant judgement.

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<sup>20</sup> §8 explains why it's important that metaphysical acceptability is a kind of goodness, not permissibility.

Armed with the more fine-grained ideology, a non-factualist account can say that Agatha and Daniel's judgements are both metaphysically acceptable, and what makes them so is: that the car is of precise shade  $s$ . We only have permissiveness in the case of Quentin's car because of its particular shade—half-way between paradigmatic red and paradigmatic orange. By contrast, the specific shade of London buses makes it acceptable to judge that they are red, and unacceptable to judge that they aren't. We can define a 'correct' judgement as one for which it is the only acceptable attitude for the judge to take to that matter.<sup>21</sup> This extended theory can say everything the theory of §4 says, but has added flexibility for dealing with vagueness. It can even express ambivalence about borderline cases, by saying that while Agatha and Daniel's judgements aren't metaphysically bad, they are hardly superb.

On my proposal, Agatha and Daniel's judgements answer directly to the precise shade of the car, and both judgements do so well enough. This contrasts with factualist reductionism about the matter, according to which the precise shade of Quentin's car is responsible for determining (or not determining) whether the car is red; Agatha and Daniel's judgements then answer directly to the *latter* state of affairs. According to factualism, what makes Agatha and Daniel's judgements metaphysically acceptable or not is the fact of the matter, or lack of one, as to whether Quentin's car is red. If there is a determinate fact of the matter, and it determines the metaphysical acceptability of judgements about whether Quentin's car is red, then only one of Agatha and Daniel judges acceptably. I argued above that if it is indeterminate that  $p$ , and that determines which attitudes to  $p$  are metaphysically acceptable, then it won't be the case that both judgements are acceptable. So, it seems, only non-factualism about vague matters can respect the permissiveness intuition.

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<sup>21</sup> Footnote 26 addresses a wrinkle in defining 'objectively correct'.

The reader may feel that I have failed to address the crucial question: is it true, false, or indeterminate that Quentin's car is red? But on the rampant non-factualist approach, answering that question is not crucial—it is irrelevant to understanding permissiveness. I'll explain why in §10; but here's a glimpse. Permissiveness regarding  $p$  is to be understood by means of a non-factualist metaphysical theory for  $p$ ; but whether  $p$  is true, false, or indeterminate is irrelevant to a non-factualist metaphysical theory for  $p$  (§3). So whether  $p$  is true, false, or indeterminate is irrelevant to understanding permissiveness.

### **7. Suspending judgement on borderline cases**

On one conception, a 'borderline case' is one on which it is metaphysically acceptable to go either way. On another conception, one suspends judgement on it without thereby 'missing out on a hidden fact of the matter' (e.g. Field 2003). If one suspends judgement on a clear case, such as whether London buses are red, one misses out on something about the world. By contrast, if one looks at Quentin's car and suspends judgement on whether it is red, one doesn't miss out.

The ideology of metaphysically acceptable judgement extends easily to capture this idea. Suspending judgement is an occurrent matteral attitude, just like affirming and denying. (Ignoring a matter is a different mental state, incompatible with suspending judgement.) Let's allow that it can be metaphysically acceptable or unacceptable for someone to suspend judgement on a matter. That captures the idea that suspending judgement sometimes acceptably fits reality. In cases of quantum indeterminacy, suspending judgement is the only metaphysically acceptable attitude to take to the matter. Suspending judgement on whether Quentin's car is red fits the underlying facts at least as well as either affirming or denying that it is red. By

contrast, suspending judgement on whether London buses are red does not fit the underlying facts—affirming that they are is the only metaphysically acceptable attitude to that matter.<sup>22</sup>

### 8. The ideology needed to treat the sorites paradox

The rampant non-factualist can say that every response to the sorites paradox is metaphysically unacceptable. That's analogous to being in a moral dilemma, where every response is morally bad. This section clarifies the ideology needed to execute this proposal. I enrich the ideology, for the last time. Then I explain why the account of the sorites should say that every response is bad, rather than impermissible.

A reminder of our working example of the paradox from §1: clearly  $R_1$  (the first patch is red), and clearly  $\neg R_n$  (the last patch isn't red). The idea is that any stance on  $\{R_1, \neg R_n, \neg \exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')\}$  is metaphysically unacceptable. So we need to enrich the ideology by allowing *combinations* of occurrent attitudes to be metaphysically acceptable or unacceptable. This enrichment is well-motivated by other aspects of the account of vagueness, too. It is acceptable for Agatha to affirm that Quentin's car is red, and acceptable for her to affirm that it isn't; but it is metaphysically unacceptable for her to do both. The combination is bad, and not because one judgement or the

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<sup>22</sup> Sometimes one can know something to be a clear case, without knowing which way it goes.

One is epistemically obliged to suspend judgement, though suspending is metaphysically unacceptable—and one knows it to be. The epistemic requirement to suspend judgement trumps knowing that suspending is metaphysically unacceptable: suspending is the thing to do. It's unmysterious why. From a practical point of view, it is wiser to suspend judgement when you have no evidence either way, knowing you thereby miss out on the fact of the matter, than to guess.

other is bad. This extension allows us to characterize penumbral connections. It is acceptable for Agatha to affirm that the car is red, and acceptable for her to affirm that it is orange, but it is unacceptable for her to do both.

It is metaphysically unacceptable to: judge that Quentin's car is red but suspend judgement on whether it is orange. Suspending judgement is not the same thing as ignoring the matter: the former is an occurrent attitude, the latter is the absence of any occurrent attitude. There is nothing wrong with judging that Quentin's car is red and ignoring the question of whether it is orange.

I suggested in §6 that whether Agatha's judgement is metaphysically acceptable is a measure of how well it answers to the underlying facts. But there is no underlying fact that makes it bad to: judge that Quentin's car is red and judge it is orange. I don't think this is a problem. The world makes both individual judgements metaphysically acceptable, but there are also top-down constraints on what combinations of attitudes are metaphysically acceptable. Top-down constraints on acceptable combinations are familiar in other normative domains. Suppose for example that I have two nephews, Nigel and Neil. £20 is a good birthday present to give either of them, as is £30. But it would be bad to give them different amounts. It is bad to give Nigel £20 and Neil £30, and this can't be explained by the individual propriety of the gifts. We must posit a top-down constraint on acceptable combinations of gifts. I see no cost to holding that metaphysical acceptability is structurally similar.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The meanings of "Quentin's car is red" and "Quentin's car is orange" determine the meaning of "Quentin's car is red and Quentin's car is orange". But the acceptability-conditions of the two conjuncts don't determine the acceptability-conditions of the whole conjunction. Therefore meanings are not acceptability-conditions. There's no reason for

Let's stipulate how we'll talk about this. The metaphysical acceptability of an occurrent attitude is independent of how it meshes with the others held by the judge—let's say it is *intrinsic*. For example, only the shade of the car is relevant to whether it is metaphysically acceptable to judge that it is red. When a judge considers multiple questions, the truths about the (intrinsic) metaphysical acceptability of each attitude, plus the top-down truths about the acceptability of combinations of those attitudes, together determine the *all-things-considered* metaphysical acceptability of each combination of attitudes to the questions faced. Analogously, giving Nigel £20 and Neil £30 is all-things-considered bad, because of the constraint on combinations of gifts. It is the intrinsic propriety of the individual gifts that explains what's wrong with giving Nigel £1 and Neil £1.

What top-down constraints are there? Some impose penumbral connections, and §9 describes constraints to the effect that we treat vague properties as lacking sharp boundaries. Top-down constraints of logical coherence are central. A simple example: it is very bad to judge that Quentin's car is red and judge that it is not red, though both judgements are (intrinsically) acceptable. In general, I propose:

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rampant non-factualists to think otherwise. After all, the approach evaluates token judgements on the basis of their contents. The content of a judgement explains its acceptability-conditions, so its content isn't identical to its acceptability-conditions. By inspection, rampant non-factualism is not a theory of linguistic meaning; so it is irrelevant to observe that word-meaning must explain the meaning of complex sentences. By contrast, expressivism has traditionally been formulated as a theory about the meaning of moral terms. Such a theory must explain the meaning of complex sentences. That's the 'Frege-Geach problem' for traditional expressivism (Schroeder 2008 gives an opinionated review).



(LOGICAL COHERENCE) If  $P_1, \dots, P_n \vdash C$ , then it is metaphysically unacceptable (very bad) to: [judge that  $P_1, \dots$ , judge that  $P_n$ , and either judge that  $\neg C$  or suspend judgement on  $C$ ]. (‘ $\vdash$ ’ designates provability in a classical natural deduction system.)

Logically incoherent combinations of occurrent attitudes are metaphysically unacceptable, even if it is far from obvious that  $P_1, \dots, P_n \vdash C$ . In general, metaphysical unacceptability need not be easily detected. If a sample appears just like gold, yet it is not of atomic number 79, then it is metaphysically unacceptable for anyone to judge it to be gold, even if the problem is distinctly beyond their ken. I am expressivist about metaphysical acceptability (§5). I disapprove of classically incoherent occurrent attitudes, and commit myself to avoiding them—even when the problem is hard to spot. Specifically, I disapprove of combinations of attitudes out of line with a rule of natural deduction or sequence thereof. That makes it metaphysically acceptable for me to endorse LOGICAL COHERENCE (according to expressivism).<sup>24</sup>

Note that LOGICAL COHERENCE does not say that the rules of a classical natural deduction system are valid, in the sense of necessarily preserving truth or any other sense. LOGICAL COHERENCE does not say that top-down constraints can make combinations of attitudes better; it says such constraints can make combinations

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<sup>24</sup> Field (2015) has the following related view of logic. One accepts certain static constraints on full and partial belief, which one expresses by saying that some combinations are prohibited, and by saying that certain arguments are valid. I argue below for doing things in terms of badness rather than prohibition. Like Field, I favour expressivism about the relevant kind of badness (§5 above).

worse. In particular, it does not say that it is metaphysically very good to affirm any classical theorem. That's for the best, because (by conditional proof) it is a theorem that  $(R1 \& \neg Rn) \supset \exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')$ . The present approach to the sorites paradox should not say that it is good to affirm that formula. Rather, it should say that it is bad to affirm it (for reasons given in §9), though it is also bad to deny it or suspend judgement because the latter attitudes are logically incoherent.

LOGICAL COHERENCE constrains our attitudes to logically complex claims, singly and in combination with other attitudes. Of course, bottom-up factors also affect the acceptability of an attitude towards a complex claim. For example, it is okay to judge that <Quentin's car is red & London buses are red>, because it is okay to judge the first conjunct, very good to judge the second, and no top-down constraint reduces the acceptability of their conjunction. I'm not going to characterize generally how the three occurrent attitudes to a complex claim get their level of acceptability, for claims of the form  $(p \& q)$ ,  $(p \vee q)$ , and  $\exists x(\dots x \_)$ . That would take us too far afield, and I need to save some novel material for the book. In the next section, I'll just give a plausible explanation for why it is bad to judge or suspend on  $\exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')$ .

In "Wang's Paradox," Michael Dummett says that every response to the sorites is unacceptable (1975: 319–20). However, he states his diagnosis in terms of what the rules of use *require*. There is a logical problem with his proposal, and a deep explanatory problem. I'll explain why doing things in terms of *good* and *bad* combinations of attitudes avoids both problems.

Suppose Peter is presented with an n-step sorites series, as described in §1. Clearly  $R1$  (the first patch is red), and clearly  $\neg Rn$  (the last patch isn't red). On Dummett's account, Peter is required to judge that  $R1$ , and required to judge that  $\neg Rn$ , and required to judge that  $\neg \exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')$ , and required not to: [judge that  $R1$ ,

judge that  $\neg R_n$ , and judge that  $\neg \exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')$ . But that proposal is inconsistent, given (admittedly controversial) standard deontic logic. That's the logical problem.

I won't explore whether a non-standard deontic logic might save Dummett's proposal, because there is a deep explanatory problem for any such characterization of the paradox, pressed by Crispin Wright (2007 §IV). Wright points out that when faced with the paradox, we feel no pressure against our verdicts about the clear cases at either end of the sorites series. It is out of the question to stop judging that the clearly red shade is red, and that the clearly blue shade isn't red. By contrast, we do feel pressure not to affirm that  $\neg \exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')$ . This is not explained by the theory that all three judgements are required.

I propose we state the theory in terms of qualitative degrees and comparisons of badness, rather than what is required. Every combination of attitudes to the paradox-forming matters is bad, but some are worse than others. Affirming a contradiction, or giving up our verdicts about clear cases of the predicate, are outrageous responses to the paradox. It is bad, *but not nearly as bad*, to temporarily suspend judgement on whether there is a sharp boundary and on whether *reductio ad absurdum* is valid. So people are doing the best they can when they take some responses to the paradox seriously, but dismiss others as outrageous. This ideology also avoids the logical problem with Dummett's proposal. Unlike the logic of requirement, there is no prospect of the logic of badness being strong enough to derive a contradiction from this proposal.

## **9. A non-factualist metaphysics for instances of the sorites paradox**

It is bad not to treat vague properties as having No Sharp Boundary (NSB) between their instantiation and non-instantiation. This constrains the combinations of judgements we make, and our judgements about conjunctions. For example:

(NSB1) When shades  $s$  and  $s^*$  are very similar, and the question of their redness comes up, it is metaphysically unacceptable to: [judge that shade  $s$  is red and not judge that shade  $s^*$  is red].

There's nothing wrong with judging that  $s$  is red but *ignoring* the question of whether  $s^*$  is red. There is something wrong with judging  $s$  is red and *suspending judgement* on whether  $s^*$  is red. Another constraint in this family says:

(NSB2) If shades  $s$  and  $s^*$  are very similar, it is metaphysically unacceptable for a judge to affirm or suspend judgement on  $\langle s \text{ is red} \ \& \ s^* \text{ is not red} \rangle$ .

For any shade  $s$ , it is bad to affirm or suspend judgement on whether  $s$  marks the boundary between red and not-red. That makes it bad to affirm or suspend judgement on whether *any* shade marks the boundary between red and non-red. That is, it is bad to affirm or suspend judgement on  $\exists x(Rx \ \& \ \neg Rx')$ . In general, if it is bad to affirm or suspend on every instance of  $\dots x \_\_\_$ , then that makes it bad to affirm or suspend on  $\exists x(\dots x \_\_\_)$ .<sup>25</sup> Note that the theory does not say that there is no sharp

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<sup>25</sup> As I said in §8, top-down constraints only make combinations worse, not better. So they can't make it better to affirm or suspend on  $\exists x(\dots x \_\_\_)$  than the bottom-up factors suggest.

boundary between red and not-red. It says that it is bad for a judge who is paying attention to the question to do other than affirm that there is no sharp boundary.<sup>26</sup>

The key thought about the sorites paradox is that sometimes, the facts about the acceptability of individual attitudes, and the acceptability of combining attitudes, cannot all be accommodated. When addressing a paradox-forming plurality of matters, every combination of attitudes will be all-things-considered metaphysically unacceptable (bad).<sup>27</sup> Usually we are not addressing such a plurality of matters, and there is no problem taking attitudes that are individually and combinatorially metaphysically acceptable. (I draw on Maudlin 2008 in what follows.<sup>28</sup>)

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<sup>26</sup> Maybe we should say it is always ‘intrinsically’ acceptable to judge that  $\neg\exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')$ .

That would make it fiddly to satisfactorily define the ‘objective correctness’ of a claim:

$\neg\exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')$  should not qualify. A suggestion:  $p$  is objectively correct iff: for all judges  $J$  who consider  $p$ , the least bad combination of attitudes involves judging that  $p$ . Finding a nice definition isn’t important: it won’t add to the claims in the main text, which do the necessary work.

<sup>27</sup> Horgan & Potrč’s ‘transvaluationism’ does not say every solution to the paradox is unacceptable (2008: 21–8, 76–87). They say that vague thought and talk is “governed by mutually unsatisfiable status-principles” (76). But that is just a matter of there being “mutually *obeyable* prohibitions on affirmatory practice” (76). So there is a permissible response to the sorites. Horgan & Potrč don’t say what that response is, but express sympathy with the view that it is neither true nor false that there is a boundary in the application of a vague predicate (86–7). Oddly, they nevertheless insist that “vagueness essentially involves boundarylessness” (76).

<sup>28</sup> Maudlin uses his account of acceptable attitudes in a given ‘judgement situation’ to define up truth-values for the relevant matters, and hence ‘solve’ the sorites paradox. He says it is not true that  $\forall x\neg(Rx \& \neg Rx')$ . I prefer the view defended in §10.

Suppose Olive is currently only considering one question about what's red. Her attitude to that one issue can't draw a sharp boundary; NSB1 is empty in this case. She only needs to respect the metaphysical acceptability of her single attitude.

Henry is faced with a hundred objects, and tries to say which ones are red. If the objects cluster into groups of similar shades, then Henry can avoid treating similar cases differently. Henry can give the same answer within each cluster, but different answers between clusters. NSB1 does constrain Henry's attitudes, unlike those of Olive. It would be bad for Henry to switch answers in the middle of a cluster. But he can avoid that fault and have individually acceptable attitudes, as long as the objects he is considering cluster in the right way.

In a sorites series for redness, the shades of the objects do not cluster. Every item is very similar in shade to the adjacent items. Suppose Sam takes an attitude on the redness of each item in the series. She satisfies NSB1 only if she takes the same attitude to every item in the series. If she does so, then she takes the same attitude to the first and last items in the series. But the only acceptable attitudes are affirming that the first item is red and the last item is not. So it is impossible for Sam to satisfy NSB1 and have acceptable attitudes towards the first and last items in the series. Sam cannot avoid some feature of her mental state being metaphysically unacceptable. Sam's individual judgements can all be metaphysically acceptable, but then a pair of them will treat similar cases differently. That pairing of judgements will be metaphysically unacceptable, even if each member of the pair is acceptable.

Peter considers our n-step sorites series. He attends to exactly three questions: whether  $R_1$  (i.e. the first patch is red); whether  $\neg R_n$  (the last patch isn't red); and whether  $\exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')$ . It is metaphysically unacceptable for Peter not to judge that  $R_1$ . It is metaphysically unacceptable for Peter not to judge that  $\neg R_n$ . It is

metaphysically unacceptable for Peter not to judge that  $\neg\exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')$ . But it is metaphysically unacceptable for Peter to: [judge that  $R1$ , judge that  $\neg Rn$ , and judge that  $\neg\exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')$ ]. Whatever combination of attitudes Peter has to the members of the set  $\{R1, \neg Rn, \neg\exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')\}$ , something about his attitudes will be metaphysically unacceptable. Judges faced with a full sorites series, or the paradox, are simply stuck. However, judges who are not faced with a full sorites series or the paradox can usually satisfy all the demands of metaphysical acceptability. Olive and Henry can have all-things-considered metaphysically acceptable attitudes.<sup>29</sup> There is a successful practice of judging things to be red because judges usually ignore the full range of such questions. (As this brings out, the theory must evaluate a judge's occurrent mental state at a specific time, not their dispositional attitudes.)

By contrast, factualism about the matters Peter considers entails that there is a metaphysically acceptable combination of attitudes for him to take. For a factualist theory of  $p$  tells us whether  $p$  is the case, which it takes to determine the metaphysically acceptable attitudes to  $p$ . On a factualist approach, Peter will have a metaphysically acceptable combination of attitudes if he affirms the things that are the case, denies the ones that are not the case, and suspends judgements on those that are indeterminate. Only a non-factualist about the relevant matters can say that we are stuck when faced with a sorites paradox.

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<sup>29</sup> This account is very different to contextualism (surveyed by Åkerman 2012). Contra contextualism, my account presumes a stable content across contexts: the judgements all concern what is *red*. Moreover, contextualism won't say that we are stuck when faced with the paradox. It will either say that " $\exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')$ " is true in all contexts, or that it is indeterminate in all contexts.

## 10. Shall we stop trying to solve the sorites paradox?

One might worry that I've shirked the questions that most need answering. I've had a lot to say about what it is metaphysically acceptable to judge; but, goes the worry, we want to know what's *true*. This challenge also arises for my treatment of the two notions of borderline case (§§6–7), but let's focus on the sorites paradox. It is all very well saying that there is no acceptable response to the paradox, goes the worry, but we want to know whether there is a sharp cutoff in a sorites series! This section explains why the rampant non-factualist approach implies that philosophers should not try to answer that question. That is, we should not search for a 'utopian solution' to the paradox that says which of the relevant claims are true, and which of the relevant inferences are valid.<sup>30, 31</sup>

Let's say that certain *sets of matters* manifest vagueness. We've seen three manifestations of vagueness. The sorites paradox is manifested by sets of matters such as:  $\{R1, \neg Rn, \neg \exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')\}$ . The two ways for a matter to be 'borderline' (§§6–7) are two ways for a singleton set, such as {Quentin's car is red}, to manifest vagueness. We can say that a property manifests vagueness, meaning that some sets of matters

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<sup>30</sup> Schiffer's 'unhappy-face solutions' are still utopian solutions. He says, "unhappy-face solutions...tell us that there can be no determinately correct complete identification" of the false members of a paradox-forming set (2003: 69). Schiffer's unhappy-face solution to the sorites says it is true that R1 and that  $\neg Rn$ , but indeterminate whether  $\exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')$ , and indeterminate whether all three statements are true. (2003 chapter 5, esp. 222–4.) That's a utopian solution, though he labels it unhappy-faced (198, 224; but 230–1).

<sup>31</sup> Eklund (2005) gives a utopian solution, namely: there is a cut-off in any sorites series. He says that "the meanings of vague expressions are inconsistent" (41), but means that competence with a vague expression requires a *defeasible* disposition to think there's no cut-off. He thinks we should override that disposition and believe that there is a cut-off.



manifest vagueness because they concern the relevant property. §9 gave a non-factualist metaphysical theory for the set  $\{R1, \neg Rn, \neg \exists x(Rx \& \neg Rx')\}$ . In general, a non-factualist theory for a set of matters,  $\{p_i\}$ , explains the intrinsic acceptability of individual attitudes towards each of the  $p_i$  (in a non-factualist manner), gives the top-down constraints on combinations of attitudes towards the  $p_i$ , and thereby explains the all-things-considered acceptability of combinations of attitudes towards all the  $p_i$ .

As we saw in §3, whether it is wrong for Sally to kick Oscar is irrelevant to giving a non-factualist metaphysical theory for that matter. A non-factualist theory says what makes judgements on the matter metaphysically acceptable; it does not speak to which judgements on the matter are true. I labeled this THE IRRELEVANCE OF TRUTH. The idea generalizes naturally to non-factualist accounts for sets of matters: the truth or falsity of the  $p_i$  is not relevant to explaining the all-things-considered acceptability of combinations of attitudes towards all the  $p_i$ , which is what the non-factualist theory for the set addresses.<sup>32</sup>

Let's warm up for thinking about vagueness by considering relativism. According to rampant non-factualism, relativism about  $p$  is to be understood by means of a non-factualist theory for  $p$  of a certain form. Specifically, relativism about  $p$  says that it can be metaphysically correct for  $J_1$  to judge that  $p$ , but incorrect for  $J_2$  to do so (§4). Whether  $p$  is the case is irrelevant to understanding whether  $p$  is relative,

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<sup>32</sup> A wrinkle: consider the set  $\{R1, \text{it is acceptable to judge that } R1\}$ . The truth of the second member *is* relevant to the non-factualist theory for that set of matters (because part of the metaphysical theory for the first member). The problem is shallow: no stage in explaining the all-things-considered acceptability of combinations of attitudes violates THE IRRELEVANCE OF TRUTH. We can say: the truth or falsity of each  $p_i$  is irrelevant—*qua*  $p_i$ 's being a member of the set—to the correct metaphysical theory for the set.

because relativism is an issue for non-factualist theorizing about  $p$ . For example, Finean expressivism entails that morality is relative; whether it is wrong for Sally to kick Oscar is irrelevant to that metaphysical issue. In Carnap's lingo: understanding relativism is an 'external' matter, and does not involve answering 'internal' questions.<sup>33</sup>

Just as relativism is to be understood by non-factualist metaphysical theorizing, so too is vagueness. The rampant non-factualist approach to vagueness asserts (1)–(3).

1. The vagueness manifested by a set of matters is to be understood by means of a non-factualist metaphysical theory for the set (specifically, a theory that makes the claims outlined in §§6–9).
2. For all sets of non-factual matters,  $\{p_i\}$ , whether the  $p_i$  are the case is irrelevant to the correct metaphysical theory for the set. (Generalized from THE IRRELEVANCE OF TRUTH.)
3. So whether the  $p_i$  are the case is irrelevant to understanding the vagueness that the set  $\{p_i\}$  manifests. (inferred from 1 and 2)

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Williams (2016 §V) considers a “quasi-realist” approach to vagueness, but it has little in common with my proposal. He says, “although realist and quasi-realist will both agree with the biconditional that a belief that  $x$  is  $G$  is correct iff it's true that  $x$  is  $G$ , they disagree on the explanatory order.” (p. 297) But quasi-realist expressivists must deny that a token moral judgement is metaphysically correct iff it is true. Otherwise, people having different moral dislikes, and thus correctly taking opposing moral views, would imply a contradiction. Tying metaphysical acceptability to truth rules out relativism, and for similar reasons, rules out my approach to vagueness.

For example, saying whether Quentin's car is red is irrelevant to understanding how one can go either way on that question, or can suspend judgement without thereby missing out on a hidden fact of the matter. What's relevant is that all three occurrent attitudes to the matter are metaphysically acceptable. Similarly, which of the paradox-forming matters are the case, and which of the relevant inferences are valid, is irrelevant to understanding the source and significance of the sorites paradox. The non-factualist theory for the paradox-forming set of matters gives a complete understanding of the vagueness it manifests. There is no philosophical insight into the paradox that we lack unless we say how to avoid the contradiction.

Moreover, the relevant non-factualist theories (§9) say:

4. No metaphysically acceptable answer can be given to the question of how to avoid the contradiction presented by a set of matters that form a sorites paradox.

One can try to give a utopian solution to the paradox; but if §9 is right, any candidate will be metaphysically unacceptable. The quest for a utopian solution will inevitably fail. So if one accepts the proposed account of vagueness, it would be irrational to search for a utopian solution to the paradox. It would be like searching for the fountain of youth while accepting that it does not exist.

Claims (4) and (3) combine to make searching for a utopian solution to the paradox a fool's errand: the task cannot be acceptably completed, and there is no insight into vagueness we lack because we haven't completed it. Merely insisting that one wants to know how to solve the paradox is to fail to consider the proposal seriously.

The misguided reader may still wonder what *I* say if pressed on how to avoid the contradiction (given that the theory I present is silent). I'll grimace and say, "Oh bugger!" Maybe I'll temporarily withhold judgement on the validity of *reductio ad absurdum*, and on whether there's a sharp boundary, but I'll be pretty unhappy about it. When the topic changes, I'll soon go back to affirming that there is no sharp boundary, and that the laws of classical logic are valid. Maybe the all-things-considered least-bad response to the paradox includes temporarily suspending judgement on the validity of *reductio ad absurdum*. But when the paradox is *not* on the table, it remains all-things-considered forbidden to refuse an instance of *reductio*. It isn't important what the least-bad response to the paradox is, because the answer doesn't affect what we should think when we are not considering the paradox. There's no moral to be exported to other situations. The rampant non-factualist approach predicts that pressing me on how to avoid the contradiction shifts the subject-matter away from that which allows us to understand vagueness, and the sorites paradox in particular. That prediction is borne out. What sheds light on the paradox are the details of the best non-factualist accounts of vague matters, given in §9.

You might have the following worry. Non-factualism about morality does not entail that ethicists should give up trying to resolve moral paradoxes. The 'trolley problem' is constituted by the following three seemingly inconsistent claims, each of which seems true: {It is permissible to switch a runaway trolley from a path on which it would kill five to a path on which it will kill one; it is impermissible to push a fat man into the path of a runaway trolley thereby sacrificing his life to save those of five people further down the track; there is no morally relevant difference between the two cases}. Suppose expressivism implies that for currently ambivalent judges, there is no metaphysically acceptable response to the trolley problem. If expressivism is to be

plausible, it should nevertheless allow such judges to try to resolve the trolley paradox as part of their ethical inquiry. But then why should non-factualist treatments of vague matters entail that philosophers should not try to solve the sorites paradox?

Let's grant that ethicists should try to resolve the trolley problem.<sup>34</sup>

Expressivists can say that there is a practical point to overcoming ambivalence about those cases: if one finds oneself in a comparable situation, one cannot opt out of the practical problem of what to do. Having overcome one's ambivalence, there will be a metaphysically acceptable response for one to give to the trolley problem. But there is no point, either practical or theoretical, to trying to solve the sorites paradox, if the details of my non-factualist account are correct. Add the claim that any proposed solution will *inevitably* be metaphysically unacceptable, and it seems that one should not search for a solution.

In sum: the rampant non-factualist account of vagueness does not say how to avoid the contradiction, but rather strips that question of its philosophical interest. Such a treatment of the paradox is attractive, assuming that the candidate utopian solutions are not.

## 11. Conclusion

According to rampant non-factualism, the metaphysical theory for a matter specifies what makes occurrent attitudes towards it 'acceptable' in a certain sense. This makes possible a satisfying approach to vagueness. We give non-factualist accounts for every matter that features vagueness, tailored in the following ways. The non-factualist

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<sup>34</sup> Alternatively, expressivists can hold that moral paradoxes should be tolerated rather than solved. Maybe we should tolerate our ambivalence about hard cases, if overcoming it would corrupt our moral response to easy cases. That's analogous to my line on the sorites paradox.

accounts say that either verdict on certain ('borderline') cases is acceptable; suspending judgement on certain ('borderline') cases is acceptable; and no position on the sorites paradox is acceptable. These claims are part of particular non-factualist accounts for the relevant matters; they do not follow merely from the matters' being non-factual. This approach implies that it is pointless to try to say which of the paradox-forming claims are true and which of the relevant inferences are valid (§10).

Given non-factualist treatments of all matters featuring vagueness, rampant non-factualism is the only principled view (§4). Note two consequences of this package. Firstly, our metaphysical theories for non-fundamental matters should not 'ground' the relevant facts, contra recent fashion (§4). Secondly, vague properties are to be treated non-factually and so do not feature in the facts-in-reality. In this sense, there is no "vagueness in Reality." (The facts-in-reality can't be vague, but might be indeterminate in some other way; see Barnes 2014.) In particular, there are no facts-in-reality concerning the vague kinds talked about by special sciences. I take this to be an interesting result, and one that tightens our grip on the notion of a fact-in-reality. Even if the special sciences don't state facts-in-reality, they are still privileged: they make particularly good generalizations and explanations. Most notions are useful for other reasons. Some notions are pernicious, intellectually or politically. Non-factualism about a matter is compatible with recommending that we not think about it, just as factualists can recommend that we not consider truths concerning gerrymandered properties.

You might wonder what consequences rampant non-factualism has for the proper form of a semantic theory for a natural language. I think there are no significant consequences, as I explain in Jackson (2016 §8). The non-factualist theories discussed in this paper assume that our judgements share contents about what's

morally good, red, or is a table; this suggests that “morally good”, “red”, and “table” should be given some kind of invariantist semantics. I argue that non-factualism about a subject-matter is compatible with various standard forms of semantic theory, including possible world semantics and approaches on which contents are Russellian propositions. A hint: non-factualism about tables legitimizes judgements about tables, and that should include judgements like: “table” in English applies to all and only the tables.

The rampant non-factualist approach says satisfying things about the three manifestations of vagueness we’ve examined. I have not argued in detail that the other views in the literature are inferior in this regard. But if they are inferior, then the rampant non-factualist approach is the best way to understand vagueness.<sup>35</sup>

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