Logic and reasoning: the case of vagueness

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Vagueness is a crucial phenomenon for the understanding of relationship between logic and reasoning because of two reasons.

First, borderline cases highlight the fact the certain uses of vague expressions give rise to an indeterminacy which must be explained if we want to understand the nature of a vague language. Do borderline cases involve the adoption of non-classical semantics? If yes, to what extent intuitions about the truthvalues of some utterance can legitimately justify the adoption of a non-standard semantic framework? Why these intuitions cannot be seen as a sign of ignorance of what counts as the correct application for a vague expression? If, on the other hand, classical logic and semantics is not put into question by borderline cases, what role have our intuitions and our grasp of the what counts as a proper mastery of a language for choosing the correct logic and semantics for it?

Second, the sorites paradox calls for a solution which poses a dilemma: either we give up the tolerance premise which is grounded on our intuition for what counts for a correct use of vague expressions, or we give up basic logical principles such as modus ponens or transitivity of deduction which seem to constitute the conceptual core of what counts a piece of correct reasoning. On the first horn, i.e. giving up tolerance, we weaken the idea that our semantic intuitions are a reliable guide for providing a logic which can describe our reasoning since we accept that strong intuitions deeply grounded in our everyday reasoning, such as the tolerance intuition, might noy be a reliable guide for finding out the correct logic of our language. On the second horn, i.e. the modification of intuitively basic logical principles, we create a tension between our normative intuition of what counts as correct logic and what is in our everyday use of language a sound reasoning.

The current literature on vagueness as explored several options for accounting the phenomenon of vagueness (ranging from extreme revisions of classical semantics to highly conservative approaches which tend to preserve classical logic and semantics such as epistemicism), but has generally paid few attention to the relationship between logic and reasoning and the problem of whether a normative or descriptive approach is the correct attitude to have in facing these problems.

One exception to this trend is the agnostic approach elaborated by Crispin Wright (Wright (2003)) and defended in a different form by myself (Moruzzi (2005)). In fact, it is a crucial feature of this approach to provide a detailed justification of why a revision of classical logic is need in the case of vague expressions. In the workshop PALMYR 3 I would like to analyse these motivations in detail and to discuss whether they can overcome the aforementioned problems raised by the phenomenon of vagueness on the relationship between logic and reasoning.

References

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