Blobjectivism and Indirect Correspondence

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In this paper we articulate and defend a philosophical position we call <u>blobjectivism</u>, which has both an ontological and a semantical component. The ontological component, which we call <u>ontological blobjectivism</u>, makes two fundamental claims:

1.   There really is just one concrete particular, viz., the whole universe (the <u>blobject</u>).

2.   The blobject has enormous spatiotemporal structural complexity, and enormous local variability—even though it does not have any genuine parts.

The semantical component of blobjectivism adds two additional claims:

3.   Numerous statements employing posits of common sense and science are true, even though nothing in the world answers directly to these posits.

4.   Truth, for such statements, is <u>indirect</u> language-world correspondence.

In the first part of the paper we will argue that blobjectivism is a coherent conceptual possibility, and moreover is a position that accommodates both common sense and science quite well despite its radical ontological claims. The upshot will be that the position, because of the combination of its dramatic ontological parsimony and its capacity to accommodate ordinary and scientific claims as genuinely true, is a viable metaphysical-<u>cum</u>-semantical position that deserves to be taken very seriously and to be further articulated and explored.

In the second part we will sketch a range of considerations that jointly and cumulatively provide a strong case for blobjectivism. Each consideration will tend simultaneously (a) to call into question a certain class of posits as items in the correct ontology, and thereby (b) to support the contention that truth, at least for language and thought involving <u>these</u> posits, is indirect correspondence. The effect will be to progressively broaden the scope of posits in language and thought that are ontologically dubious, and simultaneously to progressively broaden the range of statements and beliefs for which truth is appropriately construed as indirect correspondence. The

upshot of these considerations will be a class of competing ontologies of concrete particulars, all of which are ontologically quite austere insofar as they eschew vastly many of the posits of common sense and of science as ontologically real.[1] Considerations will then be put forth to the effect that ontological blobjectivism has serious theoretical advantages vis-a-vis these various austere competing alternatives.

We will be arguing in broad brushstrokes in this paper, painting a large philosophical canvas quickly and sometimes adverting to claims and arguments that have been developed in more detail elsewhere.[2]

We acknowledge at the outset that notion of truth as indirect correspondence, which will figure centrally in the discussion, is an idea that cries out for substantial further theoretical investigation. We will be adverting to relevant extant philosophical work on this notion, but we acknowledge that there is more to be done. We seek to underscore the central importance of the claim that truth is often indirect language/world correspondence, rather than direct correspondence—and hence the need to explore this claim further.

1.   The Coherence and Tenability of Blobjectivism.

Imagine a world consisting entirely of gunkish, jello-ish, stuff. Suppose that this jello-world is literally partless, and yet also exhibits local variation (both spatially and temporally) in features like color, transparency, density, and the like. Given that this jello-world does not really have any parts, what would be an appropriate way to describe how various features are instantiated by the jello in various spatiotemporally local ways? One natural-looking way would be to introduce a linguistic/conceptual framework that posits certain kinds of discrete entities, and attributes various features to them. For instance, the framework might posit points and/or regions, and then attribute various properties (e.g., specific degrees of transparency or density, or specific shades of color) to these putative entities. This descriptive framework would be apt, because it would provide a way to track and describe the various aspects of real local spatio-temporal variability exhibited by the jello-world. There would be systematic correspondence between

certain statements couched in this discourse, on the one hand, and how things really are with the jello-world, on the other hand. Nonetheless, the posited points and regions would not be denizens of the jello-world itself, because this world is one which, ex hypothesi, lacks genuine parts. Thus, the operative language/world correspondence would be indirect, in the sense that the task of specifying how various properties are locally instantiated within the jello-world is accomplished by means of a descriptive/conceptual framework whose posits—viz., spatio-temporal points and regions—are mere constructs of the framework itself and are not genuine parts of the world being described. (That world has no real parts, by supposition.)

The jello-world might occasionally exhibit quite abrupt local spatial or temporal variations, in the degree to which various magnititudes are locally instantiated. Some such variations would be naturally trackable by means of still further posits in our descriptive/conceptual framework—for instance, bodies, events, and processes. In the case of dramatic local spatial transitions from high density and opacity on one hand, to low density and transparency on the other hand, it would be natural to speak of certain kinds of bodies in the jello—e.g., lumps. Likewise, the jello-world might occasionally exhibit variation of a kind that is locally abrupt both spatially and temporally, and is naturally trackable by means of posits like events and processes—e.g., local congealings. Systematic patterns of local spatio-temporal variation might well be trackable by means of generalizations involving these further posits—for instance, the generalization "Congealings generate lumps." Again, discourse employing posits like lumps and congealing-events would systematically track how things really are with the blobject—how it really does vary spatiotemporally in its local instantiatiation of magnitudes like density, transparency, color, and the like—even though it does not have any real parts. And again, such tracking would constitute an indirect kind of language/world correspondence—indirect because the posited entities would be linguistic/conceptual constructs that are not denizens of the partless jello-in-itself.

Color, transparency, density and the like need not be among the <u>fundamental</u> properties and magnitides instantiated locally in jello-stuff. It might turn out instead that other magnitudes of a theoretically more basic kind are locally instantiated in this partless world, and that "macro-properties" like color and transparency are supervenient upon, and explainable in terms of, lawful regularities involving these basic properties. Yet these basic regularities too might employ posits like points, regions, and particles—again as a way of facilitating the articulation of how the basic magnitudes are locally instantiated by the partless jello.

So a conceptual/descriptive framework that posits various kinds of parts, and makes claims employing those posits, would be quite natural even if the world being described were one which, like our hypothetical jello-world, did not really have any genuine parts at all. Such talk would track genuine local spatiotemporal variation with respect to how magnitudes are instantiated. There would be substantial and systematic—albeit somewhat indirect—language-world correspondence. Such correspondence, we suggest, would be a very plausible candidate for <u>truth</u>. After all, the posits would be playing the role of enabling us to <u>say</u> how the partless jello-stuff instantiates magnitudes spatio-temporally locally—something that otherwise would not be easy, and perhaps would not even be possible.[3]

In light of these remarks about the hypothetical jello-world, it now emerges as a conceptually coherent possibility that <u>our own</u> world, in all its glorious complexity and local spatiotemporal variation, does not have any real parts. Indeed, this is a conceptually coherent ontological framework for physics, especially if one focuses on broadly field-theoretic formulations of physical theory. The ontological framework construes the entire cosmos as a physical field which, although it certainly exhibits local variation, does not really have parts.[4]

Likewise, it now emerges as a conceptually coherent possibility that numerous posit-wielding statements of physical theory are <u>true</u> even if the posits are mere constructs of the theoretical framework and are not genuine denizens of reality. It is possible (1) that for our world, as for the hypothetical jello-world, posit-wielding statements couched in the language of physics

track genuine local spatiotemporal variation with respect to how physical magnitudes are instantiated; (2) that this tracking-relation constitutes <u>truth</u> for such statements; and nevertheless (3) that our world does not really contain any parts. If so, then the truth of such statements is a matter of <u>indirect</u> language/world correspondence, since the posits (e.g., space-time points and regions, as putative parts of the physical field that is the cosmos) enable us to say how things <u>are</u> physically with the cosmos without actually designating real entities themselves.

Can more be said about truth, in order to make clear why and how truth could be an indirect kind of correspondence relation? Indeed so. Truth is plausibly construed as <u>semantically correct assertibility, under contextually operative semantic standards</u>.[5] A statement's truth results from the interaction of two factors: the contextually operative semantic standards, and how things stand with the mind-independent world. When the semantic standards operate in such a way that a given statement can be correct semantically (i.e., true) even though the statement posits (i.e., quantifies over) certain items that are not there in reality, then truth (for discourse governed by such semantic standards) thereby becomes an indirect form of language/world correspondence.[6]

Since statements in physics-level discourse could be true even if the world does not really have parts, the same goes for statements of other kinds—statements employing terms and concepts of the "special sciences," and statements of ordinary non-scientific discourse. After all, it is very plausible that all truths about our world are supervenient on physics-level truths—that the facts describable physically determine all the facts. Thus, insofar as the relevant truths of physics already involve indirect correspondence, in general this also should be so for truths of higher-level discourse, truths that supervene on physics-level truths. Here too, our language and thought would be tracking real local spatiotemporal variation in the blobject. And in general, the operative language/world correspondence relation now would be even more indirect than in physics: the contextually operative semantic standards would conspire with mind-independent reality in more complex, more subtle, and more holistic ways to render statements semantically correct (i.e., true).

Take, for instance, a statement like "In summer of 1999, NATO was conducting a massive bombing campaign against targets in Serbia and Kosovo." Certainly there are genuine, mind-independently real, <u>physical</u> variations in the blobject that are tracked by this statement, even on the supposition that the blobject lacks real parts—e.g., the kinds of physical variations that correspond to talk of explosions. But the statement also presupposes a rich and complex network of intertwined concepts (nation, international agency, campaign, bomb, war, airplane, etc., etc.); these concepts figure in a broad fabric of interconnected statements. According to the ontological/semantical picture now being suggested, such statements typically would figure <u>collectively</u> in complex, somewhat holistic, indirect-correspondence relations to goings-on in the mind-independent world.[7] Individual statements would often count as semantically correct (i.e., true), under contextually operative semantic standards, even though they employ posits (e.g., NATO, Serbia) that do not designate genuine denizens of reality.

The upshot of the preceding discussion is that blobjectivism is a conceptually coherent, and theoretically tenable, philosophical position concerning matters of ontology and semantics. Ontologically, our own world could be, like the hypothetical jello-world, a physical blobject that lacks real parts and yet still exhibits genuine structural complexity—that is, genuine variability in how magnitudes are locally, spatiotemporally, instantiated. Semantically, part-positing discourse could often be true nonetheless—with its truth being an indirect kind of language/world correspondence, consisting in semantic correctness under contextually operative semantic standards that do not require those part-posits to be "furniture of the world."

To further underscore the conceptual coherence and theoretical tenability of blobjectivism, we will briefly consider, and reply to, three initially plausible objections.

First objection: Blobjectivism is a lunatic view, because it runs so radically contrary to both our ordinary and our scientific beliefs about the world. One simply cannot take seriously the claim that there is really only <u>one</u> concrete thing rather than the multiplicity of things that both science and common sense says there are. Numerous claims about such things—about tables,

chairs, persons, molecules, quarks, etc., etc.—are <u>literally</u> true, and not merely "contextually sanctioned." So blobjectivism is not a credible philosophical position.

Reply: The semantical component of blobjectivism says that truth—genuine, literal, truth—is semantic correctness under contextually operative semantic standards.[8] It also says that in most real-life contexts of assertion, including contexts of scientific inquiry, the contextually operative semantic standards operate in such a way that the part-posits of the discourse need not link up to real entities—and hence that truth, in such discourse contexts, is indirect language-world correspondence. Thus, blobjectivism significantly accommodates our common sense and scientific beliefs, by classifying them as quite literally true.

Furthermore, the semantic component of blobjectivism also provides the resources to explain why the ontological component of blobjectivism sounds so extremely odd, even lunatic. For, the semantic component says that blobjectivism's ontological claims are made under very unusual, limit case, semantic standards—standards requiring direct language-world correspondence. Although the ontological claims are indeed true, under these direct-correspondence semantic standards, such limit-case standards are very rarely employed in human discourse, even scientific discourse. (Their principal use is in ontological inquiry within philosophy.) So the ontological claims are <u>bound</u> to sound odd and even lunatic, given that our language and concepts are almost never employed under direct-correspondence semantic standards. Since this oddness is thus explainable by means of the semantical component of blobjectivism itself, the oddness should not count strongly against the tenability of blobjectivism. As one might put it, package-deal blobjectivism renders ontological blobjectivism much more tenable than it would be on its own.

Second objection: According to blobjectivism, very little can be said positively about the blobject under direct-correspondence semantic standards. One can say, negatively, that it does not have parts. But evidently one cannot say, positively, <u>how things are</u> with the blobject. Thus,

according to blobjectivism the world-itself is indescribable by, and thus is unknowable by, humans; it is <u>noumenal</u>, in Kant's sense. Why believe in noumenal reality at all?

Reply: Blobjectivism does not entail that the world-itself is indescribable and unknowable by humans. On the contrary, humans can indeed say—and can indeed <u>know</u>—how things are with the world-itself. In particular, they can know how fundamental physical magnitude-properties are locally, spatiotemporally, instantiated by the blobject. True, in order to <u>say</u> how things are with the blobject with respect to the local spatiotemporal instantiation of physical magnitudes, it is apparently necessary to employ language that employs certain part-posits (e.g., spacetime points, and/or spacetime regions)—language governed by semantic standards that are not limit-case, direct-correspondence, standards (since the blobject has no real parts). But one nevertheless manages, by speaking this way, to say how things are with the blobject itself—how those physical magnitudes get instantiated, spatiotemporally locally.

Third objection: Surely it is very implausible that systematic, tractably specificable, truth conditions for posit-employing discourse could be formulated in language that eschews all such posits and talks only about the blobject and its attributes. Among the reasons why this is so implausible is that according to blobjectivism, very little of a positive nature can be said at all about the blobject, in language governed by direct-correspondence semantic standards.

Reply: Surely it <u>is</u> implausible that there are truth conditions of the kind in question. But, given the general conception of truth as semantic correctness under contextually operative semantic standards, there simply need not be (and very probably are not) those kinds of truth conditions—conditions which would amount, in effect, to systematic paraphrases of all true statements into statements which would bear a direct-correspondence relation to the mind-independent world. What is required, rather, is that the semantic standards be masterable by humans—i.e., internalizable as a component of human linguistic and conceptual competence. But this latter requirement could very well be satisfiable, even if statements that conform to indirect-

correspondence semantic standards are not systematically translatable into statements that eschew all part-posits and are true even under limit-case, direct-correspondence, semantic standards.

2. The Case for Blobjectivism

Having defended the conceptual coherence and theoretical tenability of blobjectivism (thereby forestalling any initial tendency the reader might have had to to dismiss the view out of hand as self-evidently absurd), let us now argue in favor of it. We will present three lines of argument that progressively call into question the ontological status of an increasingly wider class of part-posits of both common sense and science. These arguments will jointly provide strong grounds for both (1) an ontology that eschews items in the world that answer directly to the posits in question, and (2) a semantics that construes truth, for discourse employing such posits, as indirect correspondence. Then we will consider a range of possible ontological positions that remain viable in light of these three lines of argument, and we will argue that blobjectivism is theoretically preferable to the available competitors.

2.1. *Metaphysically Lightweight Posits*

We will use the phrase 'metaphysically lightweight posit' in a deliberately vague way. Under this rubric we include "socially constructed" institutional entities like corporations, universities, nations, and multi-national organizations (e.g., NATO). We also include various non-concrete cultural artifacts, like Beethoven's fifth symphony (as distinct from concrete performances of it) and Quine's book Word and Object (as distinct from concrete tokens of it).

It is not plausible that institutional entities like corporations and universities are denizens of the world-itself, over and above entities like persons, buildings, land masses, items of office equipment, and the like. Yet, when one considers whether it might be possible to "reduce" a putative entity like a university to these other kinds of entities—say, by identifying each university with some set of them (or some "merological sum" of them), or by systematically paraphrasing statements that posit universities into statements that do not—there is no plausible reductive account remotely in sight. For, the project of systematically paraphrasing university-

talk into statements that eschew all talk of universities looks hopeless; and the trouble with

attempts to <u>identify</u> a university with some set (or sum) of buildings, persons, computers, etc. is

that there are always numerous equally eligible candidate-sets (or candidate-sums), and there is

no reason to identify the university with any one of these over against any of the others. Likewise,

<u>mutatitis mutandis</u>, for other kinds of institutional entities like corporations and nations, and for

non-concrete cultural artifacts like Beethoven's fifth symphony and Quine's <u>Word and Object</u>.

So the appropriate conclusions to draw, about discourse employing these metaphysically

lightweight posits, are that the posits do not pick out items in the world-itself—and that truth, for

such discourse, is indirect language-world correspondence. In typical contexts where such posits

are employed, the contextually operative semantic standards conspire with spatiotemporally local

goings-on in the world-itself to render various statements employing these posits semantically

correct (i.e., <u>true</u>), even though the world-itself does not contain entities answering to those

posits.

To accept these conclusions is to acknowledge that the idea of truth as indirect

correspondence has applicability to <u>some</u> important kinds of discourse, and that the right ontology

probably does not include metaphysically lightweight entities like universities, symphonies, or

NATO. Of course, one could accept these conclusions while remaining a robust ontological

realist about middle-sized dry goods like tables and chairs, about persons and other living

organisms, and about the posits of physics and the special sciences. But there is more to come.

2.2.   *The Non-Arbitrariness of Composition, and its Consequences*

Peter van Inwagen (1990) wields an important and powerful form of metaphysical

argumentation that has been too little appreciated in philosophy. He poses what he calls the

Special Composition Question (for short, the SCQ): "When do several objects jointly compose an

object?"

Van Inwagen considers several initially plausible candidate-answers to the SCQ. He

argues that each has highly implausible consequences, viz., commitments to putative entities that

are not genuine objects at all according to our usual ways of thinking and talking. (For example, the suggestion that <u>contact</u> among a group of objects is what makes them jointly compose an object entails the grossly counterintuitive result that when two people shake hands, a new compound object comes into existence that ceases to exist when their hands separate.)

Van Inwagen argues, by elimination-via-counterexample of various initially plausible potential answers to the SCQ, that the only acceptable answer is that several objects compose an object when they jointly <u>constitute a life</u>. On this basis, he concludes that the right ontology of physical objects includes only two kinds of material beings: (1) "simples," whatever these might turn out to be (e.g., electrons and quarks, perhaps), and (2) living organisms. Discourse that posits other kinds of concrete objects, he says, should be understood by analogy with talk about the motion of the sun through the sky: useful and informative, but not literally true.

Two important theoretical desiderata are in play, in van Inwagen's discussion of the ontology of material beings: (1) finding a systematic, general, answer to the SCQ, and (2) adopting an ontology that conforms reasonably well to our pre-theoretic beliefs, and our scientifically informed beliefs, about what kinds of physical objects there are. Van Inwagen argues very persuasively that these desiderata are deeply in tension: they cannot both be satisfied. But he also assumes, without explicit argument, that insofar as the two desiderata conflict, satisfying (1) is theoretically more important than satisfying (2).

Now, it might well be asked whether one <u>should</u> attach more theoretical importance to obtaining a general and systematic answer to the SCQ than to "saving" tables, chairs, and other objects that we pre-theoretically consider robustly, mind-independently, real. If so, why? We submit that the answer to the first question is affirmative, and here is why. An adequate metaphysical theory, like an adequate scientific theory, should be systematic and general, and should keep to a minimum the unexplained facts that it posits. In particular, a good metaphysical or scientific theory should avoid positing a plethora of quite specific, disconnected, <u>sui generis</u>, compositional facts. Such facts would be ontological surds; they would be metaphysically queer.

Even though explanation presumably must bottom out somewhere, it should bottom out with the kinds of "unexplained explainers" we expect to find in physics—viz., highly general, highly systematic, theoretical laws. It is just not credible—or even intelligible—that it would bottom out with specific compositional facts which themselves are utterly unexplainable and which do not conform to any systematic general principles. Rather, if one bunch of physical simples compose a genuine physical object, but another bunch of simples do not compose any genuine object, then there must be some reason <u>why</u>; it couldn't be that these two facts are themselves at the explanatory bedrock of being.

There cannot, then, be a body of specific compositional facts that are collectively disconnected and unsystematic, and are individually unexplainable. Such ontological arbitrariness is not possible in the world-itself—the world whose constituents are van Inwagen's concern. In Horgan (1996) this is called <u>the principle of the non-arbitrariness of composition</u>. This principle is fundamental and highly plausible, and is a very compelling general requirement on theory construction. It generates the requirement that an adequate metaphysics of concrete particulars be one for which there is a general and systematic answer to the special composition question. This requirement has very strong weight in metaphysical theory-construction, enough to trump the desideratum of preserving the posits of common sense and science.

The trumping power becomes especially pronounced once we have available the idea that for much of our discourse both scientific and nonscientific, truth could be indirect language/world correspondence---i.e., semantic correctness under semantic standards that do not require the world-itself to contain items answering to the various posits of the discourse.[9] Common-sense and scientific beliefs employing these posits would thereby get accommodated and preserved, rather than being repudiated as mistaken—the ontology notwithstanding.[10]

So the upshot so far is that the need to provide a systematic and general answer to the SCQ, together with the great difficulty of providing such an answer that also pretty much includes all and only the kinds of physical objects that are posited in ordinary discourse and in scientific

discourse, makes it very likely that the right ontology of concrete particulars will have to be one that posits either many fewer, or else many more, kinds of concrete particulars than those that are usually posited in science and in common sense.[11] One candidate ontology that provides a systematic and general answer to the SCQ is van Inwagen's own, comprising only physical simples on the one hand, and living organisms on the other. Other eligible ontologies, including ontological blobjectivism, will be considered in section 2.4 below.

2.3. *Vagueness: Boundarylessness and its Metaphysical Consequences*

Vagueness is ubiquitous in language and thought, both in common sense and in science. Moreover, many of the concrete particulars posited in common sense and in science are vague objects—for example, vague with respect to their spatio-temporal boundaries, or vague with respect to their synchronic composition. When one attends carefully to the nature of vagueness, some striking implications emerge: viz., that vague objects are logically impossible, and hence that truth for vague discourse must be indirect correspondence rather than direct correspondence. Here we will summarize briefly the reasoning leading to these conclusions.[12]

An essential attribute of genuine vagueness is what Mark Sainsbury (1990) calls boundarylessness, a feature that can be characterized by reference to sorites sequences associated with vague terms. Consider a vague term—say, 'heap'—and consider a sorites sequence involving the given term in which the initial statement is true and the final statement is false— say, a series of statements successively predicating the vague term 'heap' first to a pile of sand with 1 billion grains, then to an object produced by removing just one grain, then to an object produced by removing yet another single grain, and so forth down to a statement predicating 'heap' to a single grain of sand. To say that vagueness is boundarylessness is to say that in such a sequence, (i) initially there are true statements (with each predecessor of any true statement being true); (ii) later there are false statements (with each successor of a false statement being false); and (iii) there is no determinate fact of the matter about the transition from true statements to false ones. Condition (iii) requires not only that there be no determinate abrupt transition from

true statements to false ones, but also that the truth/falsity transition should involve no determinate semantic transitions at all; thus it also precludes, for instance, an overall true-to-false transition involving first a determinate abrupt transition from truth to the semantic status "indeterminate whether true or false," and later another determinate abrupt transition from this in-between status to falsehood.[6]

If one considers what it would take to fully accommodate boundarylessness—that is, accommodate it in a way that thoroughly eschews arbitrary semantic transitions of any kind—one finds that, for the successive statements in a sorites sequence, there are semantic requirements in play that cannot be simultaneously satisfied. Boundarylessness has two conceptual poles. On one hand there is an individualistic pole, applicable to individual pairs of adjacent statements in a sorites sequence: viz., for any pair of adjacent statements, the two statements must have the same semantic status (truth, falsity, indeterminateness, or whatever). Otherwise there would exist a determinate semantic transition between them, contrary to the claim that there is no determinate fact of the matter about semantic transitions in the sequence. On the other hand, there is also a collectivistic pole in the notion of boundarylessness, applicable globally with respect to a sorites sequence as a whole. Two collectivistic requirements apply. First, it is impermissible to iterate indefinitely the individualistic-pole requirement for successive adjacent pairs of statements, in the manner of paradoxical sorites arguments. Second, there is simply no determinate collective assignment of semantic status to all the statements in a sorites sequence. These individualistic and collectivistic requirements cannot be jointly satisfied; for, the only way that a sorites sequence could fully conform to the individualistic pole would be for every statement in the sequence to have the same semantic status. (This is the lesson of the sorites paradox, which emanates directly from the individualistic pole of boundarylessness.) So boundarylessness is logically incoherent, in a specific way: it imposes mutually unsatisfiable semantic standards upon vague discourse.

The specific kind of logical incoherence exhibited by vagueness needs to be distinguished from a stronger, and highly malevolent, kind of logical incoherence. Vagueness does involve

weak logical incoherence—viz., the presence of mutually unsatisfiable semantic standards governing vague discourse (and vague thought-content). But this does not necessarily bring in its wake strong logical incoherence—viz., commitment to individual statements that are logically contradictory, such as statements of the form $\Phi \ \& \sim\Phi$.

The semantic standards that govern vague discourse can, and do, incorporate weak logical incoherence without the strong kind. How? Briefly, the story goes as follows. Incompatible individualistic and collectivistic semantic requirements are indeed in force insofar as vague discourse exhibits boundarylessness. That is, no requirement is defeated by any others, in the sense of having defeasibility conditions that are satisfied by the presence of the competing and incompatible requirements. But these competing requirements are not on a par with one another either. The collectivistic-pole requirements dominate the individualistic-pole requirements without defeating them; that is, to the extent that the requirements conflict, truth is determined by the collectivistic-pole requirements. In practice, this means that paradoxical sorites arguments are to be eschewed; it also means that one must not acknowledge the existence of any determinate semantic transitions (even unknown or unknowable ones) in a sorites sequence. (Semantic status still must conform partially to individualistic-pole requirements, however. For instance, it is never the case, for any specific pair of adjacent statements in a sorites sequence, that the two statements differ in semantic status.[7]) So the semantic standards governing vague discourse are logically disciplined, in virtue of the dominance (without defeat) of collectivistic-pole requirements. Because of this logical discipline, no logically incoherent statement is true, under those standards; strong generic logical incoherence is avoided.

Transvaluationism is the name for the general approach to vagueness we have been describing. Transvaluationism claims that vagueness is weakly logically incoherent without being strongly logically incoherent. It also claims that vagueness is viable, legitimate, and indeed essential in human language and thought; its weak logical incoherence is benign rather than malevolent. Just as Nietzsche held that one can overcome nihilism by embracing what he called

the transvaluation of all values, transvaluationism asserts that vagueness, although logically incoherent in a certain way, can and should be affirmed and embraced, not nihilisticaly repudiated.[8]

If vagueness is really boundarylessness, as it certainly appears to be, then, since boundarylessness involves disciplined weak logical incoherence, an adequate treatment of vagueness will have to be some version of transvaluationism. Moreover, transvaluationism is a fairly generic approach, potentially open to further development and articulation in a variety of different ways. Numerous details about the logic and semantics of vagueness remain open within the generic conception, and might get handled differently in different versions.[9] But regardless of how the details go, any account of vagueness that seriously comes to grips with boundarylessness must be a version of transvaluationism—whether its proponents acknowledge this fact or not.[10] In effect, specific proposals amount to suggested strategies for implementing the dominance-without-defeat of collectivistic semantic standards over individualistic ones.[11]

We are ready now to draw out the powerful implications of boundarylessness for metaphysics and for semantics. First, metaphysics. The <u>world</u> cannot be logically incoherent, even in the weak way: it cannot have features that are the ontological analogues of mutually unsatisfiable semantic standards. (For example, there cannot be a genuine property H (for 'heaphood'), and a sequence of sand conglomerations each of which has one fewer grain than its predecessor, such that (i) initially in the sequence there are instances of H (with each predecessor of an H instance being an H instance), (ii) eventually there are non-H instances (with each successor of a non-H instance being a non-H instance), and (iii) for each pair of successive piles in the sequence, either both are H instances, or both are non-H instances, or both are neither. For, the only way to satisfy condition (iii) would be for all the piles to have the same status vis-à-vis H.) But vagueness involves boundarylessness essentially, and boundarylessness involves weak logical incoherence essentially. Hence there cannot be ontological vagueness—and in particular, there cannot be vague objects.

Next, semantics. Weak logical incoherence is a feature of the contextually operative semantic standards governing vague discourse, in ordinary contexts of usage. Hence truth, for discourse involving vagueness, cannot be a matter of direct language-world correspondence; for, this would mean that the world itself would have to exhibit the same logical incoherence that is present in vagueness; and this is impossible. Thus—barring the wildly implausible, nihilistically self-defeating, position that vague statements are never true—truth for vague discourse must be a form of indirect correspondence. Furthermore, if this is so, then there is no particular problem about the weak logical incoherence of the operative semantic standards—as long as these standards are logically disciplined, and hence are not also strongly logically incoherent.

The upshot of these considerations is that the only viable general approach to vagueness is one that conceives it non-ontologically (thereby repudiating all vague objects), and construes truth (for vague discourse) as indirect correspondence. The correct ontology of concrete particulars will have to be one that admits no vague ones, and an appropriate semantics for discourse employing vague posits will have to be one that treats truth, for such discourse, as indirect correspondence. These conclusions have very wide application indeed, since vastly many of the posits employed both in common sense and in science are vague.

2.4.   *What's Cooking? World a la Carte*

Let us draw together some morals from the preceding discussion, especially in sections 2.2 and 2.3. The right ontology of concrete particulars, whatever it turns out to be, must meet several constraints. First, it must include no vague objects—no slobjects (as we will call putative vague objects). Rather, any objects it countenances must be fully determinate and precise in all respects, including composition and spatiotemporal boundaries; i.e., they must be snobjects (as we will call them).[13] Second, the right ontology must provide a systematic and general answer to van Inwagen's special composition question.

Living organisms, of course, are slobjects. So, since slobjects are precluded, van Inwagen's own preferred ontology fails the first of these constraints, and is not eligible. What,

then, are the principal eligible candidate-ontologies? There are three. First is what we will call

snobjective non-compositionalism, which includes only snobjective simples and no composites.[14]

A snobjective simple is an object that has no parts, and is also perfectly precise. Second is what

we call snobjective universalism. This view includes snobjective simples, and also composite

snobjects that compose in an unrestricted way—i.e., any bunch of snobjects jointly compose

another snobject.[15] Third is ontological blobjectivism, which countenances only one concrete

particular (viz., the whole cosmos).

In effect, ontological blobjectivism is a limit case of both snobjective non-

compositionalism and snobjective universalism. For, it agrees with the former view in asserting

that the right ontology includes no composite objects. And it agrees with the latter view in

asserting that the right ontology includes the whole—that is, the entire cosmos.

All three ontological positions obviously satisfy the requirement to repudiate vague

objects. In addition, each also respects the requirement of providing a systematic and general

answer to the special composition question, "When do several distinct objects compose an

object?" To this question, snobjective non-compositionalism says "Never, because there are only

simples." Snobjective universalism says "Always; snobjects compose without restriction."

Ontological blobjectivism says "Never, because there is only one real object, viz., the blobject."

Snobjective universalism is a somewhat generic ontological position, and several

different species can be distinguished. One version would countenance only snobjective

spatiotemporal regions. Being snobjective, these regions would be perfectly precise. (The simples

would be minimal snobjective regions, viz., spatiotemporal points.) Another version would

countenance only snobjective non-regions, snobjects that are not regions. Yet another version

would countenance both kinds of snobjects.

Likewise, snobjective non-compositionalism is a generic position that has several

different species. One variant would countenance only spatiotemporal points; another would

countenance only simple snobjective non-regions; yet another would countenance both.

The versions of snobjective non-compositionalism and snobjective universalism that countenance snobjective non-regions are not at all plausible. For, it appears that entities falling under the rubric of snobective non-regions simply are not posited, either in common sense or in science. <u>Simple</u> snobjective non-regions evidently are not posited, because we are told that the "elementary particles" posited in physics are more like clouds than like little billiard balls, and thus are vague in certain respects (e.g., in their spatiotemporal boundaries). Snobjective <u>compound</u> non-regions are not posited either (let alone ones that compose in the completely unrestricted fashion hypothesized by universalism); rather, the kinds of compound objects posited in both science and in common sense are virtually always vague in various ways, for instance in the spatiotemporal boundaries and/or in their physical composition. Of course, the posits introduced in a particular discourse need not pick out genuine denizens of the world-itself anyway—insofar as truth (for the given discourse) is indirect correspondence. But since snobjective non-regions are not even <u>posited</u> in science or in common-sense belief, such putative entities simply are not serious candidates for inclusion in the correct ontology.

So we are now left with three viable candidate-ontologies for concrete particulars, two of which are specific versions of genus-positions lately mentioned: (1) the version of snobjective non-compositionalism that countenances only spatiotemporal points; (2) the version of snobjective universalism that countenances only snobjective spatiotemporal regions (including points); and (3) ontological blobjectivism.

These three candidates can be ordered, with respect to comparative ontological parsimony. The simplest is ontology (3), ontological blobjectivism; it maximizes ontological parsimony by countenancing just one real concrete object, the blobject. Less parsimonious is ontology (1), since it countenances all those point-objects. Still less parsimonious is ontology (2), since it countenances not only all the same point-objects, but also a completely unrestricted mereological hierarchy of snobjective region-objects as well.

All else equal, comparative ontological parsimony is a powerful theoretical reason to prefer one ontological theory to another. Insofar as these three candidate-ontologies are concerned, we submit, all else is equal—nearly enough, anyway. For one thing, the need to complicate semantics as a counterweight to ontological austerity is faced by all three candidates; they all repudiate vague objects, and hence they all need a semantical picture according to which truth, for vast portions of human discourse both scientific and nonscientific, is indirect language-world correspondence. Furthermore, the notion of indirect correspondence, already needed for so much of our discourse, extends naturally to statements that posit spatiotemporal points and/or snobjective spatiotemporal regions—statements specifying which physical magnitude-values are instantiated "at" points or regions. The only object that needs to exist, in order for such statements to be true under indirect-correspondence semantic standards, is the blobject itself, instantiating physical magnitudes in spatiotemporally local ways.

In short, ontological blobjectivism is theoretically simpler than its principal viable competitors, and therefore is probably the correct ontology of concrete particulars. Furthermore, the overall blobjectivist position, despite is severe ontological austerity, actually accords well with familiar common-sense and scientific claims about the world. They are quite literally true, and their truth consists in genuine—albeit indirect—correspondence to the world as it is in itself.[16]

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[1] One such ontology, so-called universalism, will be ontologically liberal in one way: it includes vastly many concrete particulars, which compose without restriction into progressively bigger ones. But in light of the considerations set forth in section 2.3, the kind of universalism that will remain a theoretical option still will eschew vastly many of the posits of common sense and science, and in that sense will be austere.

[2] Relevant texts by each of the present paper's authors are cited in the references.

[3] Whether it would be possible at all depends upon whether there is some systematic way to paraphrase the relevant posit-employing statements into statements that thoroughly avoid any such posits and also are sufficiently intelligible without being paraphrased back into the original idiom. We doubt it, but we can remain officially neutral about this here.

[4] At any rate, on this picture the cosmos does not have any spatiotemporal parts. One might construe the cosmos as consisting of several distinct but superimposed fields, each of which extends spatiotemporally throughout the universe and none of which has spatiotemporal parts; and one might treat these fields as separate "parts" of the cosmos. But for simplicity, we will ignore this possibility in the text. It yields a picture much like ontological blobjectivism, even though it claims there are several concrete particulars rather than just one, because these distinct entities are all blobjects, superimposed with one another.

[5] The relevant notion of semantic correctness has nothing to do with matters of etiquette. A statement can be semantically correct, in the relevant sense, even if it would be impolite, impolitic, or otherwise inappropriate to utter it. Semantic correctness is also distinct from epistemic warrant; a statement can be epistemically warranted but semantically incorrect, and can be semantically correct but epistemically unwarranted. Finally, the relevant kind of semantic correctness is not merely a matter of using words in accordance with what they mean, but also

depends upon how things stand with the world itself—a point of clarification prompted by a question from Seth Arp.

[6] The conception of truth briefly described in this paragraph is articulated and defended at greater length in Horgan (1986a, 1986b, 1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1995b, 1998b), Horgan and Timmons (1993), and Timmons (1999 chapter 4). Horgan originally called the approach 'language-game semantics', later called it 'psychologisitic semantics', and now calls it 'contextual semantics'. It can be seen as extending and adapting the treatment of contextually variable discourse parameters in Lewis (1979). It accommodates certain motivating ideas in neo-pragmatist treatments that construe truth as "ideal warranted assertibility" (Putnam 1981, 1983) or as "superassertibility" (Wright 1987, 1992), but without embracing what Horgan (1995a, 1996) calls "epistemic reductionism." Contextual semantics is somewhat similar to the approach to truth and ontology in Sellars (1963, 1968).

[7] On the present construal of truth and meaning, epistemic standards governing warranted assertibility are closely related to standards of semantic correctness (even though the latter cannot be reduced to the former), and both involve serious holistic elements.

[8] The term 'literal', like many in our language, is governed by contextually variable semantic parameters. One use of 'literal' that is occasionally contextually appropriate is to shift the language-game into direct-correspondence semantic standards—perhaps while simultaneously denying that a given statement is true under those standards. But from the perspective of contextual semantics, this is certainly not the only correct use of 'literal', and not an especially common one. More commonly, the term functions to do things like distinguishing metaphorical from non-metaphorical uses of language, or distinguishing truth (under the contextually operative semantic standards) from near-truth (under those same standards).

[9] With this idea available, there is no need to deny (as van Inwagen does) that talk about tables, chairs, molecules, etc. is literally true. Likewise, there is no need to acquiesce in his proposed assimilation of such talk to the claim that the sun moves across the sky. This is all to the good.

[10] Here and throughout, it is important to keep in mind that according to the semantical component of blobjectivism, serious ontological claims are made within discourse that is governed by highly unusual semantic standards—direct-correspondence standards, or anyway standards that are fairly close to this limit case. Ordinary beliefs, however, are expressible by statements not governed by these same semantic standards.

[11] Some candidate ontologies include many more, and also many fewer, kinds of concrete entities than are normally posited in common sense and in science. See the discussion of "snobjective universalism" in section 2.4 below.

[12] For more detailed discussion see Horgan (1994c, 1995b, 1998b, in press), and Potrc (forthcoming). What we say about vagueness in the present paper is largely excerpted from Horgan (1998b, in press).

6. For convenience of exposition, here we discuss boundarylessness metalinguistically, in terms of statemements and their semantic status. But the same core idea applies equally well at the first-order level of description. Consider a sorites sequence consisting of the respective sand conglomerations themselves. To say that heaphood is boundarylessness is to say that (i) initially in this sequence there are heaps (with each predecessor of a heap being a heap); (ii) later there are non-heaps (with each successor of a non-heap being a non-heap); and (iii) there is no determinate fact of the matter about the transition from heaps to non-heaps.

7. Does this mean that under the correct collective assignment of semantic status to all the statements in a sorites sequence, no two adjacent statements differ in semantic status? No. According to the collectivistic-pole requirements, there is no correct collective assignment of semantic status to all the statements in the sequence.

8. One reason for the name transvaluationism is to emphasize that this position is not a species of what Williamson (1994) calls nihilism—the view that "vague expressions are empty; any vaguely drawn distinction is subverted" (p. 165). Another reason is to emphasize the need for a "transvaluation of all truth values," so to speak—i.e., the need to transcend the impossible goal of finding some logically coherent, semantically correct, collective assignment of semantic status to all the statements in a sorites sequence. The proper goal for a semantics of vagueness, rather, is to provide an adequate account of the normative standards governing semantically correct assertoric practice.

9. Perhaps transvaluationism can even be implemented by standard two-valued logic, employed in a way that respects in practice the logically disciplined weak generic incoherence of vagueness. Concerning our accommodation of vagueness, Quine (1995) remarks, "What I call my desk could be equated indifferently with countless almost coextensive aggregates of molecules, but I refer to it as a unique one of them, and I do not and cannot care which. Our standard logic takes this...in stride, imposing a tacit fiction of unique though unspecifiable reference" (p. 57).

10. The weak generic logical incoherence that any such account must take on board, at least implicitly, will inevitably reveal itself when one considers what the advocate of the particular account will be forced to say when confronted with a "forced march" through a sorites sequence. Consider, for instance, a sorites sequence for baldness: "A man with no hairs on his head is bald"; "A man with 1 hair on his head is bald"; …; "A man with 10 million hairs on his head is bald." A forced march through this sequence is a series of questions, with respect to each successive statement, "Is it true?" Each of the questions is perfectly meaningful. And for no two successive questions could it be correct to give different answers; for, that difference would mark a determinate semantic transition, contrary to the nature of vagueness. So the only thing to do, when confronted with the prospect of forced-march querying, is to refuse steadfastly to answer those persistent queries (since no complete set of answers is semantically correct). This is the

right thing to do, because it reflects the dominance of collectivistic-pole semantic requirements over individualistic-pole requirements. But although this refusal to take the forced march is entirely appropriate as a tactic for avoiding commitment to any logically contradictory statements, it does not eliminate the weak logical incoherence of vagueness. The individualistic-pole requirements are still in force, even though they are dominated by the logically incompatible collectivistic-pole requirements; for, the respective queries in the forced march are all still meaningful and each still demands the same answer as its predecessor, even though it is proper and respectable to duck those cumulative individualistic semantic requirements by refusing to take the forced march.

11. One salient example, discussed in Horgan (1998b section 4), is what is there called "iterated supervaluationism." The core idea of this approach is that the metalanguage for stating supervaluationist semantics is itself vague, and thus it too is subject to a supervaluationist treatment in a meta-meta-language; and so on, all the way up the metalinguistic hierarchy. A different approach to the logic of vagueness, also a species of the transvaluationist genus, is described in Horgan (1994c)—a paper that is explicit about the need to quarantine the (weak) logical incoherence that is endemic to genuine vagueness.

[13] The terms 'slobject', 'snobject', and 'blobject' were introduced in Horgan (1991), with due credit to Barry Loewer, who coined the first two in conversation with Horgan.

[14] Van Inwagen uses the term 'nihilism' for the view that there are only simples and no composites. But we do not adopt his terminology here because it has unduly pejorative connotations.

[15] 'Universalism' in van Inwagen's term for the view that any bunch of real objects jointly compose another real object.

[16] We thank John Tienson, Mark Timmons, and audiences at Northwestern University and the University of Maribor for helpful comments and discussion.