

ON THE MEANINGFULNESS OF VAGUE LANGUAGE

IS VAGUE language *qua* vague meaningful and, if so, under what conditions can it be said to be so? This is the question which I propose here to consider. By the word "language" is understood the English language taken as object language. The units of language primarily under consideration are "assertions" or "statements" — units, that is, which are sentential in function, and which (without commitment in historical details) may be said, in the words of Bosanquet, to "represent a judgment," or in the words of Russell, to "express a proposition," or in the words of Peirce, to exhibit a "cognition" as "the living inferential metaboly of symbols." The word "designatum" is a convenient name of that which an assertion or statement is said to "designate" — the assumption being that every assertion or statement designates a designatum. Whether or not what is here said about assertions or statements can be said of language generally is a question which lies beyond the scope of the present article, though it is my conviction that what is said may in principle claim the broader application.

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But what is to be understood by "vague language"? In answer to this question it is necessary to distinguish three views which, whether in the end separable or not, are at least *prima facie* distinguishable and with the third of which alone the discussion is concerned.

The first of these three views is stated by Russell in *The Analysis of Mind* as follows: "A word is vague when it is in fact applicable to a number of different objects because, in virtue of some common property, they have not appeared, to the person using the word, to be distinct" (p. 184). Thus the word "this" in the primitive memory-