

PHIL 2420: Vagueness

Cian Dorr

Syllabus

Schedule of topics and readings

Week 1	Introduction
Week 2	Many-valued logic Williamson, chapter 4 <i>Background:</i> Kenton Machina, 'Truth, belief and vagueness'; Tye, 'Sorites Paradoxes and the Semantics of Vagueness'
Week 3	Supervaluationism Williamson, chapter 5 <i>Background:</i> Fine, 'Vagueness, truth and logic' (difficult); Lewis, excerpts from various works <i>Optional:</i> Keeffe, <i>Theories of Vagueness</i> , chapters 7 and 8.
Week 4	Supervaluationism and the problem of the many McGee and McLaughlin, 'Lessons of the Many' Weatherson, 'Many many problems' <i>Background:</i> Unger, 'The Problem of the Many'; Lewis, 'Many but Almost One'
Week 5	Nihilism Williamson, chapter 6 Braun and Sider, 'Vague, so untrue' <i>Background:</i> Dummett, 'Wang's Paradox'; Wright, 'Language mastery and the sorites paradox'; Williamson, section 2.1
Week 6	Epistemicism Williamson, chapters 7 and 8 <i>Optional:</i> Williamson, 'What makes it a heap?'; <i>Philosophy and Phenomenological Research</i> symposium on Williamson's book with contributions from Horwich, Schiffer and Williamson; Keeffe, chapter 3
Week 7	Other versions of epistemicism Hawthorne, 'Epistemicism and Semantic Plasticity' <i>Optional:</i> Sorenson, <i>Vagueness and Contradiction</i> , excerpts.
Week 8	Field on indeterminacy Field, 'No Fact of the Matter' <i>Optional:</i> Field, 'Indeterminacy, Degree of Belief and Excluded Middle'; Field, 'The Semantic Paradoxes and the Paradoxes of Vagueness: A Unified Approach'
Week 9	Knowledge and the linguistic conception of vagueness Dorr, 'Vagueness without Ignorance' <i>Background:</i> Lewis, 'Languages and Language' <i>Optional:</i> Keeffe, chapter 6

Week 10 **Contextualism versus semantic minimalism**
Capellen and Lepore, *Insensitive Semantics*, excerpts

Weeks 11–13 **Conclusion and Overflow**
If we find ourselves with extra time, we might devote a session to vague identity (with readings from Evans, Lewis, Parsons, Williamson), and/or to contextualist approaches to the sorites paradox (with readings from Raffman, Soames and Graff).

Assessment

Unless you want to make other arrangements, you will be expected (if you want a grade for the course) to write three short (6–8 page) papers. These will be due on weeks 6, 10 and 14 (i.e. one week after the final seminar). I will try to provide some guidance on possible topics ahead of time, and strongly encourage you to discuss your choice of topic with me before you start writing. If you do want to make other arrangements—say, to write a single term paper—you **MUST** request by week 4.

Resources

Justin Needle maintains an exhaustive (up to 2003) bibliography of works on vagueness, at <http://www.btinternet.com/~justin.needle/>.

Patrick Greenough has another bibliography, with useful annotations, at <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~pmg2/Helsinki%20Vagueness%20course%202003.htm>.