

PHIL 2420: Vagueness  
Cian Dorr  
*Syllabus*

**Schedule of topics and readings**

Week 1	<b>Introduction</b>
Week 2	<b>Many-valued logic</b> Williamson, chapter 4 <i>Background:</i> Kenton Machina, 'Truth, belief and vagueness'; Tye, 'Sorites Paradoxes and the Semantics of Vagueness'
Week 3	<b>Supervaluationism</b> 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	<b>Supervaluationism and the problem of the many</b> 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	<b>Nihilism</b> 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	<b>Epistemicism</b> 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	<b>Other versions of epistemicism</b> Hawthorne, 'Epistemicism and Semantic Plasticity' <i>Optional:</i> Sorenson, <i>Vagueness and Contradiction</i> , excerpts.
Week 8	<b>Field on indeterminacy</b> 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	<b>Knowledge and the linguistic conception of vagueness</b> 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>.