

Philosophy 247r  
Topics in the Philosophy of Language: Vagueness

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 11-12 and by appointment

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**Requirements** for those enrolled: Seminar paper, 20-25 pages. Possibly a presentation, but I've not decided about that yet.

**Syllabus**

(Definitely subject to change)

- September 18      Introductory meeting
- September 25      The Problem  
Michael Dummett, "Wang's Paradox", in his *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 248-68.  
Crispin Wright, "Language Mastery and the Sorities Paradox", in G. Evans and J. McDowell, *Truth and Meaning* (Oxford University Press, 1976), pp.
- October 2          Some Options  
Christopher Peacocke, "Are Vague Predicates Incoherent?", *Synthese* 46 (1981), pp. 121-41.  
Hans Kamp, "Two Theories about Adjectives", in E.L. Keenan, ed., *Formal Semantics of Natural Language* (Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 123-55.  
Timothy Williamson, "Vagueness and Ignorance", *Aristotelian Society* sup. vol. 66 (1992), pp. 145-62.
- October 16        Some Remarks on the Nature of Semantic Theory  
Michael Dummett, "Truth", in *Truth and Other Enigmas*, pp. 1-24.  
I intend during this session to sketch a conception of semantic theory which will inform my criticisms of various of the options discussed. My own views are deeply informed by the writings of Michael Dummett. For those who do not know his work, some useful first papers are "What is a Theory of Meaning?", "Language and Truth", and "Truth and Meaning", all reprinted in his *Seas of Language* (Oxford University Press, 1993). His own conception can be illuminated by comparison with that of Donald Davidson, for which see his "Truth and Meaning", in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 17-36.
- October 23        Degrees of Truth  
Kenton Machina, "Truth, Belief, and Vagueness", *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 5 (1976), pp. 47-78.  
David Sanford, "Borderline Logic", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 12 (1975), pp. 29-39.

For an introduction to the technical aspects of ‘fuzzy logic’, see J.A. Gougen, “The Logic of Inexact Concepts”, *Synthese* 19 (1968-69), pp. 325-73. The classic paper on the topic is L.A. Zadeh, “Fuzzy Sets”, *Information and Control* 8 (1965), pp. 338-53.

- October 30           Degrees of Truth: Objections  
                          Crispin Wright, “Further Reflections on the Sorities Paradox”, *Philosophical Topics* 15 (1987), pp. 227-90, esp. pp. 250-61.  
                          Timothy Williamson, *Vagueness*, Ch. 4.  
                          Mark Sainsbury, “Tolerating Vagueness”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 89 (1988-89), pp. 33-48.
- November 6           Supervaluations  
                          Kit Fine, “Vagueness, Truth, and Logic”, *Synthese* 30 (1975), pp. 265-300.
- November 13         Supervaluations: Some Objections  
                          Timothy Williamson, *Vagueness*, Ch. 5.  
                          Jamie Tappenden, “The Liar and Sorities Paradoxes: Toward a Unified Treatment”, *Journal of Philosophy* 90 (1993), pp. 551-77, esp. pp. 561-69.  
                          David Sanford, “Competing Semantics for Vagueness”, *Synthese* 33 (1976), pp. 195-210.  
                          P. Grim, “Taking Sorities Arguments Seriously: Some Hidden Costs”, *Philosophia* 14 (1984), pp. 251-72; R.A. Sorensen, “Precisification by Means of Vague Predicates”, *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 29 (1988), pp. 267-74.
- November 20         Digression: Vague Objects
- November 27         Supervaluations: Higher-order Vagueness  
                          Crispin Wright, “Further Reflections on the Sorities Paradox”, *Philosophical Topics* 15 (1987), pp. 227-90, esp. pp.  
                          Mark Sainsbury, “Is There Higher-order Vagueness?”, *Philosophical Quarterly* 41 (1991), pp. 167-82.  
                          Crispin Wright, “Is Higher-order Vagueness Coherent?”, *Analysis* 52 (1992), pp. 129-39.  
                          Richard Heck, “A Note on the Logic of (Higher-order) Vagueness”, *Analysis* (1993), pp. 201-8.
- December 4           The Epistemic View  
                          Timothy Williamson, *Vagueness*, Chs. 7-8.
- December 11         The Epistemic View: Objections  
                          Peter Simons, “Vagueness and Ignorance”, *Aristotelian Society* sup. vol. 66 (1992), pp. 163-77.  
                          More papers will be inserted here.
- December 18         Toward a Reasonable View  
                          Jamie Tappenden, “The Liar and Sorities Paradoxes: Toward a Unified Treatment”, *Journal of Philosophy* 90 (1993), pp. 551-77.  
                          John Burgess, “The Sorities Paradox and Higher-order Vagueness”, *Synthese* 85 (1990), pp. 417-74.