

PH3B9-15 Vagueness

23/24

Department

Philosophy

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Walter Dean

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

PH997 Topics in Metaphysics and Epistemology

Module aims

This module will offer students critical engagement with selected central topics in vagueness and the sorites paradox through the careful study and discussion of seminal works in the area.

Students will be expected to engage critically with the main arguments of the selected texts, and the philosophical positions presented in them. They will be expected to articulate their own views of the relative strengths and weaknesses of these arguments and positions.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

This module will provide an overview of the main issues raised by the phenomenon of vagueness in the philosophy of language, logic, and metaphysics. General topics to be treated include: semantic vagueness; ontic vagueness; higher order vagueness; logics of vagueness; measurement and vagueness; vagueness in linguistics, decision theory, and mathematics. These topics will be addressed via a critical discussion of the major views and theories about vagueness

put forth in the literature such as ideal language proposals, nihilism, supervaluationism, epistemicism, contextualism, and degree theories.

Syllabus:

Week 1: Introduction: history and forms of the sorites paradox

Week 2: Supervaluationism

Week 3: Epistemicism

Week 4: Contextualism

Week 5: Degree theories and fuzzy logic

Week 6: READING WEEK

Week 7: Vagueness and non-classical logic

Week 8: Vagueness and strict finitism

Week 9: Vagueness and measurement

Week 10: Vagueness and the mathematical continuum

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- By the end of the module the student should be able to have a systematic and advanced understanding and knowledge of the texts covered in the module, the main arguments of the texts, and critical responses to those arguments.
- By the end of the module the student should be able to communicate at an advanced level clearly and substantively in speech and in writing on the questions addressed in the module. They should be able to provide critical analysis of the relevant texts.
- By the end of the module the student should be able to work autonomously to articulate their own view of the relative merits of arguments, methodologies and positions in the literature, and engage critically with other points of view.
- Students should be able to demonstrate the skills involved in philosophical discussion, they will have improved abilities to analyse and critically assess complex concepts and arguments. They will be able to communicate at an advanced level clearly and substantively in speech, as well as in writing, the philosophical arguments and concepts covered in the texts. They will be able to demonstrate sound judgement and initiative in selecting appropriate texts and methods for their investigation of a specifically circumscribed problem and should have acquired an advanced ability to pursue and organize philosophical research, documenting research carefully, and showing the ability to engage independently in philosophical debate.

Indicative reading list

Cobrerros, P., Égré, P., Ripley, D., and van Rooij, R. (2012). Tolerant, classical, strict. *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, 41(2):347–385.

Dean, W. (2018). Strict finitism, feasibility, and the sorites. *The Review of Symbolic Logic* 11(2):295–346.

Dummett, M. (1975). Wang's paradox. *Synthese* 30(3–4):301–324.

Fara, D. G. (2000). Shifting Sands: An Interest-Relative Theory of Vagueness. *Philosophical Topics* 28(1):45–81. Originally published under the name Delia Graff.

Fine, K. (1975). Vagueness, truth and logic. *Synthese* 30(3–4):265–300.

Hyde, D. (1992). Rehabilitating Russell. *Logique et Analyse* 35(137–138):139–173.

- Hyde, D. and D. Raffman (2018). Sorites Paradox. In E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition).
- Keefe, R. (2000). *Theories of Vagueness*. Cambridge University Press.
- Keefe, R. (2008). Vagueness: Supervaluationism. *Philosophy Compass* 3(2):315–324.
- Keefe, R. and P. Smith (1997). *Vagueness: A Reader*. MIT Press.
- Russell, B. (1923). Vagueness. *The Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy* 1:84–92.
- Sainsbury, M. (2009). *Paradoxes* (third edition). Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, N. J. (2008). *Vagueness and Degrees of Truth*. Oxford University Press.
- Sorenson, R. (2018). Vagueness. In E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition).
- Tye, M. (1990). Vague objects. *Mind* 99(396):535–557.
- Tye, M. (1994). Sorites paradoxes and the semantics of vagueness. *Philosophical Perspectives* 8:189–206.
- Unger, P. (1979). There are no ordinary things. *Synthese* 41(2):177–154.
- Weber, Z. and M. Colyvan (2010). A topological sorites. *The Journal of Philosophy* 107(6):311–325.
- Williamson, T. (1994). *Vagueness*. Routledge.
- Williamson, T. and P. Simons (1992). Vagueness and ignorance. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume* 66(1):145–178.

Research element

The module will be assessed by a long capstone essay, which must be the product of the student's own research, and should not simply re-hash the delivered content. Students are encouraged to use the provided reading list as a jumping-off point for this research.

Subject specific skills

- (i) The capacity to read key texts in philosophy of action, focused on vagueness..
- (ii) The capacity to explain key arguments and positions found in the module reading material.
- (iii) To develop an appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of the positions and arguments found in the texts covered by the module, and to be able to analyse and assess these positions and arguments in written and oral work.
- (iv) To work effectively with peers in group-oriented work on vagueness and the sorites paradox , and to communicate and think about the metaphysics and epistemology of intentional action in a seminar environment

Transferable skills

- (i) To acquire the capacity to read demanding material effectively and critically.
 - (ii) To develop the capacity to explain demanding ideas and arguments clearly, briefly and accurately.
 - (iii) To think creatively about problems by deploying the capacity for clear thinking and reasoning
 - (iv) To work collaboratively and sensitively with others in a group environment, and to develop the self-confidence to communicate effectively in a group environment.
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Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Private study	123 hours (82%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

No private study requirements defined for this module.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time
3000 word essay	100%	

Feedback on assessment

In preparation for the 3000 word essay, students will be asked to submit a 500 word abstract (unassessed) on which formative feedback and suggestions for further reading will be provided.

Feedback on the assessed 3000 word essay will be provided on the coversheet for the essay, addressing standard areas of evaluation and individual content.

Availability

Pre-requisites

The following may be substituted as prerequisites instead of PH210:

PH340-15 Logic II: Incompleteness and Undecidability

PH341-15 Modal Logic

To take this module, you must have passed:

- All of
 - [PH210-15 Logic II: Metatheory](#)

There is currently no information about the courses for which this module is core or optional.