Institute of Philosophy
Doctoral Program "Philosophy – Language, Mind and Practice"

Master Class with Brian P. McLaughlin (Rutgers)

Vagueness (3/5 ECTS)

14. 6. - 15. 6. 2012

The main concern of the seminar is whether classical logic is applicable to natural languages, given that they are rife with semantic and referential indeterminacy due to vagueness. The seminar will focus on the two central problems of vagueness. The first is raised by the sorites paradox, a paradox that traces back to Eublides, a contemporary of Aristotle. The second is raised by Peter Unger's problem of the many. The bulk of the seminar, however, will be on issues that stem from the sorites paradox.

The seminar will be composed of six sessions, three each day. In session one, we will briefly discuss the history of the sorites paradox; examine the modern version of the paradox, first presented in Russell 1924, which purports to establish such absurd conclusions as that terms such as "bald" and "heap" are perfectly precise; see why the most common contemporary formulation of the sorites paradox fails to raise any paradox at all; formulate a version that indeed leads to paradox; and, finally, we will see that sorites arguments come in two parts, which we will call, respectively, "the logical inference" and "the semantic inference." The logical inference is valid in classical logic. The semantic inference is not valid in any logic: it moves from object language claim to a metalinguistic claim (for example, from a claim such as "There is a number n such that a person with n hairs or less on his head is bald, but a person with n+1 hairs on his head is not bald" to a claim such as "The English term `bald' is precise."). In session two, we will see why rejecting classical logic offers no comfort at all as a response to the sorites paradox. This will involve looking briefly at Kleene weak 3-valued logic, Kleene strong 3-valued logic, intuitionistic logic, infinite valued logic, paraconsistent logic, quantum logic, and relevance logic. (No prior knowledge of these logics is required for participants in the class. The class will presuppose no knowledge of logic beyond knowledge of first-order quantification theory.) Then, we will offer a pragmatic defense of classical logic. In session 3, we will begin to uncover the real puzzle raised by the sorites paradox. In session 4, we will offer a diagnosis of the sorites paradox and offer a conceptual cure. In session 5, we will examine four arguments proposed by Timothy Williamson. One purports to show that omega-semantic determinacy (semantic determinacy expressed by infinitely many determinately operators) is incompatible with transfinite semantic indeterminacy. The other three arguments all purport to show that the notion of semantic indeterminacy is incoherent. We will see why all four arguments fail. In session 6, we will see why Unger's problem of the many is not a problem for the geologist (despite Unger's discussion, it is not the problem of whether there are no mountains or instead infinitely many mountains), but is rather a problem for the semanticist. We will see how it leads to a powerful argument for the indeterminacy of reference, one different from W.V.O. Quine's arguments.

Venue: Philosophisches Seminar, Zürichbergstrasse 43, 8044 Zürich, Room: ZUP-U-8
Registration and contact: phd@philos.uzh.ch.

Thursday, June 14, 2012

Session 1: The Sorites Paradox (9:30-12:30)
Reading: Vann McGee and Brian McLaughlin's "The Sorites Paradox" (manuscript).

Session 2: The Logical Inference (14:15-17:00)
Reading: McGee and McLaughlin's "The Logical of the Sorites" (manuscript).

Session 3: **Distinctions With a Difference (17:30-19:00)**
Reading: McGee and McLaughlin's "Should We Use Classical Logic?" (manuscript).

Friday, June 15, 2012

Session 4: The Semantic Inference (9:30-12:30)
Reading: McGee and McLaughlin's "The Semantics of the Sorites" (manuscript).

Session5: **Semantic Indeterminacy (14:15-16:30)**
Reading: Williamson's "Reply to McGee and McLaughlin," *Linguistics and Philosophy* 27: 113-122, 2004.
McGee and McLaughlin's "Logical Commitment and Semantic Indeterminacy: A Reply to Williamson," *Linguistics and Philosophy* 27, 2004.
Recommended background reading:
McGee and McLaughlin's "Review of *Vagueness,*" *Linguistics and Philosophy* 21: 221-235, 1997.

Session 6: Indeterminacy of Reference (17:00-19:00)
Reading: McGee and McLaughlin's "Lessons of the Many," *Philosophical Topics* 28: 129-51, 2000.
Recommended background reading:
Peter Unger's "The Problem of the Many," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5: 411-67, 1980.

For a General Introduction to the Issues and Background Reading for the Class:
- Bertrand Russell's "Vagueness," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy and Psychology* 1: 84-92, 1923.
- Michael Tye's "Vagueness: Welcome to the Quicksand," *Southern Journal of Philosophy, Spindel Conference* 1994, XXXIII: 1-22, 1995.
- Entry entitled "The Sorites Paradox" in the *Stanford Online Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Entry entitled "The Problem of the Many" in the *Stanford Online Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

No fees apply, but please note that participants are expected to have done the principal reading. Please note that PhD students at the UZH are required to book the module in order to get 3 or 5 credit points.