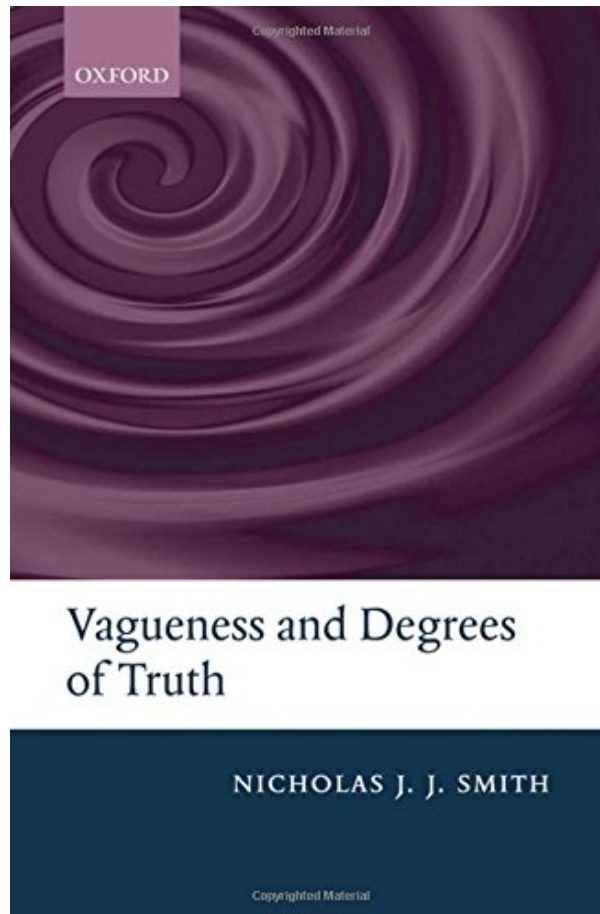


VAGUENESS AND DEGREES OF TRUTH BY NICHOLAS J. J. SMITH



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required reading for anyone working on the logic and semantics of vagueness. * Roy Cook, *Theoria* * brimming with philosophical insight and formal niceties. It deserves to, and surely will, generate much discussion * John Collins, *Philosophical Quarterly* * The book is clear, focussed, technically deft, and has impressive vision . . . a must-read for anyone interested in vagueness. * Graham Priest, *History and Philosophy of Logic* * a very significant and important contribution to the debate. * Dominic Hyde, *Bulletin of Symbolic Logic* * one of the most important contributions on vagueness in the last ten years, and for years to come . . . profound and original . . . succeeds in promoting a new and inspiring conception of vagueness * Paul Egge, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* * Both a sharply written introduction to the philosophical logic of vagueness and a persuasive defence of Smith's favoured theory * David Ripley, *Analysis* * It is an excellent book: clearly written and packed full of interesting ideas and arguments. Researchers in the area must read it should become a cornerstone of the literature. . . . The technical material is self-contained and well presented, and the book would suit a graduate or an advanced undergraduate class not afraid of the odd bit of elementary mathematical formalism. * J. R. G. Williams, *Mind* *

About the Author

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Nicholas J. J. Smith argues that an adequate account of vagueness must involve degrees of truth. The basic idea of degrees of truth is that while some sentences are true and some are false, others possess intermediate truth values: they are truer than the false sentences, but not as true as the true ones. This idea is immediately appealing in the context of vagueness--yet it has fallen on hard times in the philosophical literature, with existing degree-theoretic treatments of vagueness facing apparently insuperable objections. Smith seeks to turn the tide in favour of a degree-theoretic treatment of vagueness, by motivating and defending the basic idea that truth can come in degrees. He argues that no theory of vagueness that does not countenance degrees of truth can be correct, and develops a new degree-theoretic treatment of vagueness--fuzzy plurivaluationism--that solves the problems plaguing earlier degree theories.

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Features

- Vagueness and Degrees of Truth

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One of the best recent accounts of vagueness

By Kyle

Smith is that most invaluable kind of philosopher: he explicates points made decades ago more clearly and more revealingly than the original author did, while simultaneously making insightful and profound contributions of his own. Both of these achievements are particularly astounding in light of the subject matter, for the vagueness literature is as full of esoteric and difficult distinctions as it is ingenuity.

The book is structured into three parts; the first is divided between a section that introduces a lot of the mathematical terminology necessary for understanding model-theoretic semantics (Smith is extremely good at this, which he evidently must be aware of, given his recently published logic book), and the necessary introduction to contemporary theories of vagueness. Smith offers old criticisms of these theories as he illustrates them, but holds back the true problem he has with them until the second part of the book.

Here, he begins his positive project of offering a definition of vagueness. He motivates the need for a definition and the definition itself, showing how the telltale signs of a vague predicate, i.e., borderline cases, blurred boundaries, and the sorites paradox, can all be reduced down to "Closeness", a concept similar to that of Wright's tolerance, but with important differences. Smith uses his definition to bludgeon the theories of vagueness he introduced in the book's first part; when the dust clears, the only remaining theory is the degree-theoretic account of vagueness, which successfully handles the so-called 'jolt problem' via a continuum of truth values.

The book's final part is divided between a brilliant defense of the degree-theorist from common complaints and an assimilation between Smith's brand of fuzzy semantics and a view he calls plurivaluationism (Smith's untangling of this theory from supervaluationism is of enormous benefit), which obviates a family of complaints that essentially originate out of arguments for Quinean indeterminacy. Smith masterfully clarifies conceptual confusions and touches on practically all of the issues relevant here, including truth-functionality, norms of assertion, and a fascinating new take on degrees of belief. Even if one disagrees with Smith's final position on a topic, going through his arguments is highly rewarding.

Who would benefit from this book? A lot of it would probably go over the head of someone completely new to philosophy of language; Smith notes in his first chapter that the mathematical intro is fine for people with "little to no formal background", but I suspect readers in this camp will have to work a bit to completely grasp everything he goes over. However, Smith rewards well for doing so. As for philosophy of language oriented readers, it is a fantastic introduction to anyone who is new to the vagueness literature, and likewise for seasoned veterans. I highly recommend this marvelous book; I found it a paradigm of good philosophy.

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