

Vernünftiger Umgang  
mit unscharfen Grenzen



# Pragmatist and Contextualist Approaches to Vagueness

in Legal Theory  
and in Philosophy

1 – 3 July 2011

Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg

## Pragmatist and Contextualist Approaches to Vagueness

By inducing the Sorites paradox, vague predicates seem to indicate an incoherence at the heart of everyday discourse. Classical treatments of vagueness have attempted to show that in spite of appearances, everyday discourse is not incoherent. Most of them have argued that we are not committed to the tolerance principle which they regard as primarily culpable for the problem. However, this comes at a cost: either, one admits that there *are*, after all, sharp boundaries between the relevant predicates' positive and negative extensions, or one tinkers with classical logic.

Recently, philosophers have begun to explore the potential of contextualist ideas to alleviate the counterintuitiveness of admitting sharp boundaries. Contextualists allow sharp boundaries to exist between different *properties*, and it should not be assumed that two tokens of a given predicate express the same property. In fact, a given predicate can express infinitely many (slightly different) properties – depending on the *context* in which it is used. Contextualism can be seen as a step towards accepting that the pragmatic context of an utterance of a vague word plays a role for its meaning. This thought places contextualism near the tradition of thought known as *pragmatism* and raises the question whether it might not be possible to employ pragmatist resources to help illuminate the phenomenon of vagueness. Since pragmatists start from the thought that natural language has its origins in various kinds of practices, they are not surprised if friction between different aspects of language appear. From a pragmatist point of view, settling such friction is an ongoing challenge for language users, that is: “meaning” is constantly re-made.

The conference presents a variety of contextualist und pragmatist approaches to vagueness in order to discuss the question whether their ideas can be fruitfully applied in the debate on *legal* indeterminacy.

## Conference Office

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Rechtsphilosophie: Abt. 2 Rechtsphilosophie  
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## Conference Organization

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Homepage

[www.unscharfe-grenzen.de](http://www.unscharfe-grenzen.de)

## Registration

Registration is free, but space is limited.

If you wish to attend, please send an e-mail to [rechtsphilosophie@jura.uni-freiburg.de](mailto:rechtsphilosophie@jura.uni-freiburg.de) by June 17, 2011.

## Location

Haus zur Lieben Hand  
Löwenstr. 16

79098 Freiburg

## Friday, 1 July 2011

- 14.30 Geert Keil / Ralf Poscher  
*Introduction*
- 14.45 Jonas Åkerman  
*Vagueness and Context*
- 16.00 Coffee Break
- 16.30 Diana Raffman  
*Vagueness, Indeterminacy and Arbitrariness*  
*Commentary*

## Saturday, 2 July 2011

- 9.30 Nikola Kompa  
*Vagueness, Context Sensitivity and Categorization*  
*Commentary*
- 11.00 Coffee Break
- 11.30 Scott Anderson  
*Once and for All: Manifold Contexts of Adjudication*  
*Commentary*
- 13.00 Lunch Break

## Saturday, 2 July 2011

- 14.30 Scott Soames  
*Vagueness and the Law*  
*Commentary*
- 16.00 Coffee Break
- 16.30 Lawrence B. Solum  
*Vagueness, Context and the Interpretation-Construction Distinction*  
*Commentary*

## Sunday, 3 July 2011

- 9.30 Matthias Kiesselbach  
*Between Epistemicism and Semantic Accounts: A Pragmatist Take on Vagueness*
- 10.45 Coffee Break
- 11.15 Damiano Canale  
*A Deflationary Account of Legal Indeterminacy*

## List of Speakers

- Jonas Åkerman (Stockholm University)
- Scott Anderson (University of British Columbia)
- Damiano Canale (Bocconi University Milan)
- Timothy Endicott (Oxford University)
- Geert Keil (Humboldt University Berlin)
- Matthias Kiesselbach (Humboldt University Berlin)
- Nikola Kompa (University of Bern)
- Ralf Poscher (University of Freiburg)
- Diana Raffman (University of Toronto)
- Scott Soames (University of Southern California)
- Lawrence B. Solum (University of Illinois)

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