

MASTER'S THESIS EXAMINER REPORT

IEPS – International Economic and Political Studies

Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	Borderline duties and fuzzy values: An analysis of vagueness in ethics
Student's name:	Marti Bridgewater Mateu
Referee's name:	Janusz Salamon

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Contribution and argument (quality of research and analysis, originality)	43	
	Research question (definition of objectives, plausibility of hypotheses)	14	
	Theoretical framework (methods relevant to the research question)	14	
<i>Total</i>		71	
Minor Criteria			
	Sources, literature	10	
	Presentation (language, style, cohesion)	5	
	Manuscript form (structure, logical coherence, layout, tables, figures)	5	
<i>Total</i>		20	
TOTAL		91	

Plagiarism-check (URKUND) match score: 1%

Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria:

Marti wrote a thesis on a philosophical topic that required a very high level of command of the tools of analytic philosophy. He wrote a brilliant essay that addresses a central problem for consequentialist theories of normative ethics, namely the problem of the threshold of permissibility or obligation that are supposed to be determined on the basis of the analysis of the consequences alone. Marti presents the reader with convincing arguments that the challenges faced by consequentialism may be best analysed by drawing on the insights into the much discussed philosophical problem of vagueness (I happened to study with Timothy Williamson, the leading philosopher of vagueness). I believe Marti's thesis deserves to be awarded grade A, since he shows himself to be fully in control of the argumentative structure of the thesis which is also elegantly and engagingly written. I find nothing wrong-footed in it, and nothing genuinely controversial. Having said all that, it is not entirely clear to me what is genuinely original in this thesis, and whether, being clearly endowed with a philosophical talent, Marti actually attempted to make an original contribution to the scholarly debate about how the insights into the nature of vagueness as a problem in the philosophy of language may shed light on specific problems of moral philosophy. I might have missed the most creative moments of Marti's otherwise impressive intellectual performance, so I would be interested to hear what in his opinion is new in his thesis, compared with the authors listed in the bibliography.

I do commend Marti for scaling down considerably his initial ambitions indicated in the thesis proposal which looked like a plan for a sizeable book on “vagueness in ethics” in which the problem of “consequentialism and vagueness” to which he ultimately devoted his thesis was just one of many issues he promised to address in his thesis. The echo of this more ambitious project can still be detected in the title of the thesis which now, given the scaled down content, ironically became a good example of vagueness. Focusing on one, instead of many problems of moral philosophy that might be clarified by reference to vagueness was thus a good idea. It would be even better if having narrowed the focus, Marti would devote less space for introducing consequentialism and introducing the philosophical problem of vagueness, and attempted to explore the heart of the matter in greater detail. That would make the thesis less introductory (from the point of view of the advanced participants in the scholarly debate on the matter) and would encourage him to force himself to go beyond what other authors have already said. But perhaps this is an expectation more appropriate for a doctoral dissertation rather than Master’s thesis, hence I conclude by commending Marti’s thesis as – on the comparative scale and given the vagueness of academic assessment – deserving the highest grade.

Proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F): A

Suggested questions for the defence are:

I (do not) recommend the thesis for final defence.

Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	A	= outstanding (high honor)
81 – 90	B	= superior (honor)
71 – 80	C	= good
61 – 70	D	= satisfactory
51 – 60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	F	= failing. The thesis is not recommended for defence.