

PH384-15 Topics in Philosophy and Literature

21/22

Department

Philosophy

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Eileen John

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

Philosophy and literature are akin in a broad way, as practices in which people respond reflectively to fundamental aspects of life and in which language serves as a central medium. What are the deeper relations between philosophy and literature? How do they pursue reflective projects? Do they cooperate? Conflict? Do they illuminate or critique each other? This module investigates the relations between philosophy and literature, by considering both methodological issues (such as uses of language and forms of discourse, relations between writer and reader, kinds of experience and reasoning, criteria of evaluation) and substantive questions addressed in philosophical and literary modes (e.g., objectivity, universality, scepticism, selfhood, altruism, nihilism, recognition). Texts studied include readings that exemplify both modes, as well as scholarship addressing the issues in theoretical terms. The topics will vary, to allow focus on texts and questions relevant to lecturers' varying research expertise and interests.

Module aims

The principal module aim is to give students an opportunity for in-depth engagement with texts and issues that link philosophy and literature. Questioning the methods and forms suited to addressing fundamental human concerns is basic to both literary and philosophical practice. This

module will ask students to consider some wonderfully diverse approaches to such questions. The benefits of this module will include the opportunity to engage with rich exemplars of philosophical-literary endeavour – works that can be life-long companions – and promoting complex thinking about how human beings have investigated reality and sought understanding. This module will complement students' work in other modules, both on philosophy and on literature courses, in various ways: by highlighting features of works (e.g., use of narrative, linguistic invention, imaginative hypotheses, formal argument, impersonal address, emotional appeal, voices of doubt and authority) that often cannot be given explicit attention in philosophy modules, and by giving works that may often be classified as literature a chance to be studied for their philosophical significance. The module aims to be a setting for constructive, mutually enlightening conversation across the disciplines.

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.

After an introduction to the goals of the module, with reference to historically influential sources, the module will focus on a series of topics, devoting 1-2 weeks to each topic. The topics will highlight broadly methodological or substantive issues relevant to philosophy and literature. Each unit will incorporate study of one or two literary-philosophical texts that engage with the issues. Possible topics include: Truth and fiction, Narrative and self, Imagination and thought experiment, Wholes and fragments, Dialogue and argument, Idealisation, Authors and authority, Ethical relevance of emotions, Consciousness, Faith and doubt, and Characters and character. The diverse criteria of evaluation within philosophical and literary practices will be up for discussion throughout the module.

Learning outcomes

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

- **Key Skills:** use written communication skills to analyse and respond critically to main issues; use research skills, drawing on print and electronic resources, to initiate and de-limit a scholarly project; take responsibility for learning, showing ability to manage time and prepare for class meetings and assignments
- **Subject knowledge and understanding:** develop and communicate knowledge of exemplars that combine philosophical and literary projects; consolidate complex understanding of methodological and substantive issues that emerge from study of exemplary texts and theoretical positions
- **Cognitive Skills:** ability to distinguish relevant features of texts and to consider underlying questions raised by those features; ability to work with abstract concepts and show understanding of forms of evidence relevant to theoretical questions; ability to develop an argument that addresses a key question in a focused way
- **Subject-Specific Skills/Professional Skills:** ability to carry out close reading of texts of different kinds, showing sensitivity to forms of language and discourse; ability to consider connections and contrasts between literary and philosophical methods and goals; competence in consistent, scholarly citation of research sources

Indicative reading list

The following shows some clusters of readings suitable for a set of representative topics. Lists of further possible topics, authors and readings follow at the end.

Note: when a book is listed, normally a chapter or excerpt from the book will be selected.

Narrative and self:

Daniel Dennett, 'The self as a center of narrative gravity'

Peter Lamarque, 'On not expecting too much from narrative'

Paul Ricoeur, 'Life in quest of narrative'

Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*; 'Life imitating art imitating life'

Galen Strawson, 'Against narrative'

Literary-philosophical sources, e.g., Augustine, Borges, Evans, Jen, Munro, Rousseau

Epistemic values:

Catherine Elgin, *True Enough*; 'Understanding: art and science'

Stacie Friend, 'Believing in stories'

Peter Lamarque, 'Cognitive values in the arts: marking the boundaries'

Hilary Putnam, 'Literature, science, and reflection'

Catherine Wilson, 'Literature and knowledge'

Literary-philosophical sources, e.g., Bernstein, Calvino, Dickinson, McPherson, Paley, Plato

Representation and conceptualization of consciousness

Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*

Jaakko Hintikka, 'Virginia Woolf and our knowledge of the external world'

David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel*

Kendall Walton, 'Thought-writing—in poetry and music'

Virginia Woolf, 'Modern fiction'

Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*

Literary-philosophical sources, e.g., Ashbery, Cortázar, Davis, Gogol, Wittgenstein, Wordsworth

Fiction, reading and ethical formation:

Wayne Booth, *The Company We Keep*

Joshua Landy, *How to Do Things with Fictions*

Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*

Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason*

Eleanor Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*

Literary-philosophical sources, e.g., Biblical parables, Chekhov, Erpenbeck, Devi, Melville, Spark

List of further representative topics:

- Imagination and thought experiment
- Wholes and fragments
- Dialogue and debate
- Idealisation
- Authors and authority
- General and particular thought
- Transparency and opacity of language

- Ethical relevance of emotion
- Representation and ethical recognition
- Doubt, despair, nihilism
- Characters and character
- Allegory, parable, fable
- Evaluative criteria (e.g., expression, truth, justification, understanding, question-raising, originality, explanatory force, uniqueness, universality, internal coherence, consistency with intuitions, satisfaction of desires, disruption, diversity of perspective, exploring possibility space, political critique, artistic value, cognitive value, ethical value)

List of representative authors:

(sample of authors from the philosophical canon)

Heraclitus, Plato, Lucretius, Augustine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Wittgenstein

(sample of authors working in short story or novella form)

Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Anton Chekhov, Julio Cortázar, Lydia Davis, Mahasweta Devi, Jenny Erpenbeck, Danielle Evans, Nikolai Gogol, Henry James, Gish Jen, Franz Kafka, James Alan McPherson, Herman Melville, Alice Munro, Grace Paley, Muriel Spark, William Trevor

(sample of poets)

A.R. Ammons, John Ashbery, Charles Bernstein, Elizabeth Bishop, Anne Carson, Emily Dickinson, Robert Gray, Marianne Moore, Denise Riley, Wallace Stevens, William Wordsworth

Further representative readings:

Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds*

Gregory Currie,

Jed Deppman, *Trying to Think with Emily Dickinson*

Cora Diamond, essays in *The Realistic Spirit*

Susan Feagin, *Reading with Feeling*

Tamar Gendler, *Thought Experiment: On the Powers and Limits of Imaginary Cases*

John Gibson, ed., *The Philosophy of Poetry*

Garry Hagberg, ed., *Fictional Characters, Real Problems*

Wolfgang Huemer, John Gibson, and Luca Poggi, eds., *A Sense of the World: Essays on Fiction, Narrative, and Knowledge*

Peter Kivy, *The Performance of Reading*

Peter Lamarque, *The Opacity of Narrative; 'Poetry and abstract thought'*

Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*

Ben Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry*

Jerrold Levinson, ed., *Aesthetics and Ethics*

Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*

Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*

Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness; Love's Knowledge; Poetic Justice*

Richard Posner, *'Against ethical criticism'*

Kathleen Stock, *Only Imagine: Fiction, Interpretation and Imagination*

Martin Warner, *The Aesthetics of Argument; Philosophical Finesse*

Morris Weitz, *Philosophy in Literature*

Research element

Essay assignment, requiring research

Interdisciplinary

Incorporates study of philosophy and literature

International

Source texts will be drawn from international literary and philosophical traditions (working in translation with texts written in languages other than English).

Subject specific skills

Subject-Specific Skills/Professional Skills: ability to carry out close reading of texts of different kinds, showing sensitivity to forms of language and discourse; ability to consider connections and contrasts between literary and philosophical methods and goals; competence in consistent, scholarly citation of research sources

Transferable skills

Key Skills: use written communication skills to analyse and respond critically to main issues; use research skills, drawing on print and electronic resources, to initiate and de-limit a scholarly project; take responsibility for learning, showing ability to manage time and prepare for class meetings and assignments

Cognitive Skills: ability to distinguish relevant features of texts and to consider underlying questions raised by those features; ability to work with abstract concepts and show understanding of forms of evidence relevant to theoretical questions; ability to develop an argument that addresses a main question in a focused way

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
Seminars	8 sessions of 1 hour (5%)
Private study	74 hours (49%)
Assessment	50 hours (33%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Reading and note-taking for each week's lectures and seminar; research and writing for two short essays and one longer essay

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A1

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
Short essay 1 Short analysis of and response to a core reading	10%	5 hours	Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
Short essay 2 Short analysis of and response to a core reading	10%	5 hours	Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
2500 word essay Research essay showing independent response to a key question on the module	80%	40 hours	Yes (extension)

Weighting

Study time

Eligible for self-certification

Reassessment component is the same

Feedback on assessment

Written comments using the Philosophy Department feedback form

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- UPHA-V700 Undergraduate Philosophy
 - Year 2 of V700 Philosophy
 - Year 3 of V700 Philosophy
- Year 4 of UPHA-V701 Undergraduate Philosophy (with Intercalated year)
- Year 4 of UPHA-V702 Undergraduate Philosophy (with Work Placement)

This module is Core option list A for:

- Year 3 of UMAA-GV17 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy
- Year 3 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Core option list B for:

- Year 2 of UMAA-GV17 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy
- Year 2 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Core option list C for:

- Year 4 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Option list A for:

- UPHA-VL78 BA in Philosophy with Psychology
 - Year 2 of VL78 Philosophy with Psychology
 - Year 3 of VL78 Philosophy with Psychology

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy

- UPHA-VQ72 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature
 - Year 2 of VQ72 Philosophy and Literature
 - Year 3 of VQ72 Philosophy and Literature