

PH384-15 Topics in Philosophy and Literature

23/24

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 alike in being practices in which language is used as a central medium for reflecting on fundamental questions about reality. While their concerns thus overlap, these practices also seem to differ in their priorities, achievements and methods. This module combines two ways of studying these practices: (1) the philosophy of literature, looking at how philosophers understand key elements of literature, such as fiction, narrative, ethical and emotional engagement; and (2) study of works that combine philosophical and literary projects. Think for instance of Plato's dialogues and Nietzsche's epigrams. Putting these kinds of study together will allow us to think about the deeper relations between philosophy and literature. Do these ways of pursuing fundamental questions complement or conflict with each other? How do their respective methods and achievements illuminate our needs for experience and understanding? We will read some classic and contemporary research in philosophy of literature, as well as some short literary and literary-philosophical works. The topics will vary, to allow focus on texts and questions relevant to lecturers' research expertise and interests; substantive issues that could be addressed include conceptions of truth and knowledge, the value of empathy, the nature of fictional characters, and relations between narrative and self.

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 goals relevant to addressing fundamental human concerns is basic to both literature and philosophy. 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 examples of philosophical-literary endeavour – works that can be life-long companions – and to develop complex understanding of how human beings investigate and interpret reality. This module will complement students' work in other modules, in both philosophy and literature: by highlighting the various features of works (e.g., use of thought experiments, formal argument, metaphor, impersonal address, emotional appeal) that may not be given explicit attention in philosophy modules, and by giving works classified as literature a chance to be studied for their philosophical significance. The module aims to promote constructive 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 address both methodological and substantive issues relevant to philosophy and literature. Each unit will include study of one or two literary-philosophical texts that engage with the issues. Possible topics include: The nature of fiction, Narrative and self, Imagination and thought experiment, Epistemic values, Dialogue and argument, Emotion and fiction, Authors and authority, Ethical value of literature, Representation and reality.

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 key texts and theories
- Cognitive Skills: ability to distinguish relevant features of texts and to consider underlying questions raised by them; ability to apply abstract concepts; ability to seek and use 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.

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

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'

Richard Eldridge, 'The question of truth in literature'

Martha Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge

Hilary Putnam, 'Literature, science, and reflection'

Catherine Wilson, 'Literature and knowledge'

Gregory Currie, Imagining and Knowing

Literary-philosophical sources, e.g., Heraclitus, Charles Bernstein, Italo Calvino, Charles Johnson,

Emily Dickinson, James McPherson, Elizabeth Bishop, Plato

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'

John Christman, 'Telling Our Own Stories: Narrative Selves and Oppressive Circumstance'

Literary-philosophical sources, e.g., Augustine, Nikolai Gogol, J. L. Borges, Gabrielle Evans, Gish

Jen, J-J Rousseau

The nature of fiction:

Margaret Macdonald, 'The Language of Fiction'

Amie Thomasson, Fiction and Metaphysics

Peter van Inwagen, 'Fiction and Metaphysics'

Stacie Friend, 'Imagining Fact and Fiction'

Catharine Abell, Fiction

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

Literary-philosophical sources: e.g., Julio Cortazar, Alice Munro, Nana Nkweti, Franz Kafka, Søren

Kierkegaard, Nietzsche

Representation, consciousness and reality

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

Dorrit Cohn, Transparent Minds

Literary-philosophical sources, e.g., John Ashbery, Lydia Davis, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Virginia

Woolf, William Wordsworth, Anne Carson

Literature 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*
Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*
Derek Attridge, 'A Yes Without a No'
Cora Diamond, 'Having a rough story about what moral philosophy is'
Literary-philosophical sources, e.g., Biblical parables, Anton Chekhov, Jenny Erpenbeck, Mahasweti Devi, Herman Melville, Muriel Spark, J. M. Coetzee

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 a focused argument that addresses a question

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 A2

	Weighting	Study time
Short essay 1	10%	5 hours
Short analysis of and response to a core reading		
Short essay 2	10%	5 hours
Short analysis of and response to a core reading		
2500 word essay	80%	40 hours
Research essay showing independent response to a key question on the module		

Feedback on assessment

Written comments using either the feedback box on tabula or the Philosophy Department feedback form

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- UPHA-L1CA Undergraduate Economics, Psychology and Philosophy
 - Year 2 of L1CA Economics, Psychology and Philosophy
 - Year 2 of L1CC Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Behavioural Economics Pathway)
 - Year 2 of L1CD Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Economics with Philosophy Pathway)
 - Year 2 of L1CE Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Philosophy and Psychology Pathway)
 - Year 3 of L1CA Economics, Psychology and Philosophy
 - Year 3 of L1CC Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Behavioural Economics Pathway)
 - Year 3 of L1CD Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Economics with Philosophy Pathway)
 - Year 3 of L1CE Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Philosophy and Psychology Pathway)
- UPHA-L1CB Undergraduate Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of L1CG Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Behavioural Economics Pathway) (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of L1CH Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Economics with Philosophy Pathway) (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of L1CJ Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Philosophy and Psychology Pathway) (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of L1CB Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of L1CB Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (with Intercalated Year)
- UPHA-V700 Undergraduate Philosophy
 - Year 2 of V700 Philosophy
 - Year 2 of V700 Philosophy
 - Year 3 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)
- UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
 - Year 2 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 2 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 2 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 3 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 3 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 3 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
- UPHA-V7MW Undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Law
 - Year 2 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law
 - Year 2 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law

- Year 3 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law
- Year 3 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law
- Year 4 of UPHA-V7MX Undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Law (with Intercalated Year)

This module is Unusual option for:

- UPHA-L1CA Undergraduate Economics, Psychology and Philosophy
 - Year 2 of L1CA Economics, Psychology and Philosophy
 - Year 2 of L1CC Economics, Psychology and Philosophy (Behavioural Economics Pathway)
 - Year 3 of L1CA Economics, Psychology and Philosophy
- UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
 - Year 2 of V7MR Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite with Economics Major)
 - Year 2 of V7MP Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite)
 - Year 2 of V7MP Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite)
 - Year 2 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 2 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 2 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 3 of V7MR Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite with Economics Major)
 - Year 3 of V7MP Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite)
 - Year 3 of V7MP Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite)
- UPHA-V7MM Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics (with Intercalated year)
 - Year 4 of V7MS Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite with Economics Major) (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of V7MS Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite with Economics Major) (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of V7MQ Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite) with Intercalated Year
 - Year 4 of V7MM Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite) (with Intercalated year)
- UPHA-V7MW Undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Law
 - Year 2 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law
 - Year 2 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law
 - Year 3 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law
 - Year 3 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law
- Year 4 of UPHA-V7MX Undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Law (with Intercalated Year)

This module is Core option list A for:

- UMAA-GV17 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy
 - Year 3 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
 - Year 3 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
 - Year 3 of GV17 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:

- UMAA-GV17 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy
 - Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy

- Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
- Year 2 of GV17 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 Core option list F for:

- UMAA-GV18 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Intercalated Year
 - Year 4 of GV18 Mathematics and Philosophy with Intercalated Year
 - Year 4 of GV18 Mathematics and Philosophy with Intercalated Year

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
- Year 2 of UPHA-VQ52 Undergraduate Philosophy, Literature and Classics
- UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
 - Year 2 of V7MP Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite)
 - Year 2 of V7MP Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite)

This module is Option list C for:

- UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
 - Year 3 of V7MP Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite)
 - Year 3 of V7MP Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite)
 - Year 3 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 3 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
 - Year 3 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
- UPHA-V7MM Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics (with Intercalated year)
 - Year 4 of V7MS Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite with Economics Major) (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of V7MS Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite with Economics Major) (with Intercalated Year)
 - Year 4 of V7MQ Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite) with Intercalated Year
 - Year 4 of V7MM Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite) (with Intercalated year)

This module is Option list D for:

- UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
 - Year 2 of V1V5 History and Philosophy
 - Year 3 of V1V5 History and Philosophy
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V8 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V6 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad)
- UHIA-V1V7 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)
 - Year 2 of V1V7 History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)
 - Year 3 of V1V7 History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)
- UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
 - Year 2 of V7MR Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite with Economics Major)
 - Year 3 of V7MR Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite with Economics Major)