

PH384-15 Topics in Philosophy and Literature

26/27

Department

Philosophy

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Eileen John

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

Multiple

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 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 questions raised by 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

- Key skills: ability to make constructive contributions to seminar discussion that evidence preparation; communicate clearly and to provide reasons for views expressed; interact respectfully with peers in whole and small group discussion.

Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

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	18 sessions of 1 hour (12%)
Seminars	8 sessions of 1 hour (5%)
Private study	124 hours (83%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Reading and note-taking for each week's lectures and seminar; research and writing for one short essay 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 A3

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Short essay 1	10%		Yes (extension)
Short analysis of and response to a core reading			
2500 word essay	80%		Yes (extension)
Research essay showing independent response to a key question on the module			
Seminar participation	10%		No

Assessment group R

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
3000 word essay	100%		Yes (extension)

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:

- Any Honours course in Arts and Social Sciences
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