

The Philosophy of Fiction

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1. Course Aims and Objectives

This course will introduce and examine a number of philosophical issues raised by fiction, covering topics at the intersection of aesthetics and epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophies of language and mind: the nature of fiction; whether fictional characters exist and if so, what they are; whether fiction can be used as a model for how to 'explain away' apparent commitment to the existence of problematic kind of objects (such as numbers, electrons, or moral properties); whether we can gain real-world knowledge from engaging with fiction; the problem of "imaginative resistance" (why we seemingly cannot 'suspend disbelief' on things like principles of morality when engaging with fiction); and the "paradox of fiction" (how can we, for example, fear Darth Vader when we don't believe he really exists), and whether we need a new psychological state (an 'alief' in Gendler's terminology) to solve it. In this course, we will gain familiarity with these issues and with the main approaches that philosophers have proposed in response, we will critically evaluate these responses, and we will consider the bearing of these issues about fiction on broader issues within philosophy and more generally.

2. Intended Learning Outcomes

This course will allow students to demonstrate core skills in philosophy, including interpreting and critically engaging with philosophical texts, evaluating arguments and theories, and developing one's own ideas in response to the issues discussed. Students will read a mixture of classic and contemporary texts on the philosophy of fiction, and will acquire knowledge of the main theories of the nature of fiction and fictional characters, and the main responses to problems like the paradox of fiction and the puzzle of imaginative resistance.

3. Course Content

The main text for the course is R. M. Sainsbury's *Fiction and Fictionalism*, 2010, Routledge. The entire book is available online through the library, but it's also available as a relatively affordable paperback if you would like your own copy.

Week 1 What is Fiction?

Primary Reading

Kathleen Stock, 2011, 'Fictive Utterance and Imagining', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 85: 145-61. Available online through University library.

Stacie Friend, 2011, 'Fictive Utterance and Imagining II', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 85*: 163-80. Available online through University library.

Background Reading

R. M. Sainsbury, 2010, *Fiction and Fictionalism*, Routledge, chapter 1.

Advanced Reading

Stacie Friend, 2012, 'Fiction as a Genre', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 112: 179-209. Available online through University library.

Kendall Walton, 1990, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Harvard University Press.

Gregory Currie, 1990, *The Nature of Fiction*, Cambridge University Press.

Week 2 Truth in Fiction

Primary Reading

R. M. Sainsbury, 2010, *Fiction and Fictionalism*, Routledge, chapter 4. (If you're unfamiliar with Lewis's views and with appeals to possible worlds, please read this chapter before attempting Lewis's paper.)

David Lewis, 1978, 'Truth in Fiction', reprinted in David Lewis, 1983, *Philosophical Papers Volume I*, 261-75. Available online through University library.

Please also read 'Postscript C' to Lewis's paper, on pages 278-9 – it'll only take a minute or two and it'll be important for next week.

Background Reading

Richard Woodward, 2011, 'Truth in Fiction', *Philosophy Compass*, 158-67.

Advanced Reading

Alex Byrne, 1993, 'Truth in Fiction: The Story Continued', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71: 24-35. Available at: <http://web.mit.edu/abyrne/www/truthinfiction.pdf>

R. M. Sainsbury, 2014, 'Fictional Worlds and Fictional Operators', in Manuel Garcia-Carpintero and Genoveva Marti (eds.), *Empty Representations: Reference and Non-Existence*, Oxford University Press, 277-89. Available online through University library.

Gregory Currie, 1990, *The Nature of Fiction*, Cambridge University Press.

Week 3 Learning from Fiction

Primary Reading

Stacie Friend, 2014, 'Believing in Stories', in Greg Currie, Matthew Kieran, Aaron Meskin, and Jon Robson (eds), *Aesthetics and the Sciences of the Mind*, Oxford University Press, 227-48. Available online through University library.

Background Reading

The readings for week 2.

Advanced Reading

Rae Langton and Caroline West, 1999, 'Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 77, 303-19. Available online through University library.

Week 4 The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance

Primary Reading

Tamar Gendler, 2000, 'The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance', reprinted in Tamar Gendler, 2009, *Intuition, Imagination, and Philosophical Methodology*, Oxford University Press, 179-202. Available online through University library.

Advanced Reading

Tamar Gendler, 2006, 'Imaginative Resistance Revisited', reprinted in Tamar Gendler, 2009, *Intuition, Imagination, and Philosophical Methodology*, Oxford University Press, 203-26. Available online through University library.

Brian Weatherson, 2004, 'Morality, Fiction, and Possibility', *Philosophers' Imprint* 4, 1-27. Available online.

Kathleen Stock, 2005, 'Resisting Imaginative Resistance', *Philosophical Quarterly* 55, 607-24.

Cain Todd, 2009, 'Imaginability, Morality, and Fictional Truth: Dissolving the Puzzle of 'Imaginative Resistance'', *Philosophical Studies* 143, 187-211.

Kendall Walton, 1994, 'Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 68: 27-66.

Week 5 The Paradox of Fiction

Primary Reading

Kendall Walton, 1978, 'Fearing Fictions', *Journal of Philosophy* 75: 5-27. Available through JSTOR.

R. M. Sainsbury, 2010, *Fiction and Fictionalism*, Routledge, chapter 1, section 4, 12-20.

Background Reading

Colin Radford, 1975, 'How Can We Be Moved By the Fate of Anna Karenina', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 45: 67-80. Available through JSTOR.

Advanced Reading

Shannon Spaulding, forthcoming, 'Imagination, Desire, and Rationality', *Journal of Philosophy*. Available online at: <http://philpapers.org/archive/SPAIRA.pdf>

Kendall Walton, 1990, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Harvard University Press.

Week 6 Alief

Primary Reading

Tamar Gendler, 2008, 'Alief in Action (and Reaction)', reprinted in Tamar Gendler, 2009, *Intuition, Imagination, and Philosophical Methodology*, Oxford University Press, 282-310. Available online through University library.

Background Reading

Tamar Gendler, 2008, 'Alief and Belief', reprinted in Tamar Gendler, 2009, *Intuition, Imagination, and Philosophical Methodology*, Oxford University Press, 255-81. Available online through University library.

Advanced Reading

Kengo Miyazono and Shen-yi Liao, forthcoming, 'The Cognitive Architecture of Imaginative Resistance', in Amy Kind, forthcoming, *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*, Routledge. Available online at: <http://philpapers.org/archive/MIYTCA.pdf>

There's lots of recent papers arguing against acknowledge aliefs as mental states – try searching for 'alief' on philpapers.org

Week 7 Realism about fictional characters

Primary Reading

R. M. Sainsbury, 2010, *Fiction and Fictionalism*, Routledge, chapters 3 and 4.

Background Reading

Stacie Friend, 2007, 'Fictional Characters', *Philosophy Compass* 2.
Available at https://www.academia.edu/1430745/Fictional_characters, or you can download through the University library.

Advanced Reading

Peter van Inwagen, 1977, 'Creatures of Fiction', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14: 299-308. Available online through JSTOR.

Amie Thomasson, 1999, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, Cambridge University Press.

Saul Kripke, 2013, *Reference and Existence*, Oxford University Press.

Week 8 Irrealism about fictional characters part 1

Primary Reading

R. M. Sainsbury, 2010, *Fiction and Fictionalism*, Routledge, chapter 6.

Background Reading

Stacie Friend, 2007, 'Fictional Characters', *Philosophy Compass* 2.
Available at https://www.academia.edu/1430745/Fictional_characters, or you can download through the University library.

Advanced Reading

Kendall Walton, 1990, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Harvard University Press.

Week 9 Irrealism about fictional characters part 2

Reading are the same as for week 8, with the focus remaining on Sainsbury chapter 6.

Week 10 Fictionalism

Primary Reading

R. M. Sainsbury, 2010, *Fiction and Fictionalism*, Routledge, chapter 7.

Background Reading

Matti Eklund, 2011, 'Fictionalism', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available online.

Advanced Reading

R. M. Sainsbury, 2010, *Fiction and Fictionalism*, Routledge, chapters 8, 9, and 10.

Each of Sainsbury's chapters ends with a 'further reading' section – try there for further suggestions.

Week 11 Revision