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 one 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

Week 1 What is Fiction?

Primary Reading


**Background Reading**


**Advanced Reading**


**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.)


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**


**Advanced Reading**


Week 3 Learning from Fiction

Primary Reading


Background Reading

The readings for week 2.

Advanced Reading


Week 4 The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance 1

Primary Reading


Background Reading


Advanced Reading


Kathleen Stock, 2017, Only Imagine: chapter 4, 121-44.


**Week 5 The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance 2**

*Primary Reading*


*Advanced Reading*


**Week 6 The Paradox of Fiction 1**

*Primary Reading*


*Background Reading*


*Advanced Reading*


**Week 7 The Paradox of Fiction 2: Alief**

*Primary Reading*


*Background Reading*


*Advanced Reading*


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

**Week 8 Realism about fictional characters**

*Primary Reading*


*Background Reading*

Stacie Friend, 2007, ‘Fictional Characters’, *Philosophy Compass* 2. Available at [https://www.academia.edu/1430745/Fictional_characters](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.

Week 9 Irrealism about fictional characters

Primary Reading


Background Reading

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

Advanced Reading


Week 10 Fictionalism

Primary Reading


Background Reading


Advanced Reading


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

Week 11 Revision