

THE PHILOSOPHY OF FICTION (PHIL10153)

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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, epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophies of language and mind. For instance: What can be made of emotional responses to fiction: are these responses themselves a kind of make-believe, or are they authentic? Can it ever be rational to respond emotionally to characters and narratives we know to be fictitious? What are the interrelationships between fiction, aesthetic value, and ethics? Are, for instance, morally abhorrent works of fiction *ipso facto* aesthetically flawed? How can we understand truth in fiction (e.g. the truth that Sherlock Holmes is a detective)? Do truths about non-existent objects require there to *be* non-existent objects, about which our claims can be true? How can we learn from fiction; how can descriptions of what is unreal furnish us with knowledge of what *is* real? It is increasingly acknowledged that fictions can play an important role in scientific theorising? Do fictions in science obstruct or enhance scientific understanding? Finally, philosophers have explored the possibilities that areas of practice and discourse such as mathematics, morality and religion can be best understood as themselves kinds of fiction. We explore mathematical, moral, and religious *fictionalism*.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. 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
2. Acquire knowledge of the main theories of the nature of fiction, central philosophical issues surrounding fiction, and important varieties of fictionalism
3. Analyze the strengths and weakness of these theories and responses

ASSESSMENT

This course will be assessed by two pieces of writing: a midterm essay of 1500 words, due in October (worth 40% of the total grade), and a final essay of 2500 words (worth 60% of the total grade). More information, including dates and topics, will be announced during the course.

CONTACT TIME

The course content will be delivered by a weekly two hour seminar, which will run for eleven weeks. You are expected to read the set texts in advance of the seminars, and to be prepared to discuss them in detail. In addition to the seminar, I will be available to answer any questions about the course or the readings at my office hour. If meeting during my office hour is not possible, please feel welcome to arrange another time to talk.

TOPICS AND READINGS

WEEK 1 | What is fiction?

Essential reading

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

Further reading

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

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

Deep dives

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

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

WEEK 2 | The paradox of fiction

Essential reading

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

Further 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.

Lamarque, P. (1981) 'How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions?', in *British Journal of Aesthetics*.

Shannon Spaulding, forthcoming, 'Imagination, Desire, and Rationality', *Journal of Philosophy*.

Deep dives

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

Jenefer Robinson, 2005, *Deeper Than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art*, OUP.

WEEK 3 | Aesthetic value and ethical value in fiction

Essential reading

Carroll, Noël. "Moderate Moralism." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36 (1996): 223–238.

Anderson, James, and Jeffrey Dean. "Moderate Autonomism." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 38 (1998): 150–166.

Further reading

Eaton, A. (2012). Robust Immoralism. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 70(3), 281-292

Deep dives

Berys Gaut, 2007, *Art, Emotion and Ethics*, OUP.

WEEK 4 | The semantics and metaphysics of fiction (I)

Essential reading

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

David Lewis, 1978, 'Truth in Fiction', reprinted in David Lewis, 1983, *Philosophical Papers Volume I*, 261-75.

Further reading

Alex Byrne, 1993, 'Truth in Fiction: The Story Continued', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71: 24-35.

Nolt, John, "Free Logic", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/logic-free/>>.

Deep dives

Priest, Graham, 2005, *Towards Non-Being. The Logic and Metaphysics of Intentionality*, Oxford: Clarendon.

Sainsbury, R.M. (2005), *Reference Without Referents*. OUP.

WEEK 5 | The semantics and metaphysics of fiction (II)

Essential reading

van Inwagen, Peter. "Creatures of Fiction." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977): 299–308.

Further reading

Everett, Anthony. "Pretense, Existence, and Fictional Objects." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74 (2007): 56–80.

Kroon, Fred and Voltolini, Alberto, "Fictional Entities", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/fictional-entities/>>.

Reicher, Maria, "Nonexistent Objects", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/nonexistent-objects/>>.

Rorty, Richard. "Is There a Problem About Fictional Discourse?" In *Consequences of Pragmatism*. By Richard Rorty, 110–138. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982.

Thomasson, Amie L. "Fictional Characters and Literary Practices." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43 (2003): 138–157.

Deep dives

Azzouni, Jody, 2010, *Talking about Nothing: Numbers, Hallucinations, and Fictions*, New York: Oxford University Press.

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

WEEK 6 | Learning from fiction

Essential 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.

Further reading

O'Brien, L. (2017) 'The Novel as a Source of Self-Knowledge', in *Art and Belief*, Sullivan-Bissett, E., Bradley, H., Noordhof, P. (Eds.)

Pippin, Robert (2009). What Is a Western? Politics and Self-Knowledge in John Ford's *The Searchers*. *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2):223-253.

Pippin, Robert B. (2011). Agency and Fate in Orson Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai*. *Critical Inquiry* 37 (2):214-244.

Stump, Eleonore (2009), 'Modes of Knowing: Autism, Fiction, and Second-Person Perspectives'. *Faith and Philosophy*, 25(5), 553-565.

Stump, E. (2010). 'The Story of Job: Suffering and the Second-Personal.' In *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*.: Oxford University Press.

Deep dives

Berys Gaut, 2007, *Art, Emotion and Ethics*, OUP.

Gibson, John (2007). *Fiction and the Weave of Life*. OUP.

WEEK 7 | Fictions in science

Essential reading

Catherine Z. Elgin - Exemplification, Idealization, and Scientific Understanding <<http://elgin.harvard.edu/exemplification/scirep.pdf>>

Further reading

Fictions in Science: Essays on Idealization and Modeling, ed. Mauricio Suárez, London: Routledge, 2009

Deep dives

Elgin, Catherine Z. *True Enough*. The MIT Press, 2017.

WEEK 8 | Mathematical fictionalism

Essential reading

Long, Mary (2010), 'Mathematics and Make-Believe', in *Mathematics and Reality*, OUP.

Further reading

Balaguer, Mark, "Fictionalism in the Philosophy of Mathematics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/fictionalism-mathematics/>>.

Burgess, John P. (2004), 'Mathematics and Bleak House', *Philosophia Mathematica* 12, 18-36.

Leng, Mary, 'Fictionalism in the Philosophy of Mathematics', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Deep dives

Field, Hartry, (2016), *Science Without Numbers* (2nd edition). OUP.

Leng, Mary (2010), *Mathematics and Reality*, OUP.

WEEK 9 | Moral fictionalism

Essential reading

Joyce, R. (2016). 'Moral Fictionalism.' In *Essays in Moral Skepticism.*, OUP.

Further reading

Husi, S. (2014). Against Moral Fictionalism. *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 11(1), 80-96.

Nadeem J. Z. Hussain. (2004). The Return of Moral Fictionalism. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 18, 149-187.

Daniel Nolan, Greg Restall & Caroline West (2005) Moral fictionalism versus the rest, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 83:3, 307-330

Deep dives

Joyce, R. (2002). *The Myth of Morality*, Cambridge University Press.

Kalderon, Mark (2005). *Moral Fictionalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

WEEK 10 | Religious fictionalism

Essential reading

Scott, M, Malcolm, F. Religious fictionalism. *Philosophy Compass*. 2018; 13:e12474.

Further reading

Cordry, B. (2010). A critique of religious fictionalism. *Religious Studies*, 46(1), 77-89.

Eshleman, A. (2010). Religious fictionalism defended: Reply to Cordry. *Religious Studies*, 46(1), 91-96.

Sauchelli, A. (2018). The Will to Make-Believe: Religious Fictionalism, Religious Beliefs, and the Value of Art. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 96(3), 620-635.

Deep dives

Le Poidevin, R. (2019). *Religious fictionalism* (Cambridge elements. Elements in the philosophy of religion). Cambridge University Press.

WEEK 11 | Choose your own adventure

Revision week.

Please note the syllabus may be subject to minor changes.

FURTHER READINGS AND ESSAY WRITING

In completing this course you will learn to become effective researchers. To this end, while readings are supplied each week, it is up to you to conduct your own research and seek out further secondary sources that will aid you in understanding these topics. Four sources may be particularly useful:

[DiscoverEd](#)

DiscoverEd is the Library's discovery service. Use it to search the Library's collections: this includes books, e-books, journal titles, journal articles, databases and more. Use EASE to sign into your Library Account and manage loans, renewals, requests and fines.

[The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.](#)

This provides introductory encyclopaedia articles, written by experts, on many topics in philosophy. As well as providing a useful introduction to the topics at hand, the readings lists at the bottom of each article can be used to guide further research. The IEP is freely accessible online.

[The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.](#)

Like the IEP, the SEP also provides encyclopaedia articles, written by experts, on many topics in philosophy. These tend to be slightly longer and more detailed, but also more difficult, than IEP entries. As before, the reference list at the bottom of each article can be used to guide further research. The SEP is freely accessible online.

[Oxford Bibliographies](#)

Oxford Bibliographies provides research guides in the form of annotated bibliographies compiled by experts in their given field. This is available online through the library tab in MyEd.