

PHIL 375: Philosophy and Literature

Summer Term 1, 2025

SYLLABUS

This course takes place on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) People.

In this course, we will explore literature as a mode of philosophizing: that is to say, *a way of doing philosophy*. In many traditions of thought, novels, poetry, plays, and other literary forms are used to explore and communicate philosophical theories and problems, to spark ideas and conversations, and to inspire change, both individual and social. In the first half of the semester, we will study and discuss a range of examples of philosophical literature, analysing their various techniques, strategies, strengths, and weaknesses. In the second half, students will create and workshop their own philosophical writing. Each student may choose their own preferred genre to write in.

Instructor

Carrie Jenkins, carrie.jenkins@ubc.ca

Teaching Assistants

TBA

Email enquiries

Please put PHIL375 in the subject line. I aim to reply withing two working days of receipt. (Working days do not include weekends or UBC holidays.) If you don't hear back within two working days, please feel free to send a follow-up.

Office hours

Tuesday and Thursday, 10-11am, ONLINE

The Zoom link can be found on Canvas.

If you can't make these times, please email me for an appointment.

Canvas

<https://canvas.ubc.ca/courses/165821>

iClicker

TBA

Please register for iClicker if you haven't used it before.

Class times

Tu Th 4-7pm, ONLINE

The Zoom link can be found on Canvas.

This course is synchronous. Students are required to attend class regularly and to participate in class activities.

Learning objectives

1. Acquire a valuable toolkit of conceptual resources, including elements from literary and scholarly traditions of thought;
2. Study relevant works by historical and contemporary philosophers, writers, and philosopher-writers,
3. Develop skills for deep reading, textual analysis, philosophical reasoning, and creative writing;
4. Prepare for advanced undergraduate or graduate study in philosophy and/or creative writing.

Texts

There are three required books of which you need to secure (hard or electronic) copies: *Nausea* by Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Nice and the Good* by Iris Murdoch, and *The Sovereignty of Good* by Iris Murdoch. All other required texts will be made available online. This is not a good course to choose if you don't like reading LOTS! We will be reading two complete novels, and other materials. If reading that much isn't your jam, this course isn't for you.

Assessment

- Participation: 10%
 - Participate regularly and thoughtfully in class activities to earn this part of your grade.
- Essay (critical analysis of philosophical literature studied during the first half of the course): 40%
 - Due: **TBA**
 - Length: Approximately **2000 words**
- Draft of philosophical creative writing: 10%
 - Due: **TBA**
 - Length: Approximately **2000 words**
 - Typically a short story. If you want to write in a different genre, **alternative guidelines should be agreed with the instructor prior to submission.**

- If you wish, you may include a short explanatory statement (up to 300 additional words) about the piece. This is advisable if there are elements of context that may not be evident to readers, but which are important for understanding the work.
- Final piece of philosophical creative writing, revised taking into account peer feedback: 40%
 - Due: **TBA**
 - Length: Approximately **2000 words**
 - If you wish, you may include a short explanatory statement (up to 300 additional words) about the piece. This is advisable if there are elements of context that may not be evident to readers, but which are important for understanding the work.

Course policies

Grading rubric

1. Essays: Each essay should discuss one or more of the set texts covered in this course. Key factors for assessment will be: (a) depth of understanding of the text(s) discussed, (b) clarity and focus, (c) essay structure, and (d) quality of philosophical engagement with the text(s).

2. Creative writing: Specifics will depend on genre (poetry is a different creature from fiction, for example), but in all cases the main factors for assessment will be: (a) creativity and compellingness of the writing, (b) quality of philosophical content, and (c) success in using the chosen form to convey the philosophical ideas.

If you can't do the work on time

I am happy grant extensions where needed; just ask. However, work submitted late *without* an extension cannot be accepted, unless exceptional circumstances made it impossible to request an extension in advance of the deadline. This policy is in place to ensure that the course TAs are able to manage their workload and grade everyone's work fairly.

Note on Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, which is intellectual theft, occurs where an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. However, when another person's words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately

indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else's work as one's own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student's own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments. Please see [UBC's guidance on Academic misconduct](#).

Note on AI

Using generative artificial intelligence such as ChatGPT to do your writing for you will generate a *product* (text), but it will skip over the *process* by which you (yourself) would have generated the product. Learning is a result of the process of thinking and writing; in the absence of that *process*, the textual *product* itself has no value or purpose. What about using AI to “just to edit and refine” your work? I recommend approaching this with extreme caution: the core skill and the gift of a creative thinker and writer is their own voice. There is no substitute.

Mandatory Syllabus Statement about UBC's Values and Policies

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious and cultural observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available [here](#).

Note on atmosphere

Some of the topics of this course may comprise sensitive material for many people. While we may be examining and questioning beliefs, including some deeply-held ones, everyone in the course—instructor, TAs, and students—has a shared responsibility to ensure that we do so with care and respect, ensuring that our environment is supportive and conducive to learning. No offensive jokes or comments, or other harmful behaviors with respect to race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or anything else, will be acceptable. The aim of our online discussions is not to “win” arguments or to prove how smart we are, but to learn collaboratively with others.

Schedule

<p>May 13</p>	<p><i>The relationship between philosophy and literature</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plato: Book X of <i>Republic</i> (any edition) • Lucretius: <u>lines 418-482 of <i>De Rerum Natura</i> translated by William Ellery Leonard</u> (alternative <u>prose translation by W.H.D Rouse</u>) • Audre Lorde: <u>'Poetry is Not a Luxury'</u> • Iris Murdoch: <u>Interview with Brian Magee for <i>Men of Ideas</i></u>
<p>May 15</p>	<p><i>What can stories do? Part I</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrie Jenkins: <u>'Do gender norms enforce a divide between literature and philosophy?'</u> • Aesop: <i>The Hare and the Tortoise</i> • Lewis Carol: <u>'What the Tortoise Said to Achilles'</u> • Gregory Currie: <u>'Does Fiction Make Us Less Empathic?'</u>
<p>May 20 and 22</p>	<p><i>Sartre, plus essay-writing advice</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jean-Paul Sartre: <i>Nausea</i> [content note: suicidal ideation, sexual assault, pedophilia, self-harm, ableism, racist language]
<p>May 27</p>	<p><i>Murdoch's non-fiction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iris Murdoch: Chapter 2 ('On 'God' and 'Good') from <i>The Sovereignty of Good</i>
<p>May 29 and June 3</p>	<p><i>Murdoch's fiction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iris Murdoch: <i>The Nice and the Good</i> [content note: suicide, racist language, pedophilia] There is a helpful introduction by Catherine Bates in the 2000 Vintage edition, which I will post on Canvas for those who have other editions.
<p>June 5</p>	<p><i>What can stories do? Part II</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jorge Luis Borges: Selected short stories (pdfs on Canvas) • Graham Priest: <u>"Sylvan's Box: A Short Story and Ten <u>Morals</u>"</u>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ken Liu: <u>'Excerpt from <i>Theuth, An Oral History of Work in the Age of Machine-Assisted Cognition</i></u>, plus <u>'Story Notes'</u>
June 10 and 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Creative philosophical writing: prompts and practice</i>
June 17 and 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Peer feedback: workshopping drafts in small groups</i>