

Philosophy and Humour

Start date 13th January 2017 **End date** 15th January 2017

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge

Tutor Dr. Alexander Carter **Course code** 1617NRX060

Director of Programmes Emma Jennings

For further information on this course, please contact Public Programme Coordinator, Clare Kerr
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To book See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 746262

Tutor biography

Alex was recently awarded his PhD in Philosophy by the University of Essex. Before this, Alex studied Philosophy & Ancient History at the University of Wales, Swansea and Philosophy at the University of Bristol. He has over four years of teaching experience in Ethics, History of Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion and has worked at the Institute of Continuing Education since 2015 as a Panel Tutor and as Academic Director for Philosophy. Alex's ongoing research interests include the theology of Simone Weil and the ethical philosophy of the "later Wittgenstein".

Course programme

Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00 Dinner

20:30 – 22:00 Session 1: Philosophy & Humour: A double act?
In this introductory session we will ask why philosophy has had difficulty taking humour seriously in the past, and why it is *worth* taking humour seriously today.

22:00 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

Saturday

07:30 Breakfast

09:00 – 10:30 Session 2: Four Theories of Humour
In this session we will examine four, more or less successful, theories concerning what humour consists in.

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30 Session 3: What's Funny about Philosophy?
We will continue by examining some of the surprising, yet varied, methodological similarities between philosophy and humour.

13:00 Lunch

14:00 – 16:00 Free

16:00 Tea

16:30 – 18:00 Session 4: The Strange & The Familiar
We will assess the claim that philosophers and humorists have a similar, other-worldly approach to life, i.e. both view the strange as if it were familiar and the familiar as if it was strange.

18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	<p>Session 5: The Comic, The Tragic & The Absurd</p> <p>Humour comes in many forms, including some which inform the human condition. By examining these ethically significant forms of humour, we will shed some light on what it means to be human.</p>
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

Sunday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	<p>Session 6: "A Serious and Good Philosophical Work..."</p> <p>Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) is reputed to have said that "a serious and good philosophical work could be written consisting entirely of jokes". We will consider what Wittgenstein might have meant by this and what significance can be attached to it.</p>
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	<p>Session 7: Punchline</p> <p>A review of the course as a whole highlighting any potential implications/objections. We will close with a general discussion and Q&A session.</p>
12:45	Lunch

The course will disperse after lunch

Course syllabus

Aims:

- To engage philosophically with a typically informal subject, humour.
- To assess methodologies for investigating humour in a philosophical way.
- To develop general philosophical skills in argumentation and analysis.
- To gain a deeper understanding of humour, a fundamental human trait.

Content:

The course seeks to redress the apparent tensions that exist between humour and Philosophy. We will explore the limited, historical material relating to the Philosophy of humour, including insights from Rene Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Henri Bergson and Ludwig Wittgenstein. We will assess historical and contemporary theories of what humour consists in. The majority of the course, will revolve around questions of how humour informs existential questions of how one ought to live.

Presentation of the course:

The course will comprise formal lectures incorporating interactive presentations and discussion sessions. Throughout each session, students will be invited to reflect, comment and pass judgement on the ideas being introduced. At the end of each session, handouts will be distributed to facilitate independent reading on the topics covered.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

- have an appreciation for historical attitudes to humour.
- apply philosophical methods to new and unusual topics.
- critically assess what humour consists in.

Reading and resources list

Listed below are a number of key texts that it might be beneficial to consult prior to the course, although there is no requirement to do so.

Other reading suggestions can be found at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/humor/#Bib>

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Bergson, Henri	"Laughter, an Essay on the Meaning of the Comic" Available Online: http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4352/4352-h/4352-h.htm	Macmillan, 1900
Carroll, Lewis	"What the Tortoise Said to Achilles" Available Online: http://www.ditext.com/carroll/tortoise.html	Mind 4, No. 14 (1895), pp. 278-280.
Carroll, Noël	Humour: A Very Short Introduction	OUP, 2014
Critchley, Simon	On Humour	Routledge, 2002
Critchley, Simon	"Did You Hear The One...?" Available Online: http://www.richmond-philosophy.net/rjp/back_issues/rjp2_critchley.pdf	Richmond Journal of Philosophy 2, 2002
Russell, Bertrand	"The Professor's Guide to Laughter" Available Online: http://users.drew.edu/jlenz/br-on-bergson1.html	The Cambridge Review 33 (1912), pp. 193-4

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 10 November 16