

## Post-truth and post-satire: thoughtful laughter in an age of confusion

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<b>Start date</b>	23 June 2018	<b>End date</b>	23 June 2018
<b>Venue</b>	Madingley Hall Madingley Cambridge		
<b>Tutor</b>	Tyler Shores & Dr Alex Carter	<b>Course code</b>	1718NDX062

**Interim Co-Directors of Public and Professional Programmes**

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**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746262

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### Tutor biography

Tyler Shores is a PhD student in Education at the University of Cambridge and received his Master's Degree from the University of Oxford. He has worked as part of the University of Cambridge research ThinkLab and will be presenting his research on digital distraction at the 2018 Cambridge Festival of Science. At the University of California, Berkeley, he created and taught a course on The Simpsons and Philosophy — which became one of the most popular courses on campus at the time (with over 500 undergraduate and graduate students attending the first class). Tyler's research interests include the experience of print and digital reading in relation to attention and distraction — and has published scholarly articles and book chapters on social media, and the impact of digital technology in everyday life. Tyler is a regular contributor to the Wiley Blackwell Philosophy and Popular Culture book series, including the recently published LEGO and Philosophy, and other volumes such as Alice in Wonderland and Philosophy. He previously worked at Google on the Authors@Google lecture series, one of the world's largest online lecture series and in online education at Stanford University.

Dr Alex Carter was awarded his PhD in Philosophy by the University of Essex in 2015. Before this, Alex studied Philosophy & Ancient History at the University of Wales, Swansea and Philosophy at the University of Bristol. Alex has taught on a range of subjects including Ethics, History of

Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion. He has worked at the Institute of Continuing Education since 2015 as Academic Director for Philosophy and as a Panel Tutor. Alex's teaching method invites students to feel the "pain of the problem", i.e. to recognise the very real ways in which philosophical problems affect our lives. Accordingly, Alex is most keen to offer his support to philosophical projects that not only inform contemporary debates but actively affect change. Alex's ongoing research interests include the theology of Simone Weil and Ludwig Wittgenstein's ethical philosophy.

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## Course programme

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09:30	Terrace bar open for pre-course tea/coffee
10:00 – 11:15	<b>Are we living in a Post-Satire Era? (Alex Carter)</b>
11:15	Coffee
11:45 – 13:00	<b>Satire, Social Media &amp; <i>The Simpsons</i> (Tyler Shores)</b>
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 15:15	<b>Journalism: Entertainment or Information? (Tyler Shores)</b>
15:15	Tea
15:30 – 16:45	<b>Punchline: Humour &amp; Violence (Alex Carter)</b>
16:45	Day-school ends

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## Course syllabus

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### Aims:

By engaging in philosophical debate, critically assessing arguments and evidence and asking probative questions students will have the opportunity to explore emerging social and political trends.

### Content:

The Day School will explore the narrowing, yet increasingly fractious, relationship between information and entertainment. Our opening question, "Are we living in a post-satire age?", concerns the role humour has played, but may no longer play, in political engagement. Western Democracies share a long tradition of satirising the ruling classes and not simply in order to make us laugh. In recent years, technological developments have altered the cultural landscape such that satirical humour has become increasingly serious, or is it that contemporary politics is *no longer* serious?

Consequently, at a time when reality appears to be stranger than fiction, sources of humour and relevant satire such as (but certainly not limited to) *The Simpsons* can function as something of a

much-needed reality check. In the second session, we will look at the changing nature of political satire, and how humour and parody can make us more critical viewers of the news and information that we consume in many different forms of media.

Increasingly, the line between entertainment and information appears to be increasingly blurred. In our third instalment, we will discuss the importance of situations where there may not still exist a meaningful distinction between the two. We will consider the philosophical foundations of what we find humorous and amusing (and why), and what these things can tell us in a culture of soundbites, six second videos, and a form of information consumption that favours the image over the printed word more than ever.

We will close by looking more closely at the close parallels between humour and violence. Superficial references to violence abound, e.g. “*punchline*”, as well as jokes *about* violence – “No one expects the Spanish Inquisition!” But there is also a sense in which both humour and violence challenge our ways of thinking. The Nazis moved quickly to suppress “subversive” comedy. Why? Because there is no antidote to laughter, except perhaps a bullet.

### **Presentation of the course:**

The Day School will be comprised of formal lectures incorporating interactive presentations and discussion sessions. Throughout each session, students will be invited to reflect, comment and pass judgement on the ideas introduced.

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

- Think critically about not just *what* we consume in information and entertainment, but also the importance of *how* such content is presented to us in the way that it is.
- Discover new ways of engaging with the philosophical questions and issues that are very much embedded in our daily lives and the media that we encounter.
- Encounter new and useful ways of thinking about the ideas that we are exposed to: ideas, assumptions, and values are so ubiquitous that they become invisible — the intent of this course is to make the ordinary and familiar feel slightly less so, and how unfamiliarity can give rise to new thoughtfulness in all of us.

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## Reading and resources list

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Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk \*

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Author	Title	Publisher and date
Gray, Jonathan, Jones, J. P., & Thompson, E.	<i>Satire TV: Politics and comedy in the post-network era</i> [see: Chapter 1 “The State of Satire, the Satire of the State”]	NYU Press, 2009
Morreall, John	<i>Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor</i> [see: Chapter 6 “Having a Good Laugh: The Positive Ethics of Humor”]	Wiley-Blackwell, 2009
Critchley, Simon	<i>On Humour</i> [see: Chapter 6 “The joke’s on all of us - humour as sensus communis”]	Routledge, 2011

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### Website addresses

<http://nautil.us/issue/30/identity/identity-is-an-inside-joke>

<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20160829-how-laughter-makes-us-better-people>

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### Additional information

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#### Venue

Details of how to find Madingley Hall can be found on our website:

<http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk/who-we-are/how-to-find-the-institute>

#### Refreshments

Tea and coffee and lunch will be provided. If you have any specific dietary requirements or allergies and have not already advised us, please inform our Admissions Team on [ice.admissions@ice.cam.ac.uk](mailto:ice.admissions@ice.cam.ac.uk) or +44 (0)1223 746262.

**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:* 21 March 2018