

**Philosophy 240: Philosophical Problems in the Arts**  
Fall 2011

**General information**

Time: MW 1:30 PM – 3:18 PM  
Location: Townshend 255  
Webpage: <http://bdcaplan.com/current-teaching> (click on the 'PHIL 240' tab)

**Instructor** Ben Caplan

Office: 337F University Hall  
Office hours: T 3:30 PM – 5:18 PM, or by appointment  
Phone: 292.7914  
Email: [caplan.16@osu.edu](mailto:caplan.16@osu.edu)

**Graders** John Hurst, Joe Reich

Office: 214 University Hall  
Office hours: M 3:30 PM – 5:30, or by appointment (Hurst)  
M W 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM, or by appointment (Reich)  
Phone: 292.3663  
Email: [hurst.154@osu.edu](mailto:hurst.154@osu.edu), [reich.41@osu.edu](mailto:reich.41@osu.edu)

**Course description**

We'll be talking mainly about fiction and music. Our discussion will be informed, on the one hand, by reading what philosophers have to say about fiction and music and, on the other, by reading some fiction, watching some fiction, and listening to some music. We will be addressing three broad topics: (1) ontology, (2) truth and interpretation, and (3) emotion.

In the first part of the course—on ontology—we will ask (1.1) whether fictional characters really exist and (1.2) what kind of thing a musical work is. In the second part of the course—on truth and interpretation—we will ask (2.1) about the relation between what's true according to the fiction and what's explicitly stated in the text and (2.2.) about how the genre or category that a work of art belongs affects how we interpret it. In the third part of the course—on emotion—we will ask (3.1) how we can care about what happens to fictional characters in the fiction when we know that nothing of the sort happens to real people outside of the fiction and (3.2) about what makes musical works sad or happy.

This is going to be a discussion-based course. (If you expect me to lecture for the entire class period, you will be disappointed.) I'm going to be presenting you with some puzzles and problems, and I'm going to expect you to think and talk through

them with me. What material we cover and how we cover it (and also how long we take to cover it) is going to depend in part on how the discussion goes.

Partly as a spur to discussion, partly as a way of equipping us all with a common stock of examples for the purposes of our subsequent philosophical theorizing, I plan to open each Monday's class by discussing an assigned movie or video. (The plan is to make them available streaming through OSU Media Services Digital Library: <https://drm.osu.edu/media>.) I haven't done this before; we'll see if it works.

## **Readings**

Readings will be available electronically, usually if not invariably through Carmen (which is not the course webpage). A schedule will be posted and updated on the course webpage (which is not Carmen). Further information on the readings is available in the tentative outline below.

## **Course requirements**

Students will be required to complete four short assignments, each of which will be worth 25% of the final grade. Each assignment will be announced in class and posted on the course webpage at least one week before it is due. You will be expected to hand in your assignments on time and to know about them whether you come to class or not. (They will be posted on the course webpage.) In the absence of an acceptable documented reason, late assignments will be penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade per day and won't be accepted more than one week late. A really easy way to not do well in this course is to hand in your work late.

The first assignment will be on fictional characters, and one of the subsequent assignments is going to be a short paper (i.e. one that is not longer than 2-3 pages) in which you will be asked to refute a recent philosophical paper by Caplan on the interpretation of *Fight Club*.

In ways explained below, participation can help (but not hurt) your grade.

## **Attendance**

I don't have a policy on attendance. I won't be taking attendance, and you won't automatically lose any points for not coming to class. You're grown-ups; I am going to assume that you can make rational decisions for yourself about whether to come to class or not.

That said, most of the assignments will be based closely on what happens in class (in fact, I will write most of the assignments in light of what happens in class), and not coming to class is an excellent way to lose points on those assignments. Incidentally, not coming to class, showing up in my office hours, and expecting me to explain everything to you before an assignment is due is seriously uncool. (If you do miss

class, the serious thing to do is get the notes from someone, read them over, do the readings, and *then* come to me with questions.)

Also, in borderline cases I reserve the right to revise your final grade upwards so that it matches my sense of your engagement with and mastery of the material, and coming to class and participating is an excellent way of demonstrating such engagement and mastery. (In case you were wondering, coming to class and texting, or fooling around on Facebook, or talking to your neighbor, or throwing spitballs, is not.)

### **Disabilities**

Students who might need accommodations are encouraged to contact me and the Office for Disability Services (150 Pomerene Hall, 292-3307).

### **Academic misconduct**

Academic misconduct is a serious offense. You are expected to know what counts as academic misconduct. You are also expected not to commit it. Among other things, your work must be your own, and you must cite all of your sources. If I suspect that you have committed academic misconduct, I am required to report my suspicions to the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM), which may impose punishments that range from failure to suspension and expulsion. I have done turned matters over to COAM before in this course, and if I have to I will do so again.

Academic misconduct is defined in Section 3335-23-04 of the *Code of Student Conduct*, which you are expected to be familiar with. Ignorance of the *Code of Student Conduct* is no excuse for academic misconduct.

The *Code of Student Conduct* is available here:

<[http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/pdfs/csc\\_12-31-07.pdf](http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/pdfs/csc_12-31-07.pdf)>.

Information on the Committee on Academic Misconduct is available here:

<<http://oaa.osu.edu/coam/home.html>>.

### **GEC requirement**

This course satisfies the Breadth—Arts and Humanities—Visual and Performing Arts (2(C)(2)) requirement.

*Goals:* Students evaluate significant writing and works of art. Such studies develop capacities for aesthetic and historical response and judgment; interpretation and evaluation; critical listening, reading, seeing, thinking, and writing; and experiencing the arts and reflecting on that experience.

*Expected Learning Outcomes:* (1) Students develop abilities to analyze, appreciate, and interpret significant works of art; and (2) students develop abilities to be an informed observer or active participant in a discipline within the visual, spatial, and performing arts.

In this course, students develop their abilities to analyze, appreciate, and interpret significant works of art—and to be informed observers of film and listeners of music—through a sustained reflective engagement with *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* (2008) and Johnny Cash's cover of "Hurt" (2002).

## **Tentative outline**

### **1. Ontology**

#### **1.1. Fictional characters**

Peter van Inwagen, "Creatures of Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14.4 (Oct. 1977): 299-308.

Anthony Everett, "Against Fictional Realism," *Journal of Philosophy* 102.12 (Dec. 2005): 624-649.

#### **1.2. Musical works**

Jerrold Levinson, "What a Work of Music Is," *Journal of Philosophy* 77.1 (Jan. 1980): 5-28.

Julian Dodd, "Sonicism II: Against Contextualism," *Works of Music: An Essay in Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 240-276.

Peter Alward, "The Spoken Work," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62.4 (Autumn 2004): 331-337.

Ross P. Cameron, "There Are No Things That Are Musical Works," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48.3 (July 2008): 295-314.

### **2. Truth and interpretation**

#### **2.1. Truth in fiction**

David Lewis, "Truth in Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15.1 (Jan. 1978): 37-46.

Kendall L. Walton, "The Mechanics of Generation," *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundation of the Representational Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 138-187.

## **2.2. Categories and genres**

Kendall L. Walton, "Categories of Art," *Philosophical Review* 79.3 (July 1970): 334-367.

Charles Palliser, "The New Surgeon at St. Oswald's," *Betrayals*, 1994 (New York: Ballantine, 1995), 49-59.

Ben Caplan, "Never Been Kicked," in *Fight Club*, ed. Thomas E. Wartenberg, *Philosophers on Film* (London: Routledge, 2011), 132-162.

## **3. Emotion**

### **3.1. The paradoxes of fiction, tragedy, and horror**

Colin Radford, "How Can We Be Moved by the Fate of Anna Karenina?," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 49 (1975): 67-93.

Susan Feagin, "The Pleasures of Tragedy," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20.1 (Jan. 1983): 95-104.

Berys Gaut, "The Paradoxes of Horror," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 33.4 (Oct. 1993): 333-345.

Noël Carroll, "Enjoying Horror Fictions: A Reply to Gaut," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35.1 (Jan. 1995): 67-72.

Berys Gaut, "The Enjoyment Theory of Horror: A Response to Carroll," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35.3 (July 1995): 284-289.

### **3.2. Musical expressiveness**

Stephen Davies, "Philosophical Perspectives on Music's Expressiveness," *Themes in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 169-191.

Thomas Fritz et al., "Universal Recognition of Three Basic Emotions in Music," *Current Biology* 19.7 (14 April 2009): 573-576.