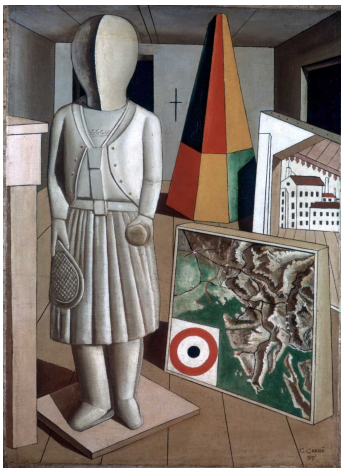
AS 150.4XX Philosophy and the Imagination

Spring 2027



The Metaphysical Muse (1917)
Carlo Carrà

Instructor:	Fergus Horan	**Time:**	2x Weekly, TBD
Email:	fhoran3@jh.edu	**Location:**	TBD
Discussion Hours:	TBD	**Term:**	Spring 2027

Course Description

In this course we will consider two questions: why do we value the imagination, and what are its limits? Imaginative capacities are often taken to be our most humane and valuable, whether that be in our ability to think of better futures and inspire others, or in our ability to construct theories and works of art, but there is little consensus on what defines and unites these capacities. To answer the first question we will look at the nature of art and creativity, inquiry, and radical political thought. To answer the second question we will look at how philosophers have tried to define the imagination and its limits. Can we and must we imagine a better world?

We will meet two times a week, with a mixed lecture-seminar structure. We will work on a single reading per class, with texts which span recent philosophy, from Sartre to Ruha Benjamin. The first half of the course deals with puzzles about what the fundamental nature of the imagination is like, and the second half of the course deals with what role the imagination plays in our lives. The texts are primarily works in contemporary philosophy, with

no prior knowledge required. Our task will be to see how our picture of the mind shapes our orientation to politics, art, and science in ways we might not expect.

Learning Outcomes

At the completion of this course, students will be:

- Able to engage with and compare texts from a variety of eras and fields.
- Familiar with a wide range of theories of the imagination from political theory, philosophy, and cognitive science.
- Able to compare how different thinkers have understood the value of the imagination.
- Able to deconstruct and construct philosophical arguments.

Assessment

- **Weekly in-class paragraphs – 15%**

  Every week, we will begin one of our sessions by writing for 10 minutes a brief response to one of the readings.

- **Class participation – 15%**

  Students are expected to participate in class by asking questions, and doing so will lead to a participation grade based on participation across the course.

- **First Worksheet – 10%**

  Half way through the term, students will fill in a worksheet which forms the skeleton of a response paper. They will choose a section of a paper we have read for class, and will answer:

  1. What is the main thesis of the passage you have selected?
  2. What are the points the author makes to support this thesis, i.e. what are the premises?
  3. What objection can you make to the thesis or the premises?
  4. How would the author respond to this objection?

  Suggestions for passages will be provided.

- **First Paper, 1500 words – 20%**

  The week after receiving their worksheets back, students will be expected to convert these into continuous prose, forming a response paper to the reading they have selected.

- **Second Worksheet – 10%**

  At the end of the term, students will repeat the worksheet task outlined above for a paper we have covered in the second half of the course.

- **Final Paper, 2500 words – 30%**

  The final assignment is a paper in continuous prose, developed from either or both of their worksheets. The paper should summarize a view we have encountered in the literature, pose an objection to the view, and consider how the author could respond, before concluding. Prompts will be suggested, but students will also be able to choose their own topics, with approval. No additional reading beyond that set in the course is required.

Academic Integrity

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. For this course, possible ethical violations include plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration on term papers.

Report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the associate dean of student conduct, or designee, by calling the Office of the Dean of Students at 410-516-8208 or via email at studentconduct@jhu.edu.

If you are unsure about whether a particular act counts as plagiarism, please feel free to discuss this with the instructor.

Accommodations

Johns Hopkins University values diversity and inclusion. We are committed to providing welcoming, equitable, and accessible educational experiences for all students. Students with disabilities, including those with psychological conditions, medical conditions, and temporary disabilities, can request accommodations for this course by providing an Accommodation Letter issued by Student Disability Services (SDS). Please request accommodations for this course as early as possible to provide time for effective communication and arrangements.

For further information or to start the process of requesting accommodations, please contact Student Disability Services at Homewood Campus, Shaffer Hall #101, call 410-516-4720, email studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu, or visit the website: `https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/disabilities/`.

If you anticipate needing accommodations for religious reasons, including time off for religious holidays, please contact the instructor as soon as possible.

You are welcome to bring a person under your care, such as a child, to class on occasional days when your responsibilities require it, for example, if emergency child care is unavailable, or for health needs of a relative.

Anxiety, Stress, and Mental Health

If you are struggling with anxiety, stress, depression, or other mental health-related concerns, please consider visiting the JHU Counseling Center. If you are concerned about a friend, please encourage that person to seek out their services. The Counseling Center is located at 3003 North Charles Street in Suite S-200 and can be reached at 410-516-8278 and online at http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter/.

Class Climate

I am committed to creating a classroom environment that values the freedom of speech, diversity of experiences, and perspectives that all students bring. Everyone here has the right to be treated with dignity and respect, while expressing their views. I believe fostering a free and inclusive climate is important because research and my experience show that students who interact with peers who are different from themselves learn new things and experience tangible educational outcomes.

If you ever have concerns in this course about harassment, discrimination, or any unequal treatment, or if you seek accommodations or resources, I invite you to share directly with the instructor. I promise that we will take your communication seriously and seek mutually acceptable resolutions and accommodations. Reporting will never impact your course grade. You may also share concerns with the department chair, Steven Gross, sgross11@jh.edu; the Director of Undergraduate Studies, Hilary Bok, hbok@jh.edu; the Assistant Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, Darlene Saporu, dsaporu@jhu.edu; or the Office of Institutional Equity, oie@jhu.edu.

In handling reports, people will protect your privacy as much as possible, but faculty and staff are required to officially report information for some cases, e.g. sexual harassment.

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Schedule and Readings

No purchasing of texts is required, and all readings will be made available on Canvas. Bullet points individuate the readings for a class within a week; typically this is only one reading per class. Students are expected to have completed this reading before class, so that they can engage in writing and discussing their responses to the paper.

Part I: Contemporary Puzzles Concerning the Imagination

1. Imagination and Society

Why is the imagination meaningful to us? What role does it play in our lives?

1. Benjamin, Ruha. 2024. *Imagination: A Manifesto* (A Norton Short). W. W. Norton & Company. Selections.
2. Schwartz, Avshalom M. 2021. 'Political Imagination and Its Limits'. *Synthese* 199(1): 3325–43. doi:10.1007/s11229-020-02936-1.

2. Imagination and Mental Imagery

Is it all in your head?

1. Ryle, Gilbert. 2009. *The Concept of Mind*. London; New York: Routledge. Ch. 8.
2. Kind, Amy. 2001. 'Putting the Image Back in Imagination'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62(1): 85–109. doi:10.2307/2653590.

3. The Limits of the Imagination?

Are there things we can't imagine? Is it possible to imagine something entirely new?

1. Phillips, Ian. 2025. 'Aphantasia Reimagined'. *Noûs*, Early View: 1–22. doi:10.1111/nous.12551.
2. Paul, Laurie Ann. 2014. *Transformative Experience*. Oxford University Press. Selections.

4. Imaginative Resistance

Why is it harder to imagine some things, rather than others?

1. Gendler, Tamar Szabó. 2000. 'The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance'. *Journal of Philosophy* 97(2): 55–81.
2. Weatherson, Brian. 2004. 'Morality, Fiction, and Possibility'. *Philosophers' Imprint* 4: 1–27.

5. Knowledge by Imagination

How might we learn from the imagination?

1. Sartre, Jean-Paul. 2004. *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*. London; New York: Routledge. Selections.

2. Kind, Amy. 2018. 'How Imagination Gives Rise to Knowledge'. In *Perceptual Imagination and Perceptual Memory*, eds. Fiona Macpherson and Fabian Dorsch. Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/oso/9780198717881.003.0011.

6. Imagination and Perception

Are imagination and perception separate? Does one play a role in the other?

1. Hopkins, Robert. 2012. 'What Perky Did Not Show'. *Analysis* 72(3): 431–39.

2. Martin, Michael G. F. 2019. 'Betwixt Feeling and Thinking: Two-Level Accounts of Experience'. In *Acquaintance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/oso/9780198803461.003.0005.

Part II: The Roles of the Imagination

7. The Imagination in Perception

Does the imagination play a role in perception itself?

1. Strawson, P. F. 2008. 'Imagination and Perception'. In *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*. Routledge.

2. Nanay, Bence. 2010. 'Perception and Imagination: Amodal Perception as Mental Imagery'. *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 150(2): 239–54.

8. Empathy and Imagining Others

Can we imagine being others? And should we?

1. Williams, Bernard. 1973. 'Imagination and the Self'. In *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956–1972*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 26–45. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511621253.005.

2. Goldie, Peter. 2011. 'Anti-Empathy'. In *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, eds. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie. Oxford University Press.

9. Imagination and Fiction

How does the imagination play a role in appreciating art?

1. Camp, Elisabeth. 2009. 'Two Varieties of Literary Imagination: Metaphor, Fiction, and Thought Experiments'. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 33(1): 107–30.

2. Peacocke, Antonia. 2021. 'How Literature Expands Your Imagination'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 103(2): 298–319. doi:10.1111/phpr.12716.

10. Imagination and Politics

Does radical politics require the imagination?

1. Kelley, Robin D. G. 2002. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. Sections.

2. Bottici, Chiara. 2012. 'Towards a Theory of Imaginal Politics'. In *The Politics of Imagination*, eds. Chiara Bottici and BenoÃőt Challand. Abingdon, Oxon: Birkbeck Law Press, 16–37.

11. Imagination and Science

What role does the imagination play in science?

1. Breitenbach, Angela. 2020. 'One Imagination in Experiences of Beauty and Achievements of Understanding'. *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 60(1): 71–88. doi:10.1093/aesthj/ayz048.

2. Frigg, Roman. 2010. 'Fiction in Science'. In *Fictions and Models: New Essays*, eds. John Woods and Nancy Cartwright, 247–87. Basic Philosophical Concepts. Munich: Philosophia.

12. Imagination and Metaphysics

How does our ability to do philosophy relate to the imagination?

1. Kung, Peter. 2010. 'Imagining as a Guide to Possibility'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 81(3): 620–63.

2. McSweeney, Michaela M. 2023. 'Metaphysics as Essentially Imaginative and Aiming at Understanding'. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 60(1): 83–97. doi:10.5406/21521123.60.1.07.

13. Imagination and AI

Can an AI imagine?

1. Davies, Jim. 2020. 'Artificial Intelligence and Imagination'. In *The Cambridge Handbook of the Imagination*, Cambridge Handbooks in Psychology, ed. Anna Abraham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 162–72. doi:10.1017/9781108580298.011.

2. Kind, Amy. 2022. *Imagination and Creative Thinking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781108973335.

3. Mahadevan, Sridhar. 2018. 'Imagination Machines: A New Challenge for Artificial Intelligence'. *Proceedings of the AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence* 32(1). doi:10.1609/aaai.v32i1.12214.