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INTRODUCTION

Theories of humour are traditionally divided into two classes: superiority or relief theories, and incongruity or ambiguity theories. As their names imply, the former tend to ascribe amusement primarily to a particular attitude of mind, while the latter account for it by describing its objects as having a particular quality.

Enjoyment as an attitude is always a response to an object present to the mind or feelings. If, then, enjoyment in amusement is identical with feelings of superiority or relief, its objects must always display characteristics of inferiority or inhibition. But the enjoyment of humour seems to be distinguishable from a reaction to particular kinds of topic, and from any personal relation felt between the subject and the objects of his amusement.

Incongruity theories do not explicitly ascribe the enjoyment of humour to a particular range of topics. What kind of enjoyment the enjoyment of
Chapter 1

Recent Discussions of Amusement

Recent discussions of emotions as an aspect of the philosophy of mind have promulgated the idea that emotions are connected logically with (or conceptually determined by) their objects. This relation is thought to be conceptually distinct from their causal relationships. Out of this general view come two articles which throw light on what amusement is, as the subjective aspect of humour.

The first of these is Michael Clark's article "Humour and Incongruity", published in 1970.¹ It is Clark who first, as far as I know, rightly insists on tackling humour from the point of view of amusement, an essential first move in the fruitful discussion of the subject:

There can be no adequate account of the notion of humour without one of the notion of amusement. For the humorous is so characterized in virtue of the human attitude of response to it: we call something humorous if it is apt to, or should or deserves to, amuse people, or some special sort of person. By "amusement" here I do not, of course, mean trivial diversion of any sort, I am using the word in the narrower sense in which amusement is amusement at the humorous or comic, or witty. In this paper, then, I shall approach the question "What is humour?" via the question "What is amusement?" Clark follows through this valuable first step by using Anthony Kenny's analogy (introduced in Action, Emotion and Will) between actions and emotions in terms of the material and formal objects of verbs. Just as verbs have material and formal objects ("Joan of Arc was the formal object of burning not qua saint, nor qua woman, but qua inflammable material"), so emotions may be said to have material and formal objects. Clark claims in this way

2 Clark, "Humour and Incongruity", p. 22.
to give a more rigorous explanation than anyone heretofore for the idea that amusement is conceptually linked to incongruity. He does not argue for incongruity as such, but accepts this from previous writers:

I think it is illuminating to think of some traditional theories of humour as attempts to specify the formal object of amusement... I will suggest that it is an essential feature of any object of S's amusement that it should be seen as incongruous by S. In other words "that which is seen as incongruous" gives the formal object of being amused by. A related view can be found in Aristotle and one has been put forward more recently by Schopenhauer...

Having identified this object, then, he makes a standard objection to it, that not all incongruities are funny. His reply to this is that the formal object may be further defined (as Kenny shows) through the distinction between genus and species. The generic description of incongruity as the formal object of amusement may be further specified: Clark does this by introducing the notion of enjoyment -

5 Clark, "Humour and Incongruity", pp. 24-5.
amusement is aroused only by incongruities that are wanted or liked for their own sake:

I shall suggest that amusement is the enjoyment of (perceiving or thinking of or indulging in) what is seen as incongruous, partly at least because it is seen as incongruous....Moreover, it is necessary to add that the apparent incongruity is not enjoyed just for some ulterior reason.6

For his analysis of what it is to enjoy, or derive pleasure from, something, he relies on a modified version of the account offered by C.C.W. Taylor in his paper "Pleasure".7 Clark describes Taylor's account as follows:

What cases of wanting x for its own sake are cases of enjoyment, then? Taylor's answer is: those where x is an action or 'passion' (in Hume's sense) of the subject. For example, to enjoy a football match is, strictly, to enjoy watching a football match. Any action which I perform or experience which I have, wanting to perform or have it for its own sake, is necessarily something which I am enjoying.

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8 Clark, "Humour and Incongruity", p. 29.
But Clark does not find this entirely satisfactory because it does not include an explanation for distasteful effort which may be involved in something otherwise wanted for its own sake, such as a piece of difficult philosophical writing. He therefore adds the modification that no great effort should be involved, and comes up with the following substitute account:

If the object of amusement for S is an action or experience of S, then he will want to indulge in that action or have that experience for its own sake because he sees it as incongruous. If the object of amusement is an object of S's perception or thought, then he will perceive or think of that object for the sake of doing so because he sees the object as incongruous. Furthermore, it must (in the appropriate sense) be easy, involve no great effort, to persist in perceiving the object, or in the acting or experiencing. If it does require such an effort, we may be said to appreciate the humorous qualities in the object, but we may not properly be said to be amused by it."

Clark says that there need be no element of belief that something is incongruous in amusement.

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Clark, "Humour and Incongruity", p. 31.
that is, there need be no reference to a belief that what is perceived as incongruous, is incongruous.

In this he is at variance with Kenny, who says that:

The description of the formal object of a mental attitude such as an emotion, unlike the description of the formal object of a non-intensional action must contain a reference to a belief. Only what is wet can be dried; but something which is merely believed to be an insult may provoke anger.  

By contrast, Clark says:

Amusement need not contain that sort of reference to a belief, only to the way the object is perceived or thought of. I do not know whether what Kenny says would be true if for 'reference to a belief' you substituted 'reference to a belief or to the way the object is perceived or thought of', though it does seem plausible.

The difficulty seems to lie in the idea of a 'reference' to a belief. The reference need not be in any way a conscious one; in the case of amusement, to imply that there was a conscious reference to

incongruity would be to imply that anyone who was amused had carried out the kind of analysis Clark has carried out and therefore taken a philosophical interest in the subject. But on the contrary beliefs may not be 'conscious occurrences' - they can be states in which case their manifestations need not imply any conscious reference to them. Consequently there is no need to suppose that a person who is amused is conscious that what amuses him is 'enjoyable incongruity' - he merely says or indicates by laughing "That's funny".

Clark points out that his account of amusement as the enjoyment of incongruity is quite distinct from explanations which seek to explain amusement causally. It is distinct from, but not in conflict with them; for incongruity, the logically necessary component in amusement, is not always causally

* Armstrong discusses the general category in which beliefs fall in Belief, Truth and Knowledge (Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 7-23. He concludes that beliefs are normally states: "...there is no reason why this state should be something which the believer is conscious of being in. He may or may not know that he holds a certain belief." (p. 9)
sufficient to explain all the enjoyment which may be experienced:

It is true that I have insisted that a reason for the enjoyment in cases of amusement must be the apparent incongruity of the object, but I do not claim that it will always be the only reason or provide us with a full causal explanation of the enjoyment. It seems to me that superiority and relief from restraint theories provide partial answers to the demand for this sort of explanation and that it is not a demand that can be met by a purely philosophical theory. Some sort of empirical investigation is surely necessary to satisfy it. 12

Clark provides in this article a clear delineation of the issues involved in the philosophical analysis of humour. He describes incongruity as a necessary but not sufficient condition of amusement. As the object of amusement incongruity does not appear to imply any particular topics which are humorous in themselves, such as degradation, insult, or sex. Nor does he give any particular subjective attitude priority, for the enjoyment of incongruity has no necessary connection with an enjoyable feeling of superiority or relief from tension.

12 Clark, "Humour and Incongruity", p. 31.
Laughter has traditionally been considered philosophically among the emotions or 'passions'. But there is also a strong philosophical tradition which describes humour and comedy as having a painful subject matter which nevertheless is so managed as to cause not a painful but a pleasurable effect. It is therefore a relevant point for discussion on the subjective side, whether the humorous attitude is an emotional one or not. Clark describes amusement as an enjoyable perception of incongruity, and uses the word 'indulging' as an alternative description. But is this a strong enough affect to be called an emotion, or is it more closely related to cognition? It is this question that I now wish to address through a discussion of Robert A. Sharpe's article published in 1975, "Seven Reasons Why Amusement is an Emotion".

In accordance with modern notions of intentionality, Sharpe first notes that amusement, like most emotions, has an object. He does not specify its objects further except by asserting that the objects of paradigm cases of emotion can be merely intentional: "We should therefore regard the objects of amusement as intentional objects, as we do the ob-
jects of paradigm cases of emotion." 13

Second, he asserts that like emotions such as fear and anger, amusement admits of degrees. This seems to fit well with Clark's analysis, for there are degrees of enjoyment.

Third, Sharpe thinks that the ability to suppress behavioural manifestations is an important mark of an emotion. But the ability to suppress manifestations of an emotion seems less important for identifying amusement as an emotion than the fact that like sorrow or joy it has a typical physical manifestation, which happens to be laughter. Nevertheless, I shall argue that laughter is the expression of an attitude rather than an emotion, and that the fact that it can be suppressed is an indication of its lesser production, as a pro-attitude rather than an emotion, of disturbance or agitation.

Fourth, Sharpe says 'many emotions are the subjects of self-deception', and amusement is liable

to this kind of censorship because 'If I feel that to be amused at an obscene or blasphemous joke is morally wrong then I might wish to disguise to myself the fact that I was amused.'

Here he takes up what is traditionally a counter-example to an asserted immediacy and/or incorrigibility of emotion, and elevates it into a characteristic of emotion. He compares amusement as an emotion with jealousy and envy, which one might also wish not to admit. But it seems more likely in amusement that enjoyment is diminished by e.g. moral objections than successfully repressed or disguised.

Sharpe's fifth argument is that many emotions are intrinsically pleasant or painful, and amusement is intrinsically pleasant. This is true, but less interesting than Clark's analysis which alleges that the particular kind of pleasure afforded by amusement is the enjoyment arising out of a distinctive perception.

His sixth reason is the cause: object distinction

derived from Kenny and discussed by Clark. Clark defines humour in terms of amusement and its logical objects. Sharpe applies this distinction (that is, between the object of an emotion as what the emotion is about, and the cause of the emotion as the belief of which it is the effect) to the case of the audience at the Oxford Union laughing in anticipation of a remark that Gerald Hoffnung is about to make: while the remark is the object of laughter, it is the audience's antecedent guess that it is coming that causes them to laugh.

His last reason, he says, struck him as a counter-argument to the idea that amusement is an emotion. The sense of humour is subject to the development of taste, whereas emotions are not. But then, he thinks, after all he can develop his love of books or people consciously and intentionally. Similarly, his sense of humour can become more discriminating and subtle:

My choice of what works I love and also what people I love is, at least in part, also a matter of taste and taste may develop. In
the same way what amuses me is also a matter of taste and it is a taste that can alter and develop.  

Our enjoyment of works of art has of course relevance to the enjoyment of comedy or jokes, for these have qualities of form and aptness which are aesthetic and subject to judgments of taste. This seems to show that Clark’s analysis is correct in describing amusement as enjoyment of a particular kind of perception ("seen as incongruous"), which gives scope for a rather more considered and self-conscious reaction than most ordinary emotions which Sharpe himself contrasts with "the emotions which are appropriate responses to art". I shall argue later in agreement with Sharpe’s last point, that amusement is logically the enjoyment of incongruity as the form in which the topics of humour are presented, and, as such, a pro-attitude rather than an emotion.

In "Causes and Objects of Some Feelings and Psychological Reactions" D.F. Pears describes  

15 Sharpe, "Seven Reasons", p. 203.
amusement at a remark as a "psychological reaction almost too brief and superficial to be classified as a feeling." This suggests that amusement as a reaction may be the manifestation of an underlying disposition to see situations or remarks as enjoyably incongruous. That humour in its subjective aspect is in fact dispositional is taken for granted by, for instance, Gilbert Ryle, in Concept of Mind:

Dispositional words like 'know', 'believe', 'aspire', 'clever' and 'humorous' are determinable dispositional words. They signify abilities, tendencies, or pronenesses to do, not things of one unique kind, but things of lots of different kinds.

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* Pears argues that amusement cannot be dispositional because its character as an immediate reaction to its object renders it incorrigible. He imagines it only with difficulty being assimilated to other dispositions like depression, whose manifestations are corrigeble. But I think the difficulty is avoided if amusement is considered as the manifestation of a disposition.
Presumably a man can exhibit his humorous disposition by, for example, tripping someone up or by saying "Truce is stranger than friction". Similarly, these exhibitions of a disposition can be occasions of amusement for different kinds of people. That the sense of humour is dispositional seems to be borne out also by such ordinary language phrases as 'sense of humour' and 'funny bone'. *

It is to be hoped that these recent discussions of humour and amusement have yielded a conceptual scheme which will bring order to the review of previous theories which follows. It should be possible to see these theories as attempting to fill in with concrete detail the notions of 'incongruity', 'enjoyment', 'amusement', and 'sense of humour'.

* This is also borne out by the history of the word humour in its derivation from the four humours, or physical predispositions, with their accompanying psychological colourings.
Chapter 2

Superiority and Relief Theories

The topic of humour was dealt with by thinkers in the ancient world in three contexts: as a tool of rhetoric, as an aspect of character, and as the form and subject matter of dramatic comedy. In rhetoric, it was its ability to relax and lighten the atmosphere which made it a subject of interest. On the other hand it was considered a dubious good in the hands of the boorish or the unsophisticated because of its contradictory nature as an enjoyable mode of attention directed to unpleasant things. Both Plato and Aristotle see its subject matter as inherently unpleasant, and it is in their views that superiority theories seem to have their origin.

Plato's references to laughter in the Republic are generally disapproving - loud uncontrolled laughter is to be banned, and is in itself a sign of instability, like its tragic equivalent, self-indulgent lamentation. In the Philebus Plato deals with laughter as an example
of a mixed emotion of pleasure and pain: we laugh enviously or maliciously at the man who misjudges himself in the sense that he overestimates his own virtues — but only as long as his vanity is not expressed in power to injure us. Plato's attitude to laughter as such is disparaging, but of course humour is exemplified by Plato in his portrayal of Socrates; and in the Symposium, in an atmosphere more indulgent to the arts than the Republic, Socrates is represented as arguing that dramatic skill should be able to turn itself equally to tragedy and comedy.

It is Aristotle who, in the Poetics, lays down a since pervasive notion of the objects of humour:

As for Comedy, it is as has been observed an imitation of men worse than the average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly. The Ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain.1

Aristotle's description of the objects of comedy

The analysis of the data showed that...
as faults and deformities dictates that the subjective attitude that finds them funny can hardly be positive enjoyment, but rather an absence of pain. In the Nichomachean Ethics, however, he deals with this question by saying that the kind of jokes a man can put up with are dependent on his own character, and acknowledges that there can be a positive enjoyment which is dependent on the taste and judgment of individuals:

...the well-bred man's jesting differs from that of a vulgar man, and the joking of an educated man from that of an uneducated. One may see this even from the old and new comedies; to the authors of the former indecency of language was amusing, to those of the latter innuendo is more so; and these differ in no small degree in respect of propriety. Now should we define the man who jokes well by his saying what is not unbecoming to a well-bred man, or by his not giving pain, or even giving delight, to the hearer? Or is the latter definition, at any rate, itself indefinite, since different things are hateful or pleasant to different people? The kind of jokes he will listen to will be the same; for the kind he can put up with are also the kind he seems to make. There are, then, jokes he will not make; for the jest is a sort of abuse, and there are things that lawgivers forbid us to abuse.²

Although Aristotle says "The ridiculous side of things is not far to seek, however, and most people delight more than they should in amusement and in jesting"\textsuperscript{3}, he makes a distinction between the buffoon and the boor, the former "a slave to his sense of humour", the latter who "contributes nothing and finds fault with everything."\textsuperscript{3} Between them are "those who joke in a tasteful way [who] are called ready-witted, which implies a sort of readiness to turn this way and that; for such sallies are thought to be movements of the character, and as bodies are discriminated, so too are characters."\textsuperscript{4}

Aristotle is rather grudging in his acknowledgment that humour can be enjoyed; this seems to arise partly out of his view that it expresses hostility, and partly out of his view of what its objects can be. Each consideration implies a standard of judgment - intelligence in the exercise of the sense of humour, and taste in the choice of objects. While the hostility could be thought to be the expression of a kind of superio-

\textsuperscript{3} Aristotle, "Nichomachean Ethics", p. 394.
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rity, the objects of humour as 'the Ugly' can be seen as a particular formulation of the idea of incongruity which dictates that the subjective attitude will be described pejoratively.

There was a good deal of interest in laughter, as such, in the renaissance; it was accounted for physiologically as movements of 'spirits' in the body, and psychologically was held to be related to rationality: "laurentius...holds, with the best of the Schoolmen, quod homo sit risibilis quia rationalis (man laughs because he is rational)". The enjoyment of humour is here referred to the intellect as such, rather than any particular subjective attitude, although Duns Scotus, for example, cites the standard object:

The object of laughter is a novel, sudden, trivial, or ludicrous thing, having wit or subtility, which minds enjoy, as when a person, walking carelessly and inattentively, falls down in the mud.

While we may miss the 'wit and subtility' in this case, perhaps the missing link between a superiority


6 Quoted in Gardiner, Feeling and Emotion, p. 137 fn.
theory with regard to the object, and some rather different notion of intellectual enjoyment caused by incongruity, may be found in De la Chambre's views as Gardiner gives them:

We laugh, he holds, because, according to a theory of the ludicrous since often repeated, we thereby give expression to the feeling of our own superiority. Animals do not laugh because they have neither a sense of their own excellence nor a developed social consciousness. The expression of laughter De la Chambre represents as all ultimately derived from pleasure and surprise...

Descartes treats the objects of laughter and the ridiculous very briefly in The Passions of the Soul. He regards the springs of laughter as being primarily wonder and surprise, hardly ever joy, which does not have the requisite physical effect. Hatred, too, when it is combined with surprise can have the physiological effects which lead to laughter. Like Aristotle, he differentiates between illiberal and liberal jesting, attributing to the latter a motive in controlling faults. As a movement of character, its enjoyment is primarily intellectual and aesthetic, rather than

7 Gardiner, Feeling and Emotion, p. 139.
definable as a 'passion':

As regards the modest bantering which is useful in reproving vices by making them appear ridiculous, so long as we do not laugh at them ourselves or bear any hatred towards the individuals concerned, it is not a passion, but a quality pertaining to the well disposed man which gives evidence of the gaiety of his temper and the tranquillity of his soul, which are characteristic marks of virtue; it often also shows the ingenuity of his mind in knowing how to present an agreeable appearance to the things which he ridicules.

It is, of course, well known that Hobbes gives the most clear and unqualified expression to the superiority theory of laughter:

Sudden glory is the passion which maketh those grimaces called LAUGHTER; and it is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. And it is incident most to them, that are conscious of thefewest abilities in their own favour, by observing the imperfections of other men. And therefore much

laughter at the defects of others, is a sign of pusillanimity."

He even denies that there can be any other important reason for laughter, e.g. that something is amusing:

That it consisteth in wit, or, as they call it, in the jest, experience confuteth; for men laugh at mischances and indecencies, wherein lieth no wit nor jest at all.10

Hobbes expresses least equivocally of all philosophers the view that laughter and weeping are simply functions of who is in trouble, oneself or another:

To fall on the sudden, is disposition to weep. To see another fall, is disposition to laugh.11

This, then, is to assimilate all laughter to that described by Aristotle in the context of Comedy:


laugh at others; nor does Hobbes coat the pill by implying that there are degrees of laughter which show degrees of refinement. Rather he thinks that there must be a difference in the treatment of the object of laughter for it to be enjoyed by all without pain; this difference is the abstraction of the butt from all personal reference - not an easy prescription:

Laughter without offence, must be at absurdities and infirmities abstracted from persons, and when all the company may laugh together: for laughing to oneself putteth all the rest into jealousy and examination of themselves.\(^\text{12}\)

It is interesting to note that Hobbes says that laughter refers to 'a passion that hath no name; but the sign of it is that distortion of the countenance which we call laughter, which is always joy.' In naming it himself, as 'sudden glory', he approached the question from a purely subjective point of view. In doing so, he seems to have distorted it to such an extent as to deny that it had any necessary

connection with amusement* at all. As a passion, 'sudden glory' implies an immediate emotional (rather than the aesthetic and intellectual one implied by Aristotle and Descartes) reaction to its objects, in which the sense of humour becomes a consistent disposition to take joy in one's own superiority.**

The concept of humour underwent an historically important development in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which must be taken into account because it led to a change in philosophical thinking about humour which spread beyond England to continental Europe. Very briefly described, this development was the rise of an everyday kind of realistic comedy which was exemplified both on stage

* It is of course relevant here that the word 'amusement' had its first use as exciting laughter towards the end of the seventeenth century. As Locke says, in the Essay Concerning Human Understanding, of mixed modes 'made arbitrarily by the mind': 'It is convenient, if not necessary, to know the names, before one endeavour to frame these complex ideas.'

** Descartes denied that joy was necessarily involved in laughter.
and in novels. The impetus was given by Ben Jonson in *Every Man out of his Humour*; the butt of humour became the man in the grip of a particular humour, or physiological-cum-psychological disposition which made him ridiculous because of an abnormal imbalance in his make-up. The butt, however, became more and more sympathetic, so that the satirical aims of comedy were gradually changed into a much gentler, even a sentimental, delight in the variety, eccentricity, the essential richness of possibility in the human condition.

Encapsulated within this development is the evolution of the word "humorist" from the victim of a humour, to someone able to create, or delight in, amiable human oddity. The increasing sentimentality of humour meant that there was a desire to redefine it in some terms other than superiority theory, or theories which linked it in any direct way with rationality. But in the nineteenth century, the conceptual framework in which humane studies developed was fundamentally changed by the development of scientific modes of enquiry, exemplified by Darwin's theory of the evolution of species, and the
advent of psychology as a separate discipline. The emphasis in thought about human faculties shifted specifically to the consideration of their genesis and function. In the case of humour, while superiority theories gave way, in the mood of Romanticism, to incongruity theories, they reappeared in the thought of psychological thinkers because their interest was not so much in questions such as what do people laugh at, and why?, as more precisely formulated ones: what function does laughter perform in an individual psychic economy, and in society? and, since it seems to be (as Koestler calls it) a 'luxury function', what survival value may it have?

These more narrowly physiological and psychological explanations of laughter tended to combine the notions of incongruity and superiority by showing that it is the perceived incongruity which elicits the feeling of superiority issuing in laughter. Alexander Bain, writing in the 1860's, thought that incongruity itself needed to be more closely defined than hitherto, for there are many incongruities that have no ludicrous effect, e.g.
'five loaves and two fishes among a multitude'. He achieved this, he thought, by showing that it was the relief from the constraint produced by the ordinary seriousness and necessities of life that produces amusement. Incongruity for him was 'false and faded dignities...unmeaning and hollow pomp...Whatever prostrates, even for a moment, an awe-striking personage, is a delightful relief.' There is no mention here of wit or word-play, and it is hard to see how they could be made to fit in.

Herbert Spencer, in an essay which stresses the physiological aspects of laughing, responds specifically to Bain's formulation of ludicrous incongruity. His physiological explanation of laughter as the release of surplus psychic energy leads him further to specify the incongruity as 'descending', for the first element of contrast must raise a considerable emotional or mental excitement, which is then surplus in the face of a second and necessarily more trivial element - hence the essentially
meaningless muscle and pulmonary-visceral agitation known as laughter.

Finally, in this review of the second fifty years of the nineteenth century which sets the scene for the full-fledged theories of Bergson and Freud, it is worth noting that Darwin, in his book *The Manifestation of Emotions in Man and Animals* devotes some pages to laughter in the context of 'joy and high spirits'. He dwells on the muscular movements involved, observes his infants closely to record the evolution of their responses through smiling, bleating noises, and outright laughter. He comments on the tendency of young people and idiots to smile and laugh whenever they are pleased, as evidence that these muscular movements are genetically an expression of pleasure as such; and on the 'curious analogy' between tickling of the body and of the imagination, both of which produce laughter. He implies some kind of explanation of this when he says:

In this case [laughter at a ludicrous idea] and in that of laughter from being tickled, the mind must be in a pleasurable condition;
a young child, if tickled by a strange man, would scream from fear. The touch must be light, and an idea or event, to be ludicrous, must not be of grave import.\(^\text{14}\)

One might say that the explanation is that both are enjoyed in what is essentially an atmosphere of play, and this idea is taken up and expanded upon by later psychologists, e.g. Freud and Eastman.

In his long essay *Le Rire*, Bergson relates his theory of humour to his general theory of the *élan vital* and the function of human intelligence in the service of evolution. He bases his theory on three observations: that only 'the human' (that is, not landscape, nor animal, nor thing, unless they are seen as moulded by human caprice) can be a source of humour; that humour is purely intellectual, because it is characterized by what he calls an 'anaesthesia of the heart'; and that it is wholly social: 'Our laughter is always the laughter of the group'.\(^\text{15}\) By a somewhat obscure inductive process

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he then concludes that the function of intelligence exercised in humour is to reprove the individual in his social relations when he has entrenched himself in some rigid, fixed, or mechanical mode of behaviour which disrupts (though not fatally, because Bergson recognizes this kind of corrective influence as not a matter of life or death for society) the flow of human creativity and adaptability.

Bergson describes this idea as the leitmotiv of his essay - its influence will be very indirect, he implies, in some instances, but nevertheless a line of connection can usually be traced between the object of laughter, and the notion of a 'mechanical encrustation on the living'. It enables him to account for all kinds of common comic techniques, e.g. imitation, repetition, disguise, caricature, as representations of the automatic, mechanical, and absent-minded behaviour of such aberrant victims of idées fixes as Don Quixote and the characters of Molière's comedies.

It can be seen that Bergson's theory is a cunning and original amalgam of superiority and incongruity theories. Humour picks on the inadequately socia-
lized and adapted who fall short of a norm roughly defined as suppleness in the service of evolution; the central incongruity involved is between the 'mechanical' and the 'living'. But it can be classed as primarily a superiority theory because it is assumed that the point of view from which the sense of humour is exercised must necessarily be that of the adequately supple and adapted.

But this analysis does not take sufficient note of the variability of the humorous point of view. Humour does not really appear to have an axe to grind. Bergson knows this, but he has not related the flexibility of humour itself sufficiently to his leitmotiv to see that the latter, in its rigidity, inevitably leads him astray. He is forced into self-contradiction when he says:

The man who withdraws into himself is largely made up of this very withdrawal. This accounts for the comic being so frequently dependent on the manners or ideas, or, to put it bluntly, on the prejudices of society.16

For in this case it is the mechanical encrustation (a prejudiced society) which is taking the liberty of laughing at the individual who withdraws from it.

It would be quite unfair to Bergson, however, to confine an account of his thought about humour to his leitmotiv, for it appears itself often as a mechanical stop to his careful and fruitful observations. For example he points out that:

The reciprocal interference of two sets of ideas in the same sentence is an inexhaustible source of amusing varieties....

and

Inversion and reciprocal interference, after all, are only a certain playfulness of the mind which ends at playing upon words....

and, commenting on Bain's notion of degradation, he points out that

...while the transposition from solemn to trivial, from better to worse, is comic, the inverse transposition may be even more so. 17

17 Bergson, Laughter, pp. 138-141 passim.
While he makes the strange claim that plays upon words seize on something mechanical and rigid in language itself, he also shows that some broader definition of what is not funny than adaptability or suppleness is required:

...if...language were an absolutely unified organism incapable of being split up into independent organisms, it would evade the comic as would a soul whose life was one harmonious whole, unruffled, as the calm surface of a peaceful lake.18

For it is indeed true that if words were necessarily wedded as sound to meaning, there would be no possibility of puns and wordplay as vehicles of incongruity.

Freud's book *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* has, as its title suggests, a fairly narrow focus and intention. For one thing, it is concerned with verbal and conceptual jokes as such, and gives a full account of the techniques involved in such jokes, e.g. compression and displacement. But he wants to differentiate jokes, as verbal and

conceptual conceits, from all other forms of the comic, on the grounds that, like dreams, they are produced by the unconscious mind in forms which disguise their motive sources. The claim is that the fact that they have point or meaning is incidental, for this merely performs the function of distracting both perpetrator and hearer from realizing that they are about to indulge in desires whose motives were best concealed: to inflict insult, for childish play, or for indecent exposure.

Both the form and the content of a joke (as distinguished from other forms of humour) spring from the unconscious mind. Jokes produce two forms of pleasure: first amusement, and second pleasure in cathetic release, or the discharge of feeling dammed up by repression. Amusement, as forepleasure, and the release from inhibition, contribute to each other's intensity; but the joke is to be understood first as the relief of inhibition, to which amusement contributes primarily as palliating the shame involved in its objects.

The book is therefore to be understood primarily in the context of Freud's psychological theories
of psychic economy and of the unconscious mind, and not as a theory of humour in general. He wishes, in fact, to differentiate jokes from 'merely comic pleasure'; merely comic pleasure he attributes to the empathetic perception of differences of cathetic charge (feeling accruing to a particular set of circumstances) between the laughter and the object of his amusement. The contrast is, therefore, usually between 'high' and 'low', but he specifically denies that this difference is experienced by the laugher as his own superiority:

The origin of comic pleasure... - its derivation from a comparison between our own psychical expenditure and the other person's as estimated by empathy - is probably the most important genetically. It is certain, however, that it has not remained the only one. We have learnt at one time or another to disregard this comparison and to derive the pleasurable difference from the one side only, whether from the empathy or from the processes in oneself - which proves that the feeling of superiority bears no essential relation to comic pleasure. We find that it is made between two cathetic expenditures that occur in rapid succession and are concerned with the same function, and these expenditures are either brought about in us through empathy into someone else or, without any such relation, are discovered in our own mental processes.¹⁹

The paradigmatic form of comic pleasure therefore is:

'I laugh at a difference in expenditure between another person and myself, every time I discover the child in him.' Or, put more exactly, the complete comparison which leads to the comic would run: 'That is how he does it - I do it in another way - he does it as I used to do it as a child.'

This leads Freud to the position that children themselves are incapable of specifically comic pleasure. Even if they have achieved a stage of development in which they have a concept of the right way to do things, they refer this only to themselves; if they laugh at another it is out of joy in their superiority, not the comic pleasure necessarily related to the ability to compare any two standards. Freud seems here to assign a developmental significance to superiority and incongruity suggesting that the sense of humour changes with maturity from the enjoyment of superiority to the enjoyment of contrast.

From this it would seem that while Freud attributes childish laughter to one type of comparison,

20 Freud, Jokes, p. 224.
this is a comparison which in mature laughter becomes applicable to all the situations which empathy experiences. In his analysis of 'innocent jokes' he contends that it is the childish enjoyment of play with nonsense words that is disrupted by maturity, which results in the motive of play itself being repressed, so that it can only become active through 'dreamwork' - a 'plunge into the unconscious' which results in the familiar joke-techniques of compression, displacement and faulty reasoning.

Freud's theory about the unconscious motivations of jokes, put briefly:

...a preconscious thought is given over for a moment to unconscious revision and the outcome of this is at once grasped by conscious perception... .

leads him into several contradictory conclusions. First, it leads him to say that we must give different reasons for the amusement of

21 Freud, Jokes, p. 160.
the maker of a joke, and its hearer. The maker, already knowing his joke, can only attain the pleasure of relief from inhibition at second hand, by telling it to another. The hearer laughs spontaneously out of his relief whose unworthy motives are disguised for him by the element of surprise achieved by joke-technique. This is why the 'point' must be delayed by faulty reasoning. Freud asserts that jokes which provoke thought, or attract attention to their true objects, are failures, because the inhibition is aroused to consciousness before its comic aspect can distract the hearer; but it must be an unusual joke which is both able to set its confusion and at the same time disguise the fact that it will pander to any of the three repressed motives: playfulness, sexuality, and insult. Compare his two statements:

The syllogistic façades admirably fulfil the aim of holding the attention by setting it a task. While we are beginning to wonder what was wrong with the reply, we are already laughing; our attention has been caught unawares and the discharge of the liberated inhibitory cathexis has been completed....

and
...
Jokes... observe the condition of being easy to understand; as soon as they call for intellectual work which would demand a choice between different paths of thought they would endanger their effect not only by the unavoidable expenditure of thought but also by the awakening of attention.  

Freud himself raises a further objection to his theory. It is that while dreams are private, and frequently remain a mystery, jokes are nothing if they do not communicate their meaning:

A joke, on the other hand, is the most social of all the mental functions that aim at a yield of pleasure. The condition of intelligibility is, therefore, binding on it; it may only make use of possible distortion in the unconscious through condensation and displacement up to the point at which it can be set straight by the third person's understanding. Moreover, jokes and dreams have grown up in quite different regions of mental life and must be allotted points in the psychological system far remote from each other. A dream still remains a wish, even though one that has been made unrecognizable; a joke is developed play.

Another difficulty with the theory is that it seems difficult to maintain that a desire for play


is felt by adults as so inherently shameful as to require this kind of disguise. Yet Freud must account for the fact that there are a lot of jokes which are funny without being either sexual or insulting - he must, if these have the compressed and therefore dream-analogous form of made humour, account for their origin in the unconscious mind as the locus of repressed motives. In this case, the motive must be play as the infantilism that is most appropriately inhibited. But all forms of play involve the use or exercise of faculties (which is partly why e.g. tennis or chess are not guiltily played) so that it is strange that Freud should deny that there is something in the mental activity occasioned by jokes which accounts for the pleasure they give us:

The two fixed points in what determines the nature of jokes - their purpose in continuing pleasurable play and their effort to protect it from the criticism of reason - immediately explain why an individual joke, though it may seem senseless from one point of view, must appear sensible, or at least allowable, from another....Nor have we any need to enter further into the question of how pleasure could arise from the alternation between 'thinking it senseless' and 'recognizing it as sensible'. The psychogenesis of jokes
has taught us that the pleasure in a joke is derived from play with words or from the liberation of nonsense, and the meaning of the joke is merely intended to protect the pleasure from being done away with by criticism. 

No wonder Freud relegates the discussion of shaggy dog stories ("there is no appropriate name for them, but they might well be described as 'idiocy masquerading as a joke'") to a footnote. Since their point is that they have no point, he cannot relate them to the unconscious mind. Since they 'really are' nonsense, he attributes their original telling to a desire to annoy, and their repetition to a desire for revenge for that annoyance.

Just as the original motive of superiority may be modified by an ability to take other points of view, it seems possible to say in refutation of Freud's idea that innocent jokes are motivated by a guilty desire to play, that the original nonsense of children is modified by an ability to play with words meaningfully simply because adults know and

24 Freud, Jokes, p. 131.
understand more of their relationships. Freud seems to acknowledge this himself when he calls jokes 'developed play' for play is a conscious activity, and there seems no good reason why it should recede into the unconscious mind when it is developed.*

In a much later essay, 'Humour', Freud returns to the subject of the comic in general in the following terms. He says that just as, in wit, the unconscious makes its contribution to the comic, so in humour, it is the superego which makes a contribution. Again, he connects it with a process of 'liberation' - but this time not from inhibition, but a liberation of the ego in 'an assertion of its own invulnerability'. What makes this assertion possible is the unusually benevolent role of the superego. As 'parent' it undertakes a loving and

* That jokes are metaphorical is a point made by many writers, e.g. Koestler and R.H. Blyth. The latter [in Zen in English Literature & Oriental Classics (Hokuseido Press, Tokyo, 1942)], specifically speaks of humour as a kind of poetry. Presumably poets and wits would agree that their metaphorical expressions are produced in some non-discursive, intuitive or 'unconscious' way.
protective service to the ego; it assures it that its troubles are not serious:

! Look here! This is all this seemingly dangerous world amounts to. Child's play - the very thing to jest about.25

This is an attitude that wards off suffering: Freud connects this idea with the pleasure principle (as he did the form and matter of jokes with repression); and through the notion of a hyper-cathexis of the superego, by means of which it imposes this different perspective on the suffering ego, he fits it into his overall theory of a psychic economy.

It is interesting that Freud links humour, as he did jokes and comic pleasure, to the play of childhood, and in addition to intellectual activity:

Like wit and the comic, humour has in it a liberating element. But it has also something fine and elevating, which is lacking in the other two ways of deriving pleasure from intellectual activity. Obviously what is true about it is the triumph of narcissism, the ego's victorious assertion of its own invulnerability.26


26 Freud, "Humour", p. 216.
It seems clear that Freud would attribute the enjoyment of humour not so much to the perception of any intrinsic formal features of its object (such as incongruity) as to psychic relief occasioned by the general nature of its objects as topics — danger, insult, indecency and so on. Thus his mentions of play and intellectual activity do not seem to perform any important function in his theory. Play is understood as something childish and even shameful. The intellectual activity which he says is a source of pleasure is nevertheless assigned an anomalous role since its function is to disguise rather than exhibit the topics it is attending to.

The last work to be considered under the rubric of superiority and relief theories is Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation*. As the title implies, he is concerned with those faculties which contribute to the inventiveness of the human mind. The process behind all creative acts, he thinks, is the ability to discover hidden similarities; creative acts he classifies under three headings: humour, discovery, and art. To each of these three
categories he ascribes an emotional 'tone': humour arises out of aggression, scientific discovery out of emotional neutrality, art out of sympathy or identification. In all three cases, there is a process which is by its nature 'bisociative' or metaphorical, and it is through this kind of shortcut, which avoids discursive or logical thought, that advances are made in human enterprises - the kind of advances that are genuinely new departures as opposed to the day-to-day pushing on of intellectual or aesthetic processes.

Koestler classifies laughter as a reflex, the release of emotions for which civilized man has no need. The specific emotion necessarily involved (although there may be others) is aggression, aroused by the topics of humour, an emotional reaction which is perceived by the intellect to be inordinate:

In a word, laughter is aggression (or apprehension) robbed of its logical raison d'être; the puffing away of emotion discarded by thought.27

On the other hand he points out that humour is a late development, and that

...a level of evolution had to be reached where reasoning had gained a certain degree of autonomy from the 'blind' urges of emotion; where thought had acquired that independence and nimbleness which enable it to detach itself from feeling - and to confront its glandular humours with a sense of humour. Only at this stage of 'cortical emancipation' could man perceive his own emotions as redundant, and make the smiling admission 'I have been fooled'.

The aggressive/defensive feelings released by bisociation of incompatible spheres of reference (what Koestler calls 'matrices') are what laughter expresses for Koestler. It is for this reason, i.e. that he attributes laughter to a subjective emotion of this kind, that he is included here among superiority theorists. However, his view of the objects of humour seems to conform to incongruity theories:

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28 Koestler, Act of Creation, p. 63.
Comic discovery is paradox stated. Scientific discovery is paradox resolved.  

It is unclear whether the aggressive/defensive emotional reaction is aroused by the elements which are bisociated, or by the bisociation itself. It is also unclear where any notion of the enjoyment of humour may come in. It may be that "the smiling admission 'I have been fooled' " indicates that the pleasure is aroused by the fooling itself*, in which case he conforms quite well to Clark's idea that humour is the enjoyment of incongruity. But certainly this is only implicit in Koestler's arguments which generally support his assertion:

Whatever the composition of the emotional charge which a narrative carries, it will produce a comic effect only if an aggressive/defensive tendency, however sublimated, is present in it. You may be deeply moved by a person's predicament, and yet unable to

29 Koestler, Act of Creation, p. 95.

* The word 'funny' from to fon, or trick, lends some support to the idea that it is particularly incongruities which fool the mind that amuse it as well.
suppress a smile at its ludicrous aspect; and the impression of the 'ludicrousness' of another person's behaviour always implies an assertion - conscious or unconscious - of your own superiority; you smile at his expense. 30

Summary

Superiority theories attribute the enjoyment of humour essentially to a subjective, perhaps emotional, reaction to its subjects. The subjective reaction has the character of a comparison of oneself with the objects of humour, a comparison which results in feelings of pleasurable superiority or relief. The descriptions of the objects of humour vary considerably, but are generally conditioned by the assumptions about the subjective reaction. Thus, although they often involve implications of incongruity, and even detailed and accurate accounts of the forms incongruity can take, the incongruities are not considered principally in their logical character; rather they carry an implication of ugliness or degradation resulting from a compari-

30 Koestler, Act of Creation, p. 54.
son between their elements, or between them as a unit and the amused person.

That superiority theories specify narrowly and unjustifiably the nature of the enjoyment aroused by the exercise of a sense of humour seems to be their most unsatisfactory aspect. It is then difficult to differentiate between humour and any other situation (such as burying a tomahawk in one's enemy's head) which also may lead to feelings of superiority and/or relief. As Stephen Leacock points out, in citing this example,31 this may be the genesis of laughter, but cannot be an eternally valid explanation.

The questions these theories answer, rightly or wrongly, are primarily questions about our motives and purposes. Answering them involves assumptions which are difficult to justify and which frequently lead to incompatible assertions. Hobbes is led to say that laughter has a less important connection with wit and humour than with sudden glory in one-

self; Freud says that humour is an intellectual activity which is initiated unconsciously and must not provoke thought; Bergson says that laughter with its reforming purpose is always the laughter of the group so that it is impossible to laugh at oneself. Also, despite the accuracy of their accounts of the objects of humour, as explanations they are impossible to reconcile. While Bergson denies that any emotion is involved, Koestler asserts that it is emotions that are 'puffed away' in laughter. Bergson perhaps sums up the essence of superiority theories when he contrasts his own with 'purely philosophical theories' involving 'the contradictory', for he has isolated the cause of humour, while 'the contradictory', not being a sufficient condition of laughter, must be characterized as merely its product.32

Chapter 3

Incongruity Theories

Incongruity theories approach the analysis of humour through its objects, and therefore touch only indirectly on the subjective sense of humour. Some writers, however, do think that the nature of incongruity implies something about the minds that enjoy it.

Locke, for example, denigrates verbal play as a sign of a somewhat volatile intelligence:

> For wit [lies] most in the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy; judgment, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully, one from another, ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similarity, and by affinity to take one thing for another.¹

Chapter

Introduction

The introduction of this chapter will discuss the importance of the topic. It will also provide a brief overview of the literature and provide a foundation for the main arguments to be presented in the following sections. The introduction will conclude with a statement of the research questions or hypotheses to be addressed in the study.

Methodology

The methodology section will describe the methods used in the study, including the design, data collection, and analysis techniques. This section should be detailed enough to allow other researchers to replicate the study. It should also include any limitations or potential biases in the methodology.

Results

The results section will present the findings of the study. This section should be organized in a logical and clear manner, with each major finding or result presented separately. Graphs, tables, and other visual aids may be used to help convey the results more effectively.

Discussion

The discussion section will interpret the results and relate them to the research questions or hypotheses presented in the introduction. This section should also compare the findings to previous research and discuss any implications or practical applications of the results.

Conclusion

The conclusion section will summarize the main findings of the study and restate the research questions or hypotheses. It should also provide a final perspective on the significance of the results and suggest areas for future research.

References

The references section will list all the sources cited in the study. This section should follow a consistent citation style and include all relevant information, such as the author, title, publication date, and source.

Appendices

The appendices section can include additional information that is not necessary for the main text but may be useful for understanding the study. This section can include data tables, additional analyses, or supplementary materials.
Locke therefore discusses humour in the context of the relation of ideas, in a chapter dealing as his editor says, with 'elaborative thought' - for Locke says that wit proceeds by metaphor and allusion, performing shortcuts which beguile through their liveliness, but are not conformable with 'the severe rules of truth and good reason'.

It is interesting now to turn to Kant and see how he deals with the questions raised by Hobbes and Locke: whether laughter is typically unsympathetic and what relation it has to reason. Kant wrote about laughter both in the Critique of Judgment and Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View. The latter work takes up Hobbes' point, as it were, and disposes of it thus:

It is not the most charming comment on men that their enjoyment increases when they compare it with others' pain, while their pain is lessened when they compare it with others'....But this is a purely psychological effect (according to the principle of contrast: opposita mixta se posita magis eluscent) and has no bearing on the moral matter of wishing suffering on others.... We suffer in sympathy with another person by imagination (so that when we see someone losing his balance and almost falling, we
If it were truly your wish to know the answer to a question and you were in a good mood to hear it, you might be inclined to listen even if you didn't fully agree with the method used to arrive at the answer. However, more productive learning occurs not in the attempt to memorize or reproduce the answer, but in the attempt to understand the reasoning behind it. It is through this process of understanding that the true value of knowledge is realized.
involuntarily and vainly lean towards the opposite side, as if trying to set him right), and are only happy not to be involved in the same fate.

This is to be compared with Hobbes:

To fall on the sudden, is disposition to weep.
To see another fall, is disposition to laugh.

Perhaps dispositions differ enough that, as Aristotle said, they will determine what can and cannot be laughed at.

Kant's views on the logical import of wit and humour are not unlike Locke's. His dictum that laughter is the product of 'strained expectation that issues in nothing' is well-known, and invariably criticized by those who wish to emphasize the rational aspects of humour. And it is true that there are many jokes which leave matter for thought behind, even if their main point is an irreducible paradox, or an irreconcilable incongruity. It is also to be noted that Kant shares Locke's view that

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there is something easy about wit - it requires less concentration and perhaps intelligence, than ratio-
cination. In his *Anthropology* he relegates it, for example, to the end of a congenial dinner-party, after serious subjects of mutual interest have been canvassed during the first courses. The conversa-
tion will degenerate into jesting and teasing with the gradual exhaustion of the diners, for whom se-
rious conversation has been more of an effort.

Kant actually gives a much fuller account of the exact motions, as it were, of the mind in amusement than he is ordinarily credited with. His descrip-
tion is reminiscent of Aristotle's 'movement this way and that':

...the jest must contain something that is capable of deceiving for a moment. Hence, when the illusion is dissipated, the mind turns back to try it once again, and thus through a rapidly alternating tension and relaxation, it is jerked back and put into a state of oscillation. 3

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In a good joke, that is, one which is genuinely funny because it is genuinely teasing, he says:

...we treat our own mistake in the case of an object otherwise indifferent to us, or rather the idea we are following out, as we treat a ball which we knock to and fro for a time, though our only serious intention is to seize it and hold it fast.  

Humour is associated thus with games of fortune and music as giving free play of sensations; in the case of amusement, these sensations are produced by 'change of representations in the judgment; by it, indeed, no thought that brings an interest with it is produced, but yet the mind is animated thereby'.

Kant therefore introduces several important notions: that humour is intellectual play; that it produces no concepts; and that the play is a pleasure in itself. He locates it rather delicately among cognitions and emotions as follows:

Voltaire said that heaven had given us two things to counterbalance the many miseries of life - hope and sleep. He could have added laughter, if the means of exciting

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4 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, p. 179.
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it in reasonable men were only as easily attainable and the requisite wit or originality of humour were not so rare, as the talent is common of imagining things which break one's head, as mystic dreamers do, or which break one's neck, as your genius does, or which break one's heart, as sentimental romance writers (and even moralists of the same kidney) do.\footnote{Kant, Critical of Judgment, p. 181.}

It is to be noticed, therefore, that Kant's exposition puts humour in the aesthetic bracket through its being resolved as not fully rational because it is pre-conceptual; yet it is concerned with the judgment rather than the emotions, and is conceived of as a 'mental disposition':

Humor, in the good sense, means the talent of being able voluntarily to put oneself into a certain mental disposition, in which everything is judged quite differently from the ordinary method (reversed, in fact), and yet in accordance with certain rational principles in such a frame of mind. He who is involuntarily subject to such mutations is called a man of humors (launisch); but he who can assume them voluntarily and purposively (on behalf of a lively presentiment brought about by the aid of a contrast that excites a laugh), he and his exposition are called humorous (launig).\footnote{Kant, Critical of Judgment, p. 181.}
D.H. Monro, in his survey of philosophical writing about humour, *Argument of Laughter*, says that Kant is 'generally regarded as the father of incongruity theories'. But it is likely that literary criticism, contemporary with or in the wake of the rise of romanticism, was an equally important source for an idea which was half-intentionally an answer to and a denial of Hobbes' view of human nature. This is shown by the implication that incongruity not only applies formally to the objects of humour, but is evident also in the mixture of feelings aroused in its enjoyment: the incongruities are defined in such a way as to reflect on man's existential situation as arousing such conflicts of feeling.

Typically, Hazlitt in England, and Schlegel followed by Jean-Paul Richter in Germany, took the view that the essence of comedy and humour is contradiction of various kinds. The quintessentially humorous contradictions are between, for example, the

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spiritual and the physical, the infinite and the finite, or between the finite and the Idea. Various more subtle aperçus are grafted on this general scheme. Jean-Paul, for example, includes in his analysis the notion of a double or treble perspective on contradiction, which would make all humour ironic. Both he and Hazlitt comment on the pervasive contingency of humour:

Mere wit, as opposed to reason and argument, consists in striking out some casual and partial coincidence which has nothing to do, or at least implies no necessary connection with the nature of things, which are forced into a seeming analogy by a play upon words, or some irrelevant conceit, as in puns, riddles, alliteration etc.

But it was Schopenhauer who gave a more clearly philosophical form to this theory of humour as being

8 Jean-Paul Richter, The Horn of Oberon, Introduction & Translation by Margaret R. Hale (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1973), p. 86.

about oddity and contradiction. Animadverting on Kant and Jean-Paul as being nowhere near a solution of the problem, he proposed that the essence of humour is its form as faulty logic:

In fact, if we want to know the thing absolutely explicitly, we can refer everything ludicrous to a syllogism in the first figure, with an undisputed major and an unexpected minor maintained, to a certain extent, only by chicanery; and it is in consequence of this combination that the conclusion has the quality of the ludicrous.10

The essence of humour for Schopenhauer is, then, that it parodies thought. And this is what gives us pleasure in humour; the pleasure, he says, lies in the primacy humour reveals of percept over concept, which is revealed as inadequate to reality.

...perception is the original kind of knowledge, inseparable from animal nature, in which everything that gives immediate satisfaction to the will presents itself. It is the medium of the present, of enjoyment and cheerfulness; moreover it is not associated with any exertion. With thinking the oppo-

site holds good; it is the second power of knowledge, whose exercise always requires some, often considerable, exertion. And it is the concepts of thinking that are so often opposed to the satisfaction of our immediate desires, since, as the medium of the past, the future, and what is serious, they act as the vehicle of our fears, our regrets, and all our cares. It must therefore be delightful for us to see this strict, untiring, and most troublesome governess, our faculty of reason, for once convicted of inadequacy.

He harks back by implication too to the notion quod homo risibilis quia rationalis of the Schoolmen, when he points out that only man, who can reach the universal through concepts, can laugh; the animal in a world only of perception, has no standard of comparison.

True to his time, Schopenhauer distinguishes between the comic and the humorous. Humour is the comic faculty of the serious man, the man "convinced that he conceives things as they are, and that they are as he conceives them". This conviction, easily upset in the intelligent and observant man, leads to

It is true that some years ago, there was much disagreement about the best way to divide the country's resources among the states. Many people felt that the federal government should have more control over the economy and social welfare programs. Others argued that states should have more autonomy to make decisions that were best suited for their own needs. The situation remains complex, with ongoing debates about the balance between federal and state authority.
the subjective form of laughter, humour:

For, more closely considered, humour depends on a subjective yet serious and sublime mood, involuntarily coming into conflict with a common external world very different from it...for reconciliation, it attempts to think its own view and this external world through a double incongruity, now on one side now on the other, with the real thing thought through them.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus, having scorned Jean-Paul's theorizing, Schopenhauer comes very close to it himself, particularly in this idea that a multiple viewpoint is involved in humour. His theory about the form humour takes, the faulty syllogism, inevitably leads him to think about the subjective elements which respond to it. The faulty subsumption when it is discerned as amusing entails precisely this kind of multiple viewpoint in the humorous man.

Kierkegaard, who follows closely in the wake of Jean-Paul and Schopenhauer, and whose theory of humour owes a great deal to them, particularly uses this multiple-view character of the subjective side

\textsuperscript{12} Schopenhauer, \textit{Will and Representation}, Vol. II, p. 100.
of humour in his analysis of the progress of the religious man through his aesthetic, ethical, and religious development. Humour becomes for him an agent of change from one stage to the next, through its ability figuratively to unite contradictions and to adumbrate in more humble terms the ultimate paradox of the God-Man. In particular, he contrasts humour with pathos (the tragic) in its possibility of showing 'the way out' because it provides an alternative perspective, and releases the man who can practise it from being wrapped up in the limits of everyday existence. In Kierkegaard's thought, however, which involves the final decision to cast oneself out over the abyss of faith, the function of humour in the highest religiousness is dubious - he is never sure whether, at this stage, it is to be trusted, or whether it is acceptable, as an attitude

of mind, to God.*

Lastly, in *Comic Laughter*, published in 1961, Marie Collins Swabey has produced a rich and full account of humour as incongruity from a rationalist point of view. The claim is that humour is a value, and its value lies in its reference to an ultimately rational and harmonious reality:

...comic insight authenticates itself, as it were, by appealing to rational principles as the criteria to render judgment upon its effort to infringe them. By our laughter we reject the non-feline cat, the talking quadruped, as impossible and so reaffirm the supremacy of the logical world and the cogency of thought to grasp it. In brief, perceptions of the comic turn upon insight into the falsity of any attempted denial of the laws of thought and inference, while insight into the failure of such attempts is what constitutes their comic self-contradiction. 14

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* "To what extent may there be humor in prayer, in which there is a disregard for all secular relatively, an informal du-relationship to God", he asks in his *Journals* (Indiana University Press, Indiana, 1970), Vol. II, p. 262.

Because Swabey insists that one derives a value, in the shape of an intimation of the fundamental rationality of the universe, from comic laughter, she tends to dismiss all laughter that patently has not got this root as not 'comic'. For example shaggy dog stories she dismisses (as Freud did) as simply annoying, and specifically annoyance at being tricked. She would dismiss also the laughter of yokels at anything strange as unjustified:

As maintained in this essay, comic laughter is never resolvable into matters of mere empirical habit, custom, the association of ideas, or simple feeling and sensation. Basically, perception of the comic requires the grasp of incongruities that are both logical (as regards the science of reasoning) and teleological (involving a fitness of the parts within the pattern of the whole) - a sense of consonance in dissonance, concord in discord, that is, congruence in incongruence.  

Swabey, therefore, insists that incongruity itself, although the necessary form of humour, fails to be funny unless it is somehow resolved by an apprehen-

15 Swabey, Comic Laughter, p. 115.
The raw text from the image is not legible due to the quality of the image. It appears to contain a page of text, possibly a document or a letter, but the characters are not clear enough to transcribe accurately. If you have a clearer image or additional context, I would be happy to help further.
sion of congruity, and that it is this apprehen-
sion that as it were sanctifies its opposite. It
is in this way that humour becomes a value worthy
to be discussed along with the good, the true, and
the beautiful which derive their value from their
coherence. However, jokes which provide a resolu-
tion of their incongruities are relatively rare,
and satire (for which Swabey has not much sympathy)
make it its business to show that incongruities are
in fact the substance of our lives by showing how far
we are ruled not by rational considerations, but by
empirical habit and custom which we take to be ra-
tional; humour does not in fact produce its oppo-
site, the perception of congruity. While the per-
ception of incongruity relies on our rational abil-
ity to detect identity and difference, it seems
perverse to describe it as any kind of insight into
the rational principles which may govern the universe.*

* The possibility that this may be so is sympathe-
tically entertained but finally dismissed by
Pierre-José About in a recent essay "Signifi-
cation de l'humour" in Revue de Métaphysique
et de Morale, Vol. I, No. 80:

L'humeur est philosophe en ce qu'il vise a
certains déchiffrements du monde, en ce qu'il
tend à discrediter l'illusoire pour attendre à
l'essentiel, mais il n'est pas dessein philoso-
phique parce qu'il lui manque pour cela la rigueur
du concept et la réflexion sur sa propre validité.
(p. 362)
Summary

Unlike superiority theories which dictate what the objects of humour must be, incongruity theories carry with them no clear implications about the opposite pole, the subjective attitude. But they are based more securely in a reliable empirical foundation, that is, the examination of jokes and humorous situations.

As far as incongruity theories imply anything about the minds that enjoy incongruity, it is that they must be rational in their discernment of identity and difference, and further, that it is the discrepancy between the orderliness of rationality and the disorderliness of experience that is enjoyed.

The enjoyment is then interpreted psychologically as either a humanly valuable acceptance of the everyday anomalies of existence, or by rationalist extrapolation as a recognition of an underlying order in which those anomalies are optimistically reconciled. Here, hardly less than in superiority theories, enjoyment is ascribed not only to the incongruities themselves, but to a further bonus of meaning or understanding which yields an emotional, intuitive, or intellectual resolution of paradox.
Chapter 4

The Enjoyment of Incongruity

In this final chapter my aim is to relate the historical survey of theories of humour to Clark's description of amusement as the enjoyment of incongruity.

Superiority theories attribute the enjoyment to a subjective feeling of superiority or relief, while incongruity theories tend to think of it either as an intellectual enjoyment of something understood through the incongruity - a bonus of truth - or else as the enjoyment of an at least temporary bamboozling of the mind, even, like Schopenhauer, a triumph over reason itself. Neither seems quite to agree with Clark that it is the incongruity itself that is enjoyed; that is, wanted, undergone, or indulged in for its own sake.

Clark himself dismisses superiority theories as 'psychological' - that is, as not of interest to the philosopher, and susceptible only to empirical inves-
tigation for their confirmation or disproof. At the same time, he does not suggest any further avenue of investigation by which we might try to understand what it is about incongruity that we enjoy.* I propose now to investigate the notions of both enjoyment and incongruity to see if a connecting link can be found.

The concept of enjoyment is distinguished chiefly by its immediate involvement with its object. Things which are enjoyed are approved for their own sake. It follows that when incongruity is enjoyed, it is not for any further bonus of self-congratulation or relief from conventional restraints. This is not to deny that superiority and relief are sources of enjoyment. But if they were the prime sources of the enjoyment involved in amusement, jokes might indeed be, as Hobbes maintains, just indecencies and

* But he does suggest that both incongruity and enjoyment may be further defined in particular species of amusement, e.g. the enjoyment of wit is an enjoyment requiring exercise of intellect on a subtle incongruity ("Humour and Incongruity", p. 32, note 6).
motion for the purpose of analyzing the possible
improvements in the design of the system.

I would like to propose that we investigate the
improvements that can be made to the current
system and identify areas where improvements
can be implemented.

In the immediate future, we will need to
address some issues that have been identified in
the current system. These issues include:

- Lack of integration
- Inefficient data processing
- Limited scalability

It is not clear at this time how these issues can
be resolved. However, I believe that a thorough
analysis of the current system and

*the need for the current system to
be more efficient and scalable
would be beneficial. This would
allow us to identify the areas
where improvements can be
made.

In conclusion, I believe that the current
system has potential for improvement. It is
important that we take the time to
adequately assess the system and
make necessary changes to ensure
its continued success.
unfortunate accidents. Certainly, this kind of gratification seems to be a more urgent motive than amusement, with its related meanings of mere pastime and diversion. As Perry says in his discussion of the concept of pleasure, in which he gives considerable attention to enjoyment:

If we may say that what one desires and strives for is the possession of something he does not possess, the existence of something which does not exist, or the occurrence of something which has not occurred, then we may say that objects of desire and striving are never actual. On the other hand, objects of enjoyment are necessarily actual, for we cannot enjoy what is not.¹

The enjoyment of incongruity does not then seem to be a want, as the desire for self-glory or relief or wisdom might be. Psychological explanations in these terms, such as Freud's, seem to overplay a conative element which is hardly present in the concept of amusement as the enjoyment of incongruity.

Is amusement then, if not a want, an emotion, as Sharpe argues? Incongruity, as a condition, hardly seems the kind of relation between things which would arouse the degree of disturbance which is characteristic of emotion. As Perry says in The Concept of Pleasure:

Although pleasure either as enjoyment or gladness is not incompatible with a measure of excitement, where excitement reaches such a pitch that a person can be described as agitated, distracted, or overwhelmed, it becomes inappropriate to say that he feels pleasure. It is just where a person is agitated, disturbed or distracted that the term 'emotion' is most appropriately applied.2

When the object of an attitude is something as formal as 'incongruity', the likelihood of being 'moved' by it seems far-fetched; to quote Perry again:

...pleasure must be classified as emotion if the dichotomy between feeling and cognition is accepted, but the cognitive aspects of many sorts of feeling, including pleasure, must not be overlooked.3

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2 Perry, Concept of Pleasure, p. 111.
3 Perry, Concept of Pleasure, p. 111.
The Council of Pike

After the passage of an ordinance, the Mayor, in consultation with the members, shall appoint a Board of Trustees to act upon all matters pertaining to the interests of the Council. The Mayor shall also have the power to appoint special committees or task forces as needed.

When the object of an ordinance is to provide for the improvement of the city, the ordinance shall be enacted by a two-thirds vote of the members present at the meeting. The ordinance shall take effect thirty days after its passage.
It may well be objected to this, that the word incongruity must not be given too much weight, for it is, after all, a philosopher’s abstraction, which in actual instances of funny occurrences and jokes is clothed in all kinds of concrete and sensuous detail. As Schopenhauer points out, it is the recalcitrance of perception to the dictates of reason that constitutes the enjoyment in amusement. The cognition of incongruity may be all but buried in emotional responses of self-congratulation or pleasurable relief from restraint, produced by the imaginatively sensuous enjoyment of incongruities on aggressive or sexual themes. But here philosophical thinking about humour, if not the laughing general, makes the distinction between the enjoyment of incongruity (an enjoyment focussed upon the relationship between elements of thought or perception), and the cathetic charge released by the topics of jokes (which may be pleasurable, conflicting, or unpleasant emotions, rather than enjoyment). In making this distinction between enjoyment and emotion, I rely on Perry's account of enjoyment:
Enjoyment is a non-evaluative, non-conative pro-attitude toward some actual object for what it is in itself, which object is a present doing, undergoing, or experiencing on the part of the subject or is something intimately connected with a present doing, undergoing, or experiencing on his part.

This account of enjoyment allows a separation of the elements in the subjective response to humour, and thus an explanation of some of the anomalies in the theories of humour which have been examined. Bergson's insistence that humour is 'purely intellectual', predicated on an 'anaesthesia of the heart' (compared with its usual classification among the emotions or 'passions') expresses the primacy of the formal relation of incongruity, over the emotional charge which may attach to the elements brought into that relation. The mildness of a 'pro-attitude' is always at risk in amusement at subject matter which is inherently capable of arousing unpleasant emotion. On the other hand, topics which are inherently capable of rousing pleasurable

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4 Perry, *Concept of Pleasure*, p. 214.
emotions will intensify the pro-attitude, thus producing, for example, hilarity, or the violent, insensitive, or abusive laughter described by Plato and Aristotle.

The distinction between incongruity and the topics which it brings into relation may most easily be understood by analogy with modes of aesthetic expression. In painting, for example, the distinction is illustrated by paint on a flat surface which gives a distinctive form to the subject which is portrayed. Just as we distinguish liking a picture of puppies for its painterly qualities from liking puppies, so the theorist of humour distinguishes between enjoying a topic presented in incongruous form, and enjoying thinking about, learning about, or experiencing, the topic itself. Just as we may question the aesthetic enjoyment of painting in someone who might say 'I like this picture because it is a picture of food and I like food', so we question the enjoyment of a joke if it can be expressed primarily as the gratification of a taste for sex, insult or enlightenment.
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That enjoyment of incongruity is an aesthetic enjoyment, that is, the enjoyment of an object interpreted through an imposed form, can be illustrated in various ways. The most obvious is to rephrase a joke in discursive terms. That a man is happier if he can live within his means is a truism. Micawber's expression of this truism is made amusing by exaggeration and emphasis, an incongruous juxtaposition of a small sum of money and resultant 'Misery' or 'Happiness'.

The isolation of enjoyable incongruity as the specific formal object of amusement may seem rather unspecific, not only because it is abstract, but because it might apply to objects which do not in fact amuse. Examples which spring to mind seem to be of four kinds: those which are more pathetic than amusing, those which are more sublime than amusing, those which are purely a matter of sensation, and those which are more oddly interesting than amusing.*

* Instances, respectively: a child attempting a task too difficult for him, an alpine flower blooming out of bare rock, consuming alternate mouthfuls of hot curry and cold cider, the fact that sea anemones are carnivorous animals.
The first three, however, seem to make their effects not so much through incongruity (which is necessarily an unresolved relation) as through contrast. The enjoyable element in such contrasts is an accountable difference which provides no challenge to the ordering mind to attempt some kind of solution.

This leaves the fourth class, those enjoyable curiosities colloquially described as 'funny-peculiar' and thus distinguished from 'funny ha-ha'. I am able to offer only a tentative explanation for their being enjoyable incongruities which do not amuse: that is, that they are oddities which may as a class or classes be so familiar that their individual occurrence is simply another example of an old puzzle, e.g. the oddities of human nature and of nature (such as camouflage). Perhaps quite often such oddities could, by skilful comic invention, be given a novel or graphically incongruous form which would render them amusing rather than merely peculiar.

Naturally-occurring humorous situations, and the laughter of simple people at what is outside their experience may seem to be further exceptions to the notion that incongruity is the aesthetic form of
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humour, for incongruity is necessarily the ill fit between not less than two elements. If a yokel laughs at city dress, however, the elements of incongruity are what he sees on another and his own normality. At its most simple-minded, amusement expresses a comparison between expectation, assumption, or prejudice, and what is actually presented, for it is just this comparison that is seen and enjoyed as incongruous. There is no philosophical need, therefore, to make a distinction between the laughter of the sophisticated and the laughter of the naïve, between, for example, the wit of Oscar Wilde and the laughter of a child at the incompetence of a playmate.

It follows that the same kinds of criticism and doubt about the aesthetic, ethical, or truth values of humour arise as in the cases of other aesthetic forms. It is possible to be amused by good jokes on repulsive or immoral subjects just as it is possible to admire good paintings of repulsive subjects or erotica. It is equally possible that such enjoyment can be destroyed by emotions such as sorrow or dis-
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If you have any specific questions or if there are parts of the text that you would like me to focus on, please let me know. I will do my best to assist you.
gust aroused by their subject matter. A feeble pun which relies on consonance of sound without introducing an equal play on meaning is deficient in incongruity and fails to satisfy a mature mind, although it may please a child-like one, for whom the mere fact that one sound has two meanings suffices.

The questions what it is we enjoy when we enjoy incongruity and why incongruity should be enjoyable at all are perhaps best approached (although they may not be wholly answerable) through the concept of enjoyment itself. Taylor says in "Pleasure":

The question why exercising a characteristically human capacity should be in itself a good is very difficult; the answer is certainly connected with the fact that most if not all enjoyments involve the exercise of some capacity.5

So the questions perhaps become: what capacity is

5 C.C.W. Taylor, "Pleasure", p. 17.
exercised in the perception of enjoyable incongruity? and in what way does incongruity exercise it? The obvious candidate seems to be the rational capacity to detect identity and difference. But the perception involved is of incongruity, or unresolved difference; the rational capacity therefore is exercised, but also balked of its usual goal of making sense of things. This apparent mis-use of our rationality is enjoyable, Schopenhauer thought, because it provides an escape from the ordinary rules of reason. Aristotle and Kant suggest that it is the actual activity of looking for the sensible solution ("looking this way and that", tossing a ball to and fro) that is enjoyed much like a game.* So it may be that incongruity provides us with the enjoyable exercise of our rational capacity on something that challenges it; and that, moreover, it is exercised in the mode

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* It is interesting that Aristotle's metaphor is echoed in the history of the word amusement itself, from old French 'amuser', to cause a dog to lose the scent and therefore to search for it.
of play, an idea which Freud, among others, suggests, and which is borne out by numerous words and phrases, e.g. *jeu d'esprit*, and 'ludicrous'.

Incongruity, considered as the form of humorous objects, therefore, does not tell us very much about the mind that enjoys it, except that, as the Schoolmen said, it is rational to the extent of discerning identity and difference, and perhaps, further, that it enjoys the play of its own thoughts and perceptions. Marie Collins Swabey's extrapolation from this that humour has metaphysical and ontological dimensions, that it is a value to be measured against the true, the good, and the beautiful, is only a possible consequence. As a form, incongruity cannot be as well a content; but as a form, and therefore an empty vessel, it dictates the shape of things that can enter into it, and congruence can do so only by implication. There is no necessity, therefore, in the laughing response to incongruity, that its perception has been resolved in a further congruence. It is equally possible that such a resolution, as the end of incongruity, is also the end of amusement.
It is not surprising, perhaps, that philosophers either try, like Swabey, to assimilate humour into theories of coherence, or, on the other hand, denigrate it, like Locke. For to an orderly and rational mind, unresolved difference (the concept of incongruity) may be a dubious object of enjoyment. 'The ugly' (Aristotle), 'the unseemly' (Cicero), 'degradation' (Bain), have been its persisting descriptions. But by making its species in humour 'enjoyable' incongruity, Clark goes a long way towards showing that it has nevertheless the innocuous function of a necessary formal element. We are enabled to see that pleasure deriving from other sources - our need for triumph, relief from tension, enlightenment, or reconciliation of existential problems - can be supplied by humour just as they may be supplied by other forms of art, but that these are the result of thematic rather than formal elements.

Just as "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music"\(^6\) where form and matter are in-

distinguishable, and contribute together to the intensity of enjoyment, so a really 'rich joke' (to use Max Eastman's phrase) resonates on many levels of feeling and meaning for whose enjoyment incongruity is necessary without necessarily being sufficient.

Conclusion

Superiority and incongruity theories of humour are, as Clark says, not in conflict. What our examination of their history shows, however, is that they have harboured a third possibility, that of a form which supplies the linking element between the subjective attitude, and the objects it surveys.

While the former has been variously guessed at ('sudden glory', 'superiority') and the latter examined and compiled ad nauseam, they can be brought together in the notion, not that incongruities can be funny, but that objects must exhibit the formal relation of incongruity if they are to amuse.

Finally, then, amusement is the manifestation or occurrence of an underlying disposition (the sense of humour) to see and enjoy topics, situations,
or ideas brought into incongruous relation. That incongruity as a form can be so enjoyed is an irreducible fact; this specific kind of perception can then be rendered less or more enjoyable by emotions aroused by the topics, situations, or ideas in themselves. As a disposition and as a form, that is, in its subjective and objective aspects, humour is not inherently moral or dependent on degrees of intelligence. Its enjoyment is closer in kind to aesthetic feeling than either to cognition or to emotion, although these latter can be and indeed often are secondarily involved.
Bibliography

Books


Articles

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