3-16-2020

Praxis, Poems, and Punchlines: Essays in Honor of Richard C. Richards

Steven Gimbel
Gettysburg College

Praxis, Poems, and Punchlines: Essays in Honor of Richard C. Richards

Abstract

Richard C. “Dick” Richards has a 40 year history of being an influential philosopher, teacher, and colleague. This volume collects thoughts, memories, and philosophical essays that engage with and celebrate the life and career of this much beloved figure.

Keywords

Richard C. Richards, philosophy, humor

Disciplines

Metaphysics | Other Philosophy | Philosophy | Philosophy of Language

Praxis, Poems, and Punchlines:
Essays in Honor of Richard C. Richards

Edited by Steven Gimbel

Table of Contents

Introduction

Steve Gimbel

One of the most wonderful aspects of the job of university professor is that one's occupation is based on an area of personal expertise that shapes one's Being. So it is with Richard C. "Dick" Richards, who, amongst other areas of specialization, is a philosopher of love. Richard's Being is one deeply entrenched in love. There is, of course, the romantic love he long shared with his recently passed wife Marty, but there is also the love of many, many students and colleagues, both in and beyond the department at California State Polytechnic University at Pomona, and undeniably his love for poetry, humor, and the philosophy to which he dedicated so many years. Most of all, though, is (as cliché as this sounds), his love of life. Few people so embody the virtues they discuss, living so vitally and thereby affecting the lives of so many who come in contact with them, even briefly, that this love is shared by so many. This volume is intended as a testament to that love given and now redirected back toward Richard C. Richards.

On the title page of my personal copy of his book *A Philosopher Looks at the Sense of Humor*, is a personal inscription in which he deems me his "favorite Jew." This is a sentiment I accept with the

deepest honor. (I wish I could return it in the converse, but I would risk alienating my wife and while I love Richard…I don't love him THAT much). It is characteristic of his sense of humor: wry, sharp, and unexpectedly edgy while delivered with a calm sophistication. If one were to encounter a martini as dry as his sense of humor, it would leave one shaken, if not stirred to action trying to find how one could mirror his subtle, effective delivery. Richard contends that humor is the appreciation of incongruity and his humor perfectly embodies it. He is capable of delivering even the most crude remark in a sufficiently erudite manner that you are left at first wondering whether he really just said what your ears heard. Those who know him, know full well what he said, how he said it, and generally will need help getting off the floor as a result.

That scholarly, cultured way of being is not feigned for the sake of the joke. Dick is the quintessential philosophy professor: possessing a mastery of the history of human thought, committed fully to rigor in discourse, open-minded in his consideration of perspectives well-beyond the expected, and playful with ideas both new and old. He fully embodies the life of mind. In this way, he stands as a model to those of us who later embarked upon the path. He is the sort of authentic intellectual who reinforces your own love of ideas and wisdom because you can see without cynicism

that such authenticity is, in fact, possible. He stands as an instance of the final cause of the passion for thought that led so many of us to start thinking about these questions in the first place as naïve, excited teenagers. We then see someone well-removed from those early days, who has traveled the road for decades and has retained the love of that journey.

Richard loves philosophy and we love philosophy. For this reason, we also love him. That love is the reason for the following essays.

Richard C. Richards, I Hardly Knew Ye

Peter Francev

I first met Richard Richards at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, in the fall of 1996. I was a Freshman who had a curious interest in philosophy; yet, at the time, I was a Biology major planning of a life in Hawaii where I'd be conducting research on sharks while teaching at the University of Hawaii and surfing before and after work. Little did I know that my life would be changed forever, after a chance meeting with Richard.

During the first week of the fall quarter, I walked across campus from the biology labs and headed over to the Philosophy Department offices; I was planning on double-majoring and sought some much needed advice. Richard was the only professor in his office, so I nervously stopped and knocked on his door. He called out to "Come in." I did, not knowing what to expect. There, sitting before me, was a rather lanky individual, whose face was buried in some papers.

He quickly told me to sit down and asked what he could do for me, stating that I didn't look familiar, asking which of his three classes I was in. I told him that I wasn't a student of his- yet- but that I was a Bio major and was interested in double-majoring. He told me that this was "Good. Good", and that Philosophy would be a fine second major,

especially one where the analytical thinking skills would complement the scientific ones that I would surely be learning during the next four years.

He asked what my interests were in philosophy and before I could answer, he followed up with inquiring what philosophers I had read. "Nietzsche and Camus." He quipped that Nietzsche was "alright" and Camus was a "good guy". He said a few other things, mainly about which classes to take, including his own History of Philosophy sequence. (Richard taught both, History of Ancient Philosophy, History of Medieval Philosophy, Existentialism and Philosophy of Love and Sex. And as an eighteen year-old, it was the last course that he mentioned that had piqued my interest.) I knew that my previous exposure to Nietzsche and Camus, which was merely "recreational" reading that I had done on my own, would require the course on Existentialism, and his two history courses were core required classes. Apparently, I was going to be seeing quite a bit of this Richards fellow—and he'd be seeing a lot of me.

Philosophy 465: Philosophy of Love and Sex

Right. So here I was sitting in Richards's Love and Sex class, along with about 80 other students, most of whom were wearing sweatshirts with the Greek letters of their fraternity or sorority sewn on the front. At exactly 6:00pm, on the first Tuesday of Spring Quarter 1997, Professor Richards walked

into our classroom (in one of the Engineering buildings, for some reason), put down his books, notes and syllabi down and announced the following disclaimer to the class: “Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is Philosophy 465: the Philosophy of Love and Sex. I am your professor, Professor Richards. This is not, let me repeat that: this is NOT a course in which we are going to discuss the pleasure of sex; we are not going to talk about why your boyfriend can’t get you to orgasm; we are not going to search for the “g-spot”, like Indiana Jones on some quest. We are going to look at all types of loves from a PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE. Period. If you’re interested in any of the aforementioned classes, please see Dr. So-and-so’s class on human sexuality or Professor What’s his name’s class on the psychology of relationships. Understand? Good.” At that point, exactly 1/3 of the class stood up, grabbed their things and walked out. He then turned to the remaining students and went over the syllabus BEFORE he took roll and dealt with the adds and drops.

Hold on a second. What’s this? Look, look. It says “PORNOGRAPHY” for Week #7. YES!! I knew it. I knew that there was going to be some sort of porn in this class. And then he discussed the unit on pornos. We’d be watching a porno and discussing the merits of the porn with the writer, director and star of the flick. Wow. This was awesome; this really was a

senior level philosophy class. And then, six weeks later, at the end of week #6, Richards cued us in on what to expect for next week's lecture and discussion: it was going to be…wait for it…wait for it…a foot fetish porno. What. The. Hell. Is that!?!? Well, dear reader, it is exactly what is appears to be: a porno of feet. Feet walking. Feet running. Feet jumping. Feet putting on shoes. Feet taking them off. Socks covering feet. Socks seductively coming off. Feet in red high heels. Feet in black pumps. Toes "playing" with grapes. Toes "playing" with earthworms. Feet, feet, everywhere and not the slightest hint of moaning or groaning.

At the end of the class, I submitted a research paper where I argued the merits of Romeo and Juliet being in love and NOT in infatuation. Richards totally disagreed. He pitched his arguments during office hours; I pretended to listen and agree. However, this was MY paper and I was going to write it my way. And my way I did…and I received my lowest grade in any of Richards's classes. I earned a "B".

<u>Philosophy 312 and 313: History of Ancient Philosophy and History of Medieval Philosophy</u>

The following year, I was fortunate enough to take two more classes with Richard: Philosophy 312 and 313: History of Ancient Philosophy and History of Medieval Philosophy, respectively. If I remember correctly, I had one class on Mondays and

Wednesdays and the other on Tuesdays and Thursdays, which meant that I had four days of Richard, his dry wit and the wealth of knowledge of nearly 2,000 years of western philosophy. I remember doing well in both classes; for History of Ancient Philosophy, my end of term research paper was a comparison of Plato and Aristotle on poetry. When I handed him a rough draft for his commentary, he merely quipped: "When it comes to poetry and pretty much anything else, Plato is a bastard." From that moment onwards, I knew that one of my undergraduate advisors was an Aristotelean.

The History of Medieval Philosophy was a bit more subdued. We covered the major figures, using Frederick Copleston's multivolume tome as the foundation of our reading. It was during the medieval class that I learned two important things from Richard: first, despite all of the godliness, the medievalists were an intellectually rich group of thinkers; and second, luckily, the Arabs thinkers kept Plato and Aristotle alive. He instilled in all of his students that if it wasn't for the Arab philosophers, then the medieval period would really have been "the dark ages".

Philosophy 480: Existentialism

Existentialism was my baguette and butter. Remember, back when I was a punk in high school, it

was Nietzsche's aphorism "God is dead." and Albert Camus's novel *The Stranger* that ignited my interest in both Existentialism and philosophy as a whole, and now I was going to have my fourth class with Richard. It was my junior year. We began the quarter painstakingly looking at L. Nathan Oaklander's Introduction to Existentialism. We briefly looked at Husserl as the Existentialists forefather, and spent the bulk of the class looking at Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Beauvior, and Camus. While most time was spent fairly evenly, I again learned two more crucial things from Richard that have stayed with me to this day: first, if Plato was a 'bastard" by Richards's account, then Heidegger went above and beyond Plato's bastardness and was a "s.o.b." Secondly, and most important of all, Camus is a fantastic philosopher. I learned the nuances of Camusian philosophy and this is Richard's enduring legacy on me and my students. If it wasn't for his methodical and meticulous analysis of Camus, then I would not have been motivated to attend graduate school at University College Dublin, where I would have written a Master's thesis on Camus's early philosophy of the Absurd. If it wasn't for Richard and his appreciation and respect of Camus, then I would not have gone on to co-found the Albert Camus Society UK/US or the *Journal of Camus Studies*. And, if that wasn't enough, it was because of insistence that Camus is a philosopher that I have been

fortunate enough to expose my students to the rigors of Camus's philosophy.

Philosophy 499: Independent Study: Albert Camus

During my Senior year, as I was thinking of grad school applications, I was drawn to UCD's strengths in Continental philosophy- not to mention the fact that it was a student-oriented program (I will explain this in detail, in a moment.)- I approached Richard about working with me on an independent study, where I could focus on Camus exclusively. In hearing that I wanted to go to grad school in Ireland and write my MA thesis on Camus, Richard suggested that I look at Dostoevsky as an early influence. (This would be key because a year later, my MA thesis would have a chapter devoted to Dostoevsky's influence on Camus. That chapter would stem from my research the previous year, in the final class that I had with my mentor.) I read *Notes from Underground* for the first time; I saw immediate connections to Camus's characters Meursault and Clamence, from *The Stranger* and *The Fall* respectively. Even today, when I teach Notes, I still get goosebumps thinking back to my excitement at what I thought was discovery while sitting in Richard's office.

Post-BA Graduation

Following my graduation, I enrolled at University College Dublin; one year later, I walked out with a MA in (Continental) Philosophy. I taught high school for a couple of years; turned down a PhD program in Philosophy (scared of being $125,000+ in debt by the time I finished and not having a tenure track job.); went back to graduate school (MA in English); and began a life of teaching at the community college level (Currently, with one year left before tenure and finishing a PhD in English.).

I am a product of Richard's dedication to his field and to his students. There isn't a day that doesn't go by that I do not think of him, or what he taught me, or how he showed me to always believe in your students. He demonstrated to me that you push your students, even when you don't think they can handle the pressure or the criticism, because often times they will surprise you. He was a model professor: he expected a lot from his students; he pushed them to their limits, but he was always by their sides encouraging them to never give up. He taught me to care and be respectful of our students, just as he was with me. It is his impact on my life that allows me to impact the lives of students whom I come into contact with every day. So, Richard, on behalf of the countless number of students that had the pleasure and honor to sit at your feet and learn from your wisdom, I thank you for everything.

Humor and the Good Life

Laurie Shrage

I don't remember how it started, but somehow throughout my career at Cal Poly Pomona, Dick regularly asked me what colors I wanted. Then, a few days later, he would leave a bag of bearded iris rhizomes in our department office for me. Evidently, Dick was obsessed with breeding these plants, and his breeding program generated many "rejects," which he shared with his friends and colleagues. My garden was full of his beautiful rejects, and I soon learned to appreciate these plants, which I think was Dick's true aim.

Before I arrived at Cal Poly, Dick launched a course on the Philosophy of Love and Sex. It was a popular course so, when I was hired, Dick asked if I would be interested in teaching some sections. I agreed, and over many years, Dick and I shared materials and ideas for this course. It's hard to imagine that Dick's course could be taught in today's climate. For example, he would invite a filmmaker who made "crush fetish" films to his class to discuss the ethical issues involved. The films were often disturbing to students, and thus students would struggle both to understand the point of view of the filmmaker and then to marshal all the moral theories they had absorbed to argue against the activities depicted in the films. Dick's classroom discussions

were lively, contentious, engaging, thought-provoking, entertaining, and memorable. Dick was admirably respectful to both his guest and to his students, and worked to ensure that many points of view would be heard and assessed. He showed his students how to have illuminating and productive conversations among people with widely divergent views. Occasionally a student might complain about the topics or materials Dick shared, but fortunately our department and university could be relied upon to defend the principle of academic freedom.

I similarly had a few student complaints when I included in my course (in the 1990s) such topics as same-sex marriage or BDSM. Today I am more cautious, as I have had students record without permission parts of my courses, and these recordings could easily be viewed out of context. Also, I am less confident today that universities will strongly defend a targeted faculty member's academic freedom, or protect faculty who are responsibly teaching highly controversial topics.

Dick's greatest contribution to our department was his cultivation of humor. He often pointed out the incongruities of our lofty pursuits at Cal Poly Pomona surrounded by fields of horses and, of course, horse shit. Cal Poly's campus was situated on an Arabian horse ranch donated by the Kellogg cereal family, and we also had an Ag school, with cows, chickens, and a swine unit. This was a great

place to appreciate the "paradoxical, the illogical, and in general the often surprising elements in human existence." For example, when teaching about the scientific study of masturbation in my Philosophy of Love and Sex course, it was heartening to discover that corn flakes were actually invented and manufactured by the physician John Kellogg to suppress this supposedly awful vice. When Tony the Tiger mascots would show up at our various campus celebrations, these could be occasions to contemplate the hidden meaning and power of corn flakes.

Dick was especially attuned to the odd similarities and contrasts between the self-important, enterprising humans who inhabited the campus and the exploited, ruminating animals. His casual observations about the ranch/farm setting of our somewhat insane endeavor to lead the life of the mind served to sharpen our appreciation of incongruity. They also helped us reframe our obsessions—with annoying students or power-grabbing administrators—and ultimately cope with the unrelenting demands of the work place. I vaguely remember him wishing we all had more horse sense about our predicaments.

Although Dick began writing and publishing about humor after he retired from Cal Poly, I think some of his philosophical musings about humor wore off on me. I began including a section in my

Philosophy of Love and Sex course on why sex is often the subject of humor—is there something inherently funny about sex? I would bring in examples of sexual humor, and ask students to analyze these in terms of the various theories of humor, e.g., superiority, relief, incongruity, play, and so on. It turned out to be one of the most fun and engaging sections of the course—and my students probably needed some relief from our investigations of sexual assault, harassment, perversion, and so on. In my course on feminist philosophy, I started including a section on gender and humor: what makes a joke sexist, why are there so few women comedians (there are many more today), what is feminist humor, and why are feminists charged with being humorless? It was hard to find writings by philosophers on these topics, and yet these questions invite philosophical analysis.

I think Dick is right that appreciating humor is a form of aesthetic understanding. If this is so, then it would be good to expand our capacity for recognizing the incongruous and surprising elements around us. Perhaps, deepening such forms of appreciation should be included at all levels of instruction. When I read to my granddaughter, I've become more aware of how children's books contain many incongruities and surprises, and part of the joy of reading to children is to see if they recognize which incongruities are "real" (in some sense) and

which are not. We expose children to fantasy and fiction in order, we think, to expand their imaginations and creativity, but perhaps part of what we're doing is expanding their sense of humor. As Dick notes, this is different from the ability to laugh, and is more about the capacity to notice weird and unexpected relationships among things. Helping people develop their sense of humor is probably a good way to help them live a good life, so why don't philosophers do more of this?

Whenever I see a bearded iris, especially a dark purple one, I'm reminded of Dick. And then I my mind usually turns to crush films or why corn flakes are not just for breakfast…

Humor in the Zhouyi

Bradford Hatcher

Introduction

It was the 1969-1970 school year at Cal Poly, Pomona, when I signed up to study some philosophy under Dick Richards, on the advice of my brother Byron. I was in the middle of a radical renovation of my worldview at the time, having dropped out of college. The rocket science major didn't work out, once I realized that all the jobs were military, and the math major had suffered from an epiphany while trying to differentiate inverse hyperbolic trig functions on two hits of acid. I needed to switch to some more primitive human endeavors, where it wasn't so very far to the creative frontier. Both philosophy and psychology fit that bill: those guys didn't have a clue, except maybe Nietzsche and Maslow. I wouldn't find out about the Stoics, Epicureans, and Cynics until later. Neuroscience wasn't really invented yet.

Byron and I had lucked out big time in public high school with a world-class teacher (literally), who understood that education required little more than lighting a fire and keeping it stoked. Hunger to learn would never be a problem for either of us. And I knew that Byron wouldn't point me to a lesser teacher. I would be serious about my new studies, but that problem was getting chipped away

slowly by Alan Watts and Asian studies. That's where Dick came in, a funny guy in a serious business. I took logic and semantics the first semester, and ethics the next. There was something about humor, and the way Dick demonstrated it. I wish I'd kept copies of his zany-ass quizzes. Anyway, that approach of his gave me a huge missing piece to my puzzle. I had always had a fondness for pranks, and always enjoyed comedy, but this went a lot deeper than that. For me it was the license to unbind ourselves from any one perspective or frame of reference, to go exploring outside the box, to put unfamiliar things together, and to nest analogies. To poke the world, to sound out the idols for that hollow ring. It was the key I needed to cognitive nimbleness, and was almost the same thing as play. It was permission to be a polymath, an eclectic, and an interdisciplinarian. It was permission to question everything, and especially my own seriousness. I didn't have that overview before, and I remain immensely grateful to Dick Richards for that gift. A 2015 cartoon by Hilary B. Price pictures a happy rat walking atop the walls of a maze and wondering "Why didn't I think of this earlier?"

I picked the following essay because it illustrates what can happen when we approach a thing that's always taken seriously with the suspicion that it might have something to entertain a sense of humor. The commentary is on the Zhouyi, or

Changes of Zhou, the original part of the Book of Changes, superficially a book of divination written 28-30 centuries ago, but which appears to also contain a situational ethic or moral instruction for the young of the noble class (Junzi, a word that changed meaning with Confucius). The book was used officially by the king and the nobles. Of the tens of thousands of studies done on this book, from hundreds of different points of view, I have never encountered a one that acknowledged a layer of humor in the subtext. But I saw stuff that I thought was peeking through, even though humor had to have plausible deniability at the royal court, since it was primarily used to affirm important decisions in affairs of state. I saw what I thought were hints and puns, and plenty of irony and caricature, but I wasn't certain until I had taken a few years to learn ancient Chinese and translate the book myself.

Humor in the Zhouyi

In 1997, when I first proposed writing an article with this title, I wondered what ideas others had already happened upon and so I posted an inquiry on several newsgroups in search of some favorite examples. I was a little shocked to learn that, while many long-time readers had had several humorous coincidences and encounters with the Yijing, very few saw any

intentional humor buried in the text itself. A few, particularly those belonging to religiously Daoist, academic Modernist, and the Twitching Captives schools, were quite openly hostile to the idea.

Indeed, few systems of thought or belief have acknowledged humor as a special state of mind and made an honored place for it in their doctrines. Only three of the world's 'religions' come to mind: Daoism, Zen and Sufism. All three of these seem to be deeply concerned with the resolution of paradox, of which spontaneous laughter, grinning, or weeping in good ways, is often the consequence. Elsewhere, humor seems to be more of a threat than a promise. When Abraham was called to test his faith in YHVH, he was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac as proof. Care to guess what the name Isaac meant when the story was written? Laughter. The coexistence of belief or conviction and humor is often the most difficult paradox of all to resolve. Just ask anyone who has followed their love of the lighthearted lore of Zen into a Zen monastery: this can be a bitter, cold shock, at least until you can get the Roshi alone.

Humor was making its way into Greek art and literature by the 5th century

BCE, and it was fully at home there by the time of Aristophanes. But humor had appeared long before this, on cave walls and in Egyptian hieroglyphics. It cannot be that people did no chuckling yet. As to the China of the Early Zhou, it may be argued that the serious matters faced by the royal court could not permit such foolishness, especially where there were questions of war and such. But doesn't this call to mind the royal courts of old Europe, where the court jester or fool had the ability to make the king laugh at just the right moment? And how many lives might this have saved? There would of course have been serious constraints on the Zhouyi authors - it would not be at all wise to offend or insult the king or his court. The authors, even in jest, were not pure fools - wherever such seeds were to be planted, there would need to be a little ambiguity, a lot of subtlety, some back doors to escape through, and plenty of plausible deniability. Otherwise the work would face censorship whenever a king took offense. As such, it's always very easy to see the serious side of even the funniest Zhouyi line.

I need to call upon my personal experience with the humor of shamans in

their more ‘primitive’ versions of the societal role of counselor or mental health worker. These people have cracked me up too often to ignore this. This proves nothing, but it prepares me to accept humor as a deliberately applied treatment, or a therapy. The Sufis have mastered this as well, and use it with a kind of surgical precision to treat human ignorance (of the divine) as a disease. The understanding of humor as medicine has even gained wide acceptance in professional circles, and claims of its effectiveness is backed up by a statistically significant number of statistical studies. Humor will usually involve being jerked suddenly out of a prior state of mind. In anxiety or neurosis, it is the ’thing which we do not understand’ which is obscured by our life within these mindsets, expectations or frames of reference as mental confines. In subjects for divination, the ‘thing that I am just not seeing’ will often demand nothing more than a new mindset, expectation, or frame of reference. This is humor’s home turf. ‘Before you say something that might offend another person, it is always a good idea to first walk a mile in their shoes. That way, if they take offense to what you say, you are already a mile away. Plus you have

their shoes.' Much of humor, whether rude and crude, or refined and witty, seems to have two key ingredients: 1) a buildup of something that might be called an emotional charge, which is released suddenly into nowhere; and 2) the juxtaposition of two frames of reference which are worlds apart, with the humoree's attention being jerked suddenly from one to the other. Sometimes, however, it may simply be the enjoyment of cognitive dissonance.

The source of the emotional charge that humor makes use of is often something much less than noble: aggression, apprehension, fear, xenophobia, racism, sexism, revulsion at deformity, negative or anti-sympathy, or other emotional discomfort. The use of laughter, of course, goes way back in primitive society in its use as a corrective social force, as a precursor to shame. You don't see much of this malice in the Yijing, but it may be that the frequency of malice in humor in general is the source of so much reluctance to perceive humor as a device used by the Zhouyi authors. In contrast, the emotional charge here, as it is in the teaching stories of Daoism, Zen and Sufism, seems to use more of the reader's

hope, expectation and anticipation, and to rely heavily on the respect and reverence that the tradition is accorded. The current theories of humor, of which Arthur Koestler is the best known author, suggest that the process of humor involves emotion and intellect traveling a while down the same track or line of reasoning. The intellect is then made to jump suddenly and unexpectedly onto a different track, leaving emotion, with its greater inertia or slower response to change, derailed with nowhere to go and nothing to do but go Blooey.

The frames of reference, lines of reasoning, or tracks to jump, can come from any two worlds which are unrelated and have their own sets of internal logic, assumptions, and rules. The two can be literary vs literal (walk a mile in their shoes), one meaning vs another meaning (take my wife, please), general vs specific (that was no lady, that was my wife), mental vs physical, specialized vs common, sacred vs secular, trivial vs exalted, conscious vs automatic, part vs whole, mental vs material, and so on. The simplest form, the pun, plays on the homonym or polysemy, the assignment of two different meanings to the same word or sound. The Yi seems to

have much of this - the limited number of syllables and polysemous nature of the Ancient Chinese language would, I suspect, make this play irresistible. Much of this, of course, would be lost to us, lost on us, and even lost on the later Chinese scholars. Some we can infer, like plays on Yi as Change, Easy and an ancient place name. And some seem to carry well between Chinese and English because they are the same puns in both languages and both cultures.

The notion of cultural differences brings up a much bigger problem. As Koestler says, "Humor thrives only in its native climate, embedded in its native logic; when one does not know what to expect, one cannot be cheated of one's expectations." In other words, if one of the two juxtaposed frames of reference is missing (or hard to reach, or poorly understood) in the cultural repertoire of the hearer, both sides of the joke are lost. You could see how the mere existence of cultural differences could be used to avoid looking for humor altogether. Even the Chinese people do not exactly live in the Zhouyi's native climate. But look at this statement closer: only in its native climate.

This is oversimplified and there is a much broader spectrum here. In its narrowest sense this points to the difficulty of a native of rural Minnesota in "getting" a New Yorker's urban humor. A little broader might be the difficulty that an American television viewer has in laughing at a BBC comedy special. Then there is my own most embarrassing difficulty with understanding sophisticated puns in Swahili. But there is also a sense in which 'native climate' can refer to the broader realms of human experience, and I have already made my prejudices known regarding this issue - that technology and complex cultural advances aside, we still have a great deal in common with the Early Zhou Chinese as humming beings living in humming societies with more than a hundred millennia as a single species in common. And in conjunction with this, an argument can be made that the Zhouyi authors were keeping their famously keen cognitive abilities alert to the existence of human universals. Assuming that they were looking for common problems, this is what they wanted to write about. With this possibility, we should not be too quick to assume that any or all Zhouyi humor would necessarily be lost to our cultural

differences.

It has been my admittedly unreachable objective to discover the intended meanings of the Zhouyi authors. I have made no apologies or excuses for this, and I will openly disagree with anyone who claims that this should not even be attempted simply because it is doomed to failure. As a working hypothesis, and not a theory in need of a proof, the value of the idea can be judged by its conclusions as well as by its premises. And one of these conclusions is that the hypothesis might be able to solve several long-standing and otherwise intractable problems of interpretation. An inability to even look for humor may have left a number of lines completely misunderstood and thus badly translated for all these many centuries. I am, of course, too close to the task to be the judge of this, and so I submit the following for your edification and amusement.

Below are several examples of what I consider to be intended humor, but somewhat buried by the Zhouyi authors in what I've termed 'layers of vertical ambiguity.' It has gradually become my opinion that humorous devices such as these, particularly irony, used to illustrate a

situational ethics, and caricature or parody, using images depicting people 'unclear on the concept,' may be characteristic of as much as a tenth of the Zhouyi text. Irony and parody are the two most common forms, but there are others, some specific to the nature of the Zhouyi itself, which will be discussed as they come up. All this is in addition to the use of a still more frequent 'simple light-heartedness.' Even if some of these nominations fall to more serious scrutiny, I hope that enough survive to at least open a discussion on the topic, to which there seems to be a lot of resistance from both believer and scholarly types. Two translations are given for each line, one of the popular versions and my own. Admittedly mine seems to put a little spin on the line translation to help to bring out the subtle ideas, but a look at the Matrix translation and the Glossary will show that I have still not ventured very far at all from a strictly literal translation. In fact, I have tended to be more verbatim than the often stuffier translations.

01.4 - □ □ □ □ ，□ □ 。

* Leaping about on the brink of a chasm. He is not at fault. (tr. Blofeld)
* Somehow to dance across the deep. With no mistakes.

This one is more of an example of simple lightheartedness than humor, and it has a good reason for being so. It is generally assumed that the subject is still the young dragon, finally ready to make that all-important rite of passage, the big transition from aerodynamic theory to true flight, wherein the insubstantial wind must be grabbed, used for support, and climbed upon. (Wind is from the hui gua or upper Trigram in the zhi gua or resultant hexagram). Well, you may be a young dragon, but standing there on the edge of that cliff for the first time, your mighty knuckles are still really white. Just take hold of the wind - yeah, right. While the very Gravity of the situation must be fully appreciated, it is also the thing that will kill you. And so it is important to learn to 'lighten up,' giving up all but the most necessary baggage. Lightening up could be just the key, just the thing to do against gravity. I think the line is similar in

implication to this quote from David Lloyd George: “Don’t be afraid to take a big step if one is indicated. One cannot cross a chasm in two small jumps.” Btw, this is translating Yue4, with its feather radical, as a shamanic feather dance, a rite of passage from one world to another. But here is an example where vertical ambiguity is necessary. At the same time, another querent might be ready to hear exactly the opposite: “Look down. This is a serious jump. Rethink this whole thing. Life or death. Nothing funny here.” The authors, at least from my perspective, appear light-hearted and playful much of the time. They loved to look at things and problems in novel ways, and they loved to have fun with words and expressions. But I want to concentrate here on lines which bear more of the structural properties of humor.

05.6 - □ □ □ ，□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ ，□ □ □ □ 。

* The topmost line, divided, shows its subject entered into the cavern. But there are three guests coming, without being urged, to his help. If he receive them

respectfully, there will be good fortune in the end. (tr. Legge)
* Entering into a pit. With no invitations extended to visitors, three people arrive. To attend to them will end in good fortune.

The authors use the term Xue2 (pit, hole, cave) in several places the same way we do, as (also) a predicament, or an emotional state, or the dumps of despair, and as a pun. The general idea of the Gua is to maximize the meantime, to get ready for less humdrum experience to arrive, and to get worthy of its arrival. The opportunity to have cleaned up one's pit, one's dump, has now passed and now here come the guests. One can still salvage some dignity here by showing respect.

10.6 - □ □ □ □ ，□ □ □ □ 。

* The sixth line, undivided, tells us to look at the whole course that is trodden, and examine the presage which that gives. If it be complete and without failure, there will be great good fortune. (tr. Legge)
* Studying the footsteps, examining the omens. (If) these come full circle, supreme good fortune.

You have just finished treading on

the tiger's tail. If you are still alive, this can be taken as the primary measure of success. Ghosts do not leave footprints. If your footprints do not lead all the way back to where you now stand, you must have had bad luck somewhere. The omen is that you have already succeeded. The natives of Fiji have a tongue-in-cheek peasant omen parallel: if you are walking through a coconut grove and a coconut lands on your head, this is an omen that you had very bad luck.

13.5 - □ □ , □ □ □ □ □ □ 。□ □ □ □ □ 。

* Men bound in fellowship first weep and lament, but afterwards they laugh. After great struggles they succeed in meeting. b) That is, they are victorious. (tr. Wilhelm)
* Fellowship with others begins with wailing (and) weeping. But then follows with laughter. Mighty armies can entertain each other. 13.5x Praising each others abilities.

I hope the translation explained this one. There are other levels to meet on, and the battlefields have better uses. The wordplay relies on the broad range of

meanings for Yu4 (7625), meet with, encounter, receive, entertain, engage, etc. to show that there are other options in real life as well. Here is a fairly rare instance where the Wing authors of the Xiao Xiang 'got it' as well.

15.1 - □ □ □ □ , □ □ □ □ , □ 。

* The first line, divided, shows us the superior man who adds humility to humility. Even the great stream may be crossed with this, and there will be good fortune. (tr. Legge)
* Authentic modesty in the noble young one (is) useful (in) crossing great streams. Promising.

This line illustrates the simple, straightforward application of incongruity, a device used many times in the Zhouyi. The Gua Ming of Qian1, at least when it is glossed as Modesty, is fraught with a number of connotations which are inconsistent with the ideas being set forth here. Modesty can carry implications of false humility and self-effacement, or connote a toady or a sycophant. The Zhouyi uses this device to dismantle these illusions.

The very idea that modesty can be applied to the achievement of great and ambitious ends (and later, that modesty can even be used to set an army in motion) sets up a kind of tension which is broken only with the understanding that something closer to Honesty, Authenticity, or Maturity is being portrayed here.

27.6 - □ □ , □ □ , □ □ □ □ 。

* The source of nourishment. Awareness of danger brings good fortune. It furthers one to cross the great water. (tr. Wilhelm)
* (At) the source of the appetites. Brutal (but) promising. Worthwhile to cross the great stream.

For me this one calls up the image of two missionaries sitting in a big old cannibal cook pot. But in any event, this far across the great water, the tables can turn and predator can quickly become prey. The food chain is actually a nutrient cycle. The corresponding line in the zhi gua is the one beyond hope of returning, which was repeated in the West as Napoleon's winter march on Moscow.

28.1 - □ □ □ □ ，□ □ 。

* The first line, divided, shows one placing mats of the white mao grass under things set on the ground. There will be no error. (tr. Legge)
* (For) cushions, using white thatch grass. Make no mistakes.

This is an example of irony. While precaution is called for here, and this behavior shows what is ordinarily admired as a civilized, aesthetic sense, what is needed here and now is a heads-up brand of caution. Elsewhere throughout the Gua texts, the roof is about to come down. These little woven white place mats are seriously misplaced. The Zhouyi will frequently trap someone who has moved on to the Yao Ci texts but has already lost sight of the theme of the Gua as a whole.

43.5 - □ □ □ □ ，□ □ □ □ 。[□ □ □ □]

* In dealing with weeds, firm resolution is necessary. Walking in the middle remains free of blame. b) The middle is not yet in the light. (tr. Wilhelm)
* Wild greens (on) dry land. Determined to

uproot. To balance the behavior is not a mistake. 43.5x The center has not yet been honored.

This is irony again. Our dedicated gardener has too much force and not enough sense. Not only is he destroying salad greens as weeds, they are growing voluntarily on a hill, where no plowing or irrigation is necessary. Presumably he will then replace them with something more delicate, which needs more weeding, and will require that water be run uphill to meet its needs. This is not the world's first permaculturist here, and not the path of least resistance. The character is demonstrating the normally praiseworthy virtue of persistence, but without this being in balance (Zhong1), it is not a virtue yet.

44.3 - □ □ □ ，□ □ □ □ ，□ ，□ □ □。

[□ □ □ □]

* His haunches have been flayed and he walks totteringly – trouble, but no great error! 44.3x His walking totteringly implies being able to walk without being dragged. (tr. Blofeld)
* A rump with no skin. His progress (is)

second-rate now. Brutal. (But) not a complete mistake. 44.3x Advancing (but) now not being dragged.

The Gua text was right: the woman was powerful. It was not at all useful to court that woman. Apparently, little helmet-head has been demonstrating poor leadership skills for some time now. This represents one of the forms of humor specific to the Yi, preying upon the reader who has lost sight of the theme of the Hexagram as a whole, in this case Restraint. However, ropes, chains and other kinds of restraints may indeed have been involved. But he has learned his lesson, and now he is no longer bound, leashed, or tethered. Maybe some sweet nurse ...

47.5 - □ □ ，□ □ □ □ ，□ □ □ □ ，□ □ □ □ 。[□ □ □]

* His nose and feet are cut off. Oppression at the hands of the man with the purple knee bands. Joy comes softly. It furthers one to make offerings and libations. b) Thus one attains good fortune. (tr. Wilhelm)
* Nose cut off, feet cut off. Oppressed by rouge-sashed (ministers). And then

gradually finding relief. Worthwhile (and) productive to sacrifice (this) sacrifice. 47.5x To suffer happiness.

Our subject here is a noble or a sovereign (line 5) with the ability to make command decisions. But his life is being moved by forces outside his control because he is being so purely passive in all things. He has adopted the victim mentality. Maybe next time they bathe him they could use ice water. This is an example of parody, satire or caricature, and this device may be found in every line of this particular Hexagram. The Hexagram itself has being stuck in rut, a mindset, an expectation, or a frame of reference, as a good portion of its central theme. Given this, it is not surprising that the text attempts to get the reader outside looking in, and poking some fun at the victim's approach to life.

50.3 - □ □ □ ，□ □ □ ，□ □ □ □ ，□ □ □ □ ，□ □ 。

* The third line, undivided, shows the caldron with the places of its ears changed. The progress of its subject is thus stopped. The fat flesh of the pheasant which is in the

caldron will not be eaten. But the (genial) rain will come, and the grounds for repentance will disappear. There will be good fortune in the end. (tr. Legge)
* The cauldron's ears [handles] (have been) altered, its function (is) impaired. The pheasant's rich meat is not eaten. A sudden rain (would) diminish regrets. In the end, an opportunity.

This is parody, satire or caricature again. This situation has been grossly mishandled, and you can't get a grip. Here too is an example of common ideas crossing cultural boundaries and used as images, metaphors, and finally puns, in both cultures. If the cauldron represents, let us say, your philosophy of life, it lacks practical application. The cauldron appears to have been redesigned either by artists or by art critics. The most you can do now is pray for rain to put out the fire, to salvage what's left of the fat, juicy pheasant. And rethink the relationship between form and function. The Gua theme concerns pragmatism, the application of reliable methods in the cultivation of merit and a superior culture. Empty ritual and show do violence to this objective.

53.4 - □ □ □ □ ，□ □ □ □ ，□ □。

* The wild goose gradually draws near the tree. Perhaps it will find a flat branch. No blame. Wilhelm says: “A tree is not a suitable place for a wild goose. But if it is clever, it will find a flat branch on which it can get a footing.” p. 207. (tr. Wilhelm)
* The wild goose advances by degrees to the trees. Perchance to find that flat branch. No harm done.

A similar image appears in the Shijing at 1.10.8, with geese fighting for balance in a Jujube tree, so this image was apparently known to the culture as a whole and may have been proverbial. Geese, of course, have floppy webbed feet, not mighty talons able grab hold of anything but mud and water. The call here is for acceptance, patience, and adaptability, but the image is a caricature, or a Gary Larson cartoon. The goose, if he fails, can always waddle around on the hill, with a view almost as good as an eagle’s.

57.6 - □ □ □ □ ，□ □ □ □ ，□ □ 。

* Crawling below the bed. He loses what is required for his traveling expenses. Persistence brings misfortune. (Blofeld) [In line two, a rabble of diviners and wizards are used]
* Subtleties happening under the bed. Losing some valuables (and) an axe. Constancy has (its) pitfalls.

This happened only recently, down in Line 2. Our subject has now been comforted, and laid all doubts to rest. His Wushi have assured him that this was only a couple of spooks trying to wear him down. But this time the 'spooks' are really there, and run off with his money and his axe. The symptoms are the same, but the disorder is entirely different: different kind of spirits this time, spiriting his stuff away. As Xun4 doubled, this is the 'thinking twice' Hexagram. Here of all places it is not wise to generalize from single instances and go back to sleep on your bed of complacency. Quick generalizations are most ill-suited to the shapeshifting world of the Gua Xun. Here again is a line of the type which plays with the tendency to lose sight of the subject matter of the Gua as a whole, or to not

relate one line to what is happening in the others.

Excerpted from *The Book of Changes: Yijing, Word by Word*, 2006, published free online at www.hermetica.info

Mongo Give Good E-Mail

Camille Atkinson

The first time I met Richard C. Richards (whom I later learned was also known as Mongo) we were at the 2013 LPS conference on the west coast of Florida. He was wearing a T-shirt that said something about having attended his own funeral, so I figured that he, like me, had a penchant for gallows humor. Later, during an author-meets-critics session focusing on his at-the-time-new book (*A Philosopher Looks at The Sense of Humor*), I was as eager to learn more about his work as I was delighted by the friendly banter between him and the other attendees. Although this was the first time I had been to this conference or met members of the society, it was immediately clear that this was a man who was both loved and respected. So, because I was determined to get a piece of him myself, I bought his book, read it, then reached out to him via email. Thus began one of my most cherished online relationships. Actually, that's an easy hurdle to clear as I don't, as a rule, have online relationships and consider the term itself a bit oxymoronic. No, we didn't become "FaceSpace" friends or start "sexting" one another—in fact, I suspect that he would be as uninterested as I am in such 21st century distractions. Of course, I can only speak for myself, but I hope it will suffice to say that I avoid social

media as much as I do angry fire ants or artisanal pizza, and not necessarily in that order.

Because I enjoyed him and our exchanges so much, I kept finding excuses to keep the conversation going. I also wanted to pay tribute to his work somehow—or, at least, the one book of his that I'd thoroughly read and carefully annotated—because I found it fun, funny, and important. So, with his permission, I wrote an online review. What follows are some excerpts from longer dialogues using our pseudonyms—"Mongo" and "Daughter of One-Lung-Low" or, for brevity's sake, "DOOLL." I'm not sure how he became Mongo but suspect it had something to do with the Mel Brooks film, "Blazing Saddles." As for my moniker, Mongo gets credit for coining it after I'd shared the silly, self-deprecating joke my Chinese-Russian father told his doctor when informed that he and his lungs were working at less than 75% capacity—specifically, he asked her to refer to him by his "Chinese name of One-Lung-Low."

I hope this provides enough context to appreciate the following exchange and, no, I haven't bothered to clean-up any grammar, spelling, punctuation, and so forth. Moreover, it most certainly will not be in APA, MLA, CIA, LSD, or any other proper academic style and format.

Me: Hi "Mongo"!

Mongo: Hi, Daughter of One Lung Low.

I'll cut into your email and make some comments at the end if I haven't covered it all.

First off, your review of the book is a delight. You have indeed captured my thinking, emphasizing some points better than I did. Thanks you. And your own reactions are clear and cogent. I am delighted to have such a fine reviewer.

DOOLL: OK, my turn to cut in...It's kinda like dancing, huh?!

Mongo: Certainly not a sword fight.

DOOLL: Oh good! I was hoping I didn't blow it somehow—it was fun for me, but I'd hate to have disappointed you.

The [job] interview process of the last, ugh! TWO years has been horribly frustrating—I seem to be suffering from something analogous to the "always a bridesmaid, never a bride" type problem. However, this year seems more promising so keep your fingers, toes, etc. crossed for me!

Mongo: Even my eyes will be crossed.

DOOLL: In the meantime, I have a humor question for you and would like you to help me make sense of the following experience: I was in line at the grocery store today and noticed a huge, red mess on the floor nearby. I said, "Geez, that looks like a crime scene!" Of course, it wasn't but I wasn't sure what it was and, fortunately, the man who dropped it laughed and said, "Yeah, what a waste of a good Merlot, huh?" One of the cashiers laughed too but then quickly covered his mouth because all of the other folks within earshot were wearing expressions of disapproval. Now, I've been in Bend long enough not to care what folks think of me but I'm always wondering about differences in what counts as funny and/or humorous. So, you tell me, did my quip count as humor? If so, where was the incongruity? If not, would you say it was merely a case of "funny-ha-ha" that only two of us (plus my husband) laughed at??

Mongo: Damn. A real-life example to test a theory. So the theory is internally fairly consistent. Now it has to apply and explain? I suspect your reaction was humor. The inconsistency would be the different and clashing explanations of the liquid on the floor.

DOOLL: OK, so here's one more question I have regarding the incongruity condition for humor...Can there be different interpretations for what counts as incongruous? For example, I thought I was pointing out a different incongruity—namely, that it would be rather unexpected or surprising to find a "crime scene" at a supermarket check stand. Then again, depending on what markets one shops at…maybe not??

Mongo: Incongruity is a function of the mindset. How is that for obscurity? It is a function of what a person expects, what “fits” into that, and what doesn’t. But the important part is the state of mind of the individual. Someone distracted or anxious will probably not be able to play with the incongruity she notices. Of course two people can see the same thing, and only one sees something that does not fit. One man’s incongruity is another man’s ordinary world.

DOOLL: I suspect that this might explain, at least partly, why my attempts at humor fail around here more often than not. Not only do many people seem unaware of the incongruous, much less how fun it can be to play with them, they don't even seem to notice inconsistencies. All I know is, teaching logic or critical thinking at COCC was WAY harder than I could ever have imagined. This is because a large

number of students failed to understand what a contradiction was, let alone care about it! This also explains why they cut my position, cancelled all philosophy classes for over a year and now offer only two per term.

Mongo: What a weird decision. I have always had an intrinsic suspicion of administrators.
The merlot dropper may have been laughing from nervous energy, or maybe he too saw and appreciated the inconsistency. Same with the clerk. Sometimes you can't be sure of what other people are laughing at, and why, so you just use the WAG system (Wild-Assed Guess.) The inconsistency was not strong, the laughs were hard to interpret, and overall it is hard to tell for sure.

DOOLL: Yeah, that's the problem, isn't it?? Meaning, we can only see others' external behavior (laughter, pained expression, etc.), so it's virtually impossible to know the cause or causes of it. Even when it comes to understanding my own motives, I can't always tell or there's more than one explanation for why I did what I did. This is also the problem with psychological surveys that ask folks about their intentions, motives and so forth which is why I don't put much stock in them. The surveys which ask couples about sex and cheating really get me—

mainly because I think we humans are pretty good at lying, even to (or especially to) ourselves…

Mongo: I think it was Nietzsche who said: I will not lie, not even to myself. Pretty hard to keep that commitment.

In sum, we carried on like this for months, also sharing personal stories about our families, children or the lack thereof, etc. What I don't believe Mongo knew was how painful my life was at the time. Not only was I in a chaotic mess-of-a-marriage, I was living in rural Oregon.

When I told one of my urban-dwelling uncles that I'd landed there, he quipped, "Geez, you could have been kidnapped to a better place!" In other words, it was an unfamiliar place where I felt unusually alone and isolated—despite being married or, perhaps, because of it—and having never really dealt with the untimely deaths of my parents. I mention this only to underscore how grateful I am for Mongo's substantive and regular email attention. His wisdom and generosity suggested a sense of community, however abstract, and his unrelenting sense of humor provided a delicious relief from those moments of despair. On a more rational and practical level, the exchange of ideas gave me the intellectual stimulation that I would not have had otherwise, and his work inspired me to get some

research, writing, and publishing done. For that, I remain forever in his debt. So, if he ever needs a kidney, there's lien on one of mine with his name on it.

I will close this tribute with a quote from Carrie Fisher—another brilliantly funny person who, sadly, is no longer sharing jokes with or among the living. In an interview shortly before she shuffled-off those mortal coils, she defended her penchant for self-deprecating and irreverent humor. Saying something to the effect of, "It creates community when you share private, embarrassing things and can find other people who share those things." This is exactly the kind of kinship I experienced in my Mongo-encounters. It's also why I remember Richard C. Richards so fondly and with such sheer delight. And, I will continue to do so for as long as I remain a part of this world. For all I know he may outlive me. If so, I hope he will recall me with equal fondness as more DOOLL than fool.

Aesthetics, Humor, and Virtue: Reflections on Richards and the Good Life

Elizabeth Victor

Introduction

In *A Philosopher Looks at the Sense of Humor*, Richard C. Richards discusses how one's appreciation of and ability to create incongruities is a necessary condition for developing a sense of humor. One's sense of humor, according to Richards, can be a component of happiness. In this paper, I will build on Richards's concept of the sense of humor. I will argue that Richards account is consistent with an Aristotelian picture of happiness as holistic well-being. Specifically, I will suggest that the attitude underlying the aesthetic and/or the humorous is a kind of pro-attitude that must be cultivated (i.e., one is not simply born with a developed sense of humor). I argue that a sense of humor, as an Aristotelian virtue, is consistent with Richards's developmental account of a sense of humor. However, I am making a stronger claim than Richards; I will argue that the sense of humor is necessary for happiness. In this way, I am filling out Richards's account of the role one's sense of humor plays in one's long-term happiness. Since a good Aristotelian will offer examples to elucidate the intermediate position between the extremes, I offer an analysis of Richards own writings and behavior as exemplifying an

excellent sense of humor, one that has served as a model for others to emulate the kind of play necessary to "transform a simple incongruity into the stuff of humor".

Richards' Theory of The Sense of Humor

In Chapter five of his book, Richards tells us that a sense of humor is a "kind of aesthetic experience" that is a playful engagement with incongruities. He explains, "[s]ince humor is a response to the incongruous, the sense of humor is the mental capacity…to playfully discover or create unexpected and surprising combinations of elements" (Richards 2013, 71). He employs a developmental account to explain how one goes about training up a sense of humor, telling the reader that attitudes (a sense of humor being one of them) are "a set of habits with which we approach life." Said habits are learned early, Richards tells us, including one's sense of humor. We can see evidence for this in the way that children play with incongruities—trying on a sense of humor when they first learn how to tell a knock-knock joke. I was recently around some small children, and they were tickled pink by the silliness of the incongruities within these kinds of jokes. Here are a couple of choice knock-knock jokes:

Knock, knock!
Who's there?
Cow Says!
Cow Says who?
No silly, cow says 'moo' not 'who'

Knock, knock!
Who's there?
Boo!
Boo who?
Oh don't cry, it's just a joke

These sorts of jokes capture what Richards calls "the sense of the funny." We might think of the sense of the funny as a nascent sense of humor. As Richards indicates, "[t]o become the sense of humor, the sense of the funny must become habitual… [a]n attitude involving the development of appreciation of incongruities must occur" (ibid, 77). From the habitual "play" with a sense of the funny, we develop a sense of humor through the cultivation of the aesthetic appreciation of incongruities (ibid, 77-78).

This cultivation of an aesthetic attitude or stance toward incongruities is what gives the sense of humor value, over and above a cheap thrill or temporary amusement. Beyond eliciting "happy laughter" from others, a sense of humor allows us to face the difficult fact that we're all going to die, and

everyone we know will die, and life is likely meaningless. The cultivation of the sense of humor, as a form of art, gives us power over the fact that we're mere mortals, and that is something that gives humor value above and beyond the instrumental use of humor in, the classroom, or the hospital…or the bedroom. This stance or pro-attitude that underlies the sense of humor directly contributes to a person's well-being.

Yet, even as Richards maintains that a sense of humor has a role in happiness, he seems to stop just short of claiming that a sense of humor is necessary for a person to be happy. A person might, for instance, develop other coping mechanisms to help him through life's rough patches, building a fulfilling life without having acquired a sense of humor. However, he hedges this claim in the very next paragraph as he states, "I think a person can be happy without having or experiencing joy and delight, but it would be a rare person who could do this…a sense of humor is in almost all cases necessary for a happy life" (ibid, 114-15).

<u>Richard and Aristotle Walk into a Bar (and they both say ouch!)</u>

On my interpretation, it seems that Richards is suggesting that the attitude underlying the aesthetic and/or the humorous is a kind of pro-attitude that must be cultivated (i.e., one is not

simply born with a developed sense of humor). In this next section, I argue that a sense of humor, as an Aristotelian virtue, is consistent with Richards developmental account of a sense of humor, but I don't think Richards goes far enough. In building on Richards arguments, I will make the further claim that the sense of humor is necessary for happiness.

Aristotle on Humor

Some might argue that what Aristotle considered wit was quite narrow, maybe too narrow to capture the range of funny stuff Richards discusses. Aristotle goes so far as to hint that some kinds of joking ought to be outlawed. Specifically, he states, "since a joke is a type of abuse, and legislators prohibit some types of abuse, [the legislators] would presumably be right to prohibit some types of jokes" (Aristotle 1999, 66). John Morreal, for instance, interprets this passage as evidence that "though Aristotle considered wit a valuable part of conversation (Nicomachean Ethics 4, 8), he agreed with Plato that laughter expresses scorn." (Morreal 2016). What is clear is that Aristotle presents wit as one of the virtues and he discusses humor in *Rhetoric*.

In Book II, Chapter 8, section 13 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle first presents us with the virtue of wit. He describes wit as the intermediate position between buffoonery and

boorishness (Aristotle 1999, 26). In a more detailed explanation of the virtue of wit, in Book Book IV, Chapter 8, Aristotle states that wit is a matter of character as he says, "[t]hose who go to excess in raising laughs seem to be vulgar buffoons…[t]hose who would never say anything themselves to raise a laugh, and even object when other people do it, seem to be boorish and stiff. Those who joke in appropriate ways are called agile-witted. For these sorts of jokes seem to be movements of someone's character…" (ibid, 65, my emphasis). Aristotle cautions that we must be discriminate in our use of humor, being sure to pay attention to context and our audience, as he says that if humor is to contribute to relaxation and amusement, one must "…say and listen to the right things and in the right way. The company we are in when we speak or listen also makes a difference" (ibid.). In this way, the wit, as a virtue, is like many other virtues, we must be trained up through practice and wise counsel.

Aristotle is short on the details of how we go about training up the virtue of wit, but he does give us an account of humor that is similar to the incongruity theory Richards depends upon. In *Rhetoric* (III, 2), Aristotle presents us with something akin to the incongruity theory of humor. He states, "[t]he effect is produced even by jokes depending upon changes of the letters of a word; this too is a surprise. You find this in verse as well as in prose.

The word which comes is not what the hearer imagined." (Aristotle 1941) For Aristotle, the laughter expressed comes from the incongruity between the joke and the facts of the world. When taken in combination with his explanation of wit in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it makes sense why one would need to know his audience. Incongruities change, depending upon context and audience education level, gender, life experiences, etc. For instance, if I'm at a party with a bunch of MDs, I might use the pun "Conjunctivitis.com — that's a site for sore eyes", but this joke would fall flat with my siblings. If I'm in a room full of philosophers, I might say "Zeno walks half way into a bar…", but again, this joke would fall flat with just about everyone in my family. Knowing the audience is crucial to the apt exercise of wit.

<u>The Role of Wit in Happiness (Eudemonia)</u>

The link between joking and pain, when taken in conjunction with Aristotle's stress that wit be expressed in the right place, at the right time, gives us insight into how wit is tied to happiness. The cultivation of an attitude to see incongruities, and play on incongruities that appear in our lives can, as Richards indicates, act as a coping mechanism. Developing a means to alleviate the tension or face our own mortality (or the mortality of those we love), will certainly help us cultivate virtue in other

areas of our lives. Indeed, if we fail to cultivate an appreciation of incongruities, we may be deficient in other facets of our moral lives. Being deficient in one area of our character may erode other facets of our character as well. For instance, if we never really "get" a joke or appreciate a double entendre, this might undermine our friendships, incite anger when we don't get that something is said in jest, or act as a barrier to being pleasant (can you imagine how frustrating it might be to not get a joke; being a person that only laughs for social cohesion?). In addition, I find it hard to imagine, as Richards implies, what other coping mechanisms might function as a sense of humor does. For instance, exercise is certainly good stress relief, or so they tell me, and it may help reduce my rage, but does it really help others reduce stress or face the hardships of life?

There is an inherent social dimension to a sense of humor that is other-oriented, connecting to the sense of political that Aristotle tells us is part of our essence. Other coping mechanisms seem to differ insofar as they are self-centered. No doubt, humor and laughter can be self-centered, but it need not be. Moreover, the virtue of wit and the sense of humor, as described by Richards, is responsive to one's environment; in a word, responsive to others in a way that restores our humanity and recognizes the humanity in others. It is this dimension of the

sense of humor—the fact that it calls us to attend to the environment around us and others that makes it an essential element of well-being. Of course, to develop a sense of humor, like any virtue, requires that we have role models to help us cultivate wit.

Developing 'The Sense of the Funny' into 'The Sense of Humor'

Moral education is an essential aspect of developing virtuous habits, and Aristotle stresses the importance of role models for us to emulate. Toward that end, I propose that Richard C. Richards be considered a role model for exercising wit, particularly within professional academic philosophy. I offer three examples to help illustrate my point:

Autobiography of Richard C. Richards (on amazon.com)

Now that I've gone through all of the dry material—let me get to the good stuff! If there ever was evidence that Richards is a man of wit, let me submit, for your consideration, his autobiography that he posted on his Amazon.com profile. I stumbled upon this beauty while I was getting a free copy of his book from kindle:

I remember little of my conception and birth. I assume it took place, but I was not in a position to appreciate it. It was all just a whirl of

chromosomes and genes. Plus a rude exit into the world at Moscow, Idaho. They tell me it was in 1935. They could be wrong. I had what was, compared with children today, an idyllic youth, spent in an atmosphere of no TV and other digital devices, mostly because they had not been invented yet. We roamed the fields and woods near Boise, Idaho, fished, and threw rocks at Neanderthals, who were plentiful at the time.

A move to Santa Barbara, California, after the late, great WWII introduced me to the world of thinking, stimulated and occasionally threatened by some really great teachers at both Santa Barbara High School and the University of California, Santa Barbara. At the latter I discovered my true vocation, but became a philosopher instead. UCLA put the cap on my bottle of education, and I spent nearly forty years teaching at California State Polytechnic on a one-year temporary appointment. I got all the mileage out of that appointment I could.

My first marriage produced one son, Randal, who produced nine grandchildren, who produced four great grandchildren so far. A wonderful marriage to Marlene "Marty" Richards has added immeasurably to my life. The philosophy of humor has interested me for years, and with retirement, I decided to write the book, *A Philosopher Looks at The Sense of Humor*. It has a serious intent and a humorous approach. That way I

can offend a larger number of people: both the humorous and the serious. My funeral occurred several years ago, but it did not take. But I got to put the fun back in FUNeral. (Richards n.d.)

You can't make this shit up—and yet he does! It's glorious—funny, punny, loaded with examples of incongruities that you have to both laugh at and appreciate.

Putting the Fun in Funeral

This next anecdote serves as further evidence of Richards's wit—it's not just something he crafts in writing, but something he has cultivated through action. Some of you may be wondering what it means to put the "fun back in FUNeral"; allow me to elaborate. Now I don't know all the details, but as legend has it, some number of years ago, Richard C. Richards actually faked his own death and arranged his own funeral. At said funeral, he greeted people with t-shirts that actually said "putting the fun back in FUN-eral"! Could you imagine?

Speaking of funerals—I think Jerry Seinfeld said it best, "According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy." This is actually true—several surveys

ranking people's fears have confirmed that people actually fear speaking more than death (Croston 2011). Unless you're Richard, then you speak at your own funeral!

Author-meets-Critics Sessions

For Richards, the sense of humor is not something to be checked at the door of academic philosophy. If anything, that's where the incongruities shine the brightest. As some of you may know, Richards has been a regular contributor to the Lighthearted Philosophers' Society annual conference, both as a presenting author and as a heckler. He has really has been one of the foundational figures and has had a heavy hand in shaping this organization, shoring us up when we just started to ensure we could continue philosophizing over the good, bad, and ugly jokes for years to come. These are some of the many reasons why we honor him with the Richard C. Richards almost memorial prize. That's right—that prize money is, well, I wouldn't call it sugar-daddy money, Splenda-daddy money—that's what it is!

One of the most memorable "presentations" involving Richards was the Author-Meets-Critics session on his book *A Philosopher Looks At The Sense of Humor*. Turning the traditional APA-style panel on its head, Richards was joined by three hecklers: Tom Brommage, Steve Gimbel, and

Eugene Zaldivar. Instead of the stuffy, traditional panel, the author met with heckles and jeers, for a lively roast of the book. Chock-full of dick jokes, rips on Richard's age, and good old-fashioned jabs, the hecklers incorporated a good amount of philosophical analysis into their bit. As a member of the audience, it was fascinating to watch and really set the example of what this organization is about: doing serious work, all the while not taking yourself (or your work) too seriously. I don't want you to take my word for it, though, so I've garnered some additional evidence from one of the hecklers—Eugene Zaldivar.

Zaldivar was kind enough to offer additional evidence from this author-meets-critics session. In a recent correspondence, he told me of some choice quotes that Richards asked to use for promotional materials (on the book's website or the book jacket). What, pray tell, were these words of high praise? Zaldivar said, "I'd like to start by admitting that I found this to be a really nice book. It has all of the hallmarks of a classic. It's printed on paper. It has a lemur on the cover. It's written by a human with a sense of humor. Yup, a really nice book. Richard notes that one can disgust by using humor. Reading this book is proof that this is true." Richards was sure to carefully couch his request, noting, "[m]y editor may come up with some other dastardly way to use the quotes, with, of course, proper citation of

academic affiliation, thereby all but guaranteeing that you will be fired and disgraced as a philosopher and as a person. It would be a favor to me if you would agree to any part of the above requests. If not, I respect your good judgment" (Victor 2018). Zaldivar kindly agreed, noting that he didn't want to appear unkind with the "disgust" bit. He shared this with me for two reasons; as he explained, "[f]irst, it shows his humility and sense of humor. In picking two quotes that are clearly meant to be digs at his expense he shows that he doesn't take himself too seriously and that he can appreciate humor even when he's the butt of the joke. In addition, the fact that I trusted his instincts shows the respect I have for him. I can think of many other people who I'd be less willing to entrust with material that is less than well-mannered" (ibid.).

The second anecdote, Zaldivar offers is from last year's panel on Steve Gimbel's book, where he read Richards's review:

The first major criticism is that trying to understand humor through comedy is a gigantic, super-colossal mistake. Comedy is a performance art. Humor involves the sense of humor in a wonderful way. Approaching humor through the mid-wifery of comedy leaves important insights unaccounted for. Those insights include the role of the sense of humor in the creation of comedy, and in the enhancement of human existence. Minor

considerations, of course, but monumental nonetheless…With a remarkable grasp of the field of the Philosophy of Humor, Steven has introduced a productive new perspective into the philosophical brew from which the dove of acceptance of the Philosophy of Humor is now emerging. His background as a stand-up comedian gives us all fresh insights into older problems and brings up a few new ones in addition (ibid.).

As Zaldivar explains, "[i]n the first line Richard gives a fairly strong critique (he clearly disagrees with Steve!) but does so with humor and self-deprecation in order to take some of the sting out of the criticism. In the hands of a lesser person this could have been a very contentious point. And then he adds some very nice comments about Steve and the book at the end" (ibid.). These examples are meant to illustrate how Richards has served as a model of incorporating humor into academic settings. As Zaldivar interprets them, these kinds of examples "demonstrate a kindness of spirit, sense of humor and sharp understanding of the material that are individually in short supply and almost unheard in aggregate" (ibid.). Until the Lighthearted Philosophers' Society, I had thought seriously about humor, but I had never seriously exercised wit, and I definitely didn't have a sense of humor about academic philosophy. For me, developing a sense of humor has been essential to my well-being when

navigating the bullshit that is the academic market, overcoming flagrant instances of sexism and misogyny (in general and at academic conferences in particular), and the shit show that is "making it" in this profession. How to do this, and how to do it well, is something that I'm learning from Richard, and others who emulate him. Lest this be a big kiss-ass session, I'll end by saying that I hope to hear more about how Richards regards the limits of the sense of humor, and how one could be happy or have a fulfilling life without a sense of humor.

Bibliiography

Aristotle. 1999 translation. Nicomachean Ethics. Translated by T. Irwin (2nd Edition). Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.

Aristotle. 1941 translation. The Basic Works of Aristotle. Translated by R. McKeon. New York: Random House.

Croston, Glenn. November 2012. "The Thing We Fear More Than Death." Psychology Today. Accessed July 20, 2018. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-real-story-risk/201211/the-thing-we-fear-more-death.

Morreal, John. Winter 2016. "Philosophy of Humor." The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed July 20, 2018.

https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/humor/.

Richards, Richard C. 2013. A Philosopher Looks at the Sense of Humor. Healing Time Books.

Richards, Richard C. n.d. “About Richard C. Richards.” Amazon.com. Accessed July 20, 2018. https://www.amazon.com/Richard-C.Richards/e/B001KDYS36/ref=dp_byline_cont_book_1.

Victor, Elizabeth. 2018. “Re: Richard C. Richards at the LPS memories, please” Message to Eugene Zaldivar. Friday, July 20, 2018 via email.

Richard Richards, Robert Roberts, and Aristotelian Aristotelianism

Steve Gimbel

This paper is a tribute to a philosopher and a person I have long admired, Richard C. Richards. As a clear and rigorous thinker, a thoughtful and accessible writer, and as a kind, blunt, and extremely funny person, Richard embodies virtues I hope to someday claim as well.

It is, I believe, fitting, to begin this tribute to Richard by considering the philosophical work of someone else entirely. Richard has a well-developed sense of humor, something he defines as the attitude to properly appreciate incongruities, and the idea of honoring one person by discussing the work of another is surely the sort of incongruity he has the attitude to appreciate.

The other philosopher I want to begin discussing in order to honor Richard C. Richards is another prominent name in the philosophy of humor, Robert C. Roberts. Roberts is emeritus from Wheaton College, that is, the Wheaton College in Illinois, not the Wheaton College in Massachusetts. (I want to be perfectly clear that we are talking about Robert Roberts from Wheaton, not Robert Roberts from Wheaton.) Richard Richards and Robert Roberts, we will see, are similar in that the

accounts of humor they give come from a commitment to an Aristotelian foundation.

Robert Roberts is quite explicit about this in his article "Humor and the Virtues." In this piece, Robert Roberts, like Richard Richards, begins by adopting an incongruity account of humor. For both Robert Roberts and Richard Richards, an act is humorous only if it includes an incongruity that is at least perceived by the person finding the act humorous (more than perception may be required, but the perception of the incongruity is at least a necessary condition for an act to be an act of humor).

Robert Roberts, like Richard Richards, is not interested in humor theory for the sake of humor theory, but hopes to find how we ought to think about humor as embedded in the lived life.

The key to perceiving incongruities for the sake of humor, according to Robert Roberts, is "perspectivity." When we see something as incongruous, what we are often doing is seeing the same thing from multiple perspectives. By seeing the same thing through different interpretive lenses, we can make sense of the same thing in different, perhaps contrasting, ways.

This perspectivity, he argues, requires dissociation, that is, (a) the ability for us to recognize that there is a perspective other than our own to be occupied, and (b) the ability to then occupy this

alternative perspective. To develop a sense of humor, that is, to be able to recognize humor, one needs to always be aware that one is perceiving through a perspective which is not the only possible perspective.

He does not, however, contend that all is mere perspective. He is committed to the existence of an objective reality. So, we must not attribute to Robert Roberts a perspectival perspectivalism, but rather a more limited perspectivalism which he terms "soft perspectivalism." There is a real world, he holds, but we experience it from one of many possible angles.

Humor is to found in simultaneously understanding: (1) the perception of the object of the perception from our perspective, (2) that there is another perspective from which the object of perception may be perceived, (3) the perception of the object of perception from the alternative perspective, and (4) that there is an incongruity between the two perceptions despite the fact that they are perceptions of the same object being perceived. Sometimes, but only sometimes, this incongruity will be of the proper sort to be humorous. A sense of humor is the ability to distinguish the proper from the improper cases.

The question he ultimately seeks to answer in setting this out is whether a sense of humor ought to be considered a virtue, or at least something

capable of enhancing one's moral education which he works out in terms of character development which in turn is worked out in terms of virtues. This is where the Aristotelianism is fully transparent.

This gets ramped up further with Robert Roberts' contention that each person possesses both a character and a nature and that virtue is the state of one's character being brought into line with one's nature. To recognize that there is a gap between one's character and one's nature is to see oneself in two different ways as being two different things. This is an incongruity and can, through proper dissociation and perspectivity, allow one to laugh at one's own flaws and foibles. This, then, puts us in a place of objective knowledge about what we need to improve in ourselves and that is crucial to personal growth. In Robert Roberts' own words,

> "The concept of a virtue implies the concept of a human nature. To possess a virtue is to be 'qualified' as having to that extent realized one's nature, as having become in actuality what one inevitably was in potentiality. The concept of a virtue is thus the concept of a congruity between one's character and one's nature, and thus of the live possibility of lacking congruity between character and nature – of falling short of one's telos. Given this, the form of humor

> closely connected with the virtues would be a representation of moral failures as incongruities. To perceive such incongruities in oneself and others would be a mark of moral knowledge, and the disposition to perceive them could be counted as an important part of wisdom. In so far as wisdom is a virtue which pervades the others – there being wisdom concerning justice, wisdom concerning truth-telling, wisdom about situations calling for courage, etc. – the moral sense of humor would perhaps apply, with differences, to the whole range of virtues (Roberts, p. 130)."

We see in Robert Roberts' writing that a sense of humor may be an aid to becoming a more virtuous person, in other words, an aid in our moral education.

Let us now turn from Robert Roberts to Richard Richards. Richard Richards, like Robert Roberts, contends that we possess a character and, like Aristotle, holds character to be comprised of attitudes and proclivities that we develop through our choices and our actions. Like Robert Roberts, Richard Richards is committed to a real reality and among that which may be considered objective is humor. It is an objective fact of the world if something is humorous and those with a developed

sense of humor will be the accomplished judges that we can turn to in order to see whether an act was, in fact, humorous.

So, what is it to have a sense of humor according to Richard? In his words,

> "A sense of humor is an attitude or set of attitudes that involve a tendency to notice, explore, and sometimes create incongruities, and to appreciate them in a playful way that is usually pleasurable (Richards, p. 72)."

A sense of humor is thus, first and foremost, an attitude or set of attitudes. What is an attitude?

> "An attitude is a habitual psychological structure that influences and often controls what we perceive, that is, what we think and feel, and the beliefs we have about those things we perceive and feel. Though the term 'attitude' has, in common usage, come to mean mostly a bad or hostile attitude, I am using the term much more generally. Roughly, an attitude is a set of habits with which we approach life, and many attitudes are learned early in life (Richards, pp. 72-3)."

As with Robert Roberts, we see with Richard Richards, a firm commitment to a practical Aristotelianism.

A sense of humor for Richard is thus an attitude. It is an attitude which leads to the appreciation of incongruities. Let us take the notion of incongruity to be well-understood and well-defined (ignoring Robert Latta's objections here). The question remaining is therefore, "What is it to appreciate an incongruity?" Richard answers,

> "The act of appreciating involves recognizing the worth of something. It involves the discovery or creation of value. You have to have some sort of knowledge in order to appreciate something. That also distinguishes it from simple cases of liking. You can like something without recognizing its worth or value. You can value something without liking it. The recognition of value or worth involves the possession of some kind of knowledge other than that involved in liking (Richards, p. 76)."

Appreciating something, an incongruity or otherwise, involves specialized knowledge which some may possess and others not. In this way, we see John Stuart Mill's famous passage from Utilitarianism being obliquely referred to in which

there are some who have developed a proclivity that makes them superior judges of value. "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is only because they only know their own side of the question. (Mill, p. 10)." In the same way, if a person with a developed sense of humor finds something funny and someone else does not, the person without the developed sense of humor is wrong about the objective fact of the humorousness of the object.

The sense of humor as Richard Richards sets it out does not require an objective human nature. It is a desirable development in the character of a person, but not a failure of character the way Robert Roberts would have. As such, what we see in Richard Richards' conception of the human and the sense of humor is something akin to Kant's notion of an imperfect duty. It is a good to develop it, but not something morally necessary.

But its development is not direct. According to Richard, the development of a sense of humor requires first that one develop a sense of the funny.

> "The sense of the funny is a skill at determining where a person is likely to find the amusing, rather than simply waiting for

> something to happen which causes laughs. It also includes a habitual understanding of when it is appropriate to laugh and when it is not (Richards, p. 77)."

As a child, one develops a sense of the funny, but then as an adult one may go farther and develop a full-fledged sense of humor.

> "When does the sense of the funny become the sense of humor? It varies in individual cases. We hone the ability to laugh at the proper times. From this proceeds the ability to appreciate the incongruities of life. It takes more learning for a person to have a sense of humor than to learn to laugh when others laugh, to laugh when someone says something that is called 'funny' and we feel obliged to laugh (Richards, p. 78)."

So, where Robert Roberts gives us an account of the sense of humor that comes not only from a commitment to a virtue ethics, but also a commitment to the underlying metaphysical picture of the human being, we can say that Robert Roberts has an Aristotelian Aristotelianism. Richard Richards, unlike Robert Roberts, does not have an Aristotelian Aristotelianism. Richard Richards' Aristotelianism is more intricate. He invokes the sort

of levels of knowledge being morally relevant that we find in Mill. He makes the sense of humor a desirable property along the lines of the imperfect duties of Kant. And he makes the development of it a stepwise evolutionary process of the sort we find in Hegel. Therefore, we can say that Richard has a Kantian Hegelian Millian Aristotelianism.

I love the phrase "Kantian Hegelian Millian Aristotelianism" because it might be a convoluted way of saying something straightforward which would make it quite Kantian. It might be a convoluted way of saying absolutely nothing, which would make it quite Hegelian. Or it might just lead one to have a nervous breakdown which would make it quite Millian.

I will mention the title of one of my favorite papers in the philosophy of language at this point by Nathan Salmon. His goal in this article is to revive John Stuart Mill's approach to language and is titled, "How to be a Millian Heir." I do not bring this up because it has any relevance at all to the points I am making here, but rather because this is my paper and I will talk about whatever the fuck I want.

So, we have with Robert Roberts and Richard Richards, two contrasting Aristotelian accounts of the sense of humor. Robert Roberts is an Aristotelian Aristotelian where Richard Richards is not an Aristotelian Aristotelian, but rather a Kantian Hegelian Millian Aristotelian.

Which of the two ought we prefer? To weigh the two alternatives with an eye toward seeing which is stronger, I propose we look to Richard Richards. Not Richard Richards – that would be to engage in circular reasoning precisely because the reasoning would be circular. Rather, Richard Richards, by which I mean not Richard C. Richards, the beloved member of the Lighthearted Philosophers Society and emeritus philosopher of aesthetics, ethics, and love and sex from Cal Poly, Pomona, but rather Richard A. Richards, professor of philosophy with a focus on the philosophy of biology at the University of Alabama. (That's the University of Alabama not in Birmingham, but in Tuscaloosa, real Alabama – Richard Richards from Alabama Alabama). Richard A. Richards toured the world as a professional, classical dancer before he became a professional philosopher, completing his graduate work at Johns Hopkins where we took graduate seminars in philosophy of science together. I pride myself on perhaps being the only person who is friends with both Richard Richardses.

As one would expect from an expert on evolutionary explanation, Richard Richards gives an account of aesthetic judgment which is modeled upon the Darwinian concept of fitness. Evolutionary fitness, Richards argues, is a three-place relationship among the property, the organism, and the context in which the organism finds itself. It is the

contextual piece that is essential here. No property is itself good for an organism in general, but only good in terms of its context. That context may be internal – that is, advantageous in terms of the relations of the parts of the organisms – or external – that is, advantageous in relation to some environmental factor. But whether it is an internal or external context, we have to see fitness as a function of its functional context. Fitness for Richard Richards is a function of function.

Richard Richards' own fitness, for example, has been significantly aided by the contextual factor of his avoiding gluten. He told me he dropped fifteen pounds. Dude looked good last time I was down in Alabama.

Just as with evolutionary fitness, so too with artistic fitness. We have to see fitness as a three-place relation connecting a property of the work (e.g., unity, complexity, or intensity), the work as a whole, and the context of the work. Again, the functional context may be internal – that is, a function of the property understood fully within the work itself, such as color relationships, composition, or form – or it may be external – that is, an aspect of the social, historical, or political context in which the artistic work is appreciated.

As a philosopher with a strong biological background, he points out that a number of the properties we judge positively in works of art are

direct results of our cognitive structure which directly results from our brains being the product of evolutionary processes. The human brain, for example, is outstanding at edge detection because we naturally engage in lateral inhibition wherein the brain naturally exaggerates the contrast in light values when darker and lighter areas are juxtaposed. This is why we will naturally project boundaries and edges onto pieces like pointillist works in which none exist.

As such, our appreciation of art – and we can argue by extension, humor – is a function of our function as humans. This is very much in line with the sort of Aristotelian Aristotelianism of Robert Roberts as it posits universal human properties which we can see as the sort of human nature Roberts requires.

But Richard Richards also contends that the external context is crucial to understanding our understanding of art. We acquire categories through education and the more educated one is, the better one is as a judge of artistic quality.

> "The experience of an artwork will therefore vary depending on which features we believe to be standard, variable, and contra-standard, and that depends on experience and learning. Consequently, functional context – and functioning – will

> vary depending on the presence of this kind of knowledge in those who experience the work (Richards, p. 267)."

Further, the acquired knowledge affects how we perceive, not just how we interpret what we perceive.

> "Education can affect the experience of an artwork in other ways. Experiments have shown that formal training influences visual scan paths in the scrutiny of the artwork (ibid.)."

If we take humor to be an artistic category, then this approach is precisely in line with the sort of Kantian Hegelian Millian Aristotelianism espoused by Richard Richards.

So, while Richard Richards may be seen at first to side with Robert Roberts against Richard Richards, in the end it does seem that Richard Richards supports Richard Richards over Robert Roberts. But he does not fully locate himself on either extreme, instead contending that the correct answer is to be found in the mean between two extremes. So, while Richard Richards may not espouse an Aristotelian Aristotelianism; Richard Richards, on the other hand, can be thought of as adopting an Aristotelian Aristotelian Aristotelianism.

But Richard Richards' Aristotelian Aristotelian Aristotelianism does not support Robert Roberts' Aristotelian Aristotelianism, rather Richard Richards' Aristotelian Aristotelian Aristotelianism supports Richard Richards' Kantian Hegelian Millian Aristotelianism. So, we must conclude that in this case, we should agree with Richard. That is, Richard, not Richard. But we agree with Richard because Richard agrees with Richard.

Bibliography

Kant, Immanuel. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981).
Latta, Robert. *The Basic Humor Process: A Cognitive-Shift Theory and the Case Against Incongruity*. (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999).
Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979).
Richards, Richard. A. "A Fitness Model of Evaluation," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. Vol. 62, No. 3. Summer 2004. pp. 263-75.
Richards, Richard. C. *A Philosopher Looks at the Sense of Humor*. (Kathmandu: Healing Times Books, 2013).
Roberts, Robert. "Humor and the Virtues," *Inquiry*. Vol. 31. pp. 127-49.

Richard Richards is a Gay Scientist

Dave Monroe

A little recognized and under-appreciated fact about the august Richard Richards is that he is a gay scientist. I know what you may be thinking—Richard's never shagged dudes, and if he has, it's shitty to out him in an essay that's meant to honor him. That's strictly his business. Or you may be thinking that that Richard identifies as a philosopher, not a physicist, biologist, or even (egads!) a psychologist. As far as I know, you would be right in both cases—and it would be terrible to call him out--despite the fact that this will hardly rise to the level of an essay.

No, what I mean is that Richard Richards practices the sort of approach to philosophy that Nietzsche prescribes in *The Gay Science.* Now, I won't pretend to know fuckall about Nietzsche—but that's okay because there are roughly 7,500 budding philosophy majors lurking in coffee shops, craft breweries, and organic grocery stores around the country who've got him figured out and would be delighted to expound on my ignorance. If you are genuinely curious about whether I've got Nietzsche right, ask one of them. Or read some Nietzsche. In any case, I'm not entirely convinced that getting philosophers "right" is the point; rather, good philosophers plunder brilliant ideas from better

philosophers or scientists, looting those concepts for their own ends–just ask Schopenhauer—and I think Richard might agree with this (c.f., his devotion to Provine and incongruity theory).

But let me try to clarify my meaning. The very title of Nietzsche's work, *The Gay Science*, as well as many of the passages contained therein (no bloody citations forthcoming) suggests that systematic inquiry (*wissenschaft:* obligatory use of a foreign word to give gravity to this paper) into very serious subjects can be approached with a lighthearted spirit of joy. It is in this sense that I mean Richard is a gay scientist.

It goes without saying that most philosophers take themselves, and their work, far too seriously. It's understandable, of course. Most of us spend so much time steeped not only in our particular areas of study but also fighting for tenure, or struggling to demonstrate the legitimacy of our field, that we lose sight of our own provincialism. It might be worth remembering that the average person would *literally* consider these debates the raving of lunatics. Richard cannot be counted among those who've lost this perspective. There's nothing he won't laugh at, including his own demise. As we all know, he's committed to putting the 'fun' back in 'funeral.' Won't that be a sight? Let's hope that day isn't soon.

Richard is funny. There's no doubt about that. He's especially deft with "dad jokes," which I suppose is appropriate, and, given his age, we might rename them "great-great-great-great-great-great-grand dad jokes" in his honor. Richard actually took lectures from Nietzsche at the University of Basel. It's a little known fact that Nietzsche resigned in 1879 due to Richard's being a thorn in his side. There's also no doubt that Richard is a *very good* philosopher—all jokes aside—and, most importantly, that Richard not only philosophizes about humor, but integrates humor in his philosophy. His work is both risible *and* rigorous simultaneously. With all due respect to other funny philosophers, it is my considered judgment that no one strikes the balance so perfectly. He is a living rejoinder to Joseph Ellin's claim (in the very first paper read at the Lighthearted Philosophers' Society) that philosophy cannot be funny. Richard shows us that Old Joe is *dead wrong.* And just dead, for that matter, though we miss him dearly.

I would be remiss if I didn't recount Richard's heroic courage and willingness to tackle tough issues head on, too. That's a pretty Nietzschean quality, I think. In the spring of 2013, I invited Richard and Steve "The Checksecutioner" Gimbel (so named because he rakes in cash with his side gigs) to give the Annual Keith Goree Memorial Ethics Lecture at St. Petersburg College. The Goree

Lecture honors one of my former colleagues, who, incidentally, was a charter member and early financial supporter of the Lighthearted Philosophers' Society. Two founding members dead already? Damn. Richard's probably next.

Anyway, the lecture is a showcase event for my department and the college; we typically shell out big bucks for relatively famous people with moderately interesting things to say about boring contemporary social issues. I was able to throw Richard and Steve a couple of ducats and pay for them to visit Florida, so, essentially, I misused public funds so I could hang out with friends. Let's recall, after all, that was the initial mission of the LPS. They agreed to talk about the ethics of humor, which I thought fitting because Keith was a wonderfully funny guy.

There was a palpable excitement in the air on the night of the lecture. Students and a spectrum of people from the community filled one of our auditoriums to capacity, eager to learn about the ethical limits of joking from two sagacious masters. Gimbel opened with a standup routine meant to offer food for thought—and, I must say, he killed. Almost everyone laughed and enjoyed the entire "lecture" (it ended up mostly consisting of Steve and Richard telling jokes) until the *hard* questions about racist, sexist, and religiously insensitive jokes came up. One should note that the crowd was *very*

diverse; there were as many Black and Latino attendees as White. Richard, undaunted by the stigmas around those subjects, gave a rousing oration on disempowering hate speech by losing our fear of using racially insensitive words. He *showed* that he wasn't afraid by chanting the 'n-word' to the crowd, who looked on with expressions that were equal parts horror, amusement, and fury. It was a little like watching a 90-year-old white man dropping N-Bombs in public. Actually, it was *exactly* like watching that. The audience began to thin, but Richard was undeterred. "N-word," "N-word," "N-word," he continued. Notice that I'm not nearly as courageous as Richard because I can't even bring myself to write the n-word.

The confused audience began leaving in droves and I started to fear for my job. Richard continued. The tension mounted. Soon, groups of angry students stormed the stage, crying out for Richard's head. Gimbel and I were forced to defend him, fending off the mobs by threatening to drop stage lights on them and beating them with microphone stands. Richard was so courageous that he did not stop the lecture until we were showered in gore.

Some of that story is *actually true*. Ask Steve or Richard—or any of the administrators at SPC who called me on the carpet. Incredibly, my dean still asks me to find the Goree Lecture speakers. And,

believe it or not, I'd enthusiastically, joyfully, have Richard come back. Again, and again, and again. And again. And again.

C'mon now! As everyone reading this essay—and all the kids in the brew pubs, coffee shops and groceries--know, *The Gay Science* (Section…uh…) is the one of the earliest deployments of the eternal return of the same. I wouldn't be doing my solemn philosophical duty if I didn't make a shitty joke referring to it.

In all seriousness, Richard, I love you and am pleased to call you a friend and inspiration. You are an innovator of a new spirit of doing philosophy—a Zarathustra—and are the soul of the Lighthearted Philosophers society. Thank you for showing us the way, you gay scientist.

The Legend of the Altweiß

Liz Sills

Once upon a time there was an Old White Man. He was very funny, but not in a "haha" kind of way. He was funny mostly in a non-threatening whimsical kind of way. Everywhere he went, people laughed merrily. He would make horrible puns and people would laugh. He would pause dramatically before saying something innocuous and people would laugh. He would make racist quips using words for Italian people that haven't been popular since the 1920s and people would laugh.

One day, on a cobblestone path that cut across a verdant meadow, the Old White Man came across an eighty-year-old girl wearing a fauxhawk and no innocence whatsoever. "Old White Man," she asked, gazing up into his cataract-clouded eyes, "Why does everyone laugh merrily in your presence no matter what you do? When I say the same things people get offended or start mansplaining the world to me."

The Old White Man thought and thought. He was very perplexed at the question, and also because the little girl had been talking to him for more than thirty seconds and had not laughed merrily. He must have an answer, he decided. Quickly (as quickly as he could, anyway) he made his way to the nearest university library and found an

august tome written by a venerated scholar with a repetitive name and decorated with an etching of a lemur whose sage eyes held the promise of resolving his quandary.

Ravenously the Old White Man searched for explanations. He read that some people laugh merrily because they feel superior to other people or ideas. This could not be true, he decided, because if it were then people would laugh more merrily at the little girl and her radical haircut than they did at him. The tome then informed him that people laugh merrily when they resolve incongruities. This was also not true, he decided, because Old White Men always automatically make sense. Relief Theory? Although he did understand that some people might be intimidated by his vast knowledge of How the World Works, he did not think that anything about him would relieve anyone of that impression. Humor and the aesthetic? Well, he wasn't bad to look at, he had to admit, but he didn't think his visage was guffaw-worthy.

Again as quickly as he could the Old White Man returned to the verdant meadow and found the little girl standing, arms crossed and legs akimbo, in the middle of the cobblestone path.

"Little girl," croaked the Old White Man, "I am funny simply because I am funny. There is no need for inquiry into the matter. I am, in a manner of

speaking, always funny because that's always just the way it is."

The little girl scowled and the Old White Man was suddenly very disturbed that there should be a little girl in the world who was not smiling. He tried making faces, but she did not laugh merrily. Nor did she laugh merrily when he rubbed her affectionately on the head and made the most obvious puns he could think of. He even attempted a winning anecdote featuring Christian religious figures, overbearing wives, and a convenience store clerk with an Indian accent, but the little girl simply glared at him.

Finally, in exasperation, the Old White Man demanded of the little girl: "Why are you so curious about the things I do, anyway? Why don't you toddle off to pick daisies and poppies in the verdant meadow. Anyway, I'll bet that if you wanted to try to be funny you could just talk about, you know, woman things. Like boobs. Boobs are hilarious."

The little girl contemplated the Old White Man seriously for a few moments. Finally, she exclaimed: "Because you're in my way!"

And with that, the little girl kicked the Old White Man in the kneecap and trotted around him down the cobblestone path out of verdant meadow. In the nearest village the simple peasant folk felt the tranquil rustle of a pastoral breeze and for no apparent reason found themselves laughing merrily.

A Philosopher with a Sense of Humor

Eugene Zaldivar

In this very short acknowledgment I think I'd like to accomplish two things. First, I'd like to give a sense of the affect that having seen Richard in action has had on me. Second, I'd like to point to an important development in philosophy of humor contributed by Richards in his work "A Philosopher Looks at the Sense of Humor" which I believe needs to be central to the philosophical discussion of humor and joking going forward.

To begin with Richard C. Richards, a name so great it earns the full allotment of its letters, is, I think, an example of what we should all aspire to as philosophers. I believe that we are all aware of the many noxious tropes in our field. For one there seems to be a sense that there must be an element of suffering in any graduate program that is worth a damn. That, in order to earn a PhD, you must be torn down and shredded. I never had the privilege of studying with Richard, but I cannot help but believe that he would have nothing to do with this way of doing things.

There is a second stereotype very common in analytic philosophy: the philosopher who believes that the only worthwhile response to a talk is to make the speaker regret having said anything at all. The philosopher who believes that a barely civil take-

down which displays the commenter's genius, for the mere pittance of humiliating the speaker, is the raison d'etra of attending a conference. That toxic, hostility is too often displayed at conferences and even putatively friendly department colloquia. I have never seen it in Richard. Indeed, I have seen the opposite.

Richard invariably has kind things to say every time he offers any sort of comment. He is the epitome of the sort of philosopher we should all strive to be. He endeavors to support and enable his interlocutors. He is not interested in showing off how smart he is, but rather in helping everyone get a better sense of the idea being discussed. Of course, this does nothing to obscure just how smart he is. Even when he is indeed pointing to a significant problem, he understands that you don't have to demean a person's efforts when offering a critique.

It took me many years of attending LPS conferences alongside Richard (and the rest of the regulars) to see that this is a better way to do things. To see that philosophers can contribute to a field without indulging our destructive tendencies. I am grateful to him, and the LPS, for that lesson. I hope to live up to it.

I have had the privilege to comment on Richard's work twice during our time at LPS. I was also allowed to work as his oracle; I read Richard's comments on Steve Gimbel's book at the 11th

meeting of the LPS in 2017. That was the smartest I've ever sounded.

In working with Richard over the years it's hard to miss one of his central concerns: getting clear about just what the sense of humor is and what it is not. Humor as he has argued at different times is distinct from joking, laughter and cleverness. It is both an attitude and an intellectual exercise. It makes our liver better and it helps us to understand our world. More precisely, he defines it as the playful appreciation of incongruity. It seems to me that this is a good analysis. His arguments have won me over.

In a recent conference I suggested, half-jokingly, that we ought to have comedy appreciation courses just as we have courses in film, art and music appreciation. I am moved, more and more to take this as a serious goal. If we do develop these courses the curriculum will be incomplete without Richards.

Putting the 'Fun' Back in 'Funeral'

Tom Brommage

The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius writes in his notebooks: "You are a little soul carrying a corpse," quoting the Greek stoic philosopher Epictetus. As he was likely writing these notes to himself as a form of mental discipline in the throes of a military campaign, he obviously meant that observation to be comforting. To most it is far from that, of course—but the reason why this is so is worthy of some attention.

For Marcus, the reality of death was manifest on the battlefield. The purpose of this stoic sense of detachment from events which we can't control becomes apparent in times like these: to remove the anxiety associated with one's own unavoidable demise. But to many in contemporary American society—filling their emptiness with consumer commodities and HOA regulations—they don't like being reminded of death. That sense of morbidity—or (as I will suggest, a sense of honesty about death) is poor manners. The sense of 'fleeing' from death into the overwhelming variety of 'pre-fab' identities is a banality amongst the existentialist philosophers. But regardless: both perspectives occupy on an opposite place in distinction between what I might call a 'common-sense attitude' and a 'philosophical attitude' towards death.

By the 'philosophical attitude,' I mean nothing more than: being unafraid to think about uncomfortable topics. We can sum it up under William James' reflection on philosophy, that it "sees the familiar as if it were *strange*, and the *strange* as if it were familiar." Reflections on death—characteristic of a sense of depression and anxiety—is one of the more uncomfortable and strange realities there is (those being capable of reflecting on it never having experienced it, of course—); the purpose of the philosophical attitude therefore is to make it familiar. As Plato tells us in *The Phaedo*, philosophers are always preparing for death.

Of course: there are other types of outlooks towards death. A 'scientific outlook,' for example—understanding it as a cessation of metabolic processes—does have the same tendency to nullify the anxiety regarding the 'end of the tour.' Through this lens, by reductionist fantasy, we can safely dodge the reality by obfuscating it in polysyllabic jargon. The scientific attitude towards death, while it fills the same role as the philosophical attitude, has the side effect of reducing death to the ontic and not the ontological, as Heidegger puts it. Death is more than one's corporeal existence as a corpse—it's always "one's own."

The first time I met Richard about a decade ago, he was wearing a T-Shirt for his own funeral. "Putting the 'fun' back in funeral" it said,

emblazoned across the front. You see: several years prior Richard had held his own funeral. When queried on the oddity, he responded dryly: “Well, one never gets to enjoy it . . .” The simple truth of that reason was unavoidable.

This is often the first story I tell people about him, for two reasons. First, I just think it’s cool. One’s mind immediately turns to Twain’s Tom Sawyer, hiding in the church rafters, listening to the wails of those below at his own funeral. But unlike Sawyer, Richard’s intent was not cloaked in deceitful or malicious intent. It was rooted in a more fundamental honesty about one’s demise.

But secondly, I also tell this story because I think it captures something important about having a sense of humor about death. While there are perhaps many different perspectives towards death that one might hold which might be called ‘philosophical’ in the sense I mean above—humor is one of those genuinely philosophical attitudes towards it. Dark and morbid humor has the effect of 'taming' the inevitable. And it is for this reason that it is truly needed: to knock one out of the malaise of denial. It allows us to be honest about our own finitude, instead of denying its looming, icy grip.

For this reason, I totally intend to rip off that joke and hold my own funeral. But I'm admitting it, because I follow Richard's example with his honesty, if not his creativity.

Objectively Funny Jokes:
Comedy's El Dorado or a Simple MacGuffin?

Mike Cundall

Could there ever be an objectively funny joke or bit of humor? With the popularity of certain forms of humor, with the appearance of puns as consistent stages in the development of humor in children, this seems a reasonable query. Further, give recent developments in humor theory, and depending on what stance you take on what is essential to the funny or humorous your answer could be yes or no.

Historically, given the prevailing theories of humor to date, the answer would have been a resounding 'no'. Whether you were a Hobbesian leviathan superior to all, or a Freudian fellow with your mental plumbing bound up like your mother's panties (apologies for mixing my metaphors), or a callous incongruitest, the answer has to be nopety-nope. The unifying thread through these disparate theories, and others in the incongruity family, of which our esteemed Richard C. Richards is an elder statesman, who certainly won't find this essay a worthy honor, is that humor is a consumer-sided event—a demand side theory. Humor is in the mind of the experiencer. If it turns out that arrangement of elements on the side of a building looked like a funny face, then it was funny. The very fact that

there is a needed cognitive appreciation by the receiver of the joke in order for humor to occur, settles the case. To imagine a universal joke that would elicit mirth from an individual is to tilt at windmills. It's, in the immortal words of Vizzini, "inconceivable." What one might find incongruous, or illustrative of superiority, or redirects my mental or neural plumbing to release laughter and humor, is specific to the individual. Cultures, individual histories are all too vast, too varied, dare I say, to incongruous, to expect that there be a joke pulled from the bowels of the comedy club that bestows upon the teller, like Excalibur to Artie, a guaranteed laugh.

But there are new players on the field and we shan't be bound to the mistaken theories of our forebears no matter how august the thinker (looking at you, Richards). So, let us give heed to a new brand of humor theory—a demand side approach. An approach that favors the would be joke creator, as opposed to the plebian audience. One, if accurate, would offer up an answer to our leading question in the positive. One that would not only tilt at the windmills, but actually knock 'em down. One that finds the fountain of youth, and lays claim to the comic grail of the universally funny joke: an answer that would pierce the incongruous heart of darkness and bring forth the heart of gold. And what upstart could propose such a radical turning of the humor

theories on their respective ears? Why none other than our own Steven Gimbel. A man whose august status is rivaled only by the length of his hair.

Exorbitant as Gimbel's recent book, *Isn't that Clever?* is, (he does claim to find El Dorado, so maybe it's worth the gold) is a healthy and needed look at humor theorizing that incorporates philosophy of science (Hempel is grinning right now, though the irony is lost on Popper) and a careful attention to those who craft jokes (Gimbel is a studied and practiced comedian). Gimbel's novel addition to humor theory is his focus on a shortcoming in the dominant theory of humor, the incongruity theory and his alternate theory of humor. Gimbel explores the worry that incongruity becomes a vacuous term or one that is drawn out so broadly as to be trivially true. It is what it is after all. Gimbel then presents an alternative theory that wants to focus not on the perception of humor, but on the object of humor itself. Instead of relying on some audience dullard to note the incongruity presented to them, Gimbel argues that humor is "An act is humorous if and only if it is an intentional, conspicuous act of playful cleverness." (Gimbel, 2017) This theory is of great relief to all failed comics out there (perhaps Gimbel is sublimating his rage?). For me, I now realize that I am damn humorous and my wife and all those students who heretofore have not "gotten" my jokes in class, well phooey on them.

Much of the power and support to be found for Gimbel's approach comes from the attention he pays to how people discuss humor. He cleverly notes that many people recognize humor as such even when they do not find the humor on offer mirthful. To Gimbel's mind, and rightly so it seems, this is a tacit recognition that while one didn't find it funny, it still is humor, and hence humor is not simply a demand side event. To recognize something as humor, but a failed attempt, already shows that humor is not simply reliant on a chortle or guffaw to be real humor. And while laughs may pay the bills, humor is more indigent, or perhaps indignant. Apparently, I have been making jokes for a very long time.

It's worth exploring more what Gimbel notes about our language when we discuss humor. In the semi-rhetorical query "You're joking right!?" one sees a glimmer of what humor really is. Gimbel notes that either way one answers supports his view that humor is a supply side phenomenon. If you respond in the negative, then it isn't a joke, my mirth or laugh were it present is inappropriately placed. If I answer in the affirmative, then the laughter is proper. Were it the case that humor was truly subjective, then the answer given by the interrogated wouldn't matter. My laughter or lack thereof would be proper only insofar as I found it funny or not. Come to think of it, this would make

current White House press briefings a whole lot easier. But to return to Gimbel's point, the fact that it is perfectly sensible to discuss and assign a proper or improper response based on whether the utterance was taken as a joke or not, indicates that there is a whole lot more than simple subjectivity in humor. Humor is more than the cognitive achievement of the perceiver. There is an important and totally ignored part of the attempt at humor. A thing agreed upon, but sometimes failed to achieve. Kudos to Gimbel for this work.

Now we're running short of time and space for a Feschriften sort of article; well at least an LPS Feschriften. But, if as Gimbel notes, the study of humor is really now working as a mature science and is really into the puzzle solving phase, what we have here is a genuine puzzle. Humor is either a supply side, objective sort of phenomenon, or it's a demand side, subjective phenomenon? I think there is some philosophical legerdemain in the way that Gimbel casts incongruity theorists as subjectivists, though I cannot for the moment clearly define why. But the truth is, his points about the recognition of failed humor are strong, which strongly indicates that there is something of great importance in the attempt to be funny.

What I will suggest, in a hand-waivy, I-can't-be-held-responsible-for-clearly-saying-why-at-the-moment sort of way, is that our discussions of

humor may be enriched if we approach humor as a success term. The best possible exemplar, paradigmatic humor if you will (damn you Tom Kuhn), would be a case where someone intends to be funny, using cleverness, and that the audience does indeed find the act to be humorous. If we set this as the best of all possible humor, then we can preserve elements of the incongruity theory worth preserving, as well an bring aboard Gimbel's insight. The upshot of this is that this approach is supported by some of what is taken as a good characteristic of scientific theorizing, broad range. A theory that brings under one tent the supply side and the demand side covers more of the phenomena of humor. And this is a step in the right direction. Our honoree would surely applaud the maintenance of the need for incongruity, and our man responsible for the honors will be pleased. It also has the benefit of widening the scope of our research and maintaining some of our intuitions on what humor is. And if science has ever liked anything, it certainly has to be explanations that cover more. Am I right?