How Do You Know If You Haven’t Tried It?  
Aristotelian Reflections on Hateful Humor

Joshua Schulz

Abstract: Howard Curzer argues that Aristotle’s virtue of wit is a social virtue, a form of philia: conversation with a witty person is pleasing rather than offensive or hateful. On the basis of an analogy between wit and temperance, Curzer holds that the witty person is good at detecting (and avoiding) hateful humor but is not necessarily an expert in judging the funniness of jokes. Curzer thus defends a moderate position in contemporary philosophy of humor—a Detraction Account of hateful humor—arguing that the humorousness of a joke is an aggregate pleasure resulting from several factors in addition to funniness. While sympathetic to Curzer’s overall approach to wit, this essay criticizes the Detraction Account as inconsistent with Aristotle’s text and implausible in its own right, and suggests a friendly amendment based on those criticisms.

Introduction

Some jokes are bad because they’re not funny. Others are bad because they’re hateful, “unbecoming, offensive, or wounding.”¹ But can a joke be both funny and hateful, or does being hateful preclude being humorous?

Donald de Sousa has argued that hatefulness precludes humorousness because hateful jokes express malicious beliefs and attitudes.² Ted Cohen disagrees, holding that hatefulness is independent of humorousness.³ John Morreall also disagrees, arguing that amusement is disengaged attention—cognitively, attitudinally, and practically—by definition, since it is indifferent to truth and generates no motives to action. A priori, then, nothing hateful is humorous because hatefulness is interested behavior.⁴ However, Morreall also holds that some humorous things are harmful because they convert objectionable stereotypes into aesthetic objects, and the repeated thinking of stereotypes “is enough to prompt us to treat real individuals poorly.”⁵ While there are no hateful objects of humor for Morreall per se, a consequentialist argument against hateful humor can be made when such humor constitutes a moral hazard. If Morreall is correct, then “interest” generates a Detection Theory of hateful humor. Since hateful joking is a species of interested joking, the person who can

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detect hateful joking will be a good judge of whether some joke is humorous, even if she is not a good judge of how humorous actually funny jokes are.

This essay will review Howard Curzer’s recent defense of a *Detraction Theory* of hateful humor, which is based on Aristotle’s treatment of wit. He argues that hatefulness diminishes the humorousness of a joke but doesn’t always trump it: hatefulness does not preclude funniness, but it does affect the overall humorousness of a joke. Curzer has thus identified an interesting middle position between de Sousa and Cohen; this essay will examine whether Curzer’s *Detraction Theory* is sufficiently non-consequentialist to represent a genuine alternative to Morreall’s *Detection Theory*. I will argue that it is not sufficient as it stands, but can be made into a genuine and plausible alternative.

**Curzer on Aristotle on Wit**

Aristotle argues that a virtue is a disposition to get a specific set of actions and passions correct. Wit is the virtue governing relaxing, amusing, leisurely conversation. For ease of reference, we will follow Curzer in referring to such conversations as “joking,” though we understand this much more broadly than Curzer does.

Since Aristotle’s comments on wit are so condensed, it is instructive to begin an investigation of wit by comparing it to its associated vices, boorishness and buffoonishness. Aristotle describes the three character states thus:

Those who carry humor to excess are thought to be vulgar buffoons, striving after humor at all costs, and aiming rather at raising a laugh than at saying what is becoming and at avoiding pain to the object of their fun; while those who can neither make a joke themselves nor put up with those who do are thought to be boorish and unpolished. But those who joke in a tasteful way are called ready witted. . . . To the middle state belongs also tact.

Aristotle clearly argues that the buffoon goes to excess not by telling too many, too funny jokes on too many occasions, but rather by telling unbecoming or painful jokes, which Curzer helpfully calls hateful jokes. The buffoon is excessive in the sense that he tells both hateful and tactful jokes, both innocently funny jokes and those that will offend or wound. While the buffoon is bufferish, then, because he is insensitive to the feelings of others and regularly offensive or hurtful with his humor, the boor is boorish by being overly sensitive about the feelings of others; he refrains from joking or listening to jokes out of extreme solicitousness rather than seriousness. The boor is not the Puritan who fears that “someone, somewhere, might be having fun,” as Mencken put it, but the politically correct administrator who “contributes nothing and finds fault with everything” (EN 1128b1–4), who treats every joke as propaganda and fears litigation more than hell. The boor falsely believes many jokes are hateful that are not.

In short, the boor and the buffoon exhibit a “flawed moral sensitivity” that is excessive or deficient not in respect to humor as such, i.e., the funniness of their
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jokes, but with respect to the hatefulness of the jokes they tell or tolerate. While the witty person will tell and tolerate mild, inoffensive, harmless jokes about themselves and others, the buffoon will tell and tolerate too many hateful jokes, and the boor will not tell or tolerate enough jokes (even the relatively inoffensive ones).

In light of this, against Bostock’s contention that wit has no characteristic passion (Aristotle never mentions it) and Fortenbraugh’s position that wit’s passion is the appreciation of jokes themselves, Curzer argues that the characteristic passion of wit is friendly feeling, or philia.\(^{10}\) The typical motivation of witty acts is the desire to be pleasant to others, to be friendly to the right people in the right ways. Curzer defends this position by arguing it best explains continence and incontinence in the sphere of wit. Rather than struggling to appreciate or not to appreciate the funniness of a joke—alternatives Curzer apparently finds incoherent due to the involuntariness of amusement—his thesis that failures of wit involve being oversensitive or under-sensitive to the feelings of others means that the continent buffoon (say) struggles against the desire to hear or tell something hateful, whereas the incontinent buffoon red-facedly enjoys and partakes in demeaning locker-room banter.\(^{11}\)

Because the witty person is sensitive to the oversensitivity of boors, and unwilling to satisfy the crass and unbecoming pleasures of buffoons, Curzer suggests, the witty person will be a comic conservative. He will not listen to hateful jokes and will not tell hateful jokes or jokes that would be perceived by his listeners as hateful, since this would be contrary to his goal of being pleasant.\(^{12}\) Rather, when he tells or listens to jokes, his desire to be friendly will make him appropriately sensitive to the objects of the jokes, the manner in which they are told, with whom he is speaking, and, Curzer suggests, the occasion of the conversation. One can succeed or fail at each of these parameters independently, and for telling and listening independently: the boorish buffoon can tell but not take jokes, whereas the buffoonish boor loves even those hateful jokes directed at herself.\(^{13}\)

The Detraction Account of Humor

If wit is a daughter of philia, as Curzer suggests, then being witty is distinct from having a good sense of humor. He must therefore deal with Aristotle’s apparently contradictory assertion that witty and non-witty people disagree about how funny some jokes are, that “the well-bred man’s jesting differs from that of a vulgar man” with respect to what jokes they find funny.\(^{14}\)

Curzer’s defense rests on a distinction between being funny and being humorous. His argument for the distinction is based on Aristotle’s discussion of temperance in Nicomachean Ethics:

[The temperate person] neither enjoys the things that the self-indulgent man enjoys most—but rather dislikes them—nor in general the things that he should not, nor anything of this sort to excess, nor does he feel pain or craving when they are absent, or does so only to a moderate degree. (EN 1119a12–14)
Curzer interprets this passage as follows. Suppose (T): “Temperate people are pained by intemperate drink proportional to its intemperance.” This does not entail (C): “Temperate people are connoisseurs of drink,” because the practical expertise involved in knowing whether x is temperate is distinct from the aesthetic expertise involved in knowing whether x is fine: “temperate people are not necessarily discriminating within the class of temperate drinks.”

This leaves open whether temperate people are discriminating within the class of intemperate drinks. Perhaps (T) entails (I): “Temperate people are good aesthetic judges of intemperate drinks,” and expertise in temperance is at the same time aesthetic expertise in what is ugly. There are several reasons to think that it isn’t. Perhaps one cannot know what is ugly without first knowing what is fine; in that case, since we cannot infer (C) from (T), and (I) implies (C), we cannot infer (I) from (T). Furthermore, since what is fine is not coextensive with what is temperate—one can drink too much fine wine—we have some reason to expect that what is ugly is not coextensive with what is intemperate either: I suppose one can temperately enjoy a Bud Lite. Let’s call the position that temperance and connoisseurship (excellent aesthetic judgment) are logically independent areas of expertise the Non-Overlapping Expertise thesis.

Curzer extends the Non-Overlapping Expertise thesis by applying it to the relationship between wit and good humor. He argues that while witty people are pained by hateful jokes, “it does not follow that witty people are connoisseurs of humor.” Just as moral expertise is not aesthetic expertise—or perhaps because it is not, if good humor is a kind of aesthetic expertise—“the witty person is the measure of what is hateful, but not the measure of what is amusing.” Thus:

When it comes to tasteful, tactful jokes, there is no reason to think that witty people are particularly good at identifying and appreciating the funny ones. They do not necessarily enjoy hilarious, appropriate jokes more than barely-funny, appropriate jokes.

Curzer adds that a witty person might find hateful jokes either enjoyable or unenjoyable, depending on the circumstances, which is what one would expect if wit governs social pleasantness rather than funniness per se.

Curzer supports the extension of the Non-Overlapping Expertise thesis to wit and humor by defending what I will call a Detraction Account of humor. The Detraction Account holds that “the humorousness of a joke depends upon many factors” other than funniness. Every virtue aims at an internal goal (acting virtuously; the noble), an external goal proper to the virtue (in this case, social pleasantness), and a counter-goal of avoiding some characteristic harm (in this case, giving offense). If the achievement of these goals contributes to the overall humorousness of a joke, then neither funniness nor hatefulness suffices to make a joke enjoyable or unenjoyable overall. Witty Mattie may be very pleased overall by a successful but very bland joke; this would afford her both the proper pleasure of wit and relief in having avoided an occasion of offense. On the other hand, Curzer writes, “mildly
hateful, hysterically funny jokes may end up being overall pleasant for her,” since the funniness of the joke may “outweigh” both her offense and her shame at having tolerated something hateful.19

The parallel with temperance strengthens this account of humorousness. If temperate Niblick “is forced by reasons of politeness or friendship to eat a second piece of cheesecake,” Curzer suggests, it doesn’t follow either that he will find the cheesecake unsavory or that his enjoyment of the cheesecake will be unaffected by his knowledge that eating it is intemperate.20 Since aesthetic judgments and moral judgments don’t overlap, the second slice of cheesecake qua cheesecake is just as tasty as the first slice, but Niblick enjoys it less than the first slice overall. Temperate pleasure “depends on many factors” in addition to the actual tastiness of the desert—namely, the set of internal and external goals proper to temperance—some of which detract from Niblick’s final enjoyment of the cheesecake. So too with wit. As second-order virtues, wit and temperance alike are useful for judging the overall pleasantness of jokes and treats insofar as the funniness of the jokes and the tastiness of the treats are already given by aesthetic judgment. Wit and temperance are good judges of how non-aesthetic moral considerations detract from one’s overall experience of jokes and treats, but are useless for detecting funniness or tastiness themselves.

Cheesecake, Tortured Cats, and Fundamental Dispositions

The point of Curzer’s deployment of the Non-Overlapping Expertise thesis and the Detraction Account of humor is to defend the position that a virtuous person can find hateful jokes funny, thus demonstrating that hatefulness does not preclude humorousness. Insofar as he defends these ideas with an analogy between temperance and wittiness, one way to evaluate them is to evaluate the strength of the analogy between enjoying a second slice of cheesecake and a hateful joke.

Let us begin by noting that Niblick’s enjoyment of additional cheesecake is not strictly analogous with Mattie’s enjoyment of a hateful joke. For one thing, cheesecake is itself good, while hateful jokes are not: hateful jokes are at best “mixed pleasures.” A stronger analogy would analyze whether temperate Niblick can overall enjoy a hateful treat—say, a savory dish of tortured cat.21 Another factor weakening the analogy is that wit is a social virtue, while temperance is not. One can be temperate but not witty alone. We can thus strengthen the analogy by comparing Mattie’s private enjoyment of, say, Daniel Tosh’s abortion jokes with Niblick’s private enjoyment of tortured cat.22 So structured, we can now ask whether the analogy still supports the Non-Overlapping Expertise thesis and the Detraction Account of humor, both as plausible interpretations of Aristotle and as plausible in themselves.

First Objection: The Argument from Sociality

I don’t think it does, for three reasons. Let me begin with the weakest. Curzer’s Non-Overlapping Expertise thesis allows that a joke may be both incredibly hateful and incredibly funny. Since wit is a social virtue, it follows that a witty person would be doubly-pained by such a joke in public—very offended and embarrassed, the
proper pain of wit, and very frustrated at not having achieved the proper pleasure of wit, namely, friendly feeling—such that even a maximally funny joke will not please a witty person overall if it is hateful enough. Funny but hateful jokes follow the law of diminishing returns: while some mild offense and frustration occasioned by mildly hateful jokes can be overcome by the pleasure of their much greater funniness, the pleasure provided by horridly hateful jokes can never overcome both the proportional offense and frustration they bring about—at least in public. So holds the Detraction Account of humor.

However, not all jokes are public: like cheesecake, one can enjoy Daniel Tosh alone in a closet. No, that’s not quite right, but surely you get the point, dear reader, if you caught that bad bit of humor while silently reading my sentences. According to the Non-Overlapping Expertise thesis and the Detraction Account, Witty Mattie could have her way with Tosh in the closet: Tosh’s humorous gropings—excuse me, gropings at humor—wouldn’t be maximally pleasant for her, since witty Mattie enjoys taking her pleasures in public, but the experience would be both very good and unopposed by shame or frustration.

This possibility highlights a major problem with the cheesecake analogy. Since temperance isn’t a social virtue, it would be intemperate for Niblick to eat a tortured cat in or out of the closet. In contrast, if the overall pleasure the witty person takes in hateful jokes is less in public than in private—sometimes diminishing even to the point of pain—then it seems that Curzer’s account must locate the badness of hateful jokes in scandal. The Scandal Account of hatefulness holds that hatefulness is relative to the feelings of one’s audience, the joker, or the joke’s butt(s), which entails that there are no objective standards, that is, no audience-independent standards, of hatefulness. Since the Detraction Account of humor implies that one and the same joke can be enjoyable in private but not in public, it tends to identify the hatefulness of hateful jokes with the scandal they occasion in public.

However, Aristotle explicitly rejects the Scandal Account, and for good reason: it doesn’t explain why the witty person should find hateful jokes embarrassing. There is an objective standard of hatefulness for Aristotle: a joke is hateful if (and only if) the witty person finds it hateful, since what the witty person finds hateful is what everyone should find hateful. Therefore, the properly witty person can give an account or logos explaining what it is about the joke that is hateful. She can even do so in private, since Aristotle argues that some things, sacred things, shouldn’t be laughed at, ever, even secretly. Tosh and Cohen reject the possibility of the sacred tout court, but plausible arguments can be made to the contrary, though I won’t attempt this here. Suffice to say that just as some things cannot be sold, either absolutely (like friendship) or without degradation (like sex), so too some things cannot be funny, either absolutely (like the Eucharist), or without normalizing the perverse (like abortion).

Now to be fair, Curzer does note that one can go wrong with respect to the object parameter of humor. However, this is not consistent with his defense of the Detraction Account of humor. He could make the two consistent by acknowledging that the sacred functions as an absolute norm of wit, but this would in turn contradict...
his thesis that the object of wit is friendliness rather than funniness, since it would govern even jokes whispered to oneself in dark closets.\textsuperscript{26}

Second Objection: Against Insulated Pleasures

The \textit{Detraction Account} of humor holds that the humorousness of a joke is a function of several independent parameters of humorousness. It therefore requires several sub-theses. The first is that each parameter of a virtue has pleasure proper or unique to it. This is in part what allows us to distinguish the various parameters of a virtue in the first place. Furthermore, however, Curzer seems to also hold that each parameter of a virtue achieves or fails to achieve its proper pleasure independently of the virtue’s other parameters—pleasures are “insulated” from one another, so to speak, such that failing to achieve one pleasure does not entail the failure to achieve another pleasure: one can enjoy the funniness of a painful joke at the same time that one is shamed and frustrated by its offensiveness. In consequence, Curzer seems to hold that the pleasure of wit (like general justice) is a second-order pleasure that is an aggregative and not qualitative sum of first-order pleasures, since the insulated pleasures of wit’s parameters \textit{compete} with each other in the final tally without directly affecting each other in their origin or quality.

The problem with this account is that a virtue’s parameters are formally but not really distinct; pleasures are not insulated from one another, and therefore virtue’s pleasure is not an aggregative good. Some choice examples make the point: though I’ve never committed them, it seems to me that the transgressiveness of rape or adultery is a proper part of the pleasure one takes in such acts, which wouldn’t be as pleasurable if they weren’t as transgressive.\textsuperscript{27} We falsify the quality of such pleasures if we separate and insulate the pleasantness of the sex (say) from the transgressiveness of the act. St. Augustine once made the same point about stealing pears, noting that the transgression and not the pears was the fruit he was after. \textit{Either} (1) every act can be described at some more basic level, independently of human intention, as good—intemperate cheesecake eating can be described as eating cheesecake plus intemperateness, lustful sex can be described as sex plus lustfulness, and hateful humor can be described as funniness plus hatefulness—or (2) the moral quality of a pleasure depends on its intentional object: pleasure is always pleasure under a description. Not only do I have difficulty seeing how (1) can account for the counterexamples above, but (as an advocate of the virtue-is-the-measure doctrine) I cannot see how one could achieve good act-descriptions by eliminating the virtuous person’s description of the act altogether. In such a case we would have no acts at all, but only: eating happening; sex happening; amusement happening. “Happenings” can never be good or bad as such: they lack the agentic condition for that possibility.

If, then, the pleasantness or painfulness of an act depends on its intentional description, the pleasures of a virtue’s parameters are not insulated from one another, because they are not really but only formally distinct. Therefore amusement isn’t a second-order aggregate pleasure, but more like an affective symptom of a \textit{ceteris paribus} judgment, as we see in the third and final objection.
Third Objection: Humor Is Not an Aesthetic Judgment

My final, most speculative, and perhaps most interesting objection to Curzer's account distinguishes between humor and aesthetic judgment. You'll recall that Curzer distinguished wit and good humor (i.e., connoisseurship of funniness) using the Non-Overlapping Expertise Thesis. Roughly, the argument holds that since moral and aesthetic judgment range over different intentional objects—one and the same joke, say, can be both hateful and aesthetically pleasing—wit and good humor constitute distinct areas of expertise. Curzer defended the argument using an analogy, arguing that just as the man of temperate drink need not be a connoisseur of drink, so too, *mutatis mutandis*, with wit and good humor.

However, it is not clear to me that funniness, like tastiness, is an aesthetic judgment, nor that one's sense of humor is really independent of one's moral character. From a Thomistic perspective, one that holds (among other things) a moderate realism about essences and teleology, all judgments of value are dependent on the goodness of objects, where goodness is a metaphysical concept referring to the degree to which some substance has actualized its essential form. Within this tradition, the moral imperative, aesthetic judgment, and, I would argue, humor, are ways or modes of representing the goodness of an object.

Humor is therefore both like and unlike morality and aesthetic judgment in important ways. Morality represents the fact that the ultimate goodness of one's life is, for rational agents, a matter of action and concern, whereas aesthetic interest presents an object for reflection and appreciation for its own sake, and not with a view to action. Humor is like aesthetic judgment in that it is a form of disinterested interest, for all the usual reasons: it does not aim at cognitive discovery or worldly action, but is pleasing for its own sake. Yet in another sense humor is very different from aesthetic judgment. Formal judgments of beauty depend on internal qualities of an artwork; artworks can be beautiful because they are “well-made” without being useful for some purpose. Moral judgments are not like this at all: it is absurd to argue that a man can commit adultery well, independently of the purposes of sex, or that one can admire the efficiency with which the Nazis orchestrated the Holocaust, the “elegance” of genocide as distinct from its human cost. The name for that kind of appreciation is “horror.” Thus humor is like morality and not aesthetic experience in the sense that some things are impossible objects of humor.

The reason for this, I believe, is that finding something humorous requires one to take a normative perspective on the world. Humor requires what Robert C. Roberts called a “sense of the normal,” a lived perspective from which one expects the world to act as it should. It is for this reason, for instance, that what we found funny as teenagers fails to amuse us as mature adults; our taste in humor is symptomatic of our moral character because one's character constitutes a perspective on the world. I would go so far as to suggest that a being who is incapable of grasping (or, in weaker Kant-speak, of representing to themselves) objective values that are normatively binding on free, rational agents, is a being who is incapable of humor as such. (It is thus an open question whether humor is available to beasts and gods.) It is for this perspectival reason that the kinds of jokes one finds amusing to tell or
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listen to track one’s character; humor is involuntary, and its quality revealing, because it is a symptom of one’s fundamental disposition towards the good. It reveals one’s basic moral attitude towards norms as such—and only free beings can have attitudes towards norms—but in a disinterested rather than interested manner. Interested attitudes towards norms, of course, are vice and virtue proper.

Humor, then, is a disinterested appreciation not of objects as such, which is characteristic of the aesthetic attitude, but the disinterested appreciation of norms considered in relation to one’s freedom. Humorous pleasure in “descending incongruity” is possible only from a perspective that can appreciate the difference between the normative necessity of reasons and the nomological necessity of physis, and play with it. Humor and aesthetic interest are, unlike moral interest, disengaged, since neither is a motive to action, but moral and humorous interest proceed from a perspective, from a grasp of the normative force of the good on a free subject. The ability to represent the good disinterestedly is therefore a condition for the possibility of both humor and aesthetic interest, but humor and not aesthetic interest requires a grasp of the normative force of the good.

It follows from this that the Non-Overlapping Expertise thesis is false. Cognizance of the normative force of the good is awareness of both the possibility of the humorous and its limits. Since what is absolutely bad cannot without contradiction be considered a legitimate object of interest, it constitutes an impossible object of humor: only the vicious man would find it funny. What is bad per accidens, but not per se, is a possible object of humor, because here we can mind the gap between what norms require and what people desire or believe. Put otherwise, while the perverse imitation of the good is a thing for laughter when considered disinterestedly, what is truly bad in itself imitates no good. Evil is the antithesis of being, and no one can have an interest in non-being save the devil. That is why no one laughs in hell, but only at it; and perhaps it means no one can laugh at heaven, though the joy of the saints surpasses all understanding.

Conclusion

These criticisms of Curzer’s Detraction Account of humor, if sound, require us to include a sub-virtue of good humor in wit, since this is required for the prudent person to judge what constitutes an illegitimate object of humor as such. While Curzer thinks that Aristotle is not concerned with funniness as such, but only hatefulness (a social vice), I would argue that unfunniness due to something’s being generally unjust (i.e., objectively bad as the virtuous person would judge it) is an absolute norm of wit. The pleasure of the witty person in what is humorous depends on the quality of the humor in this respect at least, which can bring or prevent pleasure in or out of company.

DeSales University, PA
Notes

5. Ibid., 108.
7. Aristotle tells us that “the jest is a sort of abuse” (EN 1128a30–31), and that “[Wit is] well-bred insolence” (Rhetoric, 1389b11–12). While Curzer understands Aristotle to be limiting the sphere of wit to some specific type of humor, i.e., mockery, ridicule, “put-downs or barbs” (Aristotle and the Virtues, 168), one needn’t interpret Aristotle so narrowly. One could interpret him to be pointing out that what is humorous tends to be “descending incongruity,” and thus to be advocating a kind of incongruity theory rather than a superiority theory of humor. Curzer also limits the sphere of wit to jokes (ibid.), which is not only unjustified by the text, but also anachronistic, since the practice of “joking” as telling set-pieces of humor is a fairly modern development.
11. Likewise, the continent boor struggles not to be a wet blanket, while the incontinent boor can’t help but object to what are in fact harmless conversations.
12. See Curzer’s discussion of the point on 177–179.
13. See Curzer’s discussion of the parameters of wit on 174–175.
15. Curzer makes this argument on 184.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
20. Ibid.

22. E.g., in his interview with Marion Jones, founder of *Until Abortion Ends*, Tosh asked: “How do you know you don’t like it if you’ve never tried it?” “What has abortion ever done to you?” At the end of the interview Tosh does a skit in which he gives his “frequent abortion card,” only two stamps away from a free abortion, to a very pregnant woman walking by, telling her that he “gets double-stamped for late term.” The interview is available at: http://www.jillstanek.com/2012/02/comedy-central-features-gen-y-pro-lifers/.

23. Aristotle rejects the Scandal Account at *EN* 1128a25–29: “Now should we define the man who jokes well by his saying what is not unbecoming to a well-bred man, or by his not giving pain, or even giving delight, to the hearer? Or is the latter, at any rate, itself indefinite, since different things are hateful or pleasant to different people? The kind of jokes he will listen to will be the same; for the kind he can put up with are also the kind he seems to make.” Cf. *Eudemian Ethics* 1234a18–23.

24. I leave it open whether that *logos* is the witty person herself, or some agent-independent reason.

25. See *EN* 1128a30–31. Curzer remarks that while “some people hold the view that the sphere of humor is a morality-free zone, a region of human life where nothing is sacred . . . Aristotle rightly rejects this view. Some things are just not laughing matters” (*Aristotle and the Virtues*, 176).

26. Curzer could escape this objection by arguing that one can be friendly to oneself, but whether Aristotle allows such a position is hotly contested.

