

“The legend lives on from the Chippewa on down, to the big lake they call ‘Gitche Gume’ The lake it is said, never gives up her dead when the skies of November turn gloomy. With a load of iron ore, twenty six thousand tons more than the Edmund Fitzgerald weighed empty...”. Wait a minute, that’s The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald, by Gordon Lightfoot. That was Jason’s paper from November. Notably, the album version of the song is six minutes and thirty seconds long. Jason’s summary of his November paper was ten minutes and thirteen seconds in duration. We took comments and a comfort break after Robert read your summary aloud.

Laughter. See. That’s funny.

We were on a family trip to Fort Lauderdale. About half way through the week, the minivan door came off track. I drove it back to Fort Lauderdale International Airport to the Hertz Hub. They were very kind and apologetic. As a show of their sincerity, they gave me a Lexus SUV. Black. Leather interior. Some huge Garmin monstrosity was on the dash, which was good because it was pouring and I was lost. I went back to the hotel to pick up Melissa and the kids. Because it was raining, we were heading to The Galleria Mall. On the way, Melissa asked what something like this Lexus would cost. As we pulled into the parking spot, I told her that there might be something in the glove box with information. She reached for the glove box and I stopped her hand. I said, “No, no. New fangled car. Just say, “Glove box open.”, and she did - twice. The kids thought it was funny. Hell, I did, too.

I was in a Preliminary Hearing in front of Jim Adams, as an Assistant County Attorney. Two young men had broken into a home on Denzil Drive at night while the occupants were out of town. The neighbors saw flash lights flashing around the interior of the residence and called HPD. Officers at both the front door and back caught the two kids who had black bags with loot. They were wearing black boots, black pants, black sweat shirts and Batman masks. Officer Barnes testified to this, under oath. The two boys were represented by Foster Cotthoff and Jamie Hart. I said to Officer Barnes, "Now, tell me again what these young men had on.". He said again that they had on black boots, black pants, black sweatshirts and Batman masks. I stated in open Court, "Jumpin' justice, Officer Barnes, they had on Batman masks?". Neither Foster or Jamie could cross for fear of laughing and Jim called me a "Little Son-of-a-Bitch" – almost audibly. That was really funny.

Any Monty Python fans? I used to sneak back up and watch Monty Python on Sunday nights on Channel 8 out of Nashville. Ever heard of "The Funniest Joke in the World".

"The Funniest Joke in the World" (also "Joke Warfare" and "Killer Joke") is a Monty Python comedy sketch revolving around a joke that is so funny that anyone who reads or hears it promptly dies from laughter. Ernest Scribbler (Michael Palin), a British "manufacturer of jokes", writes the joke on a piece of paper only to die laughing. His mother (Eric Idle) also immediately dies laughing after reading it, as do the

first constables on the scene. Eventually the joke is contained, weaponized, and deployed against Germany during World War II.

The sketch appeared in the first episode of the television show Monty Python's Flying Circus, first shown on October 5, 1969.

The sketch is framed in a documentary style. The British joke is said to have been laid to rest when "peace broke out" at the end of the war, and countries agree to a joke warfare ban at the Geneva Convention. In 1950, the last copy of the joke is sealed under a monument in the Berkshire countryside, bearing the inscription "To the Unknown Joke". Thus, the English version of the joke is never revealed to the audience.

A woman gets on a bus with her baby. The bus driver says: "Ugh, that's the ugliest baby I've ever seen!" The woman walks to the rear of the bus and sits down, fuming. She says to a man next to her: "The driver just insulted me!" The man says: "You go up there and tell him off. Go on, I'll hold your monkey for you."

### **WHAT'S SO FUNNY?**

**John Lindsey Adams**

**Presented to the Athenaeum Society**

**January 2, 2025**

Sooooooooo, funny. What makes these things funny? Regarding Jason's Summary, I poke at Jason, which we did in his absence. Fifteen years later, Melissa will occasionally attempt to verbally open the glove box. It was not quite as funny in the parking lot. Damn, though, it really was. I have found that, in measure, humor has a

place in Court. Absent something contemptuous, a humorous comment can relax an entire Courtroom. It can humanize a wired environment. It should never belittle, minimize the nature of the proceedings or disrespect the forum, but help a large crowd relax just a bit. Jim did not hold me in contempt. Some funny things are killers, but it may differ from person to person. We all know funny people. Well, we know some people that are funny, but some things we don't find funny and some people are not. What is funny, and how does it work?

Laughter and humor are NOT synonymous. Laughter, the universal language of joy, has long been a subject of fascination for psychologists, neuroscientists and philosophers, alike. Know this, as well, laughter is more than just the language of joy. Welcome to the human experience. Look, we are not the only species that laughs. Apes, primates, chimps – all laugh. It's sounds more like a panting. You know, the Cheetah sounds from Tarzan. It tends to be associated with physical play. It appears to require the contact, the facial expressions, as well as the sounds. Notably, apes, primates and chimps that are deaf do not have similar experiences or outcomes. In that they cannot hear the "laughter", apparently everything presents to them as aggression. Bad outcomes. Apes laugh with humans. So we are all familiar with apes, primates and chimps signing with humans. It's really amazing. Here's something you may not be aware of – apes, primates and chimps that are taught sign language, sometimes hundreds of characters, **only** sign with humans. Not that it's any less amazing, but I



think it rules out that they sign human jokes to one another. They probably just think that they are helping us humans out...

Laughter again... Not all laughter is similar. Humor may lead to laughter, but not all laughter comes from humor. Insert the Dr. Evil laugh, here. Around two million years ago, human ancestors evolved the capacity for willful control over facial movements. As a result, laughter was co-opted for a number of novel functions, including strategically punctuating conversation and conveying feelings or ideas such as embarrassment AND derision. Humans can voluntarily access the laughter program and utilize it to their own ends, including smoothing conversational interaction, appeasing others, inducing favorable stances in them or downright laughing at the people they don't like. Laughter and humor simply put do not have a one to one association. A study conducted in 2009 used actors to laugh for people. The participants were to identify the type of laughter. They found an overall recognition rate of 44%, with joy correctly classified at 44%, tickling at 45%, schadenfreude at 37% and taunting at 50%. So, look, we know that there are basically three kinds of laughs: 1. Funny laughs, 2. Tickle laughs and let's say all others, evil, nervous, derisive. We have to go through funny laughs to get to what humor is.

Humor is defined as the tendency of experiences to provoke laughter and provide amusement. Humor often relies on surprise and incongruity. This could include an unexpected punchline, an absurd situation or clever word-play. It catches us off guard. It is a complex cognitive function which may lead to laughter. *The Sage*

*Journals* notes that humor has been a part of our world, homo sapiens, for thousands of years. Ancient Greek texts contain descriptions of professional jesters and jokebooks. That's like 1200 BC. Humorous conversation has been observed by anthropologists in first contact with Australian aboriginals. Australian aboriginals have been genetically isolated for at least 35000 years. Given that even a simple joke can utilize language skills, theory of mind, symbolism, abstract thinking and social perception, humor may arguably be humankind's most complex cognitive attribute.

Is humor an emotion? In its simplest form, humor is the quality of being amusing or comic. It is a spark that may ignite laughter or evoke a smile. Emotions are typically defined as intense feelings that arise in response to a specific stimuli. *NeuroLaunch* states that emotions are the colors that paint our inner world, ranging from the fiery red of anger to the blue of sadness. Where does humor fit in? The key difference seems to lie in the cognitive processes involved with humor. Humor requires a level of mental processing and interpretation. It's not just about the feeling, but also about the understanding. Humor requires us to process information, make connections and arrive at a humorous conclusion – it's a puzzle with an accompanying feeling.

Beyond the role of humor in entertaining us, humor does serve a critical role in our emotional lives. It is a powerful tool for managing stress and regulating our emotions. In therapy and counseling, humor is often used as a means of addressing difficult emotions and situations. Our ability to access and move through our emotional states using humor is a key component of emotional health.

Neuroscientists have identified brain regions involved in humor processing, and this includes areas associated with cognitive function AND emotional responses. When we “get” a joke, our brain’s reward center lights up like a Christmas tree. It releases feel-good neurotransmitters and hormones. This neurological evidence supports the idea that humor occupies a unique space between cognition and emotion. Humor ticks all the boxes in the three components of emotion: cognitive, physiological and behavioral. Look at it this way, cognitively, you process and interpret the information. You make the unexpected connections. Physiologically, laughter triggers a range of responses from increased heart rate to the release of endorphins. Behaviorally, you smile, laugh or maybe even cry.

The most visible emotional response is the smile. It is the manifestation of our inner amusement. Not all smiles are created equal. The most genuine smile of amusement is The Duchenne Smile. It also involves the eyes, as a full facial expression. Contrary to the popular belief, a full on happy smile, The Duchenne Smile with eyes included, probably takes *more* muscle manipulation than a frown. It’s worth it, John Atkins. You just have to try.

Humor is described as an amusement park for our emotions. It takes us on thrilling rides, spins us through joy, surprise and sometimes even fear and disgust. Humor challenges our perceptions, tests our limits and ultimately leaves us exhilarated, refreshed and, potentially, exhausted.

In the late 1800's, archeologists in Iraq uncovered an ancient clay tablet with a peculiar yet almost familiar line of text. In small, wedge-shaped characters, Sumerian, they found what is arguably the world's first documented bar joke. The tablet is 4000 years old, dating nearly to the dawn of writing. The joke reads as follows: ur-gir-re ec-dam-ce in-kur-ma/nij na-me igi nu-mu-un-du/ne-en jal taka-en-e-ce. I have translated this from ancient Sumerian for you. "A dog walks into a bar and says, 'I cannot see a thing. I'll open this one.'" Nobody gets it. It was probably some type of pun, pertinent to earliest civilization in southern Mesopotamia.

Flash forward some 2000 years. Found in a Sumerian Proverb Collection, which is also known as Instructions of Shuruppak to son Ziusudra, was this beauty: "Something which has never occurred since time immemorial; a young woman did not fart in her husband's lap." So, we are left to assume that this happened frequently?

From 1600 BC, found on Westcar Papyrus, rumored to be about pharaoh King Snofru, "How do you entertain a bored pharaoh? You sail a boatload of young women dressed only in fishing nets down the Nile and urge the pharaoh to go catch a fish."

The first joke in English is found in an Anglo Saxon book of poetry from the 10<sup>th</sup> century. "What hangs at a man's thigh and wants to poke the hole that it's often poked before?". A key, you dirty bastards.

The 19th century witnessed a significant evolution and influence in the world of comedy, unveiling the humorous side of the **Victorian Era**. During this period, comedy underwent several transformations, reflecting the societal changes and cultural

upheavals of the time. A young lady being rebuked for not writing to her consort, who was on a journey, said it was out of her power, as he had carried away the *pen* with him, and left her nothing but the *ink-stand*.

I think it's safe to say that from the on-set of cognitive thought things have been humorous. Probably for some, sooner than others, and over time people have laughed (or maybe died) at the expense of something unique to mankind. DON'T YOU JUST KNOW that some caveman tripped and fell into the fire and his cave mates laughed. This is physical **Slapstick Humor**. Flash forward and think of The Three Stooges.

**Dry Humor** is delivered with a straight face and a neutral tone as if it were actual. Think of Michael Scott from The Office. Remember Stephen Wright? "I spilled spot remover on my dog and now he's gone. All those who believe in psychokinesis, raise my hand. If you shoot a mime, should you use a silencer?" Dead pan delivery really drives home the unexpected aspect of humor.

**Wordplay Humor** includes double entendres - "Marriage is a fine institution, but I'm not ready for an institution." (Mae West), cheeky metaphors - "Love is a battlefield.", pick up lines - "What are your other two wishes, because I am already here.", and puns - A criminals best asset is his lie ability.

**Toilet Humor or Scatological Humor**, is self defining. Toilet jokes aren't my favorite. But they're a solid number 2.

**Witty Humor** relies on dry, clever intellectual engagement of the listener. I know this is going to be a hard reach with this group. The famous story about Churchill

and the woman who described him to himself as disgustingly drunk. "My dear, you are ugly, and what's more, you are disturbingly ugly. Tomorrow I shall be sober and you will still be disgustingly ugly." Or my favorite Churchill comment: "Tact is the ability to tell someone to go to hell in such a way that they look forward to the trip." – Winston Churchill.

**Satirical humor** is a form of humor that uses irony, sarcasm, and exaggeration to criticize and expose human vices, follies, and absurdities. Think *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. President Merkin Muffley: "Gentlemen, you can't fight in here! This is the War Room".

**Dark Humor** can be defined as any joke that makes light of a tragic event or subject matter. Often times seen as a coping mechanism, it can also be interpreted as off-putting. When Ronald Reagan was shot on March 30, 1981, he said to the surgeons in the operating room, "Please tell me you're Republicans." Or...Personally, I hate double standards. Burn a body at a crematorium, you're "being a respectful friend." Do it at home and you're "destroying evidence". What is the worst combination of illnesses? Alzheimer's and diarrhea. You're running but can't remember where.

**Cringe Humor** is a sub-genre of comedy that derives humor from social awkwardness, guilty pleasure, self-deprecation, idiosyncratic humor, and personal distress. This is like Ben Stiller in *Meet the Fockers* explaining how to milk a cat. ...Or Robert Deniro's, "What about me, Greg, I have nipples. Can you milk me?. It's bad on multiple levels and is a first cousin to Dark Humor. I mean, what's red and bad for

your teeth? A brick. Five out of six say that Russian Roulette is safe. Please know that this is where your Dad Jokes go to die.

**Ironic Humor.** Emerson Moser was the senior crayon maker for Crayola who made over 1.4 billion crayons. He was color blind.

**Observational Humor** is based upon everyday life. This is stand up. Jerry Seinfeld. Kevin Hart. Dave Chappell. “Apparently smoking cannabis can affect your short term memory. Well, if that’s true, what do you think smoking cannabis does?” – Mickey P Kerr. I’m on a whiskey diet. I’ve lost three days already. Went to the zoo. There was only one dog in it. It was a shitzu.

**Topical humor** is a type of humor that is framed around a specific topic related to current events or issues that are important or popular at the current time. Seth Meyers from May of 2024: A 100-year-old man and 102-year-old woman in Philadelphia have set a Guinness World Record for world’s oldest newlyweds. And if you wanna know where they’re going for their honeymoon—heaven. For New Year’s Day: What does the man with no hair sing at midnight? Bald Lang Syne.

**Self Enhancing Humor and Self Deprecating Humor**, have, obviously, one central character. First, Self Enhancing Humor: I didn’t text you. Vodka did. This stuff is Debbie Downer one liners. On the Self Deprecating side of the equation, there are funny people like Nate Bargatze and Jimmy Gaffigan, but who remains the king of Self Deprecating Humor? Of course, Rodney Dangerfield. “My psychiatrist told me I going insane. I told him I wanted a second opinion and he said, “Alright, you’re ugly,

too.” “Siskel and Ebert caught my show. They gave me one finger up”. “My wife told me she wanted to have sex in the back seat, and she wanted me to drive.” “Last week my house was on fire. My wife told the kids, “Be quiet. You’ll wake up daddy.”

**High Brow Humor** requires a certain level of education or knowledge. “Do you know the name Pavlov? It rings a bell.” **Low Brow Humor**, on the other hand, well, think Kingpin, Wedding Crashers, Blazing Saddles, Step Brothers. You get the picture. But before you judge, know from Shakespeares Comedy of Errors, we see Shakespeare reveling in witty banter when he has Dromio of Saracuse describe a kitchen servant who claims him to be her own. Her circumference is said to be so great that her body can be taken for a globe, upon which can be identified distinct countries. Antipholus demands specifics, asking him, in turn, where Ireland, Scotland, Spain and the “Netherlands” may be found. Such passages highlight how Shakespeare alternates between highbrow concepts and lowbrow humor, sometimes within the span of a single dialogue. One minute he can be as brazen and cheeky as an Irish limerick, the next have Antipholus of Saracuse say to Luciana: O train me not, sweet mermaid, with thy note to drown me in thy sister’s flood of tears.

**Burlesque Humor’s** best example, for my purposes, would be topped with “Well, ain’t it a small world, spiritually speaking. Pete and Delmar just been baptized and saved. I guess I’m the only one that remains unaffiliated.” Burlesque Humor is satirical and relies on exaggeration, even to Homer’s Oddessy. It is usually characterized by a parody of serious subjects. “Hey mister! I don’t mean to be tellin’ tales out of



school, but there's a feller in there that'll pay you ten dollars if you sing into his can." And, aren't we so glad that they did.

**Farcical Humor** includes improbable consequences and heavy exaggeration. One word: "SQUIRREL!" Though the plot of the movie exists as the family welcomes out-of-town guests for the holiday, the mishaps along the way make it truly memorable. Few scenes are quite as iconic to the holidays as those of Clark Griswold lighting the Christmas lights only to have them shockingly burn out. *"Surprised, Eddie?... If I woke up tomorrow with my head sewn to the carpet, I wouldn't be more surprised."*

**Epigrammatic Humor** relies on paradox and irony. "The quickest way to double your money is to fold it in half and put it back in your pocket or three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead."

**Parodic Humor** is defined by mocking and imitation of an original work or person. Think Weird Al Yankovick and his song covers. *Eat It, Like a Surgeon, I Lost on Jeopardy*. Frank Calliendo, Dana Carvey, Darrell Hammond, Bill Hader are just a few of what is an extensive list of impersonators. Mimicry is the truest form of flattery.

It's the incongruity that gets me. The surprise. The twist. The "that's not supposed to be there or happen here. Some of the most gut wrenching, 'laugh so hard it hurts moments occur situationally'. Typically, funny things aren't supposed to happen at Church. Funerals are, by design, solemn occasions – except for Ken

Haggard's. You know you are not supposed to laugh, like at *our* meetings unless the paper is about Scrotie or Kangaroo Wars in Australia. William Turner, Mopey Adams told my brother and me while playing Scrabble at 1:30 a.m. one late snowy night, about attending First Baptist Church in town with a friend at 16 years of age. That puts this around 1928. That would have been in the 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church at 14<sup>th</sup> and Main. Something funny was said or happened and they contracted the giggles and they couldn't stop. She even blushed then when she told us the minister called her out from the pulpit, identifying her as, "You, young lady, in the yellow hat." I think that the solemnity of the setting is directly proportional to side splitting pain and is directly responsible for how everything after that is funny. Everything. I saw this described as the laughter that makes you feel like you did 100 sit ups.

A guy is sitting at home when he hears a knock at the door. He opens the door and sees a snail on the porch. He picks up the snail and throws it as far as he can. Three years later, there's a knock on the door. He opens it and sees the same snail. The snail says: 'What the hell was that all about?'

Some people are naturally funny. Some are great story tellers. Some people are not funny – well, less funny than others, but humor pervades every aspect of our lives. For every type of humor used as an example in this paper, there are ten more. For the record, there were lots of dirty jokes. I really wanted to squeeze it in. That's what she said. Laugh. Laugh often. It's healthy. If you don't see the humor, try to find it. It's

the puzzle. If you can't, move on. Laugh at everything. As Groucho Marx said, "Laugh at yourself. If you find it hard to laugh at yourself, I would be happy to do it for you."