

Phil 3304 Introduction to Logic
Logic and Humor

"After God created the world, He made man and woman.
Then, to keep the whole thing from collapsing, He invented humor."
—Guillermo Mordillo in Stuttgarter Zeitung, Germany.

I once had a friend named Gessor;
Whose knowledge grew lesser and lesser;
It grew so small, he knew nothing at all;
And now he's a college professor!

I. Macro-Theories and the Social Functions of Humor

A. Macro-theories of humor

1. Incongruity theory:

2. Relief theory:

3. Ambivalence theory:

4. Superiority or disparagement theories:

B. Social functions of humor

1. Social bonding:
2. Relief from stress and strain:
3. Expression of aggression or hostility:
4. Celebration of life:
5. Self-effacement:
6. Social correction:

7. Upholding honesty over sham:
8. Provoking thought:
9. Balancing pain:
10. Reinforcing or undermining stereotypes:
11. Therapy or catharsis:
12. Defense against attacks or threats:
13. Survival:

III. Logic and Humor

Principle: much humor is based on committing logical fallacies of various sorts as the following examples will illustrate.

"Is the doctor in?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. "No," the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in."

Two very young children ask their aged grandmother: "Granny, where do children come from?" "Well," she answered, "you, Jason, were found in a garden among the cabbages, and you, Nicole, you were simply brought over by a stork one night." The children exchange a look, and the girl asks her brother, "Should we tell her?" "Nah," the boy says. "Let the poor lady die in peace."

A man is hunting in the woods and comes across an angry and hungry bear. He drops his gun and heads down the road with the bear in hot pursuit. The hunter, out of breath and at the end of the road, can't go any further, trips and falls. As the bear approaches, the hunter looks up to God and says, "O Lord, please let this be a Christian bear!" The bear pulls up beside him, puts his paws together in the form of a prayer and says: "Thank you, Lord, for this meal we are about to receive!"

A. Non-sequitor:

B. Rationalization

- C. Faulty analogy
- D. Questionable cause
- E. Inconsistency
- F. Evasion
- G. Appeal to Force
- H. Prestige jargon ("You're not right; you just sound right!")
- I. Euphemisms
- J. Equivocation
- K. Amphibole/ambiguity (the audience is led along a certain path of comprehension and then is abruptly led to another path by the punch line)
- I. Ad hominem (against the man)
- J. Humorous use of disjunctive syllogism
- K. Subject and predicate not interchangeable in a categorical syllogism

"Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on. "I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least I mean what I say—that's the same thing, you know."

"Not the same thing a bit." said the Hatter. "Why, you might as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see!'"

"You might just as well say," added the March Hare, "that 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like!'"

"You might just as well say," added the Dormouse, "that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe!'"

"It is the same thing with you," said the Hatter.

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

L. Context