

Research Paper

Situating Morality in Humour

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Abstract

The question of ethics in humour is a challenging one. It is unclear as to how we could apply the theories of ethics to the unique challenges posed by humour. Some of these challenges include; how humour subverts the traditional notions of morality and is often contextual. As our understanding of humour and ethics continues to evolve, it is likely that new questions and considerations will be needed. The paper examines the notion and need of ethics in this domain, using the theories of Bergson, Smuts and Gaut. It begins with locating ethics of humour and considers the normativeness in humour as well as the shortcomings of the existing theories. The aim of the paper is to bring about the debates of the complex relationship humour and morality share, and address the sensitivity of the issue in order to tackle the ultimate question of ‘how seriously must a joke be taken’.

Keywords: : *Humour, Comedy, Ethics, Morality, Philosophy*

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1. Introduction

Humour’s ethical considerations are often oversimplified into dogmatic stances. The ethics of humour is usually understood with dogmatism about ethics. Any usage or attribution of ethics in relation to anything else is essentially concerned with moral judgments and practical application of moral concepts. Views on ethics of humour are substantial as they call for the audience to be observant and reflective about what laughing at such targeted jokes might indicate. Understanding the ethics of humor is crucial, as jokes about stereotypes are harmful. They self-reflection that could change them. This paper examines the notion and need of ethics in this domain, using the theories of Bergson, Smuts and Gaut. It begins with locating ethics of humour and considers the normativeness in humour and the shortcomings of the existing theories. We shall be focusing on jokes which are situational and not indulge in genres which are intended to be immoral or attacking (such as self-deprecating humour, insults and roast comedy). This exclusion is to direct the ethical questions on to humorous situations which are not consciously intended to be immoral or censored. Nevertheless, it is these genres which provoke the necessity of ethics in humour, as they are evidently designed to harm others. As long as humour can be controlled and altered, one shall be responsible for what one laughs at, and hence it becomes important for us to familiarize ourselves with the existing notions of ethical arguments in the context of humour.

For Bergson, utilitarianism has more to do with the practical engagement with the world rather than the theoretical engagement Shuster (2013). According to him, our theoretical attitudes are formed by practice, because the former always ends in practical implication, whether it is in particular instances or in collective

aspects. Ronald de Sousa believes that finding objectionable material amusing could indicate a distorted moral judgement (1987). That is, an individual who derives humour from reprehensible or censurable material may possess a questionable moral framework. This argument stems from his understanding that for an individual to find a joke funny, he/she must endorse the sentiment required to understand the context and joke. While this is true to some extent, it does not apply to all situations mainly because this premise bases itself on how sharing assumptions is what makes jokes funny. Further, the possibility of incongruity in the situation is one of the key factors to find something amusing Clark (1970). For instance, consider the Carlin (1992) bit on transcript of ‘save the planet’: Everybody’s gonna save something now: “Save the trees! Save the bees! Save the whales! Save those snails!” and the greatest arrogance of all: “Save the planet!” What?! Are these people (...) kidding me?! Save the planet?! We don’t even know how to take care of ourselves yet! We haven’t learned how to care for one another and we’re gonna save the (...) planet?! I’m getting tired of that shit! I’m getting tired of that shit!

Here, Carlin parodies the slogans of environmental campaigns familiar to the audience of the period he performed this show. This works as it plays with the reality they are used to, coming from a similar background, encountering environmental rallies and protests – Carlin successfully lightens the joke with a twisted punchline, which is enjoyable regardless of the ethical implications. The difference between the real and the aspirational ideal depends on how the satire enables the audience to act, or at the very least think about acting. Hariman (2008) says how ‘parody makes the audience self conscious about the discourse, which could potentially foster a new attitude’ towards the same.

Smuts notes how jokes on stereotypes and alienation can be blocked upon a conscious thought about such contexts. Similarly, finding such jokes offensive does not imply that such assumptions and presuppositions are repelled. It could simply be the case that we laugh even though we don’t want to; Shuster lists a few for the

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joke's incongruity, for its stupidity, its audacity or amazing calousness (2012, p.626). While a person could find such utterances funny for different reasons, the comedian utters these due to the presuppositions. While we cannot say much about the morality of the audience (who might or might not find it amusing), we can say a lot about the comedian. This therefore proves how an offense can inhibit laughter but does nothing to prove that the presuppositions are required for us to find something funny. Before examining the morality of the funny, let us first locate the need for morality in humour.

2. Locating ethics in humour

Humour can be viewed as a double edged sword. When used responsibly, it could be seen as a vehicle for commentary, empathy and understanding. When used carelessly, it can perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination and cause offense. It therefore becomes crucial to examine the ethical implications of humour. Jokes, humour, comedy and satire hold the responsibility to carry and transfer beliefs and opinions from the comedian to the audience – as well as curb any possibility of self-reflection which could remove these views which are stereotypical, unethical or offensive Goldman (2011). Therefore, every medium which has access to the masses at an influential level must be put under an ethical microscope. We shall begin by understanding the role of a comedian and humour to locate ethical angles.

Poets, writers and other dramatists have the capacity to temporarily shatter the interest we have over reality (i.e. the audience). These artists achieve this objective through diverting our prejudices of 'form and color which comes between oneself and the reality' (et al. (1914)). What the artist creates or interprets is what Bergson considers as the univocal perspective of the particular artist. He writes how 'art always aims at what is individual' (et al. (1914)). According to him, art always aims at what is individual because it seeks to capture the unique, fleeting and often ineffable qualities of experience. Unlike science, which strives for general laws and universal truths, art delves into the particular, the concrete and the subjective. This perspective is very unique to the artist, and the same individual might not perceive an object in the same way again¹ et al. (1914) Dramatic art becomes universal – as can be observed by any classical work which receives recognition and applause universally.

Following Bergson's distinction, I shall attempt to differentiate between 'generality' and 'opinion'. Here, generality refers to the path through which our encounters with the world are mediated, while opinion is the way in which we come to interpret the works of art. The same work of art can appeal to a large number of audiences if they share a similar 'truth'. As Shuster notices, while the description of a particular instance or experience gets more and more refined, the greater becomes its distance from the ordinary experience, further leading to a greater potentiality for it to be accepted universally Shuster (2013). With reference to humour, we can notice that it does not involve particulars, but what Bergson calls 'classes' (1914, p.81). This not only appeals to a larger audience, but also places comedy on a separate plane from drama.

Any reaction to drama or art is due to the audiences' resonance at an intellectual and emotional level– or sometimes, the lack of it.

In either of these cases, it reflects the ethical quotient as it causes emotional reactions which lead to the potentiality of forming beliefs. A keen sense of humour requires a nuanced understanding of social norms, cultural nuances and human psychology. It allows us to perceive the absurdity in everyday situations and to identify the underlying truths that might otherwise go unnoticed. by challenging out preconceived notions and exposing the hypocrisy in the society, humor can prompt critical thinking and ethical reflection. However, it is important to recognise that humour can also be used to perpetuate harmful stereotypes and reinforce biases. Burma (1946, p.710) writes on the role of humour in 'race' conflict and mentions how racist humour "contains more or less well concealed malice." Humour is known to impact its audience, and their morale (La Fave, 1977) but more importantly, it is shown to create psychological harm (Fry, 1977). Furthermore, Davidson (1987) shows how the benign and innocent ethnic jokes are exaggerated and that tend to have a negative effect on the targeted community. Ford and Ferguson's theory of disparagement suggest that humour that disparages (which includes ethnic, racist, and sexist humour) can increase tolerance of prejudice in people who are predisposed to it (2004, p.81). Racist jokes reinforce race ideology and ethnic jokes reduce cultures to the trivial, only to be laughed at and not something to be respected (Howitt & Bempah, 2005, p.62). Simon Weaver (2011) argues that humour acts as an agent of racist rhetoric for serious racism and that it should therefore not simply be seen as 'just a joke' or as harmless statements. Billing (2001, 2009) notes how racist jokes support extreme racist ideology and are to be seen as a reflection of it and the vast history of suppression

Similarly, sexist jokes tend to breed a climate of tolerance for sexist behaviour. They trigger a certain stereotype threat in women and men within and outside communities (this includes stereotypes such as "women are bad at driving", or, "when a woman says 'no', she's playing hard to get etc.,"). Ofcourse, sexist jokes are not the only cause of sexual discrimination and gender inequality, but it surely contributes to it.

A particularly relevant framework for understanding the mechanisms of humor, and by extension, its ethical implications, is the Benign Violation Theory (BVT), proposed by Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren (2010; 2014). This theory posits that humor arises when something is perceived as a 'violation'- threatening one's well-being, identity, or beliefs but is simultaneously perceived as 'benign', safe, acceptable, or non-threatening in the given context. The interplay of these two elements, the violation and its benign interpretation, creates the humorous experience. Consider, a pun for instance– 'Why don't scientists trust atoms? Because they make up everything'. Here, the violation is caused due to the unexpected shift in meaning of 'making up'. As a pun, this word-play poses no real threat. The violation might be the unexpected or illogical use of a word, while the benign aspect is the realization that it's just a play on words, intended to amuse rather than deceive. Similarly, in slapstick comedy, the violation is often physical harm or embarrassment, but it's benign because the audience knows the actors are not truly hurt, or the situation is exaggerated for comedic effect.

This theory offers a valuable lens through which we can examine the ethical tightrope humor walks on. The 'violation' aspect is where humor can become problematic. If the violation is too severe, or if its benign nature is not clearly established for the audience, it can lead to offense, confusion, or even distress rather than laughter. For instance, a joke about a sensitive topic might be perceived as a violation of deeply held values. If the audience doesn't

¹Here, I'm referring to the idea of the author being the first reader, and nothing more. Assigning a single interpretation to a text, or assigning an author imposes a limit on the text (or art, as an extension). From Barthes, R. (2016). The death of the author. In Readings in the Theory of Religion (pp. 141-145). Routledge.

perceive a clear 'benign' element - perhaps due to lack of context, differing cultural norms, or a perception that the comedian genuinely intends harm the joke falls flat or, worse, causes offense.

But how does ethics apply to comedy (or humour)² at all, and why must we explore this further? The simple answer is, any reaction to drama or art is due to a resonance (at an intellectual as well as emotional level) or lack of it. In either of the cases, it shall reflect the ethical quotient as it is causing emotional reactions leading to potentiality to form beliefs. Now, we shall explore if this motive is realized in humour.

3. Corrective function of humour

As we have seen, a comedian deals with classes or generality, while a dramatist deals with particular truths. Bergson mentions that comedy can get relatable to a point for the audience but not become personal. This he attributes to the lack of transparency which causes humour Shuster (2013). et al. (1914) writes regarding the person who is the target of laughter 'however conscious he may be of what he says or does, cannot be comical unless there be some aspect of this person of which he is unaware, one side of his nature which he overlooks; on that account alone does he make us laugh.

According to him, an instance or utterance cannot be funny or amusing until there is some part of it which is overlooked, not heeded to, or what one is unaware of - which makes it funny or amusing. These complexities could be understood as different labels of one's life. For instance, being a doctor may call for a certain persona of one's being, which might not be of use during off-shifts, say, with one's family. These ways of existing in the world are unconscious and rigid until one makes a conscious effort to notice them. The job of the comedian therefore comes to bring forth these rigidities and subconsciously highlight and correct them if needed et al. (1914) This forms a version of corrective function of humour

While Bergson mentions the corrective function of humour, he does not elaborate what 'ought' to be corrected. He simply uses it to describe the formal characteristics of humour's functioning. We can understand that the job of a comedian therefore does not end at merely making people laugh, but is infused with the responsibility to make them think. We cannot equate this with 'bringing change', as that responsibility is too serious to put on something taken as funny. This responsibility gets more obvious in other genres of humour, such as satire (Peter, 2016).

Different standpoints of politics could employ humour from different perspectives and demand change. But such occurrences persist when social rigidities are compromised. This is the period of lack of personal definitions which make up one's character. Breaking out from such rigidities pushes us to what Bergson terms 'laziness' or 'play'. This is the state where individuals detach themselves from any logic and continue to nurture them (et al. (1914). This process eventually leads to abandoning even the very primitive conventions of oneself. This lets the individual proceed without any mediation between convention and action Shuster (2013) This could lead to holding on to one particular convention - being too much a doctor (even when the situation does not demand), or too much a father (by being over-protective).

Amusement is the (social) recognition of this occurrence, and laughter the result. This implies that what Bergson believes as the 'corrective' nature of humour is only contextual (in a primary sense). It must therefore not be taken seriously to fit any particular convention. As B et al. (1914) writes;

As a general rule, speaking roughly, laughter doubtless(ly) exercises a useful function... but it does not therefore follow that laughter always hits the mark or is inspired by the sentiments of kindness or justice. To be certain of always hitting the mark, it would have to proceed from an act of reflection.

Bergson's theory highlights another important aspect of humour, namely the 'unsociability in the performer and the insensibility of the audience' (et al. (1914). Insensibility here is the lack of emotional investment from the audience's point of view. He believes that the relationship between emotional investment and humour is inverse. The more an individual feels emotionally invested in a situation or a person, the higher the chances of them taking the joke seriously et al. (1914). Laughter therefore breeds insensibility.³ He explains this through a thought experiment:

Try... to become interested in everything that is being said and done; act in imagination, with those who act and feel with those who feel... now, step aside, look upon life as a disinterested spectator; many a drama will turn into a comedy... how many human actions would stand a similar test?... to produce the whole of its effects, then, the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart. (et al. (1914))

Therefore, Bergson's theory of humour states that emotional disinvestment enhances humour. This premise could be useful to tackle the case of immoral, or rather jokes regarding certain stereotypes and sensitive matters. If there is a way to prove the correlation between emotional investment and morally flawed content, then one can notice that morally flawed content affects amusement such that the investment of one's emotions affects amusement Shuster (2013) The relationship between humour and ethics becomes much more complex, especially with the inverse correlation between emotions and humour; and the direct relationship between ethics and emotions. Furthermore, if we limit morality to judgements only, then it becomes difficult to see how emotions can be involved in such judgements at all Shuster (2013) This leads us to understand and perceive the moral differences as either (a) differences about application of moral ideas; or (b) disagreements regarding existence of moral ideals in the first place.

4. Normativeness of humour

Scholars like Berys Gaut hold that the judgments of humour are normative, in the sense that we find certain jokes which are morally questionable as unfunny. He claims that immoral jokes ask us to entertain morally suspect attitudes, all while not bringing out any form of amusement. Let us first explore Gaut's argument. What people might find amusing is not always what they necessarily should be finding funny, as there surely are common instances where one shouldn't be laughing but still does. This argument of normativeness of humour could be understood as an interpretation of utterances like 'that's not funny' as a reaction to jokes. Such claims presuppose a certain normativeness to jokes and amusement, which is suggestively unilateral. But for this to be taken seriously, there seems to be no rhyme in utterances of 'that is funny' in a normative fashion. There are no checkboxes for jokes

²I refer to comedy and humour interchangeably. Humor is the insightful recognition of incongruity; while comedy is its deliberate articulation. The difference lies solely in the forms being passive and active respectively. Comedy is the expression of humour.

³refer to Stocker and Hegeman(1996) for more insights regarding the relation between emotional investment and laughter

to be ethically funny – as jokes (humour) becomes very content based. The theme of the joke, the emotional investment (or disinvestment), social crowd reaction and reflective quotient all play a role in the reaction evinced from an individual.

While we question the normativeness of humour, we must also look at humour as a virtue. Robert C. Roberts (1988) suggests that humour, when employed thoughtfully can be effective, but it must be tailored to the specific context and audience, and most importantly, have an appropriate target. This amusement towards certain targets suggests that there is an unwritten list of where one should laugh and where one should not. Again, this direction does not lead us to any concrete normative structure with very evident exceptions. Most of these exceptions are cases of amusement due to incongruity. While they seem to reflect a certain level of inhumanity on the audiences' part when they find a sensitive incongruous situation amusing instead of feeling sympathetic, there seems to be no unified measure to call one insensitive. Smuts (2010) notes how 'humour is incompatible with the morally required reaction, which thereby makes it normative.' Gaut adds how if comedy 'presents certain events as funny (instances which require a humorous response at the least), if it involves being amused at heartless cruelty, then the work is not funny – or its humour is flawed' (2010, p.233). Flawed or not, he does not provide any explanation regarding what makes it less funny. What 'funny' denotes is different from the object of laughter as well as different from what the common consensus finds funny. Gaut (2010, p.61) considers 'funny' to have a normative connotation; it does not simply cause humorous reactions, but it is what makes it appropriate to have such reactions. Therefore, humour and what is 'funny' is based on what it is to find something funny and then how their merited response is (amusement or not). While having said this, Gaut does not make clear how the merit check is to be laid down. This becomes complicated especially as the premises Gaut gives are also pointed towards two very different directions. What one finds funny might not always align with the merit evaluation. Smuts suggests a singular meaning to humour, as something one finds funny in contrast to the two stage assurance process he insists on. This approach is much more pragmatic considering the inevitable factors which obstruct having an objective lens towards a joke.

5. Humour and Morality

If we want to investigate how a joke seems funnier due to its subject matter, we must realize that the world view becomes narrower and separated from any independent interpretations of such objects. Jokes cannot be morally flawed (Shuster says), as they can appear so in the light of a distinct sensibility. Smuts believes morality and sensibility are intertwined. If we were to separate these two concepts, it would be impossible to address immorality. In other words, a moral response often requires a degree of emotional sensitivity and understanding. It defeats the whole purpose of the question. An easy way around this question is to understand that moral flaws in individuals connect them to the subject or content of jokes. For instance, what causes people of one political belief to enjoy jokes on their rival political ideology; or for an individual to indulge in self-deprecating humour and laugh at oneself. But, we cannot limit the audience for any context, i.e. we cannot expect only leftists or chauvinists to enjoy the targeted (content) jokes – but anyone could find them amusing, all for different reasons as mentioned above. It depends on what the individual's dominant convention is – it reflects why they laugh at

certain jokes. But how do we differentiate between these different reactions, based on quality? Shuster claims that a chauvinist might find something funny which exemplifies what he considers a true state of affairs – even if he is aware of the alternative standpoint, it means nothing to him. This indicates how a joke could be humorous to the extent that one's worldview affects the preference and interpretation of the object over another or, in some jokes, how some objects fail to leave any impression at all Shuster (2013) Any moral flaw in one's worldview and one's sensibility gives rise to jest due to the rigidity which otherwise does not exist. Furthermore, these rigidities, if they seem compelling enough, may prohibit any reformations in the worldview, thereby highlighting the corrective feature of humour.

Research highlights how audiences whose moral identities were situationally active, tended to appreciate and generate humour others found funny, especially ones that fell into the Benign Violation theory Peer et al. (2017). While research from Tetlock et al. (2000) shows how audiences with higher moral identity neither generated nor appreciated humour, or compensate for the lack of humour by telling more jokes that do not involve moral violations. These studies highlight the strength of individual moral identity as an important factor to cultivate and reflect in overall quality of general humour.

Ethical here becomes the rational-quotient which must occur whether or not we are responsive to them. Humour and specifically satire teaches individuals what becomes important and valuable, what is worthy of mockery and what isn't. It forces us to question the relation between responsibility and laughter; and to reflect on oneself. Therefore, failure to find sexist, racist or any stereotypical content amusing stems from being rational and having a conscious resolve and acceptance of the stereotypes. It expands one's modes of conceptual analysis.

The moral quotient of a joke, while often subjectively assessed, finds a critical locus in the dynamic interplay between the joke-teller's intent, the joke's content, and the audience's reception. While theories from Bergson, Smuts, and Gaut offer invaluable frameworks for understanding humor's mechanics, ethical dimensions, and aesthetic value, they less explicitly theorize the volatile space where these elements converge, particularly when amplified or complicated by power imbalances.

A crucial area for analysis lies in the contextual contingency of moral risk. A joke's ethical implications are rarely static; they are highly contingent upon the specific social, cultural, and historical milieu in which they are uttered and received. What is considered incisive satire in one moment—perhaps a critique of an established political figure—might be perceived as deeply offensive or trivializing when societal sensitivities shift, or when the subject of the joke transitions from a position of power to one of vulnerability. The prevailing social anxieties, historical traumas, and current political climate invariably shape the moral permissibility and reception of humor. This understanding moves beyond a purely internal analysis of the joke's structural features (as Bergson might emphasize) or its inherent moral properties (as Gaut's ethicisms suggests), pushing towards a more dynamic, external assessment that acknowledges the fluid boundaries of acceptable discourse. The moral quotient thus becomes less a fixed attribute and more a function of its situatedness within a constantly evolving moral landscape.

Furthermore, a nuanced understanding requires exploring audience heterogeneity and interpretive pluralism. Gaut touches upon how moral flaws can detract from humor for some audiences, yet this barely scratches the surface of the complex reality of diverse

comedic reception. Audiences are never monolithic; they comprise individuals with varied backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences. Consequently, a joke's moral quotient can diverge widely across different demographics—age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, political affiliation, and even geographic location. An original contribution here would involve examining how these diverse interpretations arise, how they are negotiated (or, more often, fail to be negotiated) in public discourse, and what this inherent pluralism implies for the comedian's or media outlet's ethical responsibility. This perspective necessitates a shift from seeking a singular 'moral quotient' to recognizing a more complex 'moral spectrum' of reactions, where the same joke can simultaneously be deemed hilarious and harmless by one group, while being deeply offensive and morally reprehensible by another. The challenge for comedians and media is navigating this spectrum responsibly, acknowledging that a joke's perceived harmlessness by one segment of the audience does not negate its potential for harm in another.

It is imperative to delve into the performative aspect and the 'joking aside'. Humor is not merely text; it is often a performance, and the manner of delivery profoundly influences its moral reception. The comedian's tone, body language, facial expressions, and established persona can all serve as crucial signals of intent, or, conversely, as mechanisms for obscuring it. A comedian might employ ironic distance, exaggerated caricatures, or even self-deprecating humor to subvert potentially harmful messages embedded in their material, even if the surface content appears problematic. The seemingly innocuous phrase 'just kidding' or the common comedic disclaimer 'it's just a joke' often attempts to disarm criticism, but their efficacy in genuinely mitigating moral risk is highly debatable. This also reflects in the form of what we know today as 'poe's law', in the internet culture, according to which without a clear indicator of intent (like smiley, okay-emoji etc), any parodic and satirical expression could be taken as sincere.

6. Conclusion:

The question of how seriously a joke must be taken delves into the intricate relationship between humor, intent, reception, and the potential for harm. Academically, this is often explored through the lens of speech act theory, where a joke, while ostensibly a performance, can carry illocutionary and perlocutionary force. From this perspective, the 'seriousness' is not inherent in the joke itself but emerges from its contextual interpretation and the consequences it elicits. Scholars like Noël Carroll (2020), in discussing the ethics of humor, often emphasize the distinction between a joke's intended meaning and its perceived meaning, acknowledging that a jest, even if delivered without malicious intent, can cause offense or reinforce harmful stereotypes. The 'seriousness' therefore becomes a function of the joke's impact on its audience, particularly vulnerable groups, and whether it transgresses widely accepted moral boundaries. This isn't to say all humor must be devoid of edge or provocation; indeed, critical humor derives its power from addressing serious issues. However, the degree to which a joke is taken seriously often correlates with its capacity to perpetuate prejudice, incite discrimination, or trivialize suffering. Furthermore, the power dynamics between the joke-teller and the audience play a crucial role; a joke told from a position of power targeting a marginalized group will almost invariably be taken more seriously, and often with greater negative impact, than a self-deprecating jest or a joke challenging established authority.

The academic discourse, therefore, often shifts from asking 'is this joke serious?' to 'what are the effects of this joke, and do they warrant a serious response?'.

Further, the evaluation of a joke's moral risk by media organizations and comedians is a complex process, often balancing artistic freedom with ethical responsibility, and it has evolved significantly with changing societal norms. For comedians, this evaluation frequently involves an intuitive, often experiential, assessment of their audience and the cultural climate. They tend to gauge risk based on past audience reactions, the controversial nature of the subject matter, and their own personal moral compass Mehta (2025). Some comedians explicitly embrace moral risk while others shy away from overtly risky material, prioritizing audience comfort and broad appeal. From an academic standpoint, the frameworks employed, whether consciously or not, often resemble utilitarian or deontological ethical considerations. A utilitarian approach might weigh the potential harm (offense, reinforcement of stereotypes) against the potential good (laughter, social commentary, catharsis). A deontological approach, conversely, might focus on the inherent rightness or wrongness of the joke's content or its underlying message, irrespective of its consequences. Media outlets are also acutely aware of their role as gatekeepers and their potential influence on public discourse. They often consider the demographic of their audience, the context in which the humor is presented (e.g., a late-night show versus a family-friendly program), and the potential for the humor to be misinterpreted or taken out of context. The rise of social media has significantly amplified the stakes, as problematic jokes can quickly go viral, leading to widespread condemnation and reputational damage. Consequently, media entities increasingly engage in pre-broadcast content review, sensitivity readings, and post-publication monitoring of public reaction. This process is less about individual comedic genius and more about institutional responsibility, navigating the often-conflicting demands of creative expression, commercial viability, and ethical accountability to a diverse public.

These arguments on the ethical aspect of humour showcase the complication of humorous utterances, and this gets sensitive with respect to any particular example. There has been no adequate perspective to the ethical status of what one laughs at, or reflection of oneself in what one finds amusing. The investigation of the ethical status of humour must begin with finding out why it might be immoral to find something amusing or funny. We must further ponder upon what laughing on immoral and sensitive jokes reflect about us. Would the crime then be laughing at an instance which one is not licensed to find funny? And if so, is one held accountable by the joke police or a moral police? Moreover, one could be responsible only if it leads to some form of harm to oneself or others. This raises the question of how something funny could be harmful, while also being considered a medicine.

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