

## A "Holy Grail" Humor Theory in One Page.

Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Freud, and hundreds of other philosophers have tried to understand humor. No one has ever found a single idea that explains it in all its forms, or shows what's sufficient to create it. Thus, it's been called a "Holy Grail" of social science. Consider this...

In small groups without language, where we evolved, social orders were needed for efficiency. But *fighting* for leadership would hurt them. So peaceful methods were necessary. Thus, the "gasp" we make when seeing someone fall evolved into a rapid-fire version at seeing certain failures, which allowed us to signal others to see what happened, and know who not to follow. **The reaction, naturally, would feel good and make us smile**, to lower our aggression and show no threat. This reaction is called *laughter*. The instinct that controls it is called *humor*. The variables that trigger it are best represented in the informal equation:

$$\text{Humor} = ((\text{Quality}_{\text{expected}} - \text{Quality}_{\text{displayed}}) * \text{Noticeability} * \text{Validity}) / \text{Anxiety}$$

Or  $H = ((Q_e - Q_d)NV) / A$ . When the results of this ratio are greater than 0, we find the thing *funny* and will laugh, in the smallest amounts with slight smiles, small feelings of pleasure or small diaphragm spasms. The numerator terms simply state that something has to be lower in quality than we thought, and we must notice it and feel it's real, and the denominator states that anxiety lowers the reaction. This is because laughter is a noisy reflex that threatens someone else's status, so if there is a chance of violence from the person, a danger to threatening a loved one's status, or a predator or other threat from making noise, the reflex will be mitigated. The common feeling amongst those situations, anxiety, has come to cause this.

This may appear to be an ad hoc hypothesis, but unlike those, **this clearly unites and explains everything we've observed about humor**, including our cultural sayings *and* the scientific observations of the previous incomplete theories. Some noticed that it involves surprise, some noticed that it involves things being incorrect, all noticed the pleasure without seeing the reason. This covers *all* of it, naturally, and with a core concept simple enough to explain to a child. Our sayings, like "*it's too soon*" for a joke after a tragedy, can all be covered as well ("*too soon*" indicates that we still have anxiety associated with the event).

The previous confusion about humor came from a few things. For one, there are at least 4 types of laughter: At ourselves, at others we know, at others we don't know (with average expectations), and at people failing at telling us jokes. We often laugh for one reason instead of the other, like "bad jokes" making us laugh at the teller. In addition, besides physical failure, like slipping, we also have a basic laugh instinct for *mental failure*, through *misplacement*. We sense attempts to order things that have gone wrong. Puns and similar references trigger this. Furthermore, we laugh loudest when we notice *multiple* errors (quality-gaps) at once, like a person dressed foolishly (such as a court jester), exposing errors by others.

We call this the "**Status Loss Theory**," and we've written two papers on it. [The first](#) is 6 pages, offers a chart of old theories and explains this more, with 7 examples. [The second](#) is 27 pages and goes through 40 more examples, applying this concept to sayings, comedians, shows, memes, and other comedy types, and even drawing predictions from the theory that have been verified by very recent neurology studies, to hopefully exhaustively demonstrate the idea's explanatory power. If it's *not* complete, it should still make enough progress to greatly advance humor study. If it *is*, it should redefine the field. Thanks for your time. -Ernie Garrett