

## **COVID-19 Editorial Cartoons: Theories of Humor Perspectives**

**Zlatinka Blaber<sup>1</sup>, Guergana Gougoumanova<sup>2</sup>, and Barry Palatnik<sup>3</sup>**

### **Abstract**

The objective of this paper is to clarify the understanding of disaster humor in editorial cartoons through the use of classical and novel theories of humor. Select cartoons inked by artists from around the world are analyzed via the lens of five classical theories of humor—superiority, inferiority, relief, play, and incongruity theories—and three novel theories of humor—cleverness, benign violation, and mutual vulnerability theories. The study found that these classical and novel theories helped depict the COVID-19 pandemic as a phenomenon of great consequence that exerted power over citizens, governments, and business entities alike. Governments were often portrayed as entities that valued human life over the state of the economy, albeit not initially. Government policies were conveyed as having the potential to worsen the quality of life and the state of the economy. To our knowledge, no other study in humor literature has so far applied these theories to coronavirus editorial cartoons from all over the world. By bridging theoretical frameworks from the fields of philosophy, psychology, and evolutionary biology with issues penned by artists from various countries, this study enables a better understanding of disaster humor as a defense mechanism.

**Key words:** Cartoons, Coronavirus, COVID-19, Disaster Humor, Theories of Humor.

### **1. Introduction**

Man-made and natural disasters are better coped with, with the help of defense mechanisms, such as humor. Sigmund Freud believed that when one used humor in fear and anxiety-provoking situations, he or she gained a new perspective on his or her circumstances, a perspective that helped

---

<sup>1</sup> **Zlatinka Blaber**, Ph.D., CPA, Accounting and Finance Department, Salem State University, USA; [zblaber@salemstate.edu](mailto:zblaber@salemstate.edu)

<sup>2</sup> **Guergana Gougoumanova**, Ph.D., Client Documentation Management & Translation Department, Codix, Bulgaria; [ggougoumanova@codix.bg](mailto:ggougoumanova@codix.bg)

<sup>3</sup> **Barry Palatnik**, Ed.D., CPA, Business Studies Program, Stockton University, USA; [barry.palatnik@stockton.edu](mailto:barry.palatnik@stockton.edu)

avoid experiencing negative feelings and emotions (Steir-Livny, 2016). Thus, humor helps people deal with perilous situations and avoid or reduce their emotional suffering and grief. Humor, besides a mechanism for coping with anxiety, is also a vehicle of group cohesion against the critique of perpetrators (Chovanec, 2019; Üngör, 2015). It helps individuals alleviate stress, mitigate suffering, and dissipate feelings of anxiety, especially in the short term, and grants people a sense of power and control in helpless situations (Levin, 2004; Ostrover 2009). Humor also helps maintain emotional distance from the man- or nature-caused trauma, creating a comfort zone for the traumatized (Steir-Livny, 2016). Humor and laughter, including dark humor evoked by disaster, have been studied from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Recent works on humor abound.<sup>4</sup> Humor has been shown to have a positive impact on human health (Berger, 1993; Cousins, 1979; Goldstein and Ruch, 2018), a fact that makes humor especially worthy of scholarly attention and research endeavors.

The French author, André Maurois, has been credited with the saying that analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog: “When you take it apart, you find out what it’s made up of, but unfortunately the subject is killed in the process” (Quote Investigator, 2014, par. 13). Not heeding this bleak warning, the authors of the current article believe that analyzing disaster humor leads to a deeper appreciation of this sort of humor and its healing qualities. The present paper aims to contribute to the understanding of disaster humor through the use of classical and novel theories of humor in editorial cartoons. It does so specifically by depicting governments’ initial and subsequent responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, the state of the economy during the pandemic, and the pandemic’s impact on individuals. Government responses take the form of resource rationing, allocation, and distribution, local and central government policies and regulations, and social and business behavior restrictions, among others. The editorial cartoon analysis here is performed through the lens of cartoon artists from around the globe. The reason for this inclusiveness is that the pandemic has put both advanced and emerging economies on a plain level field. Scarce resources everywhere in the world were squeezed, to save lives, curb a rise in new infections, and protect healthcare facilities that worked at capacity. Often this was done at the expense of quality of life (depression, lack of socialization, impossibility to travel) and the

---

<sup>4</sup> Attardo, 2017; Buffard-Moret, 2015; Davies, 2005, 2011, 2017; Nilsen and Nilsen, 2019; Peacock, 2014; Rea, 2015; Swick and Keeble, 2016.

economy's health and vitality (business closures, vulnerability of certain industries, unemployment, and lack of social benefits in some countries).

This article is structured as follows: First, the literatures on cartoon theorizing and disaster humor are reviewed. Second, the methodology and method are introduced. Third, classical theories of humor are presented and select cartoons are analyzed using these theories. Fourth, novel theories of humor are presented and select cartoons are analyzed using these theories. Finally, a discussion and conclusion follow.

## 2. Theorizing Cartooning

Editorial cartoons, or political caricature as they are also known, have appeared in the printed press around the globe for many years. The famous *The New Yorker* magazine for example started circulation in 1925 and contained cartoons from its very inception. Cartoons are simple drawings, often satirical, that may emanate complex ideas and convey powerful messages. These sketches may or may not be lighthearted and entertaining. Humor does not need to be funny or make sense, but people tend to appreciate it more if it is both. They contain a visual element (a sketch) and a verbal element (a caption) that is optional. When it comes to political caricature, the methods of humor utilized may be complex and may rely on the image and the text equally—using polysemy (the coexistence of several possible meanings for a word/phrase), paronymy (words with related derivations, but with a different syntactic use), or syllepsis (a figure of speech in which a word is applied to two other words in different senses). These methods of humor may create humorous messages (Soare, 2020). This author further observes that “...cartoons that rely less on text have more powerful symbols, which are full of various significations that help the readers make all the necessary connections to correctly interpret the image” (p. 49). Visual metaphors and visual metonymies inferred from the image and/or text are also examined in Genova (2018). She analyzes them from the point of view of the conceptual metaphor and metonymy theory. Visual and inferential metaphors are viewed in her study as incongruities and as a result of interactions between image, title, and/or caption.

“Strong” theories of political caricature argue that cartoons stimulate and shape public sentiment directly (Brinkman, 1968; Caswell, 2004; Chatterjee, 2007; Mills, Robson and Pitt, 2013). “Weak” theories of cartooning, on the other hand, argue that political cartoons are simply reflectors of public attitudes (Thibodeau, 1989; Mills, Robson and Pitt, 2013; Wheeler and Reed

1975). Thus, cartoons provide an appropriate lens through which to study society (Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Ware, 2005; Mankoff, 2014; Mills, Robson and Pitt, 2013). According to Greenberg (2002, p. 181), cartoons, "...seize upon and reinforce common sense and thus enable the public to actively classify, organize, and interpret in meaningful ways what they see or experience about the world in a given moment." This author believes that political caricature frames contemporary issues of importance by defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies. Thus, cartoons mix normative prescriptions with factual beliefs. To content analyze political cartoons, Morris (1993) theorizes four rhetorical imperatives: *pouvoir*, *vouloir*, *savoir*, and *devoir*. In French, these verbs mean: to be able to, to want to, to know, and to have to, respectively. By extension, cartoons may be about power, desire, knowledge, or duty.

Cartooning may be complex, but some theorists have managed to condense its formative parts to a handful of rules. Morris (1993), building on Gombrich (1978), theorizes four processes of visual rhetoric in cartoons: *condensation*, *combination*, *domestication*, and *opposition*. *Condensation* involves the contraction of a complex phenomenon into one image that captures its essence graphically. Inflation, for instance, explains Morris, is a complex issue that in cartooning may be condensed to a monster that overpowers the President or Vice President of a given country. "*Combination* refers to the blending of elements and ideas from different domains into a new composite that remains clearly identifiable as something that contains each of its constituents ... [such as] a particular politician's face grafted onto the body of a pig..." (*Ibid.*). Similarly, Litovkina (2016) researches the persistent joke cycle of lawyer jokes in the United States—the animals most frequently brought up as parallels to lawyers in jokes are sharks, vultures, tigers, snakes, foxes, ticks, leeches, and rats. This is another instance of *combination*—one accomplished via personification. *Domestication* is a term that Morris borrows from Goffman (1979). It is, "the process by which abstract ideas and distant, unfamiliar persons or events are converted into something close, familiar, and concrete ... Domestication implies that the skimmers lack the information or the experience to make sense of distant events..." (p. 201). *Opposition* is a contrast that brings out differences, such as in *adult-child*, *nature-nurture*, *female-male*, and so on. To these four processes of visual rhetoric, Greenberg (2002) adds a fifth one—*transference*. "...[I]t is instructive to consider the ways in which visual discourse of the world *transfers* meaning and causal blame along a referential chain of signifiers within a particular image ... *Transference* normally operates in an implicit way that absolves the cartoon's actors of their absurd actions or

commentary by displacing blame to another, normally non-visible, actor” (p. 187). Thus, the cartoon’s villain may be the real victim and vice versa. Just like irony, a cartoon may state the opposite of what it intends to state: It may portray the perpetrator as a victim, in observance of the *transference* tool. Editorial cartoons have been analyzed through the above-summarized theories of cartooning. Yet, little if any scholarly effort has been spent on the analysis of cartoons via the theoretical lens of theories of humor that are not specific to cartoons. Such theories are based on verbal humor in general, such as stand-up comedy, theatrical comedy, and verbal jokes (Oring, 2016; Plester, 2016; Watson, 2020).

### 3. Disaster Humor

The late Charlie Davies developed the concepts of “technological determinism” or “mediatization” in disaster humor, i.e., the view that the visual presentation of disasters on television is tied to the emergence of this kind of humor (Chovanec, 2019). Chovanec challenges this premise based on the existence of pre-television disaster humor on the topic of the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, among others. Titanic jokes in his data came from a culture that was physically and cognitively very distant from the disaster. Iconic disasters, such as the sinking of the Titanic, “...can be seen symbolically as an epic fail of modernity rather than a mere tragic disaster” (p. 201). Thus, man-made disasters may be understood as a consequence of technological advances and modernization. Disaster humor is a special branch of humor that focuses on dark, unexpected, mass-scale accidents in social reality. The humor of disaster has also been studied in contexts, such as genocide (Steir-Livny, 2016; Üngör, 2015). Any of the four French verbs from Morris (1993)—*pouvoir*, *vouloir*, *savoir*, and *devoir*—may be applicable to disaster humor: The disaster exerts power over people (*pouvoir*), people want to be safe from the perils of the disaster (*vouloir*), they know how to joke about the disaster (*savoir*), and they feel obligated to go on with their lives after the disastrous event ends (*devoir*). The world-wide coronavirus pandemic is a biological, micro-level calamity, intensified by macro-level issues (internationalization and human inter-connectedness), the unique nature of the virus (novelty, immanency, and contagiousness), governments’ often belated responses to the virus, and strained economies. The COVID-19 pandemic has received little, if any attention, in the humor literature due to the pandemic’s recency.

#### 4. Methodology and Method

This paper uses the editorial cartoon content analysis method of research. A search with the word “COVID” conducted on 31 December 2020 on the Dutch website, [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com) resulted in 661 cartoon results. This cartoon repository site was selected among others (for example, [www.cartoonstock.com](http://www.cartoonstock.com), [www.politicalcartoons.com](http://www.politicalcartoons.com), [www.cartoonbank.com](http://www.cartoonbank.com), and [www.cagle.com](http://www.cagle.com)) since it listed the nationality of each cartoonist whose work resulted from the search. COVID-19 cartoons from all over the world were identified based on the keyword search. During the data reduction stage, the authors of the current paper selected for presentation cartoons drawn by artists from a variety of geographical areas—African, European, Middle Eastern, North American, South American, South-East Asian countries, to list just a few.

Theories of humor are broader than theories of cartooning. Classical theories of humor are mostly philosophical ones that have been used extensively in humor research.<sup>5</sup> They include superiority, inferiority, play, relief, and incongruity theories (Nilsen and Nilsen, 2019; Oring, 2016; Peacock, 2014; Plester, 2016; Simon, 2020a). Novel theories of humor are Gimbel’s (2018b) cleverness theory and McGraw and Warren’s (2010) benign violation theory (see also McGraw and Warren, 2010; McGraw et al., 2012). To our knowledge, no extant humor research on cartooning using classical and novel theories of humor has focused on the corpus of COVID-19 editorial cartoons from around the world. Thus, the research question that this study asks is: How do classical and novel theories of humor help illuminate the disaster humor behind COVID-19 editorial cartoons from around the world?

What follows is an account of the five well-known in humor research, classical theories of humor—superiority, inferiority, relief, play, and incongruity theories. Each of them is summarized and followed by two cartoons that illustrate this theory. Most theory summaries are based on Gimbel’s (2018a, b, c) presentation of these theories. Next, an account of three novel theories of humor follows—Gimbel’s (2018b) cleverness theory (a philosophy theory), McGraw and Warren’s (2010) benign violation theory (a psychology theory), and Simon’s mutual vulnerability of laughter theory (Simon, 2020a, b, c) (an evolutionary biology theory). The authors of this paper

---

<sup>5</sup> Integrational theories of humor also exist, such as Greenberg’s (2020) which is built on Caleb Warren and Peter McGraw’s notion of humor in explicated ambiguity, Tom Veatch’s (1998) paradox of humor as a “normal” violation, and V.S. Ramachandran’s (1998) false alarm theory of humor.

are aware of the fact that other novel theories of humor and laughter have also been developed; however, the authors see significant theoretical strengths in namely these three theories from the perspective of the coronavirus disaster cartoon. For example, the coronavirus is spread in the community and the virus' very nature is such that there arise feelings of mutual vulnerability in many.

## 5. Classical Theories of Humor

### 5. 1. Superiority Theory

Historically, philosophers have held the view that the first theory of humor is superiority theory. According to this theory, when one uses humor, he or she expresses one's superiority over another person (Gimbel, 2018b). Gimbel writes that the outcome of a successful act of joking is to establish a hierarchy in which the joke teller is above the butt of the joke. Plato, a follower of Socrates, was the first person known to humankind to propose a definition of humor. Plato disliked any form of art and held a special contempt for humor:

When Plato [narrates Gimbel (2018b, p. 60)] looks back at the events that led to the tragic killing of the great Socrates, he [Plato] sees humor as one of the operative factors ... Plato saw Athenians laughing at Socrates and was infuriated. Here were the inferior denigrating the superior. That, to Plato, is the essence of humor, and it helped reinforce the hatred that led to Socrates's vilification and death.

Gimbel continues by noting that according to Plato, poetry, theatre, and other arts (the editorial cartoon for the purposes of this paper) were harmful to men and women since the arts constituted an unfaithful representation of the world. This means that Plato assumed that all art had to be a *bona-fide*, i.e. truthful, representation of reality. Gimbel states: "The artist claims to be showing truth, but really is showing a self-created circus mirror that distorts reality and thus convinces the audience of falsehoods that seem to be truths. In this view, humor is art that places the butt of its joke beneath the teller. The nature of humor is to diminish the object of the joke" (*ibid.*).

Another well-known thinker who adopted superiority theory was the Englishman, Thomas Hobbes. He spent some of his life in exile in France after his Royalist side lost the Civil War. Gimbel writes on p. 61:



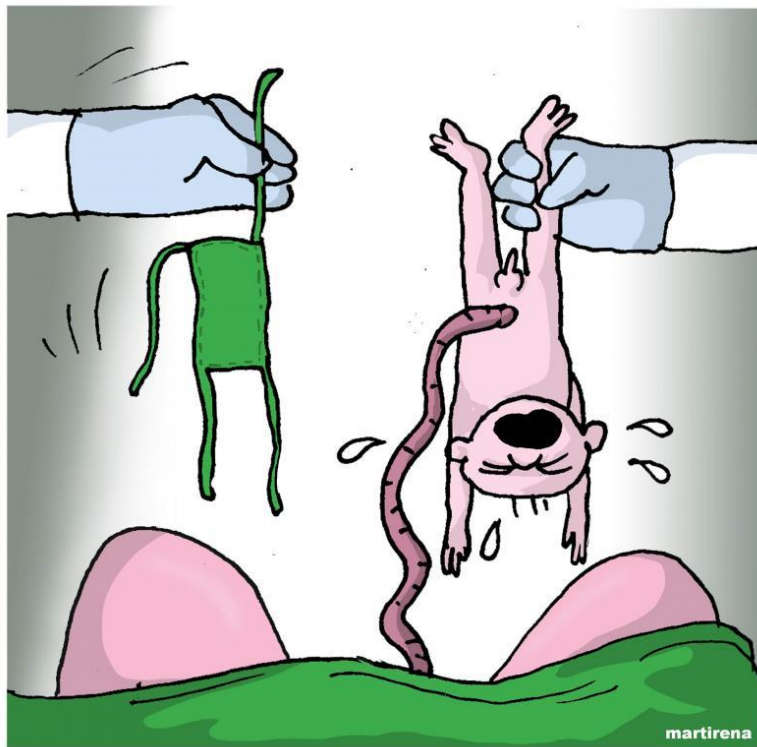
Humor, Hobbes argued, was the realization of sudden glory. Humor, therefore, has two different parts. The first is a sense of glory—that is, of superiority. To claim glory is to have triumphed over someone else. The second part is that the acknowledgment of glory has to arise suddenly. This is the earliest reference in the philosophy of humor to timing. For a joke to be a joke and for a joke to cause laughter, the realization of one's superior place must arise suddenly.

A third philosopher who subscribed to the superiority theory of humor was Roger Scruton (1944-2020). Scruton argued that humor was a cognitive process:

Where laughter itself is a mere bodily reaction, humor necessarily involves the mind ... Humor involves taking a thought—which one may or may not believe—and deeming it be ridiculous. People do not laugh when something makes sense, when something is completely baffling, or when people are moved to feel pity. People laugh when something is understood to be ridiculous. Additionally, people need to rationally see the ridiculousness in the thought to find it funny... Scruton points out people hate being laughed at. When people are the object of ridicule, they feel insulted, demeaned, and diminished. (pp. 61-62)

Cartoon 1, by a Cuban artist, illustrates the superiority theory of humor. The populations of developing countries, such as Cuba, are especially vulnerable to the virus (*Economist*, 2020b). Unemployment benefits in such countries are often non-existent or much lower than these in advanced economies.



**Cartoon 1: Protection in Children COVID 19**

*Alfredo Martirena, Cuba, 13 May 2020; printed with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).*

In Cartoon 1 entitled, “Protection in Children COVID 19,” one sees a visual comparison—the likelihood between a baby who is about to take his first breath and an untied facial mask. The medic to the left hurries to put the mask on the baby’s face; and thus, comply with mask wearing mandates or recommendations. The shape of the mask mimics the bodily pose of the baby, just like in a mirror image. This comparison is of course exaggerated. It makes the viewer chuckle or smirk. The viewer’s reaction is a cognitive response to the incongruity of the situation. In a much Hobbesian way, the viewer feels superior to the medic who plans to mask the newborn. Yet, there is a dose of truth to the circumstances depicted—this child is born in the time of COVID-19 and wearing a mask is the “new normal.” Cartoon 2, by a Portuguese artist, may also be used to illustrate the superiority theory of humor in the context of disaster humor.

**Cartoon 2: Deep Impact**

Rodrigo de Matos, Portugal, 13 July 2020; reprinted with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).

In Cartoon 2, entitled “Deep Impact,” we see the feet of a human being submerged in the ocean, one ankle shackled with a black metal weight with “lockdown” written. Three green coronaviruses swim freely in the water and a rather unhappy crab says: “I don’t see how this is gonna work in the long run!” This cartoon may be analyzed from a superiority theory of humor perspective since the artist or the viewer may feel that he or she has better, superior ideas on how to handle the pandemic than the government that imposed a lockdown. Having a human being shackled in water would mean that, eventually, he or she would most likely drown. Metaphorically, the submerged human being represents the economy, the weight—government policy and regulation, and the crab—the inner voice or thoughts of the citizens affected by the lockdown. The reality of this cartoon has been displayed via anti-lockdown protests in many countries.

## 5.2. Inferiority Theory

Solomon (2002) established inferiority theory, which in many ways is the opposite of superiority theory. Inferiority theory may contain an element of self-deprecation or self-irony: The joke is on the comedian who is in a position of superiority and talks down at the audience. Inferiority theory may be summarized as follows: “Humor results when a person placed in a position of superiority

acts in such a way as to knowingly bring himself down to the level of the audience with a mistake presented in order to inspire empathy or connection” (Gimbel, 2018b, p. 67). It has been argued that there is a special bond among people laughing over the same joke (Cohen, 1999). Joke cycles are collections of jokes about a topic or a group of people. The self-defeating humor style comprises humor that enhances one’s relationship with other people, at one’s own expense (Heintz and Ruch, 2018, p. 451). Gimbel (2018b, c) give as an example of joke cycles related to jokes about Polish people in the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s. The jokes about Poles appeared once this ethnic group became assimilated in American society, not when they emigrated in the 1910s to 1930s. The message of these jokes was: Now you are one of us and it is alright for us to laugh about your ethnic affiliation. We are thus laughing at our own ethnic affiliation in a vicarious and friendly way. One does not joke with one’s enemies, but with one’s friends. Contemporary research on affiliative humor includes studies on the humorous practice, RoastMe, on Reddit that is easily sharable on other social media channels (Dynel and Poppi, 2019). Cartoon 3, by a Colombian artist, is a relevant example of the application of inferiority theory to disaster cartoons.

**Cartoon 3: COVID King**



Elena Ospina, Colombia, 1 May 2020; printed with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).

In Cartoon 3, “COVID King,” one sees a likelihood of former President Donald Trump. A person in a superior position is the butt of the joke since he is depicted in an inferior position—as a clown. The red ball on his nose and the red dots around him evoke the coronavirus’ shape. The virus surrounds us and we are all in it (the coronavirus pandemic) together. The joke cycle about the coronavirus presupposes that there is a special bond or a common lived experience among people in an in-group. This bond consists of the fact that most people around the world are advised or ordered by their governments to stay at home, to wear masks, disinfect commonly used surfaces, and to practice social distancing. Most viewers around the world can easily identify with other people’s lived experiences since all share the same post-COVID-19 reality and lifestyle. Cartoon 4, by an Iranian artist, may also be considered as a relevant illustration of inferiority theory in the time of COVID-19.

**Cartoon 4: The World Economy Needs to Mask Off**



Keyvan Varesi, Iran, 4 December 2020; reprinted with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).

Cartoon 4, “The World Economy Needs to Mask Off,” displays a showgirl whose face is the globe and whose pole is a vaccine syringe. The girl dances with her mask off and smiles widely, her hair and dress flowing behind her. Again, one can see red coronaviruses flying in the background. Next to the stage, three businessmen dressed in suits and wearing head coverings throw dollars, oil, and gold on the stage. One of them has a head covering made of dollar bills, the second man—of a gold bullion, and the third one—of an oil barrel. The showgirl is a rhetorical sign of government policies, while the men—of the world economy (exchange and commodity trading). The economy is depicted in an inferior position to government policy—physically, the men are below the horizon of the girl. The economy depends on and is subjugated to government policies and regulations. The message that this cartoon tries to convey is that the economy would work as usual, should the government relax COVID-19 related restrictions depicted as the mask off: When it comes to Iran, Farjami (2017, p. 127) writes:

Westerners are probably more used to news concerning the tense, decade-long negotiations about the country’s nuclear programme—as a quick search of *The New York Times*’ website reveals—or, in the cultural field, Asghar Farhadi’s recent Academy Award winners *A Separation* (2011) and *The Salesman* (2016) ... [I]n Iran ... satire may cost them [our note, satirists] their freedom, result in serious financial losses, or even threaten their lives.

### 5.3. Play Theory

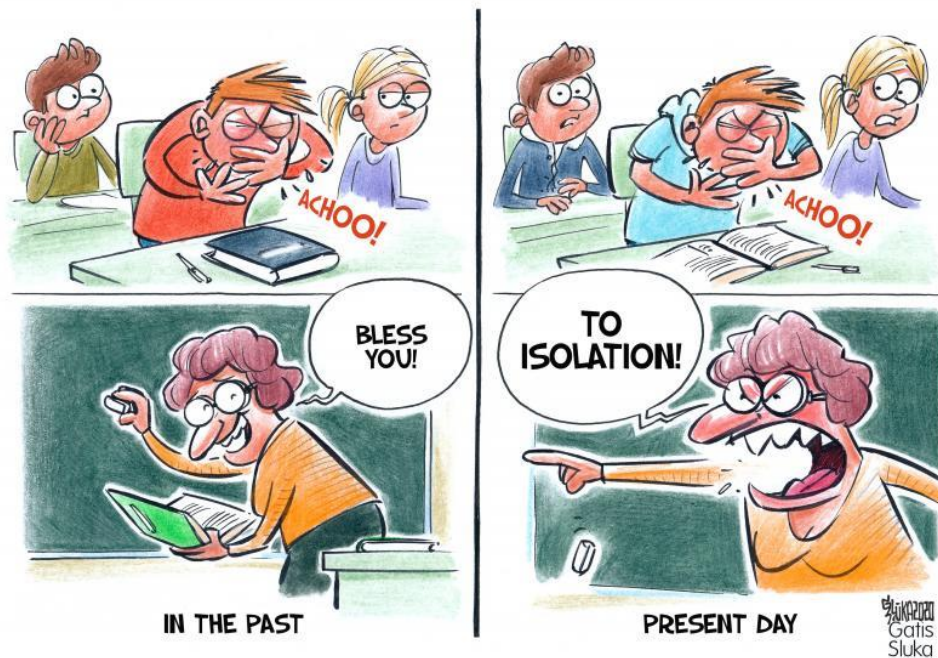
Play theory, as the name suggests, focuses on the elements of play, amusement, and entertainment in human activity. Play, among both animals and human beings, involves the use of something, usually an object, activity or motion, in playful social interactions. The intention is to have fun, build community spirit, and entertain. Play, for young animals and human beings, is also preparation for serious work, adaptation, and survival later in adult life. Play theory is both a stimulus-side and a response-side theory, argues Gimbel. Humor is not just in the mechanics of the joke or in the viewer’s reaction to the joke, but in the relationship between the joker/cartoonist and the audience/viewer, i.e. “in the common stance adopted by both the act of telling and the act of receiving the joke” (Gimbel, 2018b, p. 70).

One of the earliest play theorists was Aristotle. He was a student of Plato, but he did not subscribe to Plato's worldview. Unlike Plato, Aristotle believed in humor:

In his [Aristotle's] great work on morality, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, humor could be a virtue—that is, it could be a part of the properly lived human life. In Aristotle's view, moderation leads to maximizing your quality of life. That extends to humor: One with no sense of humor is a boor and fails to fully appreciate the joys of human life. On the other extreme, one who jokes all the time and fails to be sufficiently serious is a buffoon. The perfect way of being human is to be moderate in humor. One needs to be sufficiently playful to be truly human. (p. 71)

Further, Gimbel discusses Saint Thomas Aquinas—another early play theorist (for example, the saint's book, *Summa Theologiae*). After the Middle Ages, the European Christians rediscovered the writings of Plato and Aristotle. There was a debate that lasted for many years on whether Plato or Aristotle's worldview had to be considered the philosophical foundation of Christianity. Aquinas's supporters (the pro-Aristotelians) won this debate over the Platonists and Aristotle's thought became officially sanctioned by the Church. In Aquinas' view, to play too much was a sin and to play too little was also a sin. Cartoon 5, by a Latvian artist, is an example of the use of play theory as a vehicle for comprehending disaster humor.



**Cartoon 5: Sneezing at School**

Gatis Sluka, Latvia, 11 September 2020; reprinted with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).

In Cartoon 5, “Sneezing at School,” the viewer sees the artist’s intention to entertain in a playful manner. The cartoon is entertaining since people of all nationalities understand how COVID-19 changed the world. The meaning of a sneeze is different now, in the COVID-19 world. This bodily function has become synonymous to threat or even murder. Exaggeration aside, the context of the left and right sides of this cartoon is the same—a classroom; the actors are the same—students and teacher; while, the reaction of the teacher is very different—positive and negative. Cartoon 5 is an example of the power of cartoons to convey messages with just a few brushstrokes and just a few words. The message is delivered in a playful manner, with a “before/after” humor technique (Berger, 1993). In many areas around the globe, schools remained open during the pandemic—their local authorities had students’ intellectual growth and working parents’ interest in mind. However, a trade-off presented itself—exposure to the coronavirus at school. Cartoon 6, by a Latvian cartoonist, offers another example of the application of play theory to COVID-19 cartoons.



**Cartoon 6: School Restrictions**

*Gatis Sluka, Latvia, 27 November 2020: reprinted with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).*

In a playful manner, Cartoon 6 displays a school entrance whose door has been destroyed. Three pupils, each in an individual air bubble, are waiting to enter the school. Their teacher, with a big hammer in her hands, is welcoming them: “Welcome to class!” Play theory would be an appropriate theory to use for analyzing this cartoon: The hammer is used in a playful manner, to enlarge the entrance for the air bubbles to go through. The facial expression of the teacher shows uncontrollable joy. The pupils push their bubbles forward, reminiscent of the tier system of social distancing in countries, such as the U.K. Local authorities’ policies have varied with respect to school re-openings in the time of COVID-19, with some schools moving to fully remote instruction, while others—moving to holding classes with social distancing and mask wearing mandates. A compromise between learning and staying healthy has confronted many schools. Often, online learning has exposed deep-rooted income inequalities related to food availability and lack of technology at some pupils’ homes.

#### 5.4. Relief Theory

Relief theory offers the view that humor is a two-sided activity: The first side builds up a store of energy in the mind or body and the second side makes it clear that this energy will not be needed and so, it gets released in a burst—laughter (Gimbel, 2018b). This theory is built on Francis Hutcheson and Sigmund Freud's work. As Gimbel explains, the Scotch-Irish philosopher, Francis Hutcheson, who lived during the Enlightenment believed that energy accumulated when the mind believed there to be a difficult problem in need of solving, just to realize that this was not a problem, but a joke disguised as a problem. Freud contended that people had deep urges built in them that needed to be relieved, so that no pressure would be exercised on their minds. Laughter, according to Freud, was one of these relief acts for the mind (Freud, 1959). The Freudian approach to the human mind fell out of favor with the professional psychological community in the 1970s due to the advent of imaging technology that allowed access to the brain, further notes this author. Robert Latta reformulated Freud's relief theory (Latta, 1999). For Latta, humor was a psychological phenomenon that occurred in three stages: being in a state of cognitive lack of relaxation, understanding/getting the joke, and tension leaving the body through laughter, something that causes relaxation. Cartoon 7, by an Egyptian cartoonist, illustrates relief theory in the era of the coronavirus.

**Cartoon 7: Loneliness, Quarantine**

Amr Eissa, Egypt, 17 December 2020; reprinted with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).

The joke setup in Cartoon 7, “Loneliness, quarantine,” consists of a man sitting at a table alone, with two drinks—for him and for an absent companion. The man is most likely laughing under the influence of alcohol. The wall next to him displays a count of days in quarantine. Counting the days on the wall reminds of being stranded on an island. It also reminds of prisoners counting the days to freedom. This is Latta’s stage 1: The viewer is in a state of un-relaxation caused by the fact that the man is supposed to have company but does not. The man entertains a non-existing companion—a fact that does not make sense, would argue the viewer. Stage 2, getting the joke, happens when the viewer realizes that the man is mimicking a bar environment at his own home due to quarantine. The sudden realization that this is a kitchen, not a bar, causes an eruption of

laughter. This is Latta's stage 3. Another example of the application of relief theory to COVID-19 cartoons is Cartoon 8, by a Mexican artist.

***Cartoon 8: Christmas Vaccine***



*Dario Castillejos, Mexico, 14 December 2020; reprinted with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).*

In Cartoon 8, “Christmas Vaccine,” the viewer sees Santa Claus riding on his sleigh, with a big bag of presents behind his back. Beneath him, there are white dots evoking snow or coronaviruses. Instead of reindeer, the sleigh is pulled by six vaccine syringes. What a relief for the COVID-troubled world that has been storing pressure and worries for almost a year (Latta's stage 1)—coronavirus vaccines are finally available during Christmas time (Latta's stage 2). Some viewers' smile/nod of approval represents stage 3 of Latta's framework. Vaccine deniers or coronavirus deniers would react very differently, not with a sigh of relief, to this image.

### 5.5. Incongruity Theory

The incongruity theory is popular amongst contemporary philosophers of humor. According to this theoretical viewpoint, the central concept involved in creating a humorous situation is an incongruent situation, state or concept, i.e. two or more things that do not fit together, but are nevertheless put together or matched together. The incongruity may be linguistic, cultural, business, political, stylistic or other. Gimbel (2018b) explains that something in the joke world of the joke setup (primary interpretation of the joke) does not correspond with the joke punchline (secondary interpretation of the joke that helps the viewer understand the joke setup differently). In cartoons, the image is usually the setup and the caption—the punchline. In the absence of a caption, the cartoon title or a speech bubble may be the punchline. As seen in Cartoon 7 above, the punchline was visual—the presence of a kitchen setup on the bottom of the cartoon.

Immanuel Kant, a well-known philosopher from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, was the precursor of incongruity theory (Kant, 1951). He believed in absolute rules that did not have to be broken under any circumstances. Among modern incongruity theorists is Victor Raskin, a linguist. His view centers on the idea of “scripts.” Scripts are clusters of cognitive relations that create meaning. For instance, a word cloud to describe the word “house” (house script) may consist of words, such as building, abode, home, shelter, windows, doors, etc. Some of these words are close to the concept of a house, while others are very distant, yet somewhat related:

Raskin argues that humor is based on script opposition. That means that in a joke, the setup leads the audience to take some operative notion and make sense of it in terms of one script. The punch line then forces the audience to try to assimilate new knowledge into the primary interpretation in such a way that the script will not allow. The audience then realizes they need to change the script they are using to understand the text of the joke (Gimbel, 2018b, p. 84).

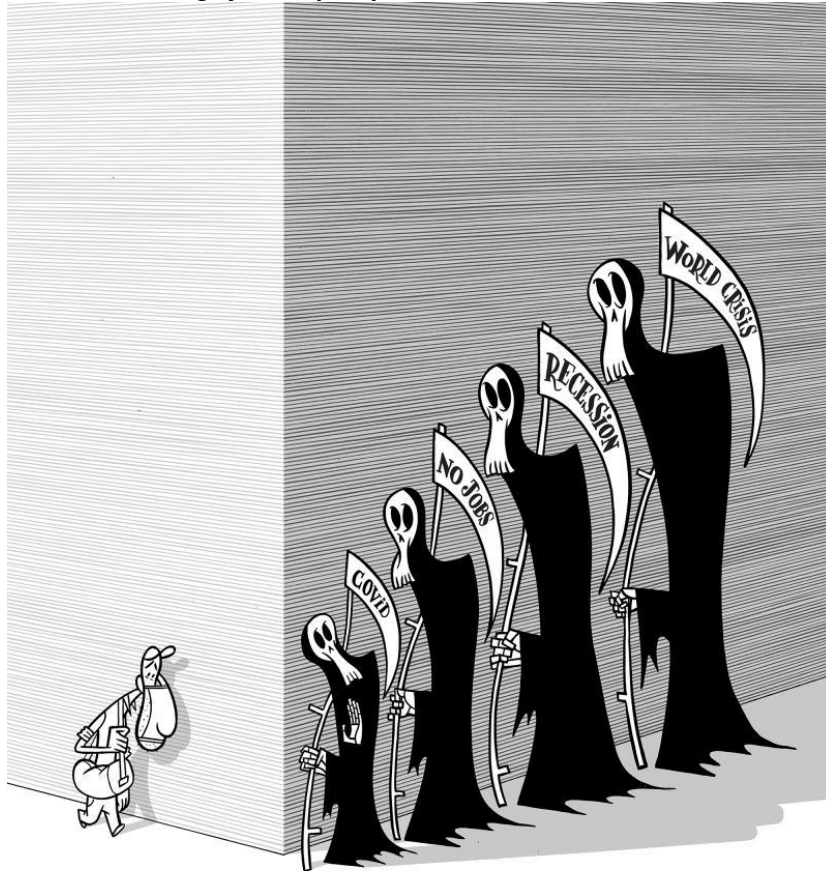
A recent experimental study found that the presence of secondary incongruities can compensate for a partial lack of understanding of humor in caricature (Carbajal-Carrera and Castro, 2020). Cartoon 9, by a Portuguese artist, may be used to help understand incongruity theory and disaster humor.



**Cartoon 9: Travelitter**

Rodrigo de Matos, Portugal, 21 July 2020; reprinted with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).

In Cartoon 9, “Travelitter,” one sees an airplane and a hotel (maybe a Hilton) disposed of in a large trash container, together with regular bags of litter and a palm tree. A man wearing gloves, an orange safety jacket, and a facial mask pushes the bin forward. A small mouse with a baseball hat, clothes, and a travel suitcase looks at the trash bin. There are several logical incongruities here. First, there is a scale incongruity (hotels, airplanes, and palm trees do not fit in trash bins). Second, mice are not tourists—a personification incongruity. What the cartoonist has probably wanted to achieve here is to depict the devastating effects of the pandemic on the hotel and tourist industries. Cities, such as New York City, have seen a surge in rodent populations as cities became quieter during lockdowns and as many city dwellers left for the countryside. Another cartoon, Cartoon 10, by an Argentinian artist, also subjects itself to analysis via the philosophical lens of incongruity theory.

**Cartoon 10: Enough for Everybody**

***-Hey, quit shoving! There's enough for everybody!***

*El Niño Rodríguez, Argentina, 10 November 2020; reprinted with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).*

In Cartoon 10, “Enough for Everybody,” the viewer is confronted by an opposition between what is seen on the left and on the right of a corner wall. On the left-hand side, there is a man who walks and looks dejected and destitute: His back is bent and he looks at the ground in front of him. The man is carrying a bag over his right shoulder and is wearing a mask. On the right hand-side, one sees four figures, all looking like death, each bigger than the previous—the first one holds a flag with “COVID,” the second one—with “No jobs,” the third one—with “Recession,” and the last one—with “World Crisis.” Very soon, the man will walk to the corner and will be confronted by the four figures who sneak on him. The poor man is bound to become a victim of all four calamities.



The incongruity here is the mismatch between what is seen in the image and what is written in the caption, “Hey, quit shoving! There’s enough for everybody!” The caption contradicts the image—a script opposition called “irony”. Shoving, or pushing one another, is typical of children trying to get the best treat from the jar or adults pushing one another to get to the Black Friday sales first. Ironically, there are no other people on the left-hand side of the image, to talk about shoving. Governments around the world, in advanced and emerging economies alike, have not managed to keep the man in the street from the calamities that this cartoon depicts so succinctly.

## 6. Novel Theories of Humor

To reiterate, three novel, i.e., non-classical, theories of humor are presented next—cleverness, benign violation, and mutual vulnerability theories. The first one is a theory based on philosophy, the second one is based on psychology, and the third one—on evolutionary biology.

### 6.1. Cleverness Theory

Steven Gimbel, whose work was extensively referred to above, is the creator of a relatively recent theory called “cleverness theory”. According to cleverness theory, “humor is a conspicuous act of playful cleverness” (Gimbel, 2018b, p. 88). This theory:

...claims that there is no necessary connection between humor and laughter. Jokes can be used for as many purposes as any other type of utterance and still be jokes. Jokes can be used to tell the truth; jokes can be used to distract from the truth. Jokes can be told to make the teller superior or inferior to someone. In essence, jokes can be used for any purpose; eliciting laughter may be the most common, but it is far from the only purpose. (*Ibid.*)

Gimbel continues on the same page by writing that several questions arise from this definition of jokes and humor: “If it is necessary to separate laughter, mirth, and amusement from humor, then what is the point of it? What is it that makes humor humorous? What is humorousness if it is not the ability to cause laughter?” Here is the answer:

The answer came to this course's instructor [Steven Gimbel who was himself a standup comedian in the Philadelphia area for several years] when he thought about the way comedians he observed judged each other's material. The jokes they approved of were not always the jokes that produced the most laughs from the audience. Indeed, some of the jokes that did well with the audience received the worst responses from the other comics. Eventually, it became clear that the comedians were judging how clever the material was. A good joke is clever. This was the trigger for the development of the cleverness theory of humor. (p. 89)

This scholar came up with four necessary and jointly-sufficient elements to account for humor. If humor is an intentional, conspicuous act of playful cleverness, then it becomes necessary to define and understand the following four terms: *intentional*, *conspicuous*, *playful*, and *clever*. First, the word "intentional" presupposes the fact that humor is an activity that human beings *choose* to engage in; It is not something that happens by accident, explains Gimbel. "Humor is an art form—not something that happens on its own. A person unintentionally slipping on ice may be funny. Similarly, Charlie Chaplin intentionally pretending to slip on ice may be funny. However, in terms of humor, these are two different actions" (*ibid.*). Something is "conspicuous" if it is seen by others. The point of art creation is to have it experienced by others. Humor occurs when people set up a play frame and do something in this frame, argues the author. The word "playful," for Gimbel, differs from this how play theorists use this concept. By "play," play theorists mean lightheartedness or silliness. In cleverness theory, on the other hand, "play" means using something for a purpose different from that for which it was originally intended. An example is using an ambiguous word to create a pun. Fourth, the term "clever" to Gimbel means that something demonstrates a cognitive virtue, i.e. any property of the mind that could be advantageous in some situation in real life. For example, being able to see things from multiple perspectives may be a cognitive virtue (as in being with a sharp mind), being well-read or well-informed, and being multi-lingual. Berger (1993) would agree that using multiple "techniques of humor," as he calls them, be they logical, linguistic, or other, improves the quality of a joke or gag.

On the next page, Gimbel explains that people praise jokes (by extension, cartoons for purposes of this article) when they are clever and criticize them when they lack cleverness. Moreover, he writes that humor is not necessarily funny: "[i]nsults or self-deprecation can be used

in humor in ways that give rise to anger or pity rather than laughter, yet these cases should be considered humor” (p. 90). Cartoon 11, by a Costa Rican artist, is an *à propos* example of the use of cleverness theory in the context of the pandemic’s cartoon.

**Cartoon 11: Doctors in Times of COVID-19**

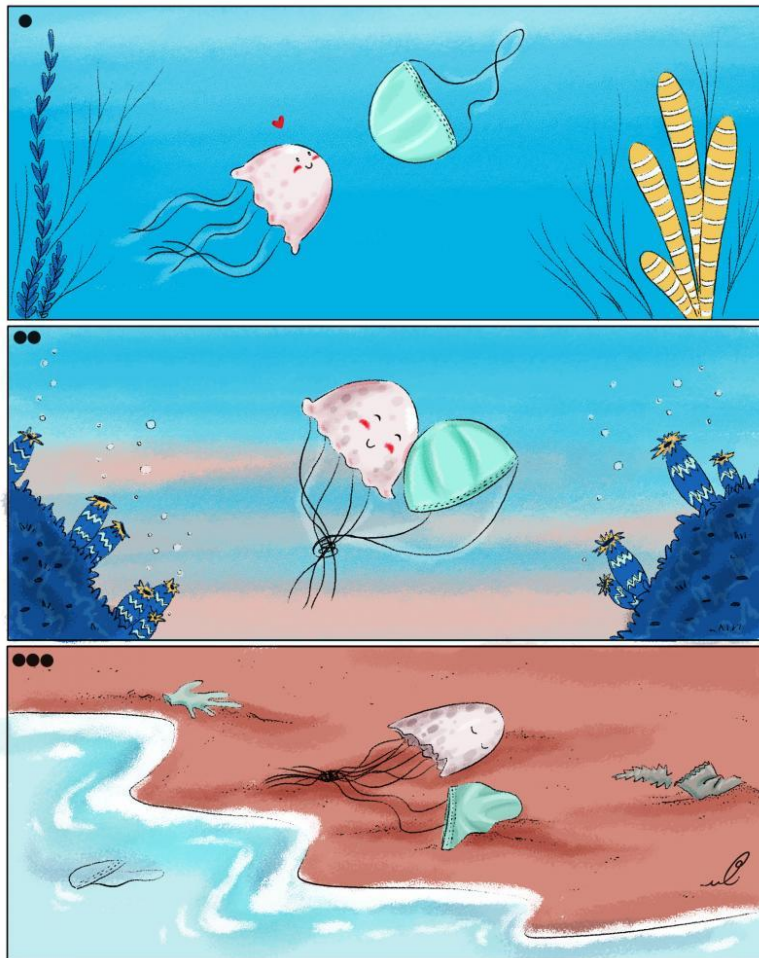


Arcadio Esquivel, Costa Rica, 23 March 2020; reprinted with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).

On the left-hand side, Cartoon 11, “Doctors in Times of COVID-19,” shows a crowd of men and women pointing up to the sky. One says, “It’s a plane,” another one— “It’s Superman,” and another one— “It’s a Super Doctor.” On the right-hand side, flying in the sky is a medical doctor, wearing a mask and a stethoscope and holding a medical suitcase. All four elements of cleverness theory are present here: There is an intentional act (The cartoonist chose to draw this cartoon. The drawing did not happen unintentionally.) which is conspicuous (The cartoon is published in the press.). Besides, something to be played with is the idea of a flying object (An object can fly, but also a man can.). There is cleverness present, as well. The cleverness here comes from the historical perspective of what was admired through time. In the early days of aviation, people admired airplanes. When television and film emerged and spread globally, people admired superheroes. Today, in the time of coronavirus, people admire medical workers—the doctors, nurses, and

hospital support personnel who often lose their own lives in the line of duty. The word, “doctor” in the third speech bubble replaces the word “man” in the second speech bubble, while the word “super” remains in both. This is a clever linguistic substitution—a conspicuous act of cleverness that is playful. Medics are conductors and facilitators of publicness. Cartoon 12, by an Iranian cartoonist, is another example of cleverness theory’s application to disaster cartooning.

**Cartoon 12: How Mask Can Be a Killer!**



*Nahid Zamani, Iran, 12 November 2020; reprinted with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).*

Cartoon 12, “How Mask Can Be a Killer!” shows three scenes: 1) A jelly fish falls in love with a facial mask swimming in the ocean, 2) The two embrace and are happy together, and 3) Both are washed off on the sand. Intentionality and conspicuousness are present since this is a published cartoon. Playfulness is present since the cartoonist plays with the concept of sea creatures and objects (masks) having feelings—they are in love. She also plays with the fact that unfortunately,

some masks find their way to the ocean, where they are not intended to serve their original purpose and resemble jelly fish—with a body and strings. The cartoon is clever since it displays the artist as a woman seeing the world in multiple perspectives. The image presents the mask as a killer (Sea creatures may get entangled in a mask's strings and die.), rather than as a life saver. The mask likened to a life saver is usually what one hears in the media.

## 6.2. Benign Violation Theory

Three conditions must be met under the benign violation theory, a psychology theory, for a situation to be considered funny, according to McGraw et al. (2012). This theory is influenced by Veatch's (1998) theory of humor. The first condition of the benign violation theory consists of a *violation* which threatens one's perception of what should happen. The second condition, *benignness*, means that there is a situation of violation, but one (usually the viewer) is removed far away from it, i.e. one is placed in emotional or physical safety. The final condition presents a situation which is *both* a violation and a benignness, such as having an alternative perception of a violation. Cartoon 13, by an Austrian artist, can be analyzed in light of the benign violation theory.

**Cartoon 13: Corona Happy Trump**



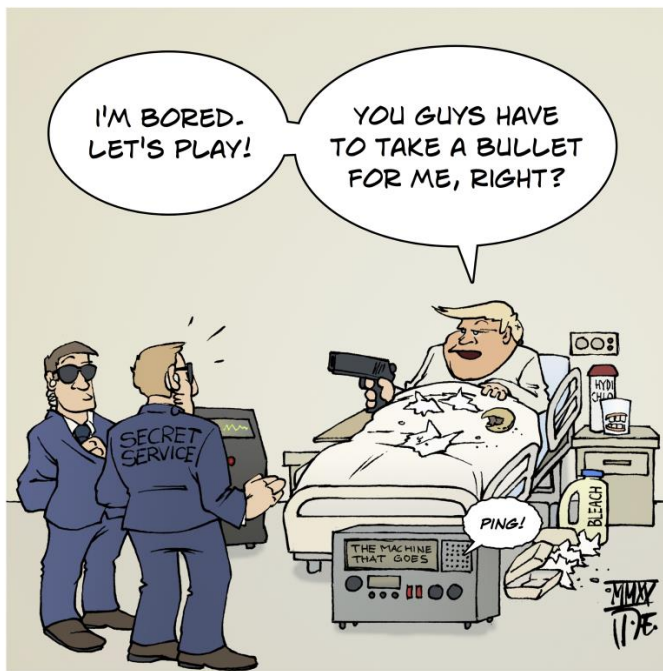
Marian Kamensky, Austria, 17 May 2020; printed with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).

In Cartoon 13, “Corona Happy Trump,” one sees gravestones and spades next to an opening in a stone wall, a fact that creates fear of death. On the left, former President Trump states with a smile: “We have more and more jobs everyday!” Taken as ironic, this statement uses a word substitution.



The correct sentence should be: “We have fewer and fewer jobs every day.” The U.S. and other governments did not take the pandemic seriously, at its outset. The danger of the virus was seriously downplayed by the federal government; thus, leading to many preventable deaths. There is a violation in this cartoon—it jokes about death. This is a moral violation since in most cultures, in *bona fide* communication (which cartoons are not examples of), death is not to be joked with, especially by a president. Digging gravestones is an activity that provides employment opportunities for some, a fact that offers an economic and societal benefit—a slight drop in unemployment (benignness). Taken together, these conditions present a benign violation—most likely, the viewers (all except undertakers) feel physically and emotionally detached from this kind of employment. The word “benign” is the opposite of “malign,” as in a cancer. Some violations are malign (one feels threatened by them), while others are benign (one feels removed from them). Cartoon 13 is an example of the latter. Cartoon 14, by a German cartoonist, is another illustration of the application of the benign violation theory.

**Cartoon 14: Trump in Hospital**



*Timo Essner, 5 October 2020, Germany; printed with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).*

Cartoon 14, “Trump in Hospital” shows former President Trump, not wearing a mask, in a hospital bed. Two Secret Service agents stand on the left, while former President Trump says, “I’m bored.

Let's play! You guys have to take a bullet for me, right?" A button on the bottom says, "Ping!" as if the former President had called a nurse. This cartoon plays with the notion of transfer of responsibility—the ones "taking the bullet" are innocent medical workers who may contract the easily communicable disease passed from their patient. There is a violation—the safety of the nurses is compromised and the speech bubble acknowledges this. The benignness consists of the fact that the viewer feels removed from the threat of getting sick in this situation (unless he or she is a nurse). Both conditions of the benign violation theory are satisfied.

### 6.3. Mutual Vulnerability Theory

Simon's (2020b, c) mutual vulnerability theory of laughter is based on evolutionary theory. He states:

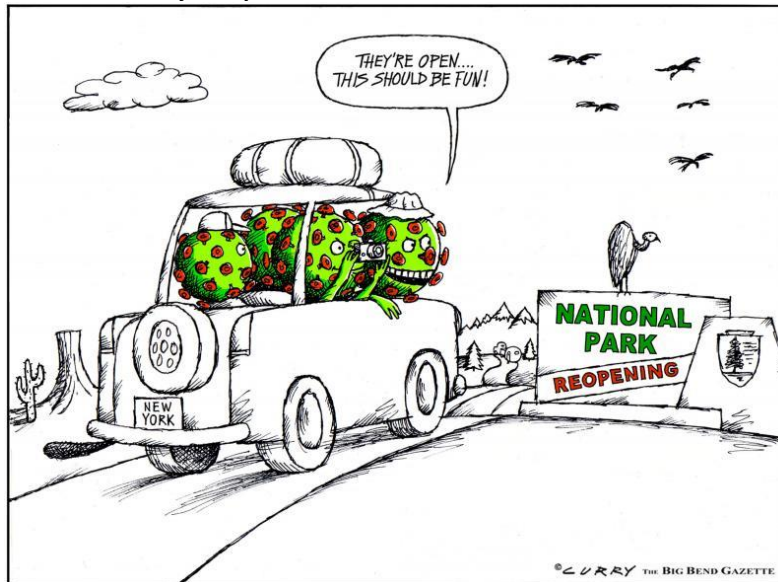
The MVT is founded on the supposition that laughter evolved as one of a suite of conscious, nonverbal, vocal communications and, further, that laughter's most comprehensive and parsimonious definition is *a vocal affirmation of mutual vulnerability*. It is important to note that this is a theory of laughter, not of humor. Humor may or may not result in laughter. Humor is broader than laughter and includes laughter as a response mechanism. Roughly translated into English, the mutual vulnerability theory of laughter's message is "I'd like to remind you that we share some degree of vulnerability." (Simon, 2020b, p. 74)

On page 76, Simon discusses "status" in vulnerability, "...I will use the term "status" to indicate degrees of vulnerability, in that diminished status represents increased levels of vulnerability and higher status signifies decreased vulnerability. Note, too, that vulnerabilities may be highlighted by both internal and external factors..." Thus, human beings' vulnerability to the coronavirus is of diminished status (increased level of vulnerability). "Lifting Laughter" is what is colloquially referred to as "laughing sympathetically 'with' someone," as opposed to "Lowering Laughter," "Self-Lowering Laughter," or "Self-Lifting Laughter" (p. 77). Simon (2020b, p. 78) proposes the following definition of "humor," "The most inclusive definition of humor would be *a deliberate attempt to inspire a feeling of amusement by creating, manipulating, or highlighting the vulnerability of a character with whom the audience (which may include the humorist and/or*



referent) can identify.” Cartoon 15, by an American artist, illustrates well the mutual vulnerability theory of laughter.

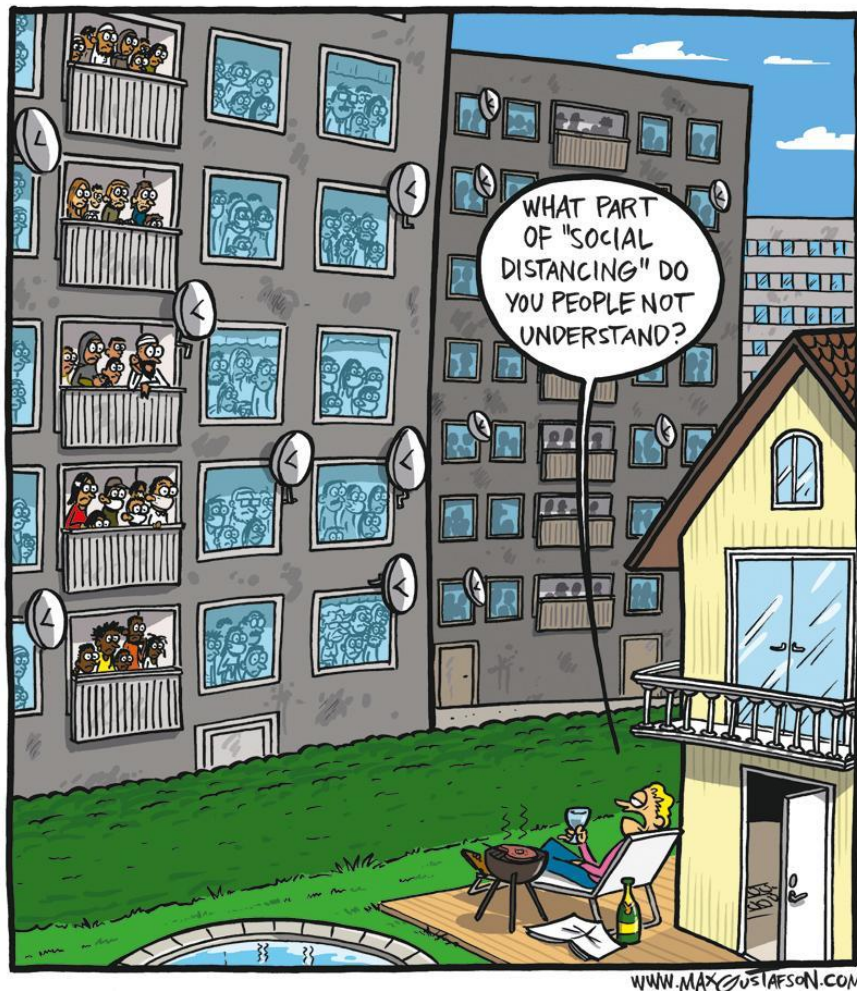
**Cartoon 15: They’re Open**



Tom Curry, USA, 26 May 2020; printed with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).

Cartoon 15, “They’re Open” shows a sign, “National Park Reopening” on the right and a car with coronaviruses on the left. One sees vouchers in the sky and cacti and a cloud on the left. The word “reopening” is written in red, the color of blood. The viruses utter, “They’re open... This should be fun!” The mutual vulnerability here consists of the fact that most viewers would identify with the fact that they have gone out at a public venue, outdoors or indoors, during the pandemic. Multiple viewers would laugh at this cartoon, this theory would argue, since they share the same vulnerability to the pandemic. Laughing at it together makes them stronger. Cartoon 16, by a Swedish artist, represent another example of this theory’s application to disaster cartooning.

Cartoon 16: Contagious Inequality



Max Gustafson, Sweden, 17 December 2020; reprinted with permission from [www.cartoonmovement.com](http://www.cartoonmovement.com).

Cartoon 16, “Contagious Inequality” shows a tall apartment building with crowded rooms and balconies. Some of its dwellers wear masks, while others do not. A terrified man with a wine glass and a book, sitting across the lawn next to a barbeque, reproaches them: “What part of “social distancing” do you people not understand?” The man lives in a three-floor house and seems to be affluent and maybe better educated than the people in the apartments. Most inhabitants of the building seem to belong to minority groups, based on their facial features, complexion, and attire, while the man is most likely white (his hair is blond and his complexion—fair). The plight of the crowds in the apartment building is one of vulnerability—these people are all subject to poverty and, thus, to the virus. They live dangerously close to one another. The crowds do not seem to be partying or intentionally violating social distancing regulations. They are simply constrained to

small living spaces. The mutuality of laughter here consists of the fact that many viewers may identify with these modern victims of poverty. This cartoon may also be examined via the lens of other theories, such as the judgmental superiority theory. Cartoon analysis is, thus, subjective; yet, subjectivity adds to the richness and depth of cartoon analysis.

## 7. Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to better illuminate disaster humor in COVID-19 cartoons through the use of classical and novel theories of humor. The cartoons selected and presented in this paper displayed the take of artists from different nationalities on government responses to the pandemic, as well as the impact of the virus on individuals and business entities. Among the government policies observed in the cartoon data were social distancing (Cartoon 6), quarantines (Cartoon 7), and mandating the wearing of a facial mask in public (Cartoons 1, 4, 10, 12, and 16). Fear of socializing and travel affected certain industries more than others (Cartoons 7, 9, and 15). Post-COVID-19, students now face a very different reality at school (Cartoons 5 and 6). Hospital resources are stretched, while health workers risk their lives (Cartoons 11 and 14). The pandemic was depicted as a vastly consequential nature-caused phenomenon that exerted enormous power over ordinary citizens (Cartoons 2, 10, 13, and 16). The cartoons displayed were evidence to the fact that some governments' acting on the initial COVID-19 outbreak was dangerously delayed and worthy of laughter, especially in the U.S. (Cartoons 3, 13, and 14), but even more so in Sweden (Cartoon 16), the U.K. and elsewhere. Government policy was conveyed as having the potential to greatly decrease citizens' quality of life and the health of the economy, especially in the short run. As the outbreak developed into a pandemic, governments around the world showed that they valued human life more highly than the state of the economy or individuals' mental health (Cartoons 4, 7, and 9). The desire to improve quality of life and the state of the economy is evidenced in the expediting of COVID-19 vaccine approvals (Cartoon 8). Cartoon 12 showed that the environment was also affected by governments' face-covering policies, albeit negatively. Abundance of caution in school re-openings (Cartoons 5 and 6), professional sacrifice by medical workers (Cartoons 11 and 14), and zest for life and entertainment (Cartoons 7 and 15), all contributed to turning the pandemic into an opportunity for reflection and positive change. Humor is a vehicle for social cohesion through playfulness, affinity, relief of tension, and survival in the face of mutual danger.

Applying five classical and three novel theories of humor to the analysis of COVID-19 cartoons, from the fields of philosophy, psychology, and evolutionary biology, highlighted disaster in a fresh, comprehensive, visual, and rhetorical light and provided innovative perspectives on humor as a defense mechanism for controlling and coping with disasters. Even though the subject matter was sober and moribund (a world-wide pandemic), many of the cartoons presented provoked smirks, smiles or even laughter and mirth. As proposed by Simon (2020b), laughter at our mutual weaknesses makes us stronger together.

Due to the global impact of the virus and the similarity among COVID-19 government policies and regulations around the globe, all cartoons analyzed in this paper spoke the same language, no matter whether they were drawn by cartoonists from Africa, Eastern or Western Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, South-East Asia or the Americas. Collectively, all cartoons drew a bleak reality, often accompanied by a ray of hope thanks to different humor styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive or self-defeating) and different humor types (comparison, personification, exaggeration, pun, sarcasm, silliness or surprise) (Taecharungroj and Nueangjamnong, 2015). Future research on disaster humor may branch into digital images, such as social media memes, besides editorial cartoons (Ajayi, 2020; Taecharungroj and Nueangjamnong, 2015). New technologies have made possible the creation of such new visual forms of art, while a variety of distribution channels—Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, TikTok, and YouTube—have made possible their virality. These venues are fertile ground for further research efforts on theoretical frameworks that deepen understanding of and appreciation for this ambiguous type of humor that is disaster humor.

## References

- Attardo, S. 2017. *Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Berger, A. A. 1993. *An Anatomy of Humor*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Brinkman, D. 1968. Do editorial cartoons and editorials change opinions? *Journalism Quarterly*, 45, pp. 724-726.
- Buffard-Moret, B. 2015. *Bons Mots, Jeux de Mots, Jeux Sur les Mots : De Création de Réception*. Paris: Artois Presses Université.
- Carbajal-Carrera, B. and Castro, O. S. 2020. The role of secondary incongruities in cartoon appreciation. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 8(2), pp. 25-48.

- Caswell, L. S. 2004. Drawing swords: War in American editorial cartoons. *American Journalism*, 21, pp. 13-45.
- Chatterjee, S. 2007. Cartooning democracy: The images of R. K. Laxman, *Political Science and Politics*, 41, pp. 303-306.
- Chovanec, J. 2019. Early Titanic jokes: A disaster for the theory of disaster jokes? *Humor: International Journal of Humor Studies*, 32(2), pp. 201-225.
- Davies, C. 2005. *Jokes and Groups*. London: The Institute for Cultural Research.
- Davies, C. 2011. *Jokes and Targets*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Davies, C. 2017. *The Mirth of Nations* (first published in 2002). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dynel, M. and Poppi, F. I. M. 2019. Quid rides?: Targets and referents of RoastMe insults. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 33(4), pp. 535-562.
- Genova, D. I. 2018. Grasping political cartoons? Not an easy matter. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 6(1), pp. 85-99.
- Cohen, T. 1999. *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Goodsell, C.T. 2017. Publicness. *Administration and Society*, 49(4), pp. 471-490.
- Cousins, N. 1979. *Anatomy of an Illness*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Economist. 2020a. A grim calculus: Covid-19 presents stark choices between life, death and the economy. *The Economist*. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2020/04/02/covid-19-presents-stark-choices-between-life-death-and-the-economy>. Accessed on 20 December 2020.
- Economist. 2020b. Daily chart: Which economies are most vulnerable to covid-19's long-term effects? *The Economist*. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2020/12/15/which-economies-are-most-vulnerable-to-covid-19s-long-term-effects>. Accessed on 20 December 2020.
- Edwards, E. 2020. Humour as a threat-coding mechanism. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 8(1), pp. 14-28.
- Edwards, J. 1997. *Political Cartoons in the 1988 Presidential Campaign: Image, Metaphor, and Language*. New York: NY: Garland Press.
- Edwards, J. and Ware, L. 2005. Representing the public in campaign media: A political cartoon perspective. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 49, pp. 466-487.



- Farjami, M. 2018. Book review: Iranian political satirists: Experience and motivation in the contemporary era. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 6(2), pp. 127-130.
- Freud, S. 1959. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. New York, NY: Basic.
- Gimbel, S. 2018a. *Isn't That Clever: A Philosophical Account of Humor and Comedy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Gimbel, S. 2018b. *Take my Course, Please! The Philosophy of Humor: Course Guidebook*. Chantilly, VA: The Great Courses.
- Gimbel, S. 2018c. *Take my Course, Please! The Philosophy of Humor: Online Lectures*. Available at: <https://www.thegreatcoursesplus.com/take-my-course-please-the-philosophy-of-humor>. Accessed on 8 August 2020.
- Goldstein, J. and Ruch, W. 2018. Book review: Paul McGhee and humor research. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Studies*, 31(2), pp. 169-181.
- Goffman, E. 1979. *Gender Advertisements*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gombrich, E. H. 1978. The cartoonist's armoury. In: *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Phaedon, pp. 127-142.
- Greenberg, J. 2002. Framing and temporality in political cartoons: A critical analysis of visual news discourse. *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 32, pp. 181-198.
- Heintz, S. and Ruch, W. 2018. Can self-defeating humor make you happy? Cognitive interviews reveal the adaptive side of the self-defeating humor style. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Studies*, 31(3), pp. 451-472.
- Kant, I. 1951. *Critique of Pure Judgment*. New York, NY: Hafner.
- Latta, R. 1999. *The Basic Humor Process: A Cognitive-Shift Theory and the Case against Incongruity*. New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Levin, I. 2004. *Mibaad la-Dmaot* [Through the Tears: Jewish Humour under the Nazi Regime]. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem.
- Litovkina, A. T. 2016. The lawyer as animal in American lawyer jokes. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 4(1), pp. 3-13.
- Mankoff, B. 2014. *How about Never—Is Never Good for you? My Life in Cartoons*. New York, NY: McMillan.
- McGraw, P. A. and Warren, C. 2010. Benign violations: Making immoral behavior funny. *Psychological Science*, 21(8), pp. 1141-1149.

- McGraw, P. A., Warren, C. and Kan, C. 2015. Humorous complaining. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(February), pp. 1153-1171.
- McGraw, P. A., Warren, C., Williams, L. E. and Leonard, B. 2012. Too close for comfort, or too far to care? Finding humor in distant tragedies and close mishaps. *Psychological Science*, 23(10), pp. 1215-1223.
- Mills, A. J., Robson, K. and Pitt, F. P. 2013. Using cartoons to teach corporate social responsibility: A class exercise. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 35(2), pp. 181-190.
- Morris, R. 1993. Visual rhetoric in political cartoons: A structuralist approach. *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, 8(3), pp. 195-210.
- Nilsen, A.P. and Nilsen, D. L. F. 2019. *The Language of Humor: An Introduction*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Oring, E. 2016. *Joking Asides: The Theory, Analysis, and Aesthetics of Humor*. Boulder, CO: Utah State University Press.
- Ostrover, H. 2009. *Lelo Humour Hainu Mitabdim* [If not for Humour, we Would Have Committed Suicide]. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem.
- Peacock, L. 2014. *Slapstick and Comic Performance: Comedy and Pain*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Plester, B. 2016. *The Complexity of Workplace Humour, Laughter, Jokers and the Dark Side of Humour*. London: Springer.
- QuoteInvestigator.com. 2014. Available at: <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/10/14/frog/>. Accessed on 20 December 2020.
- Ramachandran, V. 1998. The neurology and evolution of humor, laughter, and smiling: The false alarm theory. *Medical Hypotheses*, 51, pp. 351-354.
- Rea, C. 2015. *The Age of Irrelevance: A New History of Laughter in China*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Simon, J. C. 2020a. Essential attributes of a comprehensive theory of laughter. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 8(1), pp. 45-54.
- Simon, J. C. 2020b. Laughter redefined. *Israeli Journal of Humor Research: An International Journal*, 9(1), pp. 72-90.
- Simon, J. C. 2020c. *Why we Laugh: A New Understanding*. New York, NY: Starbrook Publishing.



- Soare, A.-N. 2020. Cartoons in Romanian humorous news. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 8(2), pp. 49-61.
- Solomon, R. 2002. Are the Three Stooges funny? Soitainly! (or When is it OK to laugh?). *Ethics and Values in the Information Age*. Joel Rudinow and Anthony Graybosch (Eds.). Toronto: Wadsworth.
- Steir-Livny, L. 2016. Is it OK to laugh about it yet? Hitler rants YouTube parodies in Hebrew. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 4(4), pp. 105-121.
- Swick, D. and Keeble, R. L. 2016. *The Funniest Pages: International Perspectives on Humor in Journalism*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Taecharungroj, V. and Nueangjamnong, P. 2015. Humour 2.0: Styles and types of humour and virality of memes on Facebook. *Journal of Creative Communications*, 10(3), pp. 288-302.
- Thibodeau, R. 1989. From racism to tokenism: The changing face of Blacks in New Yorker cartoons. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 53, pp. 482-494.
- Üngör, U. Ü. 2015. Funny as hell: The functions of humour during and after genocide. *The European Journal of Humour Research*, 3(2/3), pp. 80-101.
- Veatch, T. 1998. A theory of humor. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 11(2), pp. 161-216.
- Watson, C. 2020. *Comedy and Social Science: Towards a Methodology of Funny*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Warren, C. and McGraw, A. 2016. Differentiating what is humorous from what is not. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 110(3), pp. 407-430.
- Wheeler, M. and Reed, S. 1975. Response to before and after Watergate caricatures. *Journalism Quarterly*, 52, pp. 134-136.