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Gini and Singer have constructed a delightful and enjoyable read, which puts its finger on some incredibly important and interesting issues. If nothing else the book is enjoyable due to the wealth of knowledge presented in the biographies of various comedians, and I found myself resonating with so much of what was presented in relation to the Daily Show and the Colbert Report. In fact, in the early 2000s I was quite brazen in declaring these two shows as my primary news outlets. I was mostly joking at the time, and indeed Jon Stewart begged people not to see them as such, but many of my peers were more serious in their declaration. I would imagine this is why John Oliver, as is noted in the book, does not see his show as “fake news” but rather as an actual news show that happens to be entertaining.

That said, no one attends an academic panel to hear agreement. They may say that’s why they’ve come, but in reality, people want blood. Well, that may be overstating it, but there are a few points in the book that I think merit further discussion, and hopefully can lead to some fruitful dialogue.

In the first chapter I greatly enjoyed the point related to the temporality of humor. Indeed, many jokes have shelf lives. It goes without saying that a George W. Bush joke would fall flat in 1862. The context of Will Ferrel saying “subliminal” would make no sense. The 2000 election was a requirement for the humor there to manifest. That said, once that humor has manifested, it appears to stretch beyond the temporal, or at least the present. While the authors are right that no one is making Rock Hudson jokes currently, that doesn’t mean that people aren’t using Rock Hudson in a joke. Consider that Dennis Miller, when a commentator for the NFL, frequently made references to past military excursions. While

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the Peloponnesian War might have exceeded its shelf life as the target of a joke, it still seems to be a useful tool in making jokes about that which exists in our current culture. Granted, Miller's brand of commentary didn't meet with a warm reception, but it at least works as an example of a topic living on as a tool for humor, a part of a joke, if not the target of a joke itself.

Further, related to the temporality of comedy, I wish to posit that there are situations in which jokes run past their short "shelf life" and actually seem to spring eternal, or at least have a shelf life equivalent to military grade emergency rations. I would like to return to Ferrell's President Bush. Actually, the SNL epoch from the late 90's through the early 2000's. At the time, SNL was firing on all cylinders, making pointed political jokes, but jokes that were light, friendly, and fun. The Clinton, Bush, Hussian, Gore, etc. who were presented in their comedy were over the top amusing characters that became immediate social memes. People in their late 30's and above still fondly remember Darryl Hammond saying "Lockbox" or the aforementioned "subliminimal." What's interesting though is the group of those currently in the mid-20's or younger who are familiar with these skits and quote them frequently. These people do not enjoy the skits because they were politically relevant to them growing up, indeed some had not yet been born, but rather as a display of comedic brilliance.

To that end, Abbot and Costello's "Who's on First" is nearing a 100 year shelf life as being relevant, and not merely relevant, but a hallmark of comedic excellence. Many of Shakespeare's quips still land well with audiences, and those paying attention reading the biblical book Titus surely get a chuckle when Paul says the island of Crete is full of fools, or in Kings when Elijah suggests that Baal is using the toilet. I think in all of these situations Gini and Singer's point of the "shelf life" of a joke still holds, and I think the idea of the

necessary context of a joke being a requirement for the joke to be funny is present, but I do wonder if it is the case that some jokes, or skits, or characters, are able to exceed the short shelf life of a Tonight Show with Jay Leno style joke, because they tap in to something that transcends the cultural zeitgeist and present a way relating to the world that is less response, and more playful.

This is to say, perhaps I'm the optimist the authors mention on page 32, when they say that a joke might be a reminder of what joy life can entail. To that end, I believe my greatest area of disagreement with Gini and Singer is the somewhat negative tone in which they cast humor. Joking is a way of defanging a world that cannot be tamed, satire is a weapon to cure corruption and vice, humor came from our need to push back against the trails and tribulations of life (52), etc. Certainly all of these things can be true. Humor is a great means of disarming a situation, or of making the fearful seem tame. It is a great weapon against corruption, or to make look corrupt what the joke teller believes to be corrupt; however, is that what it is at its core?

The idea that humor can function as a coping mechanism is rather straightforward, but to project that on the whole of humor, and see that as the fundamental core of humor, seems to indicate that life is something with which we need to cope. In some cases this may be true, but perhaps life isn't fundamentally that with which we need to cope, with a few bits of joy sprinkled about, but rather fundamentally a gift, something that we ought delight in, with bits of pain thrown in with which we need to cope? I'm reminded here of two Christian thinkers, CS Lewis, and Søren Kierkegaard, and one very not Christian thinker, Martin Heidegger.

Lewis' autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, emphasizes the transformation in the way in which Lewis saw the world, which eventually led to his conversion. Indeed, he published

a collection of poetry from his days as an atheist under the name *Spirits in Bondage*, but that bondage is ended through delight. As he details in *Surprised by Joy*, there was shift in how he saw the world, his view changed to one of celebrating the delightful, and eventually determining that it must have had a source. Setting aside that last part however, we can see his approach to the world touching briefly on the topic of humor in *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Magician's Nephew*. Here Aslan is singing Narnia into creation, and as he creates the talking animals, it is decided that a bird who had made a bit of a gaff was himself the first joke of that world. No pain, no scorn, no coping, but mere delight. Perhaps we could say that the joke came from coping with the gaff, but coping in that case would only need be done if there were something with which to cope. If someone sees matters so that an error in speaking is nothing to cope with, but rather something surprising and funny, it seems we can approach humor in a more optimistic way.

Here we can think of Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith, or as he depicts him at the start of *Fear and Trembling*, the dancing tax collector. He walks, and leaps as he walks. Each step part dance, each thing he comes in contact with a gift. He hopes his wife has made a feast for dinner, but a meager soup is still a means of rejoicing. Sure, it sounds a bit like this character might be Chris Treger from *Parks and Recreation*, but he was "literally" the most delighted person on that show. What if humor is not a means primarily of handling the pain in life, but rather fundamentally a response to the joy in life, and that joy allows us to make light of the pain? Wouldn't this save us from the perpetual cynicism of satirists who believe that any answer to a social question is just a set up for another punchline? (57) Could this perhaps explain why Antonin Scalia was so close to those he disagreed with, and laughed when the butt of a joke? He had an approach the world colored by personal lightness or delight, rather than something more negative.

At this point it makes sense to bring in Heidegger. Though not known for his wit, or anything like it, his understanding of “mood” and “care” seem relevant here. One’s mood is the fundamental attunement that one has to the world, the fundamental way that a person approaches the world and cares about the world. An individual’s “world” is constructed out of care, out of what matters to them. In other words, the way that a person is attuned to the world will shape the way that she approaches objects and things for which she cares. In the ancient world, Heidegger believed that the fundamental mood people approached the world with was wonder, and everything was seen through that lens. In the Modern world, thanks to Descartes, it was doubt, and in the present its boredom. In these moods, the whole of existence is seen as tinted. In boredom a person has equal care for all things, therefore nothing has meaning; however, what if the fundamental attunement of an individual were delight, or joy? This person would approach all things, and all possibilities, perhaps with equal care in the same way the bored person does, but instead sees all things as mystifying and exciting.

To Heidegger’s point, we all know that we, the audience member, have almost complete control over whether we find a comedian amusing. For my money, the same joke told by a comedian I love, and one I despise, will land differently. I anticipate and project delight on the comedian I enjoy, John Mulany let’s say, and project boredom and disappointment on one of which I don’t see the appeal, Seth Rogan perhaps. I control how funny the performer is in large measure, because comedy is a communication, and an agreement between multiple parties. In the same way, it seems in my mind that when thinking of humor, it isn’t primarily a way to cope with a negative attunement to the world, a way to pacify the pain of the world and try and distract from it, but rather a fundamental

reaction to the joy of existence that breeds delight, and a lightness by which one can care freely for much in the world, and cope for the bits of pain that creep in.

If it is the case that humor comes from delight, then it would make sense that our oldest form of humor is surprise. Here I take issue with the idea on page 53 that the Sumerian joke about the wife farting on her husband's lap is political, and I do actually believe it is toilet humor. First, because if we are all being serious, breaking wind is funny no matter what empire one lives in, but second, because the assertion that politically women are in charge is anachronistic to assert to that epoch. Certainly today there is plenty of capital there, but at the time, the idea seems a bit stopped up.

However, that isn't the point of that section. In that section the authors are making the argument that mankind is an inherently political animal. There is an appeal to this idea, indeed everything today has been forced into the realm of politics. As the author's note about Sarah Silverman's comedy, sex, family, work, play, friendship...its all political. The question though is, does it have to be? Certainly, Aristotle claimed that man was a political animal, but at the time "political" meant something much more akin to being social and having relationships, than it meant about bureaucratic red tape and leveraging Twitter as a means of maintaining a system of power. In that vein, I wonder if man is a social animal, but the advent of modern politics actually has been a means of draining the joy from our natural social nature? Perhaps the general inclination we feel toward having to cope with the world, is because we have made the world something that it ought not be by virtue of asserting power structures, and self-serving attempts to control, when in reality, we ought to approach the world socially, throwing off the hateful partisan scorn of contemporary politics, and see the world the way that a dancing tax collector might?

Then again, I could just be an ignorant optimist that needs to get his feet on the ground, and more cynicism in his heart. Or perhaps to use TV characters created by Bill Lawrence, be a little less Ted Lasso, and a little more Dr. Perry Cox.

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