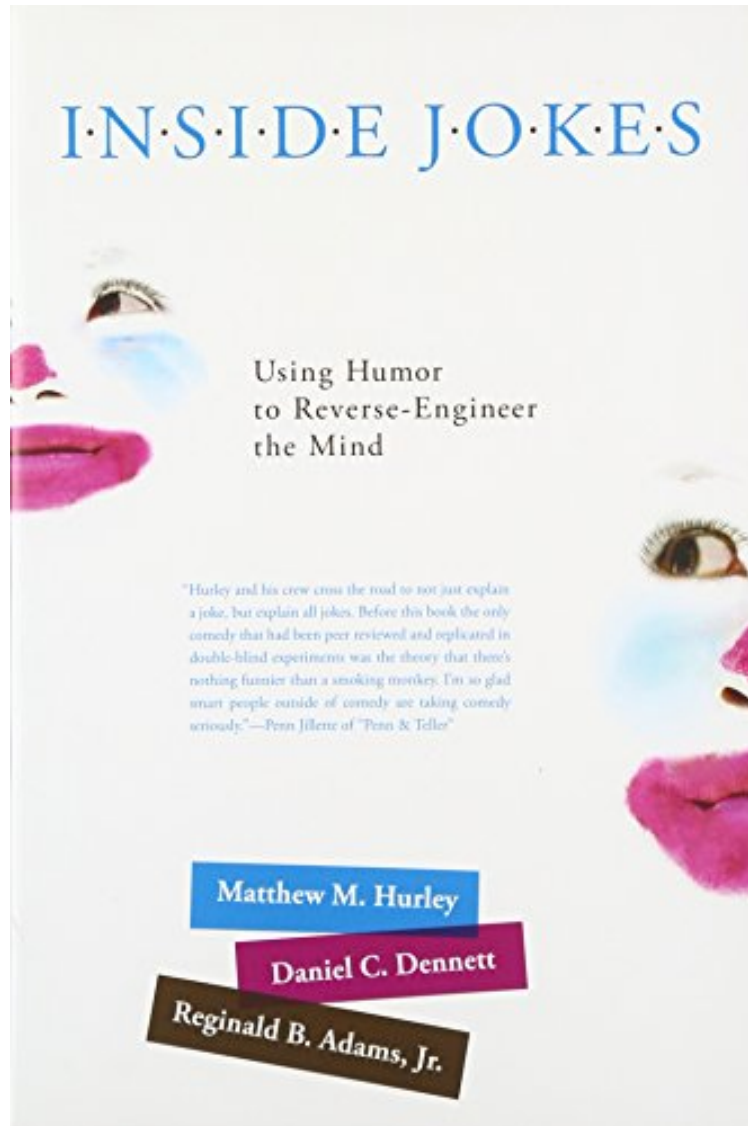


(Library ebook) Inside Jokes: Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind (MIT Press)

## Inside Jokes: Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind (MIT Press)

Matthew M. Hurley, Daniel C. Dennett, Reginald B. Adams Jr.  
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**Matthew M. Hurley, Daniel C. Dennett, Reginald B. Adams Jr. : Inside Jokes: Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind (MIT Press)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Inside Jokes: Using Humor to Reverse-Engineer the Mind (MIT Press):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. what it is like, what elicits it By Steven Williams In this book the authors try to elucidate humor and how it may be implemented in the brain and a machine. They also think that it speaks

to the workings of the mind in more general terms. To start the book they take a stab at what humor is for and how it may have evolved. They then go into the phenomenology of humor (i.e. what it is like, what elicits it, how it is expressed, etc.). After this dissection they go through the various theories of humor that have been proposed and attempt to show how they are all wanting in some manner. Then there is a chapter asking twenty questions that they think any theory of humor would have to successfully answer. They then move on to their own theory, which is dependent on emotion and which maybe foundational (i.e. there would be no humor without it). They also think that all cognition involves emotion, but not only that, they think emotion is necessary for cognition. They claim such emotions as curiosity, puzzlement, surprise, and insight are key components for cognition. They then go into what kind of mind is necessary for humor to be appreciated and generated. Their next key ingredient is their claim that is the emotion of mirth that is the centerpiece emotion in humor. They then introduce the intentional stance, which has been most fully developed by one author, Daniel Dennett. The next thing they tackle is the possible objections to their theory. They then look at humors' closer relations and what is the purpose of laughter. They wrap it up by giving the bare bones of what is needed to program a machine to express and appreciate humor with a necessary component being programming in emotions. Here are a few comments on specific parts of the text. Kindle locations are in brackets [ ]. [2565] "While a description of a situation contains a series of concepts that refer to, or imply, possible beliefs in the situation, events translated into language are always a vast underspecification of reality, and some of the relevant issues are not made obvious from the surface form." This lends support to my thinking that we do not actually think in language. I do not know if any of the authors would go this far. [3599] "There may be some justification, then, in old quip that 'laughter is the best medicine'—humor just may play a role in healing depressive cycles." It may improve the mood, and probably temporary at that, of the mildly depressed person. For the seriously depressed I doubt it even accomplishes this. [3781] They end on: "If we ever set out to produce a robot that has epistemic capacities strong enough to perform the kind of reasoning we do, we must endow it with something like humor and the other epistemic emotions." This hardly amounts to a practical program of research. They do not even give an outline of what such a program would look like. I would agree with the authors' premise that cognition, including cognition of humor, is dependent on the, what they call, the cognitive emotions. Their theory behind humor seems very plausible, but I suppose there are objections that they did not address in the book; although, they covered a lot of them. I do think they are guilty of a bit of oversell at the beginning promising a program to produce humor in a machine or robot in the last chapter. They admitted that it would not be an actual coded program, but still what they did in the last chapter could hardly be even considered a general program except in the sense of a broad plan of attack. I did enjoy the book, and it did include a lot of good jokes; although, not all were that funny by any means. If you are interested in what humor is, how it is produced, how it is received, why we have it at all, and why we find things funny, than I would recommend the book. Just do not expect a coded program for a computer or robot to generate and appreciate humor any where in the book. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A theory of the evolutionary advantage of humor, with plenty of examples to tickle the funny-bone By Bernie Gourley This book examines the science of why we find funny what we find funny. Most people probably feel about this as did E.B. White who said, "Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it." Still, while analyzing humor may not be as fun as reveling in it, it's fascinating to scientifically inquiring minds. Humor is universal (not the humor of a specific joke, but the experience of somethings being humorous.) A skilled science fiction writer might conjure up an alien race that is credibly humorless. But it defies credulity that even the remotest of aboriginal Earthling wouldn't giggle or guffaw at the sight of an off-course ball careening into an unsuspecting man's crotch. Humor's universality begs certain questions. First and foremost, one expects there to be some evolutionary advantage to a sense of humor. That evolutionary mechanism is precisely what Hurley, Dennett, and Adams attempt to demonstrate in this book. The authors suggest that the pleasure associated with humor is a reward for recognizing an incongruity, and they go into great deal to fill in the details needed to explain the panoply of things people find funny, while suggesting why alternate explanations are inferior. While there's a lot of frog-killing academic analytics and needlessly messy scholarly language, this book does offer a vast collection of examples of humor to support and clarify the authors' points. So, unlike many books on evolutionary and cognitive science, this book does have a built in light side. WARNING: there's also a discussion of why some attempts at humor fail. This means one is also subjected to a number of puns, elementary school jokes, and comedic misfires that show the reader why sometimes humor implodes. The book starts by building a common understanding of what humor is. It turns out that this isn't simple because people find many different kinds of things funny--from caricatures to wordplay. (And, whatever the initial evolutionary purpose of humor, our species has run with that reward system to places that couldn't have been readily anticipated.) Next, the authors discuss the many varieties of theories of humor that have been raised. This subject has been studied for some time, and thinkers have suggested that humor's pleasure derives from a number of different causes from feeling superior to recognizing surprise--just to name a couple. After considering the competition, Hurley et. al. start laying out the basis of a cognitive / evolutionary explanation. In chapter five they describe 20 questions they think must be dealt with, and--in the last chapter (13)--they give their responses as a summation of the book's main points. Along the way, the authors take on important related questions such as why humor sometimes fails, what

others will see as the weakness of their argument, whether a robot could be humorous, and why we laugh. The last point opens another can of worms. Even if one concludes--as the authors have--that humor is a reward system for recognizing incongruities, the question of why there is an advantage to spontaneously announcing that recognition still arises. There're are a few graphics in the book, mostly these are cartoons and humorous photos that serve as examples. The book is published by MIT Press, so all the usual scholarly features of notes and citations apply. I found this book to be thought-provoking, and the plentiful examples of jokes made it enjoyable to read as well. I'd recommend it for those interested in the science of the mind. It's a bit dry in places for readers looking for light reading about humor. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. I wanted to like it. By Rosey This is an interesting subject but the book is incomprehensible to any but experts in brain science. It's full of jargon, and the aim seems to be to use big words rather than communicate. I wanted to like it.

An evolutionary and cognitive account of the addictive mind candy that is humor. Some things are funny -- jokes, puns, sitcoms, Charlie Chaplin, The Far Side, Malvolio with his yellow garters crossed -- but why? Why does humor exist in the first place? Why do we spend so much of our time passing on amusing anecdotes, making wisecracks, watching The Simpsons? In *Inside Jokes*, Matthew Hurley, Daniel Dennett, and Reginald Adams offer an evolutionary and cognitive perspective. Humor, they propose, evolved out of a computational problem that arose when our long-ago ancestors were furnished with open-ended thinking. Mother Nature -- aka natural selection -- cannot just order the brain to find and fix all our time-pressured misleaps and near-misses. She has to bribe the brain with pleasure. So we find them funny. This wired-in source of pleasure has been tickled relentlessly by humorists over the centuries, and we have become addicted to the endogenous mind candy that is humor.

Ever since Plato (who thought we laugh at vice), thinkers as serious as Kant and Freud have put forth theories of our giggles and guffaws. Hurley, Dennett, and Adams go at the problem with the ingenuity of first-rate scientists and the timing of first-rate comics. Not only do they have the riches of evolutionary psychology from which to draw, but they're even funnier than Hegel. (Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, author of *36 Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction*) The deft use of humor can win a mate, persuade an audience, or make a tyrant quake in his jackboots. Yet no one really understands why the human brain should respond so forcefully to that cocktail of anomaly, indignity, and rhythmic vocalization we call a joke. Hurley, Dennett, and Adams offer a sophisticated analysis of this important phenomenon using high standards of evolutionary explanation -- and no, it is not a turgid academic disquisition, but written with clarity, good cheer, and, of course, wit. (Steven Pinker, author of *How The Mind Works*) [O]ne of the most complex and sophisticated humor theories ever presented.... The authors should be lauded for their thought-provoking and original work. (Evolutionary Psychology) The theory [the authors] elaborate is a detailed and sophisticated descendant of incongruity theories.... The learned and even-handed stance adopted by [them] regarding problem cases is... upbeat: they regard their theory as a provisional staging post, and a prompt to further empirical enquiry into these open-ended issues. On balance, that is probably the right attitude to take. (The Times Literary Supplement) *Inside Jokes* is the most persuasive theory of humor in the centuries that scientists have been trying to explain why we crack up. Extra bonus: unlike most such research, which is about as funny as a root canal, Hurley's analysis is -- and I don't think I'm going out on too much of a limb here -- the funniest thing the MIT Press... has ever published (in a good way). (Sharon Begley *The Daily Beast*) Science advances by asking new questions, and Matthew Hurley, Daniel Dennett, and Reginald Adams raise a lot of them.... Some of these questions have been asked before, but no previous attempt succeeds in answering so many so well. (Walter Sinnott-Armstrong *Science*) Hurley and his crew cross the road to not just explain a joke, but explain all jokes. Before this book the only comedy that had been peer reviewed and replicated in double-blind experiments was the theory that there's nothing funnier than a smoking monkey. I'm so glad smart people outside of comedy are taking comedy seriously. (Penn Jillette of "Penn Teller") MIT Press has come up with a page-turner, a book you can't put down. That is no joke! The authors have dissected the mental state of humor and, instead of dismissing it, instill awe about the beauty of the evolved human mind. Humor at its various levels cleans up our act and plays a magnificent role in making us who we are. (Michael Gazzaniga, Director, Sage Center for the Study of Mind, University of California, Santa Barbara) What's so funny about a robot with a sense of humor? In this highly original analysis, Hurley, Dennett, and Adams try to locate the holy grail, the essence of a joke, by using a variety of tools (from computer science, cognitive science, linguistics, philosophy, and even evolutionary psychology) to dissect why we laugh. This powerful team of authors goes a long way to explain why and when we laugh, and in doing so uncover insights about how the mind works. But like the proverbial millipede who, trying to analyze how he lifts each of his legs in the precise sequence, starts tripping over, readers should beware that getting inside a joke risks dehumorizing it! (Simon Baron-Cohen, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology and Director, Autism Research Centre, Cambridge University) About the Author Matthew M. Hurley is researching emotions and creativity under Douglas R. Hofstadter at the Center for Research on Concepts and Cognition at Indiana University. Daniel C. Dennett is University Professor and Austin B. Fletcher Professor of Philosophy at Tufts University. He is the author of *Sweet Dreams: Philosophical Obstacles to a Science of Consciousness* (MIT Press,

2005, 2006) and other books. Reginald B. Adams, Jr., is Assistant Professor of Psychology at Penn State University. Matthew M. Hurley is researching emotions and creativity under Douglas R. Hofstadter at the Center for Research on Concepts and Cognition at Indiana University. Reginald B. Adams, Jr., is Assistant Professor of Psychology at Penn State University. Daniel C. Dennett is University Professor and Austin B. Fletcher Professor of Philosophy at Tufts University. He is the author of *Sweet Dreams: Philosophical Obstacles to a Science of Consciousness* (MIT Press, 2005, 2006) and other books.