'Plainly of Considerable Moment in Human Society': Francis Hutcheson and Polite Laughter in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland

KATE DAVISON

Abstract
This article focuses on Francis Hutcheson's *Reflections Upon Laughter*, which was originally published in 1725 as a series of three letters to *The Dublin Journal* during his time in the city. Although rarely considered a significant example of Hutcheson's published work, *Reflections Upon Laughter* has long been recognised in the philosophy of laughter as a foundational contribution to the 'incongruity theory' – one of the 'big three' theories of laughter, and that which is still considered the most credible by modern theorists. The article gives an account of Hutcheson's text but, rather than evaluating it solely as an explanation of laughter, the approach taken is an historical one: it emphasises the need to reconnect the theory to the cultural and intellectual contexts in which it was published and to identify the significance of Hutcheson's arguments in time and place. Through this, the article argues that Hutcheson's theory of laughter is indicative of the perceived significance of human risibility in early eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland and, more broadly, that it contributed both to moral philosophical debate and polite conduct guidance.

1. Laughter in History

The question 'why do we laugh?' has occupied minds in the western world since antiquity. From Plato to Sigmund Freud – via Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, and more – the list of those who have interrogated the causes, nature and consequences of human laughter is long and it reads like a roll call of canonical European philosophers. These centuries of scrutiny have generated what are known as the 'big three' theories of laughter (Carroll, 2014).[1] First is the 'superiority' theory: it can be traced back to Aristotle and Plato, but is most commonly associated with Thomas Hobbes. His description of laughter in *Leviathan* cast it as a grimace

[1] On theories of laughter, see for example, Rockelein (2002); Morreall (ed.) (1987); Morreall (2009); Martin (2006).

doi:10.1017/S1358246120000132

triggered by experiencing 'sudden glory'. We laugh when we perceive ourselves in a superior light: it is a sneering self-applause that expresses contempt for others (Hobbes, 1651). Secondly, the 'relief' theory, which is most often attributed to Sigmund Freud. His 'hydraulic model' of psychology led him to view joking as means to release social tension: jokes operate as a safety valve, allowing a society to let off steam (Freud, 1905). Thirdly, the incongruity theory, which is often thought to have originated with Francis Hutcheson who thus holds a special place in the philosophy of laughter. His theory was set out in a series of three letters to the *Dublin Journal* in 1725, which were republished posthumously in 1750 in Glasgow – where he had been professor of moral philosophy – as *Reflections Upon Laughter*, together with a critique of Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (Hutcheson, 1750). Hutcheson contended that laughter is triggered by the perception of ill-suited pairings of ideas, objects or situations; it is our response to the coming together of things that are incompatible or out of place. Variations on Hutcheson's theory have since been proposed by a number of philosophers and psychologists and, of the three theories of laughter, incongruity is still considered to be the most persuasive (Morreall, 2009, p. 12). Yet, even now, with our rapidly developing understanding of the human brain, laughter retains an element of mystery. It occupies some psycho-somatic space: more than an emotion or feeling, it is a reaction that originates in the mind, but manifests in the body. Hutcheson's struggle to characterise his subject still rings true: 'that sensation, action, passion, or affection', he wrote, 'I know not which of them a philosopher would call it' (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 16). Sometimes we laugh deliberately, and other times involuntarily as an instinctive reaction to a moment. In both cases, though, laughter is part of our communicative repertoire; it is one of the many verbal and gestural strategies we employ while interacting with one another.[2] Moreover, it seems we have been doing so since our earliest beginnings as a species. For our ancestors, laughter was most likely an indication of safety and play: that of pre-verbal infants is thought to be a legacy of this phenomenon (Gervais and Wilson, 2005; Morreall, 2009, pp. 41–42). Of those who have investigated the phenomenon of human laughter, then, few would disagree with Hutcheson's claim that it 'is plainly of considerable moment in human society'

[2] The anthropologist Mary Douglas has been influential in this respect: see her 'Jokes' in Douglas (1975, pp. 90–114), and 'Do Dogs Laugh? A Cross-Cultural approach to Body Symbolism' in Ibid (pp. 165–69). See also Provine (2002).

(Hutcheson, 1750, p. 32), even if consensus on its precise triggers and effects remains elusive.

For an historian, however, the notion that there exists a universal theory of laughter – that what makes us laugh is transcultural and ahistorical – sets alarm bells ringing (Bremmer and Roodenburg, 1997). Historians are driven to uncover the particulars of past societies and cultures, so the question is not 'what makes us laugh?', but what has made people laugh in different times and places? This question has underpinned a subfield of research focusing on the humour of past societies.[3] And with good reason, as Keith Thomas's foundational contribution to the field argued. 'The historical study of laughter', wrote Thomas, 'brings us right up against the fundamental values of past societies. For when we laugh we betray our innermost assumptions' (Thomas, 1977, p. 77). Thereafter the history of humour expanded in line with the development of cultural history through the 1980s and '90s, not least following Robert Darnton's seminal essay on 'The Great Cat Massacre' in an eighteenth-century Parisian printshop. In accordance with Thomas, Darnton saw jokes as a tool with which to prize open past mentalities. An apparent source of historical hilarity that is deeply unfunny to modern readers – in this case the ritualistic slaughter of cats – exposes starkly the distance between past and present. Emphasising that people in the past 'do not think the way we do', Darnton argued that the effort required to explain the episode unravelled the mental world of those involved. In 'getting' the joke, he could 'get' their culture (Darnton, 1984, pp. 2 and 75–104). Now a well-established field, the history of humour has demonstrated that the subjects considered acceptable to laugh at, and how cruelly, sympathetically, exuberantly or cautiously people laugh, have all varied with time, place and culture. This has generated new insights into past cultures and mentalities, along with the values and sensibilities of the day.[4] But the history of what people have *laughed at*, is not – strictly speaking – a history of laughter. Laughing is a physical and often noisy action: it is not synonymous with humour, at which laughter might be targeted (Apte, 1985, p. 14). Laughing engages the body, the face and the vocal chords, but leaves no trace on the historical record: in an early modern context, we simply cannot 'hear the people not just talking but also laughing', as Thomas aspired to do (Thomas, 1977, p. 77). Yet, we do have representations of laughter

[3] See the extensive bibliography in Verberckmoes (1997)

[4] Notably in the case of eighteenth-century Britain, Gatrell (2006) and Dickie (2012).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246120000132 Published online by Cambridge University Press

– a great many of them, both written and visual – and we can write a history using those as source material. In this sense, the historical study of laughter has been more precisely defined as the study of how laughter was depicted, debated and interpreted by past societies (Verberckmoes, 1999, pp. 118–9). Studying laughter in this way is distinct from the approach taken in philosophies of laughter, which have discussed historical theories in depth, but often with a view to evaluating their accuracy. An article focused on Hutcheson's *Reflections Upon Laughter* is a case in point: its goal was to identify 'the limitations of Hutcheson's account of the nature of laughter' (Telfer, 1995, p. 359). In contrast, this article takes an historical approach, which aims to account for why Hutcheson was interested in laughter, and to assess the significance of his arguments in time and place. Approaching laughter in this way has already revealed the extent to which it 'mattered' in certain historical cultures (Skinner, 2001). And it also helps historians to tackle new questions in the history of humour, which concern not what people laughed at, but what that laughter *did*. As Mark Knights and Adam Morton have argued, 'laughter and satire played significant roles in political processes and social practices in a range of historical contexts', and exploring this requires a focus on their reception – indeed, their 'power' (Knights and Morton, 2017, p. 1). In this pursuit, an understanding of how laughter was understood and thought about in the past becomes all the more important.

2. Laughter and Eighteenth-Century Politeness

Eighteenth-century Britain is particularly fertile ground for a history of laughter as it was subjected to an heightened level of investigation and anxiety, which generated abundant material for historians to pore over. Such interest was bound up with the period's well-documented preoccupation with politeness.[5] In the first instance, politeness was a discourse of manners; it denoted refinement of behaviour and personal demeanour, which 'the polite' would exercise when interacting with others. It was discussed and elucidated by the influential essays of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele in *The Spectator* in the early century, and subsequent didactic literature codified polite prescriptions in detail, covering everything from how to converse agreeably to how to stand, dance the minuet, or greet a passer-by on the

[5] See On politeness and its prominence in historical scholarship see Langford (2002) and Klein (2002).

street.[6] Laughter had an ambivalent relationship with such consciously urbane and decorous forms.[7] On the one hand, cheerfulness, wittiness and geniality were crucial to polite encounters, as Jonathan Swift's *Treatise on Polite Conversation* (1738) indicates. In the preface, Swift noted that there was a 'Cause of Laughter which Decency requires' and, when well judged, laughter in conversation was 'undoubted the Mark of a good Taste, as well as of polite and obliging Behaviour' (Swift, 1738, p. v). On the other hand, laughing defied polite aspirations for self-mastery and genteel conversation. Physically, laughter was often an uncontrollable response – and it could be hearty too, shaking the body, crumpling the face and even making the eyes weep. It was such bodily contortions that the fourth earl of Chesterfield famously took issue with in his letters to his son, which subsequently formed the basis of several conduct guides. He wrote,

> Having mentioned laughing I must particularly warn you against it […] Frequent loud laughter is the characteristic of folly and ill manners; it is the manner in which the mob express their silly joy at silly things; and they call it being merry. In my mind there is nothing so illiberal, and so ill-bred, as audible laughter.

He continued in the same vein, observing 'how low and unbecoming a thing laughter is: not to mention the disagreeable noise that it makes, and the shocking distortion of the face that it occasions'.[8] In a later letter, Chesterfield dwelled upon another concern regarding laughter's compatibility with polite behaviour: its targets. Registering his distaste for the 'silly things' that triggered much laughter, he warned that,

> Horse-play, romping, frequent loud fits of laughter, jokes, waggery, and indiscriminate familiarity, will sink both merit and knowledge into a degree of contempt. They compose a most merry fellow; and a merry fellow was never yet a respectable man.[9]

Sure enough, even a passing acquaintance with eighteenth-century satirical literature, jestbooks or caricature reveals how crude the period's comic tastes could be.[10] Sexual, scatological and cruel

[6] See, for example, Anon (1762).
[7] For a full discussion, see Davison (2014).
[8] See Dobrée (ed.) (1932, III, pp. 114–18: to this son, 9 March 1748).
[9] Ibid., (IV, pp. 1379–82: to his son, 10 August 1749).
[10] This material has been explored in depth by Gatrell (2006, esp. pp. 178–210), and Dickie (2012).

humour was as germane to the age as Palladian architecture and Wedgewood tea services. Along with its uncontrolled physicality and impolite targets, there was also anxiety about the effects of laughter in social interaction: laughing *at* others was widely understood as potentially aggressive and thus not conducive to genial encounters.[11] Given both the intricacy of polite conduct guidance and recognition of laughter's prevalence in social situations, it is unsurprising to find so much ink spilled over how to laugh in company, where, when and what at.

But politeness also reached beyond a narrow concern with external behaviour, and laughter was implicated in this respect too. In the hands of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury, politeness embraced questions of inner morality and virtue so that it might, as he put it, 'carry *Good-Breeding* a step higher' (Shaftesbury, 1711, III p. 161).[12] Shaftesbury's writings from the early century anchored politeness in philosophy: it was not simply a matter of superficial social behaviour, politeness concerned the more profound appreciation of beauty, harmony and good order. These ideas gained purchase outside scholarly debate through the elevation of 'taste' in eighteenth-century culture. Described in the mid-century as 'the darling idol of the polite world', the meaning of taste extended beyond gastronomy to denote the capacity to discern and take pleasure in the subtle qualities of practically anything, from a well-proportioned landscape to wallpaper or, indeed, a witty remark.[13] Taste was aspirational: while in theory everyone had the capacity for it, only some cultivated it (Brewer, 1997, pp. 88–92). For Shaftesbury, such aesthetic appreciation was guided by an internal 'moral sense' that, if trained, enabled humankind to fulfil its natural capability for virtue. Hence a refined taste indicated inner virtue and morality. Hutcheson expanded on Shaftesbury, especially by setting out a number of internal senses, including beauty, harmony, grandeur, novelty and order, which operate as reflex responses to the perception of certain objects (Harris, 2017, pp. 325–37). This theory of internal senses was set out in his *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), but it was also elaborated in a less canonical text: his three letters to the *Dublin Journal* about laughter. For Hutcheson, laughter was a reflex that revealed the workings of our internal senses and

[11] See, for example, Smilewell (1774). The ambivalent attitude to laughter in social encounters is discussed in Shrank (2017).

[12] On Shaftesbury and politeness, see Klein (1994).

[13] *The Connoisseur*, 721 (13 May, 1756).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246120000132 Published online by Cambridge University Press

aesthetic judgements. And he was not alone on this front: later in the century James Beattie took up a similar theme (Beattie, 1776), but before Hutcheson's letters even became *Reflections Upon Laughter* in 1750, the German philosopher Georg Friedrich Meier (1718–1777) had gone a step further by explicitly arguing that jesting was a branch of aesthetic philosophy. Meier's *Thoughts on Jesting* was a two-hundred-page exposition on how best to jest in company (Meier, 1765). What he called a 'happy Jest' was 'distinguished from Buffoonery and Indecent Drollery' by its 'Conformity to the Rules of the Beauty of our sensitive Knowledge':

> And thus it is a Part, which is within the Province of the fine Arts: And a Research into the Perfections thereof must be considered as a Branch of what is called the Aesthetic. (Meier, 1765, p. 11)

The combinations of objects that any given person saw fit to laugh at revealed their judgement, morality and, of course, taste.

> As it is always an indication of a vitiated low Taste, either to jest in an insipid Manner oneself, or to approve the low, insipid Jests of others; and on the contrary, always Proof of a refined Taste, never to jest but in a sprightly Manner, and never to approve but sprightly Jests. (Meier, 1765, p. 14)

Discussions of laughter were thus entangled with politeness on several levels. Politeness resided in conversation and laughter was recognised as an important part of sharing one another's company, even if conduct guidance remained ambivalent about its effects on social interaction. More profoundly, laughter offered insights into the questions driving moral philosophers and hence attracted their scrutiny. Laughing aloud was an external behaviour that revealed the workings of the internal senses and aesthetic judgements. Getting it right was not just a matter of being 'polite' in the sense of being an agreeable companion, but also in the sense of expressing refined taste and inner virtue.

In these respects, the culture of politeness in eighteenth-century Britain provides important context in which to read Hutcheson's *Reflections Upon Laughter*. Not least, it is reminder that Hutcheson was not writing in isolation, but as part of – and in response to – ongoing debates about human risibility, its meaning and significance in society. And, furthermore, that these debates were themselves part of both scholarly philosophical inquiry into human nature, and wider cultural commentary on the nature of polite manners. Hutcheson's *Reflections Upon Laughter* was a conscious effort to rescue laughter from the trappings of Hobbesian self-interest by rethinking what

triggers laughter, but it also upheld moral philosophy's wider critique of selfishness as the key human motivation: not for nothing was it later published with a critique of Mandeville. Far from being aggressive and haughty, for Hutcheson, laughter spoke of the natural benevolence of human nature and it was crucial to the workings of a polite society. He cast laughter as a pleasant aspect of sociability, which helped to achieve the mutually pleasing and genial interactions to which polite society aspired; moreover, it offered a gentle means to correct foibles and follies without causing offence – particularly useful when good natured relations were the aspiration.

If the intellectual and cultural context is important for understanding what was at stake for Hutcheson when arguing about laughter, the contexts of original publication also have implications for how his theory should be interpreted. The usual citation is the 1750 edition, *Reflections Upon Laughter*, but the original text was written for an audience of newspaper readers and coffeehouse goers – the urbane gentlemen of early eighteenth-century Dublin. At the time, the city was home to a thriving print culture. The printing monopoly held by the king's printer since the mid-sixteenth century had been eroded by the end of the seventeenth century, as unlicensed printers and booksellers operated without challenge. The industry grew steadily thereafter, partly due to the lack of copyright law (established in England in 1710) which allowed Dublin printers to prosper by producing cheaper editions of bestsellers, copied from the originals exported from London for sale in Ireland (Kennedy, 2005, pp. 76–77; Benson, 2009, p. 371). As the second city in Britain's expanding colonial empire, Dublin was an important urban centre and not short of spaces of sociability in which the *Dublin Journal* would have been read. In coffeehouses and taverns, newspapers and periodicals were available for patrons' perusal. Reading was frequently a social activity at this time and papers like the *Dublin Journal* were read aloud, debated, and discussed by those present – typically gentlemen of the middling and upper sorts.[14] This readership sets the tone of Hutcheson's writing, as well as the subject matter. Laughter was a topic of concern for those preoccupied by politeness and Hutcheson caters for his readers by treating it somewhat playfully, even noting the irony of exploring it with such gravity (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 26). The text is shot through with his moral philosophy and his theory of the internal senses, but it is packaged for a wide reading public of educated gentlemen. It is the definition

[14] On reading practices, see Barry (1997); and on coffeehouses, see Cowan (2005).

of Addison's aspiration in *The Spectator* to 'have brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables, and in Coffee-Houses'.[15] In these respects, Hutcheson was consciously providing a prompt for coffee-house conversation by wading into ongoing debates about laughter and how to behave politely. He was not describing things as they were, but how he believed they *should* be: his text served a prescriptive purpose. No less than Addison, Steele, Shaftesbury and others, his *Reflections Upon Laughter* was part of the effort to cultivate and refine minds, morals and tempers that was at the heart of the politeness project.

3. Refuting a 'palpable absurdity'

The first of Hutcheson's three letters is concerned with refuting Hobbes's account of laughter, which was well known at the time.[16] 'Mr Hobbes', he begins, 'owes his character of a Philosopher to his assuming positive solemn airs, which he uses most when he is going to assert some palpable absurdity, or some ill-natured nonsense' (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 6). The 'palpable absurdity' in question on this occasion was Hobbes's description of laughter in *Leviathan*, which Hutcheson quotes:

> Laughter is nothing else but sudden glory, arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly: for men laugh at the follies of themselves past, when they come suddenly to rememberance. (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 6)

While allowing that Hobbes might be onto something in the case of ridiculing others' follies, (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 13, discussed below) Hutcheson has no truck with his theory as a general account of laughter. Reducing laughter to an expression of sneering self-applause was to be expected of a philosopher whose 'grand view was to deduce all human actions from Self Love'. Hobbes had 'over-looked every thing which is generous or kind in mankind' – perhaps, Hutcheson quipped, on account of 'some bad misfortune' – and instead

[15] *The Spectator*, no. 10 (12 March 1711).

[16] Joseph Addison discussed Hobbes's theory of laughter in *The Spectator*, no. 47 (24 April 1711), which gave it a wider circulation: James Beattie noted that Hobbes's theory 'would hardly have deserved notice' had it not been for Addison's essay: see Beattie (1776, p. 332).

suspected 'all friendship, love, or social affection, for hypocrisy, or selfish design' (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 6). Such a view of human nature was contrary to Hutcheson's moral philosophy, but Hobbes's theory of laughter could also be undermined on logical grounds. If all laughter springs from a sense of superiority, then Hutcheson notes that two suppositions must be true: first, that there can be no laughter either when there is no comparison being made between ourselves and another object, or when that comparison does not make us feel superior; and, secondly, that we must laugh every time we perceive ourselves as superior to another object. As Hutcheson points out, 'if both these conclusions be false, the notion from whence they are drawn must be so too', and thus he sets about a two-pronged attack to confound Hobbes's position (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 7).

First, he recounts causes of laughter that cannot be attributed to our sense of superiority. The delight we experience when we encounter wit in the writing and speech of others, for example, cannot be attributed self-applause. We might have 'the highest veneration for the writing alluded to, and also admire the wit of the person who makes the allusion'. Were we to compare ourselves, we are more likely to feel 'grave and sorrowful' at our own shortcomings than we are to delight in self-love (Hutcheson, 1750, pp. 9–10). Secondly, Hutcheson argues that we frequently experience moments in life when we perceive our own superiority, but this rarely triggers our laughter. This he describes as 'the most obvious thing imaginable', and indeed it would have appeared so to an elite, white, gentleman living in a deeply unequal society. As he sarcastically notes in his first example,

> It must be a very merry state in which a fine gentleman is, when well dressed, in his coach, he passes our streets, where he will see so many ragged beggars, and porters and chairmen sweating at their labour, on every side of him. It is a great pity that we had not an infirmary or lazar-house to retire to in cloudy weather, to get an afternoon of Laughter at these inferior objects (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 11).

And so it ought to follow that an obedient and faithful Christian 'must always be merry upon heretics, to whom he is so much superior in his own opinion', while 'all true men of sense […] must be the merriest little grigs imaginable'. Moreover, Hutcheson argues, the greater the gulf between ourselves and the object of our laughter, 'the greater would be the jest'. Thus he wonders playfully,

> Strange! that none of our Hobbists banish all Canary birds and squirrels, and lap-dogs and pugs, and cats out of their houses, and substitute in their places asses, and owls, and snails, and oysters, to be merry upon. From these they might have higher joys of superiority, than from those with whom we now please ourselves (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 12).

If superiority alone is not fit to explain laughter, what is? This is the question posed by Hutcheson in his second letter and the answer he gives is as follows:

> That which seems generally to be the cause of Laughter, is the bringing together of images which have contrary additional ideas, as well as some resemblance in the principle idea: this contrast between ideas of grandeur, dignity, sanctity, perfection, and ideas of meanness, baseness, profanity seems to be the very spirit of burlesque; and the greatest part of our raillery and jest is founded upon it (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 19).

For Hutcheson, the cause of laughter is found in our response to combinations of objects around us, in particular when contrasting objects are found to bear an unexpected resemblance. In making this argument, Hutcheson develops the ideas of others, notably Joseph Addison to whom he refers directly. In *The Spectator* no. 62, Hutcheson notes, Addison ruminated on John Locke's distinction between judgement and wit. The former Locke had described as the capacity to separate ideas from one another, whereas wit lay in the reverse:

> the Assemblage of Ideas, and putting those together with Quickness and Variety, wherein can be found any Resemblance or Congruity thereby to make up pleasant Pictures and agreeable Visions in the Fancy (Hutcheson, 1750, pp. 18–19).[17]

In *The Spectator*, Addison described Locke's account as 'the best and most philosophical Account that I have ever met with of Wit', but added the importance of unexpectedness: not every resemblance is witty, 'unless it be such an one that gives *Delight* and *Surprize*'. And he illustrated his point with an example:

> Thus when a Poet tells us, the Bosom of his Mistress is as white as Snow, there is no Wit in the Comparison; but when he adds with a Sigh, that it is as cold too, then it grows to Wit.[18]

[17] See also *The Spectator*, no. 62 (11 May 1711) and Locke (1690, p. 68).
[18] *The Spectator*, no. 62 (11 May 1711).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246120000132 Published online by Cambridge University Press

For Addison, as for Hutcheson, comic amusement results from a surprising similarity between two ostensibly divergent objects.

Hutcheson differs, however, by extending his theory to encompass our perception more generally of things out of place – a straightforward coming together of contrasting objects with incompatible ideas attached to them. This provides an explanation for why we laugh at things that could not be described as witty in the Addisonian sense. To demonstrate his point, he amasses observations from everyday life. 'Any little accident to which we have joined the idea of meanness, befalling a person of great gravity, ability, dignity', he writes, 'is a matter of Laughter'. This includes, 'the strange contortions of the body in a fall, and the dirtying of a decent dress' or even 'the natural functions which we study to conceal from sight', especially if observed in 'persons of whom we have high ideas' (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 21). He is swift to add that slip-ups are amusing no matter who the perpetrator, since the human form is generally associated with lofty ideas, but the joke is all the better in proportion to the gravity and dignity of those involved. A second example Hutcheson gives of a ludicrous incongruity is when violent passions are raised in response to a minor concern, and a third when writing that 'has obtained an high character for grandeur, sanctity, inspiration or sublimity of thoughts' – such as scripture or ancient philosophy – is applied to 'low, vulgar, or base subjects'. In both cases, the combination 'never fails to divert the audience, and set them a-laughing' (Hutcheson, 1750, pp. 19–22). An example of what Hutcheson might have had in mind here is offered by a ballad called *The Tippling Philosophers*. The work of the prolific and popular satirist, Edward 'Ned' Ward (1666–1731), it was originally published in 1710, but remained popular throughout the century; indeed, James Beattie used what he called 'that excellent English ballad' to illustrate one variety of laughter-triggering incongruity (Beattie, 1776, pp. 360–1). Each verse gleefully asserted that the wisdom of ancient thinkers owed much to wine: 'Aristotle, that Master of Arts', began one, 'Had been but a Dunce without Wine,/ And what we ascribe to his Parts,/Is but due to the Juice of the Vine' (Ward, 1710, pp. 14–15). And another, in full:

Old *Socrates* ne'er was content,
Till a bottle had heighten'd his Joys,
Who, in's Cups, to the Oracle went,
Or he ne'er had been counted so Wise.
Late Hours he certainly lov'd,
Made Wine the delight of his Life,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246120000132 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Or *Xantippe* would never had prov'd,
Such a damnable Scold of a Wife (Ward, 1710, pp. 4–5).

In the preface, Ward described the tavern sociability in which the ballad was first extemporised, before it was embellished and published for others to sing while enjoying a drink of their own. The dignity of ancient philosophy humbled by the more lowly subject of drinking: this was exactly the kind of incongruous juxtaposition of ideas that Hutcheson identified as ludicrous.

Hutcheson's theory of laughter thus has a wide remit, covering words and actions to explain why we laugh in diverse situations, but in each case the perception of incongruity between two objects is crucial. In this respect, it leans heavily upon his notion of the internal senses, which held that certain ideas occur to us whenever we perceive objects or scenes. This becomes clear in the opening passages of his second letter. Referring specifically to the workings of the internal senses, as he saw them, he argues that human nature has 'a great number of perceptions, which one can scarcely reduce to any of the five senses, as they are commonly explained; such as either the ideas of grandeur, dignity, decency, beauty, harmony; or, on the other hand, of meanness, baseness, indecency, deformity'. These different ideas are associated in our minds with material objects, people, and actions, as a result of education, culture, or their natural resemblance. As Hutcheson put it,

> For instances of these associations, partly from nature, partly from custom, we may take the following ones; sanctity in our churches, magnificence in public buildings, affection between the oak and ivy, the elm and vine; hospitality in a shade, a pleasant sense of grandeur in the sky, the sea, and mountains […] solemnity and horror in shady woods. An ass is the common emblem of stupidity and sloth, a swine or selfish luxury […] Some inanimate objects have in like manner some accessary ideas of meanness, either for some natural reason, oftener by mere chance and custom. (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 18)

Laughter is triggered when we perceive associations that are incongruous or unexpected, either in their contrast between 'high' and 'low' – sanctity and profanity, say – or by their surprising similarity. When this occurs to us, it is not our sense of beauty or harmony that is excited, but another internal sense: our 'sense of the ridiculous' (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 27). For Hutcheson, we experience the world through learned patterns, and laugh when we perceive some

disruption to our expectations, or to the routine ways in which we apprehend objects around us.

Modern theorists have described Hutcheson's explanation of laughter as an 'incipient incongruity theory' (McDonald, 2013, p. 49) – the precursor, or first attempt, at one of the 'big three' theories of laughter, and that which is still considered most credible by philosophers and psychologists. It is commonplace in philosophies of laughter to trace a direct line between Hutcheson and modern contributions to the debate. One recent survey, for example, gave a brief account of Hutcheson's contribution before describing the incongruity theory in terms he would have well understood:

> According to the incongruity theory, what is key to comic amusement is a deviation from some presupposed norm – that is to say, an anomaly or an incongruity relative to some framework governing the ways in which we think the world is or should be. (Carroll, 2014, p. 17)

Yet, if we set aside the perspective of hindsight, a different picture emerges. It becomes clear that, for Hutcheson, laughter was a vehicle for his broader philosophical arguments. Logical observation demonstrated that laughter could not be reduced to self-love: there was a good-natured variety that ran counter not just to Hobbes's comments on laughter, but to his brutish notion of human nature more generally. By explaining what *did* cause laughter, Hutcheson also interjects an account of the internal senses. His theory of laughter, therefore, is freighted with significance to contemporary philosophical debates beyond questions of human risibility. Moreover, by writing for an audience of gentlemen coffeehouse goers, he was projecting his ideas outside the confines of scholarly debate. There was more at stake than an explanation of laughter; in the context of eighteenth-century philosophy, Hutcheson's theory was an argument about human nature, and he was writing to persuade a wide audience.

4. The 'proper use' of Laughter

Having dismissed Hobbes, and set out what later became known as the 'incongruity' theory, in his third letter Hutcheson turns to laughter's consequences. These too have important ramifications in their eighteenth-century context, especially concerning the maintenance of politeness in society. 'It may be worth our pains', he begins, 'to consider the effects of Laughter, and the ends for which it was implanted in our nature' (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 27). These two

considerations address what laughter is *for* in human society and his findings fall into three arguments: first that laughter is a means of procuring pleasure; secondly, that it facilitates goodwill and amicable social encounters; and thirdly, that it can persuade people to correct their foibles without causing offence. Together, these comprise what Hutcheson describes as 'the proper use' of laughter, (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 26) but he is at pains to add a number of caveats, especially concerning laughter's targets and who is laughing.

Beginning with the first of Hutcheson's arguments, he considers laughter to have a reciprocal relationship with pleasure. The act of laughing is a pleasurable act, and feeling pleasure renders us more apt to laugh:

> Laughter is an easy and agreeable state, that the recurring or suggestion of ludicrous images tends to dispel fretfulness, anxiety, or sorrow, and to reduce the mind to an easy, happy state; as on the other hand, an easy and happy state is that in which we are most lively and acute in perceiving the ludicrous in objects: anything that gives us pleasure, puts us also in a fitness for Laughter.

Hence, he continues, our 'sense of the ridiculous' provides 'an avenue to pleasure, and an easy remedy for discontent and sorrow' (Hutcheson, 1750, pp. 26–27). That this was the first of laughter's purposes for Hutcheson is characteristic of eighteenth-century thought. Whereas Classical and Christian philosophical traditions had been uneasy about the morality of seeking pleasures of the body and mind, Hutcheson was part of a new way of thinking that accepted pleasure as a natural means to fulfilment. In particular, he contributed to the philosophical reworking of how human motivation was understood, which gave these new ideas about pleasure momentum. The Hobbesian conception of human nature held people to be driven primarily by self-preservation, leading inevitably to competition and conflict, but moral philosophers saw in human nature a natural benevolence. Pleasure is not found in egoistic hedonism, but in altruism, sympathy and sociability: it could therefore be virtuous and gratification of the senses is not reserved for the afterlife, but could, and should, be sought in this world (Porter, 1996, pp. 4–10).

Laughter is particularly beneficial, though, because it is not a lonely pleasure. Modern studies have shown that we are more likely to laugh when we are with other people (Martin, 2006, p. 113; Provine, 1996), but Hutcheson too observes that laughing is primarily something we do together, and it is infectious. As he argued, laughter 'is very contagious; our whole frame is so sociable, that

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246120000132 Published online by Cambridge University Press

one merry countenance may diffuse chearfulness to many'. In this respect, it fosters good nature and geniality:

> It is a great occasion of pleasure, and enlivens our conversation exceedingly, when it is conducted by good nature. It spreads pleasantry of temper over multitudes at once; and one merry easy mind may by this means diffuse a like disposition over all who are in company. There is nothing of which we are more communicative than a good jest. (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 32)

This passage casts laughter as a vital tool in the service of sociability, which was one of the most commendable activities in the pursuit of politeness. As the government of the self and of social relations, politeness was situated above all in the realm of interaction and exchange. Meeting and mixing with fellow humans was thought to have a refining influence on manners and morals (Borsay, 1989, p. 267; Klein, 1994, pp. 3–8 and 96–101). As Shaftesbury put it in *The Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 'We polish one another, and rub off our Corners and rough Sides by a sort of amicable Collision' (Shaftesbury, 1711, I, p. 53). His reference to 'amicable collision' is significant because politeness aspired not just to social interaction, but specifically to social accord. To this end, it called for an open, natural and easy personal manner that rested between the two extremes of frivolous hypersociability and frigid unsociability. The perfect demeanour was neither flighty and frolicsome nor grave and serious. *The Spectator* captured this sentiment when it argued for the benefits of cheerfulness over mirth. The former it considered to be 'an Habit of Mind' that was 'fix'd and permanent' and much preferable to the latter, which was 'short and transient':

> Mirth is like a Flash of Lightning, that breaks thro a Gloom of Clouds, and glitters for a Moment; Chearfulness keeps up a kind of Day-light in the Mind, and fills it with a steady and perpetual Serenity.

As such, a 'chearful Temper' would be 'pleasing to ourselves' and 'those with whom we converse'.[19] This is the same sentiment that underpinned Swift's comments on well-judged laughter in his treatise *On Polite Conversation* discussed above; indeed, the desirability of cheerfulness elaborated on an enduring tradition of thought that rested upon the Aristotelian golden mean. Moral behaviour was found through carving a 'middle way' between two extremes and,

[19] *The Spectator*, no. 381 (17 May 1712).

where laughter was concerned, 'tact' and 'wittiness' were desirable and they lay between buffoonery and boorishness (Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, quoted in Morreall (1987), pp. 14–16). This was retained in the European civility tradition and, in England, scholars have traced a marked upswing the cultural prestige attached to wit from the turn of the seventeenth century. In English translations of European conduct guidance, the old English term 'wit' – pertaining to the powers of the mind – was conflated with ingenuity, meaning inventiveness and imagination. It came to signify a celebrated ability to be entertaining, especially in terms of humorousness (Withington, 2010, pp. 186–98).[20] The ability to sparkle in company continued to be advocated in eighteenth-century polite conduct guidance, and it also permeated less esteemed genres of print. Jestbooks, for example, were commonly published with tips for the delivery of their contents. The title page of *The Nut-Cracker* (1751) advertised its contents of 'an agreeable Variety of well-season'd Jests', along with 'Such Instructions as will enable any Man to […] crack a *Nut* without losing the *Kernel*', i.e. tell the jests successfully (Anon. 1751, title page). When Hutcheson claimed that laughter could 'diffuse chearfulness' and spread a 'pleasantry of temper', he was expanding on a point widely made: that laughter was not just an important part of sharing one another's company, but – with its power to cultivate good humour – it also had a crucial role to play in fostering the social accord and agreeableness to which politeness aspired. To master the art of pleasing in company, a gentleman ought to have a certain cheerfulness and turn of wit.

Thus far in his third letter Hutcheson attended to laughing *with* others, but what should that laughter be targeted *at*? On this point, he contributed to deliberations about the ethics of ridicule and its rhetorical uses.[21] The notion that laughter could correct behaviour had its roots in the satirists of Ancient Greece and Rome; by the early eighteenth century, it was an oft-repeated defence of the satirical mode (Marshall, 2013, pp. 38–53). Writers repeatedly argued that satire upheld morality by subjecting vice to ridicule and Hutcheson agrees. 'If smaller faults […] be set in a ridiculous light', he wrote, 'the guilty are apt to be made sensible of their folly, more than by a bare grave admonition'(Hutcheson, 1750, p. 31). Poking fun at foibles

[20] On wit, see also O'Callaghan (2007), and on civility in early modern England, Bryson (1998).

[21] For debates about ridicule in the eighteenth century, see Klein (2002) and Lund (2012).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246120000132 Published online by Cambridge University Press

would alert offenders to their foolishness and, so the theory goes, they would adjust their behaviour accordingly. Yet, it was not just that people's behaviour could be corrected in this way; it was that doing so was more effective than other means. The common explanation given was that satire entertained as it instructed, but Hutcheson elaborates further. He argues that if we are challenged directly on our faults, we tend to entrench our positions as we defend ourselves; gentle ridicule, on the other hand, puts us at ease and we are more minded to change. The keyword, however, is gentle. Only if our faults are made ridiculous 'with good nature', he argues, can it be 'the least offensive, and most effectual, reproof' (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 31).

Further caveats are littered throughout Hutcheson's third letter, not least as he discusses 'rules to avoid abuse of this kind of ridicule' (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 35). First, ridicule must target only our minor flaws, or habits that are alterable. 'The enormous crime or grievous calamity of another', or 'a piece of cruel barbarity, or treacherous villainy', are not fit subjects for ridicule. Similarly, laughter should not be targeted at 'imperfections, which one cannot amend'. Were we to be caught laughing on such occasions, it would raise disgust at the 'want of all compassion' or 'hardness of heart, and insensibility' such laughter expressed (Hutcheson, 1750, pp. 30–31). A further tranche of prohibited targets for ridicule are those categorised as being 'every way great', whether a great being, character or sentiment. Primarily, the discussion here revolves around religion. Laughter targeted at divine objects or sentiments was a persistent source of anxiety in early modern society,[22] but Hutcheson's theory of laughter also contains a logical rationale for its inappropriateness. If our 'sense of the ridiculous' relies on the perception of surprising resemblances, objects that are 'every way great' cannot bear a resemblance to meanness and thus cannot be brought into a ludicrous pairing.

Stepping back from Hutcheson's text, however, it is hard to escape evidence suggesting that people *did* find plenty of hilarity in the targets Hutcheson condemns. In surviving jestbooks from the period, jokes at the expense of the poor, the disabled, and the otherwise unfortunate come thick and fast. There are tales of tricks played on blind people or amputees, or people with dwarfism gleefully thrown down chimneys or hung on tenterhooks.[23] One jestbook was divided into subsections, including 'Of Crookedness and Lameness', 'Of Faces and Scars', and 'Of Beggars' (Anon, 1760),

[22] For an exploration in the context of the European renaissance, see Screech (1997). See also Gilhus (1997).

[23] Examples discussed in Dickies (2012, esp. chapters 1 and 2).

while a dictionary of slang hinted at the verbal assault suffered by the physically impaired: defining the term 'Lord' as slang for 'a crooked or hump-backed man', it went on to say the following:

> These unhappy people afford great scope for vulgar raillery; such as, 'Did you come straight from home? If so, you have got confoundedly bent by the way' 'Don't abuse the gentleman', adds a by-stander, 'he has been grossly insulted already: don't you see his back's up? (Grose, 1785)

This is to say nothing of the sexual and scatological content.[24] Material such as this was once explained away by classifying it as 'popular' humour, with the implication that it was not for the politer sorts, but this has been difficult to sustain in the face of evidence to the contrary. On the basis of price alone, these texts must have been produced for customers of means: ranging from 1 shilling and 6 pence to as much as 5 shillings, they were beyond the purchasing power of the lower orders. Ownership is more problematic to establish but, where discovered, it is further proof that jestbooks were read by men and women of the middling sort (Dickie, 2012, pp. 30–32).[25] The presence of rude and cruel humour in polite society has often been explained in terms of hypocrisy: this was 'an impolite society that talked a great deal about politeness' (Knights and Morton, 2017, p. 21).[26] Knowledge of what people *were* laughing at certainly reinforces the need to interpret Hutcheson's comments as prescriptive, but it is also worth recognising that he was under no illusions: his effort to delineate appropriate targets for laughter was driven partly by his recognition of 'the impertinence, and pernicious tendency of general undistinguished jests' (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 34). By setting out moral and refined behaviour with respect to laughter, then, Hutcheson was knowingly offering conduct guidance.

Hutcheson's second caveat to the merits of ridicule concerns who was doing the ridiculing. He wrote:

> Ridicule, like other edged tools, may do good in a wise man's hands, though fools may cut their fingers with it, or be injurious to an unwary by-stander. (Hutcheson, 1750, pp. 34–35)

Polite conduct literature routinely instructed readers to adjust their behaviour according to their company (Davison, 2014), and this

[24] This has been discussed in Davison (2014, pp. 937–38) and Gatrell (2006, pp. 178–209).

[25] On jestbooks as a genre, see also Munro and Prescott (2013).

[26] See also Dickie (2012, pp. 1–15) and Gatrell (2006, pp. 176–77).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246120000132 Published online by Cambridge University Press

approach also underpins Hutcheson's advice. Speaking directly to his audience of gentlemen coffeehouse goers, he warns that 'we ought to be cautious of our company'. With 'men of sense' Hutcheson considers it acceptable to venture 'the boldest wit', but around 'people of little judgement' much more care is needed, as they may fail to spot the ludicrous nature of the comparison and take the similarity at face value, hence being 'led into neglect, or contempt, of that which is truly valuable' (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 35). Ridicule in the presence of 'weak company' was to be avoided, as they lack a 'just discernment of true grandeur' and are thus apt to misjudge appropriate targets of laughter. In this respect, Hutcheson carves out a distinction in society on the basis of intellectual capacity and judgement. That much is in line with conventional ideas about the aesthetic appreciation possessed by those with refined taste: taste was, after all, nothing of not a marker of status. But Hutcheson's distinction is also about gender. Just as his theory omits society's lower orders and skims over the existence of impolite humour, he is also silent on the question of women's laughter. This was an omission he shared with ridicule's great advocate, Shaftesbury, who had written 'in defence only of the liberty of the Club, and of that sort of freedom which is taken among gentlemen' (Shaftesbury, 1711, I, p. 75). Hutcheson and Shaftesbury's exclusion of women points to anxieties generated not just by laughter, but by women's laughter in particular. This is a topic that has received little scholarly attention, but it is clear that moral philosophers were not alone in advising against women's use of laughter and wit.[27] Women's conduct guidance was as intricate as that targeted at men and showed a similar concern for moderation, poise and self-restraint.[28] For women, however, chastity and passivity were essential and laughter was thought to jeopardise both. One conduct book noted that women's laughter could be read as a sign of licentiousness. Laughing aloud revealed a knowingness that belied modesty: when a young woman laughs, wrote the author, 'she is believed to know more than she should do' (Gregory, 1774, p. 59). Another conduct book – one of the most prominent for women in the period and also written by a man – advised that 'men of the best sense have been usually averse to the thought of marrying a witty female'; domestic harmony required ease, 'But we cannot be easy where we are not safe. We are never safe in the company of a critic'. And continued, 'Who is not

[27] Two works exploring women's laughter specifically are Brown (2002) and Bilger (1998).

[28] For an exploration of women and politeness see Ylivuori (2018).

shocked by the flippant impertinence of a self-conceited woman, that wants to dazzle by the supposed superiority of her powers?' (Fordyce, 1766, pp. 192–93). The anxiety here is rooted in laughter's perceived force: a wife laughing at her husband could be a moment of challenge to the patriarchal power relations that pervaded society. Hutcheson was one among many to prescribe carefully who ought to wield the power of ridicule.

The discussion of 'the effects of Laughter' in Hutcheson's third letter makes a robust case for its importance in the service of genial sociability and for the power of ridicule to correct minor foibles, thus investing laughter with a key role in the maintenance of politeness in society. Nevertheless, his confidence in laughter's merits was tempered with qualifications, especially regarding the targets of ridicule and *who* was doing the ridiculing. He concluded, 'it may be easy to see for what cause, or end, a sense of the ridiculous was implanted in human nature', but also – crucially – 'how it ought to be managed' (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 32).

5. Conclusion

Since the publication of Hutcheson's *Reflections Upon Laughter* in 1750, philosophers have repeatedly explained human risibility in terms of our perception of incongruities. Later in the eighteenth century, James Beattie's essay 'On Laughter and Ludicrous Composition' invited readers to 'incline to Hutcheson's theory', which he considered 'the best' of those he discussed, before adding his own slight refinement:

> Laughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, or as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them. (Beattie, 1776, pp. 346–47)

For Beattie, we laugh when we perceive a fleeting compatibility between two otherwise incompatible objects, but the contrast between 'dignity and meanness' so important to Hutcheson was set aside. The connection between laughter and incongruity can also be found in the writings of Immanuel Kant. In his *Critique of Judgment*, he described laughter as 'an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing': we laugh when we are prepared for one thing, but meet with another. The sudden shift experienced when we hear a joke generates a sensory pleasure, which

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246120000132 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'gives a wholesome shock to the body' (Kant (1790), quoted in Morreall (1987, p. 45)). Into the nineteenth century, Arthur Schopenhauer argued that the 'source of the ludicrous is always paradoxical': it is found in a mismatch between our expectations and an experienced reality. 'The phenomenon of laughter', he wrote, 'always signifies the sudden apprehension of an incongruity between the abstract and the concrete object of perception', that is, between our idea of things and our sensory experience of them (Schopenhauer (1819), quoted in Morreall (1987, p. 51)). Reflecting on this tradition in 1987, the founder of the International Society for Humor Studies, John Morreall, recognised the merits of an incongruity theory of laughter and argued that 'with proper refinement it can account for all cases of humorous laughter' (Morreal, 1987, p. 130). Over and above superiority and relief theories, then, incongruity theories of laughter are still considered the most persuasive, so it is little wonder that Hutcheson's place in the philosophy of laughter remains secure.

Construing Hutcheson's *Reflections Upon Laughter* solely as an 'incipient incongruity theory', however, detaches the text from its historical context and consequently overlooks what was at stake when arguing about laughter in the early eighteenth-century. Reconnecting it to its contemporary cultural and intellectual debates addresses this blind spot and opens up three further concluding points. First, *Reflections Upon Laughter* emphasises that laughter mattered in eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland. For Hutcheson, it was a subject of fascination, which came with a long tradition of philosophical scrutiny and offered insights into his theories about human nature. It was also a source of unease: an everyday aspect of sharing one another's company, but one with a power that was all too easily abused. With careful management, however, he believed laughter was integral to the maintenance of politeness in society. Hutcheson was also confident that his subject would be of interest – and use – more widely among the newspaper readers of early eighteenth-century Dublin. He knew, as well as historians do now, that the polite world shared both his intrigue and ambivalence about laughter. Secondly, the arguments Hutcheson makes are instructive. In order to rescue laughter from the hostile characterisation bequeathed by earlier thinkers, he implicitly reveals polite aspirations: his effort to identify and define laughter's role in agreeable sociability points to a desire for mutually pleasing social interactions, while his support for ridicule on the grounds that it corrected minor foibles expresses an ambition for conformity to a shared sense of acceptable conduct. His anxieties are equally telling. The condemnation of 'undistinguished jests' reveals an awareness that much humour of the time was anything but

polite, while fears about women's laughter, or about ridicule among 'weak company', point to the inequalities of gender and status that permeated his society. Thirdly, all this emphasises that Hutcheson's text should be interpreted as more than a theory of laughter; it was a contribution to eighteenth-century moral philosophy and polite cultural commentary. Its first purpose was to challenge Hobbesian conceptions of the innate selfishness of human nature and, in doing so, Hutcheson made a case for his theory of internal senses. Its second goal was to set a standard for how laughter ought to be used in society, and by whom. In this respect, it sat comfortably among the swathes of prescriptive literature published in the period, which attempted to refine minds and morals in the pursuit of politeness. Hutcheson argued his case through a focus on laughter, but his underlying intentions ran deeper than accounting for human chortles and chuckles.

Laughter is an human universal, but it is also culturally and historically contingent: what makes us laugh has changed over time, and so too has how we think about and explain that laughter. The question 'why do we laugh?' will go on being asked, as it has done since antiquity, and new answers will be found, especially as scientific disciplines make their presence felt in a debate once dominated by philosophers.[29] From an historical perspective, however, what matters is not what *actually* causes laughter, but why certain answers have been given at certain times. Taking this perspective, any 'limitations' to Hutcheson's *Reflections Upon Laughter* are less important than what it reveals about culture and society in early eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland.[30]

University of Sheffield
kate.davison@sheffield.ac.uk

References

Anon., *The Nut-Cracker* (London, 1751).
Anon., *The Laugher; or, the Art of Jesting* (London, 1760).

[29] See for example, Lavan et al. (2017).

[30] The research in this article was supported by the Wolfson Foundation. I would also like to thank Kenneth L. Pearce and Takaharu Oda for their comments on previous drafts, and participants at the Irish Philosophy in the Age of Berkeley Conference for their questions and discussion.

Anon., *The Polite Academy, or School of Behaviour for Young Gentlemen and Ladies* (London, 1762).
Mahadev L. Apte, *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach* (London: Cornell University Press, 1985).
Jonathan Barry, 'Literacy and Literature in Popular Culture: Reading and Writing in Historical Perspective' in Tim Harris (ed.), *Popular Culture in England, c.1500–1850* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 76–79.
James Beattie, 'On Laughter and Ludicrous Composition' in *Essays* (London, 1776).
Charles Benson, 'The Irish Trade' in Michael F, Suarez SJ, and Michael L. Turner (eds), *The Cambridge History of Book in Britain, Volume* 5: *1695–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 366–82.
Audrey Bilger, *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).
Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).
Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, 'Introduction' in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (eds), *A Cultural History of Humour*: *From Antiquity to the Present Day*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1997).
John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Collins, 1997).
Pamela Allen Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).
Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
Noël Carroll, *Humour: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, *The Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (3 vols, London, 1711).
Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (London: Yale University Press, 2005).
Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and other Episodes in French History* (London: Allen Lane, 1984).
Kate Davison, 'Occasional Politeness and Gentlemen's Laughter in 18th Century England', *The Historical Journal*, 57 (2014), 921–945.

Simon Dickie, *Cruelty and Laughter: Forgotten Comic Literature and the Unsentimental Eighteenth Century* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
Bonamy Dobrée (ed.), *The Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope 4th earl of Chesterfield*, (6 vols, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1932).
Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).
James Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, 2nd edn. (2 vols, London, 1766), I, 192–93.
Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* [1905], trans. James Strachey (New York: Penguin, 1974).
Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Walker and Company, 2006).
M. Gervais and D. S. Wilson, 'The Evolution and Functions of Laughter and Humor: A Synthetic Approach', *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, 80 (2005), 395–430.
Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, *Laughing Gods and Weeping Virgins: Laughter in the History of Religion* (London, Routledge, 1997).
John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*, 4th edn. (London, 1774).
Francis Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London, 1785).
James A. Harris, 'Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and the Moral Sense' in Sacha Golob and Jens Timmermann (eds), *The Cambridge History of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 325–37.
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [1651], /ed. C. B. Macpherson (London: Penguin, 1968).
Francis Hutcheson, *Reflections Upon Laughter, and Remarks Upon the Fable of the Bees* (Glasgow, 1750).
Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* [1790], trans., James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).
Máire Kennedy, '"Politicks, Coffee and News": The Dublin Book Trade in the Eighteenth Century', *Dublin Historical Record*, 58 (2005), 76–85.
Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
Lawrence E. Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century', *The Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), 869–98.
Lawrence E. Klein, 'Ridicule as a Tool for Discovering Truth' in Paddy Bullard (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Eighteenth-Century Satire*, (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2019).

Mark Knights and Adam Morton, 'Introduction' in Mark Knights and Adam Morton (eds), *The Power of Laughter and Satire in Early Modern Britain*: *Political and Religious Culture, 1500–1820* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017), 1–26.

Paul Langford, 'The Uses of Eighteenth-Century Politeness', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* series 6, 12 (2002), 311–32.

Nadine Lavan, Georgia Rankin, Nicole Lorking, Sophie Scott, Carolyn McGettigan, 'Neural Correlates of the Affective Properties of Spontaneous and Volitional Laughter Types', *Neuropsychologia*, 95 (2017), 30–39.

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1690).

Roger Lund, *Ridicule, Religion and the Politics of Wit in Augustan England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

Rod A. Martin, *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach* (Elsevier Science & Technology, 2006).

Ashley Marshall, *The Practice of Satire in England, 1658–1770* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

Paul McDonald, *The Philosophy of Humour* (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2012).

Georg Friedrich Meier, Gedanken von Scherzen [Hemmerde, 1744], trans. Anon., *The Merry Philosopher; or, Thoughts on Jesting* (London, 1765).

John Morreall (ed.), *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (Albany, NY: State of New York Press, 1987).

John Morreall, *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Laughter* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

Ian Munro and Anne Lake Prescott, 'Jest Books' in Andrew Hadfield (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of English Prose 1500–1640* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2013), 343–58.

Michele O'Callaghan, *The English Wits: Literature and Sociability in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Roy Porter, 'Enlightenment and Pleasure' in Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts (eds), *Pleasure in the Eighteenth-Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996).

Robert Provine, 'Laughter', *American Scientist*, 84 (1996), 38–45.

Robert Provine, *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (London: Faber, 2002).

J. Roecklein, *The Psychology of Humor: A Reference Guide and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002).

Michael A. Screech, *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross* (London: Allen Lane, 1997).
Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea* [1819], trans., R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp, 6th edn. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul).
Cathy Shrank, 'Mocking of Mirthful? Laughter in the Early Modern Dialogue' in Knights and Morton, *The Power of Laughter and Satire in Early Modern Britain: Political and Religious Culture, 1500–1820* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017), 48–66.
Quentin Skinner, 'Why Laughing Mattered in the Renaissance', *History of Political Thought*, 22 (2001), 418–47.
Samuel Smilewell, *The Art of Joking* (London, 1774).
Jonathan Swift, *A Treatise on Polite Conversation* (London, 1738).
Elizabeth Telfer, 'Hutcheson's Reflections Upon Laughter', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 53 (1995), 359–69.
Keith Thomas, 'The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England', *Times Literary Supplement* (21 January 1977), 77–81.
Johan Verberckmoes, 'Humour and History: A Research Bibliography' in Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (eds), *A Cultural History of Humour: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1997), 242–252.
John Verberckmoes, *Laughter, Jestbooks and Society in the Spanish Netherlands* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).
Ned Ward, *Wine and Wisdom; or, the Tipling Philosophers* (London, 1710).
Phil Withington, *Society in Early Modern England: The Vernacular Origins of some Powerful Ideas* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).
Soile Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2018).