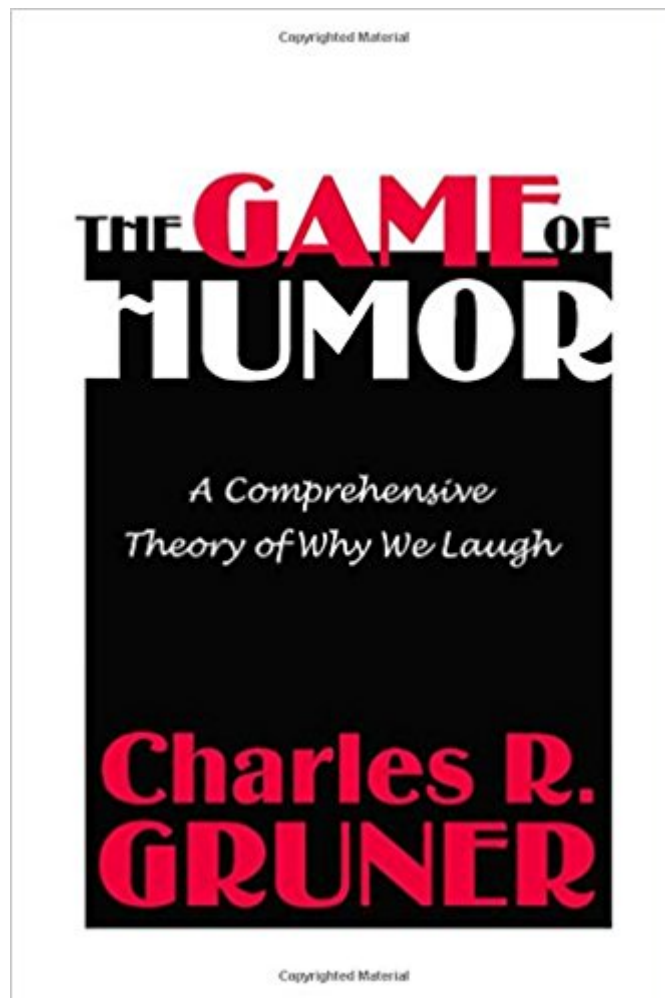




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# The Game Of Humor: A Comprehensive Theory Of Why We Laugh



## Synopsis

Humor, wit, and laughter surround each person. From everyday quips to the carefully contrived comedy of literature, newspapers, and television we experience humor in many forms, yet the impetus for our laughter is far from innocuous. Misfortune, stupidity, and moral or cultural defects, however faintly revealed in others and ourselves, seem to make us laugh. Although discomforting, such negative terms as superiority, aggression, hostility, ridicule, or degradation can be applied to instances of humor. According to scholars, Thomas Hobbes's "superiority theory" — that humor arises from mischances, infirmities, and indecencies, where there is no wit at all — applies to most humor. With the exception of good-natured play, Charles R. Gruner claims that humor is rarely as innocent as it first appears. Gruner's proposed superiority theory of humor is all-encompassing. In *The Game of Humor*, he expands the scope of Hobbes's theory to include and explore the contest aspect of "good-natured" play. As such, the author believes all instances of humor can be examined as games, in terms of competition and keeping score — winners and losers. Gruner draws on a broad spectrum of thought-provoking examples. Holocaust jokes, sexual humor, the racist dialogue of such comic characters as Stepin Fetchit and Archie Bunker, simple puns, and many of the author's own encounters with everyday humor. Gruner challenges the reader to offer a single example of humor that cannot be "de-humored" by its agonistic nature. *The Game of Humor* makes intriguing and enjoyable reading for people interested in humor and the aspects of human motivation. This book will also be valuable to professionals in communication and information studies, sociologists, literary critics and linguists, and psychologists concerned with the conflicts and tensions of everyday life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Gruner expounds on Koestler’s notion that aggression is the one indispensable ingredient for humor by taking on the daunting task of finding aggressive themes in hundreds of instances of humor over a wide historical period. A controversial book written in a confrontational style, which will provide much material for debate.” —K. M. Dillon, *Choice*

Charles R. Gruner is professor of speech communication at the University of Georgia. This is his second volume on humor. His first is *Understanding Laughter*.

The gist of Gruner’s book is this: EVERY instance of humor involves a winner and a loser (like a game). Despite this being a decent observation that pertains to some humor, Gruner claims this is the case of ALL humor. In fact, he goes to great lengths to "demonstrate" how every joke or pun involves a winner and a loser. However, many of his examples are quite stretched to fit his personal grand theory. As far as I was concerned, his credibility fell apart after he refused to admit there were limitations to the generalizability of his theory; and of course there are limitations to every theory. Also, I found the book was quite long-winded and repetitive. It could have all been stated in under 100 pages. If not for the grandiose grand-theorizing and unnecessary long-windedness, I would have given the book 3 stars.

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