

Comments

Louis R. Franzini* Comments on Christie Davies' Review of *Just Kidding: Using Humor Effectively*

Prof. Christie Davies is a scholar with great academic knowledge of humor and its manifestations throughout the world. I have admired him and his work for a long time. I even found his review of my book to be entertaining and informative, despite some occasional lapses into accusatory language and at least one grievous error (Davies, 2013).

The factual error in Davies' scholarship: The amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees our freedom of speech, is the First amendment, not the Second. In a subtle case of irony reflected within Davies' occasionally aggressive review, the Second amendment actually refers to American citizens' "right to keep and bear arms." I trust that he has no intent to do so as part of our collegial discussion.

Davies introduced a lengthy discussion of humor in other countries, whereas *Just Kidding* gives humor's international aspects relatively little attention. Interestingly, he clearly acknowledges, "Franzini's book is for and about America" (p. 103). He adds that "Dutch and French intellectuals" will not like this book. I suspect there are many other intellectuals around the world, also not the book's intended target audience, who would not like it either. There is, of course, a long list of issues and considerations and authors who are not in this or any book. My exclusions include a Davies' favorite, the rather unfunny political satirist P.J. O'Rourke and as well as other authors, who to me are not particularly worthy of our emulation as models of effective humor.

The most shocking aspect of Davies' review to me was his vigorous defense of the inane quotes and malapropisms from Sarah Palin and George W. Bush. *Just Kidding* is not a political book per se and is not intended to indict those from one political party. Note that examples are also included from Barack Obama. Perhaps a European observer has not been as closely attuned to the disproportional frequency and degrees of these prominent GOP members' public gaffes. American comedians and humor writers wept, when Palin and the younger Bush retreated from the front lines of high visibility.

In the book I advise generally to avoid jokes about international disdain, while Davies by contrast suggests reveling in them and rhetorically asks why not. The answer simply is that humor genre generally hurts the people who are the butts of those jokes. The entire theme of this book is to help people augment *effective* humor, which means

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humor that is both funny and also prosocial, constructive, and positive in its consequences. Hurtful humor can sometimes produce big laughs, if you and your country or group are not its targets.

While contemplating Davies' observations in his review, I tried to define just how our points of view differ. Essentially, it seems that Davies favors using humor as an aggressive tool to be invoked in order to win in competitive debating and to achieve power by putdowns. Indeed that can happen. He even claims that "offensive humour in a free society makes people happier..." (p. 103). I respectfully and strongly disagree. My argument is that such strategies and content can be cruel and inappropriate, if one's primary goals are truly to use your humor making to increase social cohesion and greater enjoyment of your relationships and life itself.

Finally, to balance the *ad hominem* equation, I am not and have never been "... a pagan, scripture-denying vegetarian" (p. 104). In return, I merely cite this book review as clear and compelling evidence of Davies' unrestrained prolixity.

Reference

Davies, C. (2013). Review of Louis R. Franzini's *Just Kidding: Using Humor Effectively*. *Israeli Journal of Humor Research*, 1 (#3), 102-109.