Jarno Hietalahti*

An Answer to a Question that Cannot Be Answered: A Pragmatist Approach to Viktor Frankl's and Primo Levi's Theoretical Perspectives on Humor

Abstract: This article offers a pragmatist approach to concentration camp humor, in particular, to Viktor Frankl's and Primo Levi's conceptualizations of humor. They both show how humor does not vanish even in the worst imaginable circumstances. Despite this similarity, it will be argued that their intellectual positions on humor differ significantly. The main difference between the two authors is that according to Frankl, humor is elevating in the middle of suffering, and according to Levi, humor expresses the absurdity of the idea of concentration camps, but this is not necessarily a noble reaction. Through a critical synthesis based on pragmatist philosophy, it will be claimed that humor in concentration camps expresses the human condition in the entirely twisted situation. This phenomenon cannot be understood without considering forms of life, how drastic the changes from the past were, and what people expected from the future, if anything.

Keywords: concentration camp humor, Viktor Frankl, Primo Levi, pragmatism, humanistic philosophy

1 Introduction

Humor has a positive reputation among both laymen and humor scholars; it is widely assumed that a sense of humor is a desirable personality trait that fosters, among other things, well-being (Kuiper and Martin 1998, 159). In addition, humanistic authors such as Simon Critchley (2002) and Richard Norman (2004) claim that we need to be humorous if we are to remain humane. Lydia Amir (2019) argues that a specific humorous worldview, *Homo risibilis*, is the best way to deal with human anxieties. As important as these noteworthy claims are, they should not be taken, however, as ideological truths, but the very meaning of humor for humanity must be put under close scrutiny. In this article, it will

* University of Jyväskylä; jarno.hietalahti@jyu.fi

https://doi.org/10.1515/phhumyb-2021-001

be argued that humor does not have one single purpose, but is a plural feature of human life; humor differs from one situation and person to other, and this does not hold only for, say, joke contents, but more broadly for humor as a social phenomenon too. Humor is a dynamic concept (see Hietalahti 2016).

In this paper, the above-mentioned task is approached from the perspectives of Holocaust survivors Viktor Frankl and Primo Levi. Both of them show how humor remains alive even in the worst possible circumstances, that is, in concentration camps. Even so, in the article it will be argued that their intellectual positions on humor differ significantly from each other. Frankl understands humor as a psychological tool that helps one to rise above the horrible situation; it is a survival mechanism. In the Franklian perspective, humor expresses a struggle against dehumanization in the concentration camps. Levi, on the other hand, represents humor as a reflection of humanity in the unimaginable situation. Following Levi, it is not guaranteed that humor does redeem humanity, but instead, it reveals how flexible the whole idea of humanity is, as well as the idea of humor alongside it. Roughly put, the main difference between the two authors is that according to Frankl, humor is elevating in the middle of suffering, and according to Levi, humor expresses the absurdity of the idea of concentration camps, but this is not necessarily a noble reaction.

This article does not tackle the question whether Frankl and Levi are humorous writers or not. Even though Frankl shares plenty of jokes in his written works (e. g., Frankl 1984; 1988), and Levi has been described as quick-witted (Thomson 2004, 22) and as a humorist (Cicioni 2007), the potential funniness of their writings and their personal taste in humor is left aside in this analysis. Instead, the focus is on how they describe and analyze the phenomenon of humor in the context of concentration camps. The analysis of their intellectual position on humor is based on philosophical pragmatism, and especially on William James's and Sami Pihlström's works in the field. Following James and Pihlström, the idea of plurality of voices and perspectives will be emphasized. Another fruitful idea based on pragmatism is the continuation of experience (see Dewey 1958; 1997). When applied to humor and laughter, it means that they are a part of the existential continuum of human experiences. Humor and laughter do not appear in a vacuum, but always stem from a person's unique life-history in a specific social context (see Hietalahti 2016). This continuum of experiences is pivotal to understanding humor in the camps, as will be shown.

In general, this article aims to show how pragmatist philosophy offers a valuable perspective on understanding humor—previously this philosophical tradition has been on the outskirts of humor studies, if present at all. Obviously, it is unnecessary to claim that a pragmatist perspective is the best and should override all other philosophical positions on humor, because this kind of claim would conflict with basic pragmatist ideals. The pragmatist method is founded on the idea of employing important philosophical distinctions without building controversies or relying on essentialism or accepting pernicious dichotomies (Pihlström 2015b, 37). Therefore, it will be shown that a pragmatist theory of humor is an essential addition to the field of philosophy of humor.

Based on the above-mentioned premises, there is no need to claim that Frankl is more correct than Levi, or *vice versa*, but to show how plural a phenomenon humor is. The pragmatist claim is, then, that to understand humor and its significance, neither perspective should be left out. Furthermore, it is essential to try to understand how humorous occasions in the world appear to us. Both Frankl's and Levi's observations and conceptualizations of humor are important sources in this process. Humor is a human phenomenon (Amir 2019), and when analyzed from a pragmatist perspective, it entwines with the whole wide spectrum of human perspectives and ways of expressing our existential situation in the world. One of the greatest merits of the pragmatist approach is that it does not foster relativism even if the plurality of perspectives and experiences is emphasized (see, e.g., Kivistö and Pihlström 2016, 192–3). It is true that humor is a very personal matter (Ruch 1998) and it is hard to claim that one joke is objectively funnier than another. On the level of experienced amusement, the offered pragmatist approach is very open. However, there is a very strong ethical foundation in pragmatist philosophy[1] that is based on Kantian thinking about the possibility of objective moral values (see Pihlström 2015b). When applied to humor research, this enables us to discuss the moral scope of joking and laughter on a meta-level. It is possible and sensible to claim that humor can and should be evaluated from an ethical standpoint too (see also Amir 2014; 2019). This claim refers especially to the values on which particular jokes or humorous occasions or pranks are based. By acknowledging this aspect, the articulated pragmatist approach tries to understand why humor is expressed and experienced even in the worst circumstances imaginable.

On a conceptual level, humor is understood in the terms of so-called incongruity theory which claims that humor occurs when something goes wrong, so to speak (see, e.g., Raskin 2008). Humor expresses one aspect of the workings of human mind. On a very general level, we try to conceptualize the world in the most accurate way we can, and when there is a contradiction between cultural conceptualizations, humor is potentially triggered (see Raskin 1984). This gener-

1 Of course, there are various forms of pragmatist philosophy, which are not all consistent with each other. For instance, Richard Rorty (e.g., 1991) is a highly provocative and anti-foundationalist pragmatist. In this article, however, the focus is on the Jamesian-Pihlströmian approach.

al position will be complemented via relief theory (see Freud 1968) and superiority theory (see Gruner 2000) when needed. The relief theory claims that laughter signals a relief, be it from physical danger or an illogical puzzle. The superiority theory, then, suggests that we laugh because we feel ourselves superior in comparison to the target of laughter; in short, humor is an expression of superiority.[2] Lastly, laughter refers to laughter triggered by humor, and not, for instance, intoxication.

The article is constructed as follows: First, it will discuss on a general level how humor has been expressed in the concentration camps. Second, it will introduce Frankl's position on humor from the perspective of his logotherapy. Third, Frankl's conceptualization of humor will be both complemented and criticized in comparison to Levi's claims about humor. Fourth and finally, a critical synthesis will be formulated based on the previous section from a pragmatist perspective.

2 Laughter in the Face of the Death: Humor in Concentration Camps

Humor is one of the essential features in humanity (Plessner 1970; Critchley 2002; Norman 2004). Human beings are laughing and joking creatures. Even if some rats may laugh (Panksepp and Burgdorf 2003) and there are claims about joking gorillas (Patterson and Gordon 2002), it is safe to say that other animals do not possess such a wide scope of humor, joking and laughter as human beings. Basically, everyone encounters humorous experiences (see Ruch 1998) and understanding the plurality of these experiences is of central importance from a pragmatist perspective. Humor is uniquely a human feature, and at the same time a sense of humor is a unique attribute of every individual: briefly, everyone has his or her own sense of humor which differs from others' equally unique senses of humor. Even though unique, a sense of humor is a universal feature—there has been laughter in basically every culture throughout history

2 This conceptual framework is intentionally very broad. It helps us to understand the plurality of humor at concentration camps. A more detailed take on the nuances of all three theories is beyond the scope of this article, but will be examined in future research.

(Critchley 2002). To sum up, if human beings were not humorous creatures, we would be a significantly different kind of beings.[3]

The social context is essential when trying to understand individual experiences of humor. Humor triggers, for instance, mirth, amusement, joy and hilarity, and all these are significant only when the joker is in relation to other people (see Cohen 1999; Provine 2000), and when the others have a similar kind of worldview. Philosophically speaking, there cannot be humor without others.[4] This is why a so-called solipsist sense of humor is impossible; we learn the forms and features and plurality of humorous experiences in communicative relationships to others (see Kuipers 2008). But because our individual life experiences strongly influence our personal sense of humor (Ruch 1998), we often fail to understand other people's humor, and this explains why humor is manifested in such plural ways. For some, humor consists mainly in jokes, for others in funny faces and gestures. There are those who emphasize witty texts, and for some the greatest fun is triggered by a release of bodily odors. There is no single fixed normative framework that can state what is a proper or the highest form of humor, because all the above-mentioned aspects are relevant to the phenomenon of humor. Indeed, all that is human can be presented as humorous (Kinnunen 1994), and therefore nothing is categorically non-humorous. At least in principle, we can joke about everything.

However, the technical possibility of joking about everything does not imply that all kinds of joking are appropriate. The question of appropriateness is especially important for this paper because the main topic is sensitive: humor in the context of concentration camps. A gut feeling says that the whole idea is tasteless. Concentration camps are the worst imaginable situations in human history, and it is vulgar to focus on the humorous aspects of such contexts. However, trying to understand the phenomena of humor and laughter in these surroundings is an attempt to understand humanity in the most extreme situations; humor is essentially human, and it does not disappear even in the worst imaginable conditions. This article does not by any means try to question the indescribable human suffering of the camps by claiming that it could not have been so hard if the prisoners had fun in the camps. Quite the contrary, the text humbly reminds us that there is humor even in the worst places.

---

3 It is hard to make claims about the possible sense of humor of the earliest *Homo sapiens* and other humans, say, from 12,000 years ago, but in principle, humor is potentially as old as conceptual thinking.

4 Of course, it is possible to laugh all alone, but this laughter too is based on the sociability of human life.

Obviously, there are a lot of jokes about The Third Reich (see Spalding 2001). The primary distinction is between the jokes that laugh at Jewish suffering, and those that laugh with the Jews. At the first glance, the former group of jokes is tasteless, and the latter potentially oxymoronic, because it is easy to think that one should not laugh about such situations. Let us have two examples. Whilst the tone of the first one is appalling, the distinction between the two is important for understanding the scope of the philosophical approaches:

Q: How many Jews will fit in a Volkswagen?
A: 506. Six in the seats, and 500 in the ashtrays.

Solomon, an elderly Holocaust survivor, dies and goes to heaven. When he gets there, he asks to tell God a joke. God agrees and Solomon tells the Almighty a Holocaust joke. When he is finished, God does not laugh. "I guess you had to be there," Solomon says.

The difference in tone between the two jokes is evident. The first is straightforward and aggressive: the unnamable suffering of the Jewish people during the Nazi regime is ridiculed without a grain of compassion. From a moral point of view, the first joke aims at cheap laughs through a simple shock. The second is more complicated. Someone can consider it tasteless as well, but the punchline turns the tables around. Again, the absurdity of the suffering is present, but this joke laughs at the expense of God, not the Jews. It refers to theodicy (see Kivistö and Pihlström 2016); if God is omnipotent and all-powerful, why did he let the concentration camps happen? Did he turn his back to this insane torment? The joke itself provides no answer.

Alan Dundes and Thomas Hauschild locate jokes that handle the topic of concentration camps to the category "gallows humor," and claim that they offer relief from a tension—these kinds of jokes are a defense mechanism (Dundes and Hauschild 1983, 249). A similar suggestion has been made among others by Theodor Reik (1962) and by Avner Ziv and Anat Zajdman (1993). Liat Steir-Livny points out that this type of humor can threaten the sanctity of the memory of Holocaust and hurt survivors' feelings, but on the other hand, Holocaust humor offers an alternative and subversive way of remembering the horrors of the Nazi regime. The topic is ambiguous: it can cheapen the trauma and degrade the survivors (as well as those who did not survive), but it can function as a tool for social cohesion too (Steir-Livny 2017, 7–8). In addition, studying this kind of humor offers perspectives on the plurality of humanity itself.

Evidently there are concentration camp jokes, but John Morreall further claims that there was humor during the Holocaust, and that this humor had three distinct functions: (1) humor sparked resistance, (2) it created solidarity among the prisoners, and (3) humor helped the oppressed to survive in the middle of their suffering. According to Morreall, through humor Adolf Hitler and other powerful characters of the Third Reich regime (as well as their propaganda) were ridiculed. For instance, there were specific cabarets which produced humor critical of the Nazis. Eventually, it did not take too long for the authorities to close the cabarets, and many of the performers were sent to prison camps (Morreall 2009, 119–23).

However, the imprisonment did not end the cabarets, but continued in altered forms in the new circumstances. Even though some SS troopers watched the shows, and some of them continued over weeks, the prisoners were pleased with the outcome: Nazis did laugh and enjoy the shows, but survivors have reported that these shows actually made the Nazis look ridiculous and strengthened the will to survive because the morale of the prisoners was supported through humor (Morreall 2009, 123–4). A similar spark of humorous resistance is present in the sabotage inmates exercised when possible. The inmates perpetrated, for example, little humorous misdeeds in the factories which filled them with small-scale joy, but they also caused damage in the camps, accompanied by (presumably silent) laughter:

> "The big roof trusses we put up on the worksite kept falling down and smashing because we never tightened the bolts," remembered Alfred Battams. "You have to laugh—it's the good times you remember." (Thomson 2004, 195)

In a similar sprit, many scholars have argued for the psychological benefits of such humor in the most dreadful human situation. It helps to retain the last bits of humanity (e.g., Freud 1968a; Critchley 2002; Morreall 2009). In the concentration camps, dehumanization was the main aim of the oppressors (Thomson 2004), and this was countered through humor and laughter, even if the circumstances were horrible and life awfully cheap. Morreall (2009, 124) argues that the following joke from the period sums up how humor promoted criticism, solidarity and survival:

> Goebbels was touring German schools. At one, he asked the students to call out patriotic slogans.
> "Heil Hitler," shouted one child.
> "Very good," said Goebbels.
> "*Deutschland über alles*," another called out.
> "Excellent. How about a stronger slogan?"
> A hand shot up, and Goebbels nodded.
> "Our people shall live forever," the little boy said.
> "Wonderful," exclaimed Goebbels. "What is your name, young man?"
> "Israel Goldberg."

It is important to note that even if the stories about concentration camp humor focus mainly on the humor used by the prisoners, the oppressors also had their sense of humor. The horrible suffering was amusing at least to some.[5] Ian Thomson notes how cheap life was at the camps, and this would be humorous to some of the guards. For instance, if a prisoner did not understand German, she or he was in trouble, because this would increase the likelihood of an untimely death. Thomson writes how one Italian prisoner did not recognize his tattooed prison number when it was called in German, "and by the time he got to the soup queue he was told with a smirk 'Too late!'" (Thomson 2004, 179). Of course, all the camp personnel may not have had a similarly sadistic sense of humor. As described by Morreall above, the Nazis did laugh with the cabaret shows, and this is a modest proof of their capacity for humor—even if the contents of the shows were interpreted differently by the oppressors than by the prisioners.

Generally speaking, one of the central functions of concentration camps was to crush the human spirit of the prisoners and to dehumanize them. For instance, the numbers tattooed on prisoners were an insult to Jewishness because tattoos are considered sacrilegious and forbidden by the law of Moses. There were also smaller-scale humiliations which were nevertheless significant in this process. For example, newcomers did not receive spoons, and without them, they had to eat like animals. The distinction between a proper human being, a Nazi, and a worthless inmate was made evident (Thomson 2004, 168–70). Again, it is safe to assume that this kind of treatment was amusing to at least some of the guards.

Even if humor may have helped some prisoners to remain sane (which is a great merit of humor) it would be too easy, and intellectually dishonest, to claim that humor is always humane and hopeful, and that the Nazis could not have a sense of humor because they did such disgusting and appalling things to their victims. Unfortunately, humor is not solely a humanely good device contributing to better forms of living; it can function as a tool of oppression too (see Kuipers 2008). For example, Frankl describes how newcomers to the prison camps were put in two lines. These lines dictated their destinies:

> Those who were sent to the left were marched from the station straight to the crematorium. This building, as I was told by someone who worked there, had the word "bath" written

5 Different kinds of dehumanizing customs help to mold the human psyche. Therefore, it is plausible that ridiculing prisoners would give psychological distance from another human being, and eventually help to think that such a creature is not actually a human being—or not an equal, at the very least. So, it is possible to think that humor offered psychological distance for the guards too.

> over its doors in several European languages. On entering, each prisoner was handed a piece of soap, and then … but mercifully I do not need to describe the events which followed. (Frankl 1984, 31)

Obviously, for a contemporary reader the above description is awful, but there is a possible trace of humor within—as tasteless as it may be. For a sadistic personality, a power to control others' destinies without their knowledge can be joyful, and if humor is based on contradictions, then the idea of offering soap and bath to a dirty traveler (when in reality they are going to be murdered) is potentially funny. Social philosopher and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm has analyzed this trait in his works about human aggressiveness (although not particularly in the context of concentration camps), and goes through the forms of sadism Josef Stalin embraced:

> One particular form Stalin enjoyed was to assure people that they were safe, only to arrest them a day or two later. Of course, the arrest hit the victim all the more severely because he had felt especially safe; besides that, Stalin could enjoy the sadistic pleasure of knowing the man's real fate at the same time that he was assuring him of his favor. What greater superiority and control over another person is there? (Fromm 1973, 285)

Fromm also notes that Adolf Hitler had a sense of humor which fits with his overall personality. Hitler used to joke about "corpse tea" while offering meat-based dishes to his guests, even though Hitler himself was a vegetarian. If he offered crayfish, he tended to tell a story about his dead grandmother being used as bait to catch it, or if the dinner contained eels, he would say that they were best fattened by using dead cats (Fromm 1973, 402).

A sense of humor is arguably one of the central character traits (see Kuiper and Martin 1998), but even so, one should not be too eager to claim that a sense of humor always reveals the overall personality of the joker. Our relationship to humor can consist of mixed elements. Let us have an example. According to Hannah Arendt, Adolf Eichmann—one of the major organizers of the Holocaust—was about to become a member of the Freemasons' Lodge *Schlaraffia* before he entered the SS. Lodge *Schlaraffia* was a society which cultivated merriment and gaiety, and its members had to give lectures about the nature of humor in a humorous manner. Eichmann clearly had modest tendencies in his humor, but then, during his trial on his crimes against the Jewish people, he declared that he would jump into his grave laughing while knowing that he played a major part in the Holocaust. He admitted that he worked during the first phases of "The Jewish Question" gladly and joyfully. Arendt argues that the scariest aspect of the whole trial was to realize that Eichmann was not a monster but an ordinary human being. In him, the banality of evil became evident, and Arendt understood that even so-called normal people can do, or at least accept, horrible deeds (Arendt 1965). Eichmann is an example of person who could laugh joyfully about the silliness of the world (as his relation to the Lodge *Schlaraffia* suggests) but his humor reflects its appaling aspects too. All of this suggests, for instance, that the camp guards also had senses of humor that were not necessarily aimed at humanely good objectives.

3 Laughing to Find Oneself: Viktor Frankl and Humor as a Tool for Survival

Frankl is the most famous defender of survival humor. He is known as the father of logotherapy a form of psychoanalysis aimed at finding a meaning for life, i.e., something worth pursuing, a *logos*. Frankl argues that one should not focus too much on past experiences but instead on what one can achieve in one's life. He claims that we should not be too obsessive about asking what the world has to offer to us, but quite the contrary, we should ask what we can offer to the world (see Frankl 1984). To be able to answer this question, we need to understand ourselves: who we are and what our aims are in life. He also claims that if life has a meaning, then suffering must have a meaning too (Frankl 2020). In this process of finding a meaning for one's life, Frankl suggests, humor and laughter are essential elements. In an oft-quoted passage, he describes humor as a form of human dignity.

> He [an outsider] may be even more astonished to hear that one could find a sense of humor there [in concentration camps] as well; of course, only the faint trace of one, and then only for a few seconds or minutes. Humor was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation. It is well known that humor, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds. (Frankl 1984, 63)

A sense of humor, according to Frankl, is a feature that is learned throughout life. This feature is (potentially) present in every imaginable circumstance, even in the concentration camps, where suffering is total. In this context, relatively trivial things become sources of joy. For instance, after being transferred to a new camp from Auschwitz, people rejoiced when they heard that there were no gas chambers:

> we had come, as quickly as possible, to a camp which did not have a "chimney"—unlike Auschwitz. We laughed and cracked jokes in spite of, and during, all we had to go through in the next few hours. (Frankl 1984, 65)

Frankl's ideas resonate very well with Sigmund Freud's insights about jokes and laughter, that they offer a relief. This relieving mechanism functions in two ways: firstly, humor[6] offers a way to rise above an emotionally tough situation, and secondly, it enables us to see the world from a new perspective. Humor functions as a steam valve, and the inner tension is relieved through laughter. Physiologically speaking, people laugh more easily if there is a momentary relief in a stressful situation (see Freud 1968a, also Freud 1968b). The main idea Freud offers is that we have both internal obstacles (e. g., constituted through shame) and external boundaries (e. g., constituted through social expectations) which limit our behavior, but these can be bypassed by means of humor. A typical example is when we say something jokingly, but we do not consider the joke a serious speech-act. ("I was only joking!" is a typical defense after a silly statement). However, Freud (1968a) claims that jokes become quite serious when they are interpreted psychoanalytically. These basic ideas are important for Frankl too, who wants to understand how humor can be used to find a meaning in life.

For instance, Frankl used humor in a therapeutic process he calls a "paradoxical intention" (see, e. g., Lewis 2016). This type of therapy encourages patients to face their fears and to ridicule the anxious situation (and themselves to a certain extent). Frankl argues that self-detachment is an exquisite capacity that can be achieved through humor even in the worst possible conditions. In his more poetic formulations, Frankl calls humor a divine attribute which offers a unique perspective, and at least in principle, everyone is capable of laughing at themselves: "By virtue of this capacity man is capable of detaching himself not only from a situation but also from himself. He is capable of choosing his attitude toward himself. By so doing he really takes a stand toward his own somatic and psychic conditions and determinants" (Frankl 1988, 17).

Maria Marshall (2011, 68) has listed various effects of humor in the Franklian therapeutic process which is aimed at understanding and gaining control over distressful symptoms:

1. Self-distancing from the symptoms to gain perspective;
2. Detailed explanation of paradoxical intention and the sharing of case histories;
3. Collaborative creation of exaggerated symptoms in ways that appeal to the patient's unique sense of humour;
4. Role-playing the humorous formulations during therapy sessions until the patients' sense of humour is fully activated;

6 Freud does not use the term "humor" in a similar sense as in this article but talks about the comic and jokes. I interpret these terms to mean humor in approximately the same sense that is typical among modern humor researchers. About the specific meaning of the term humor for Freud, see Freud 1968b.

5. Practicing the humorous formulations before or in actual fearful situations.

Humor becomes, then, a form of self-detachment, and through this mechanism one distances oneself from stressful situation. Frankl already practiced a primitive form of this type of therapy in the camps. He describes how he wanted to develop one of his fellow prisoner's sense of humor in the following way. The basic idea is that if a prisoner has nothing to lose but her or his "ridiculously naked" life, they might as well laugh at their situation.

> I suggested to him that we would promise each other to invent at least one amusing story daily, about some incident that could happen one day after our liberation. He was a surgeon and had been an assistant on the staff of a large hospital. So I once tried to get him to smile by describing to him how he would be unable to lose the habits of camp life when he returned to his former work. On the building site (especially when the supervisor made his tour of inspection) the foreman encouraged us to work faster by shouting: "Action! Action!" I told my friend, "One day you will be back in the operating room, performing a big abdominal operation. Suddenly an orderly will rush in announcing the arrival of the senior surgeon by shouting, 'Action! Action!'" (Frankl 1984, 63–4)

In this passage, it becomes evident that, for Frankl, humor is a defense mechanism that helps one to distance oneself from horrible situations. If one can combine incongruent elements (e.g., concentration camp routines and so-called normal life), the synthesis is readily humorous, and offers a momentary relief. Like Freud (1968b) claims, one is psychologically able to rise above one's current circumstances, and this is a way to release inner tension. Obviously, humor rarely changes the circumstances themselves, but it does change the way one relates to them.

However, the idea of humor as a safety valve is not the only aspect of Frankl's account: humor and laughter are forms of power too. This aspect is slightly more subtle in Frankl's works. He notes that while people are ridiculing their circumstances and their symptoms, they should not ridicule their own overall personality. They may laugh at themselves, but this is (hopefully) self-gratifying laughter (Frankl 1984; 1988). If one were to laugh at one's whole personality, that would be potentially a sign of a severe mental disorder, and it would be difficult to understand the subject-object relation of such self-ridiculing (see Hietalahti 2015). This notion of laughter hints that, in general, ridiculing something is an act of power—the very same idea is at the core of the superiority theory of humor (see Gruner 2000). Through laughter one feels oneself superior in comparison to the ridiculed target. Therefore, it is essential for Frankl that one does not ridicule oneself entirely because that would be against the goal of finding dignity and meaning in one's life.

In Frankl's view, the sense of meaninglessness is the gravest disadvantage of humanity, and one needs to find a meaning, *logos*, for her or his life. If one cannot overcome the nagging and fundamental experience of purposelessness, life withers away even in the midst of material flourishing (Frankl 1984; 1988). Ridiculing one's own personality, dreams, goals and life in general would go against finding any meaning in life. However, even if the world itself appears to be absurd and full of suffering, through a humorous mental orientation it is possible to find some sense and joy in life. Albert Camus has described this kind of position in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (2005) in which Sisyphus, who is doomed to repeat a dull and meaningless job eternally, should be imagined happy because he creates his own attitude towards his hellish destiny. There is mirth in the myth of Sisyphus. Similarly, Frankl suggests that with the help of humor, it is possible to see that one's own life situation is not entirely hopeless even in the camps. In this sense, Frankl's position on the significance of humor is comforting: humor and the purpose of life go hand in hand. This also happens in the concentration camps. Frankl has famously claimed that this meaning should not be construed as selfish because it is essential to ask how one can improve the lives of others and find meaning through them. To live for others is a guideline for humor too: it is not enough to be amused, but one must also amuse others if amusement is a sensible part of meaningful life.

4 The Unspeakable Humor: Primo Levi and the Silence of Laughter

As hopeful as Frankl is about humor and its significance for human life, another concentration camp survivor, Jewish Italian Primo Levi, suggests that we should be careful with our possibly idealistic thinking. This should be applied to our understanding of humor too. *Esageroma nen*, let's not exaggerate, one of Levi's leading virtues (see Thomson 2004, 17), is a fruitful idea to be applied in humor research as well.

Levi understands humor along the lines of the incongruity theory. Levi's perspective on humor can be traced to the very core of humanity, which is constituted by a contrast between two forms of living. According to Levi, human beings are paradoxical creatures. He writes that "man is a centaur, a tangle of flesh and mind, divine inspiration and dust" (Levi 1984, 9). Even though Levi focuses on this particular passage especially on the Jewish tradition, his ideas are applicable to all of humanity: human life is based on an inherent contradiction between "divine vocation and the daily misery of existence" (Levi 1984, 10). This insight explains why human life in general is humorous. Humor lies in paradoxes and conflicts, and if humanity involves an inner contradiction, there is always room for humor. The basic formulation of this kind of theoretical approach is simple: humor occurs when two apparent culturally incongruous conceptualizations are put together in a surprising way (see, e. g., Raskin 1984), and this tendency is at the very core of humanity itself.

Levi has an ethical tone and a somewhat hopeful attitude in his writings. Mirna Cicioni claims that in Levi's thinking, humans are tangles of incompatible elements, but there is still progression from darkness towards light (Cicioni 2007, 137). This is an important notion if we are to understand the : if an object is laughable, it is typically stupid or unworthy. Altogether, Levi mentions laughter a few hundred times, and not being a philosopher of humor, does not always use the term in a coherent way (see Levi 2015). However, the possibly contradictory claims about humor and laughter do not jeopardize the enterprise to understand his position on humor.

Obviously, the completed works of Primo Levi offer evidence for other kinds of interpretations of humor than are highlighted by the incongruity theory. For instance, every now and then in his texts, laughter signals relief, at times it describes superiority over others, and there is sometimes a degrading element present too: if an object is laughable, it is typically stupid or unworthy. Altogether, Levi mentions laughter a few hundred times, and not being a philosopher of humor, does not always use the term in a coherent way (see Levi 2015). However, the possibly contradictory claims about humor and laughter do not jeopardize attempts to understand his position on humor. Actually, he should not be categorized as a supporter of any single fixed theoretical idea, but instead, we need to recognize the fruitfulness of the plurality of his ideas. True, Levi writes how there could be salvation through laughter (see Cicioni 2007, 138), which refers to the relief theory, but this hardly puts him in the same category with, for example, Frankl. If instead the human being is a paradoxical creature, as Levi hypothesizes, it is understandable that humor, too, can be manifested in various ways. It can signal both the loss of order and certainty as well as the overcoming of the fear of chaos (see Cicioni 2007, 138).

In *If This Is a Man* (2013), Levi describes the varieties of laughter in the concentration camps, and the diverse things people expressed through laughter. For instance, when people were loaded onto a packed truck to be transported to camps, a guard eventually asked them to give their valuables away, and this "stirs us to anger and *laughter* and brings relief" (Levi 2013, 22; emphasis mine). This laughter is a sign of comprehension of the absurdity of the situation. The ordinary rules and rights to possessions are gone, and everyone gives their potentially valuable objects away even though there is not a strict order or regulation for this. The whole situation Levi describes is, besides being humorous, also frustrating and in an odd way relieving. The event signals that the world itself has become a queer place; there is no security, just nagging uncertainty that, however, is not entirely without comic aspects.

In the camps, the prisoners have entered a new reality. This triggers laughter every now and then despite the horrors around. In the middle of pain and torture, there is a variety of laughter. In newcomers, laughter is an apparent sign of disbelief and puzzlement, in guards, a sign of sadism, and in older prisoners, a sign of painful comprehension of the new reality. For the latter, the long-established conceptualizations about, say, human dignity, do not hold anymore, and the new social reality triggers dry laughter (if any). They understand the reasons for the experienced incongruity and why the apparently incongruent aspects cannot be reconciled (see Cicioni 2007, 142). For them, laughter does not offer salvation.

If we are true to Levi's virtues of carefulness, we need to be careful with our analysis of concentration camp humor as well. It would be illusory to think that all the prisoners had humane senses of humor, and that the guards were the only sadists in their laughter. Levi understands how these kinds of circumstances can transform human beings into beasts, and it is fully understandable that there was sadistic humor among the prisoners too. He experienced this on a very personal level:

> The higher-ranked inmates despised inept greenhorns like Levi, whose serial number 174517 instantly betrayed his freshman status and put him at the bottom of the camp's pecking order. In the first week Levi had naively believed a Yiddish-speaking *Häftling* [prisoner] when he told him: "You don't like what you do? Go peel potatoes, then." Levi asked if he could join a "Potato Peeling Work-Detail", and for his ignorance was viciously beaten by a *Kapo* [prisoner functionary], while the others stood by laughing. (Thomson 2004, 171)

In the quotation above, laughter divides newcomers from the longer-term prisoners. The newcomers want to understand the horrible conditions, and they want to find at least some sense in the new context. They yearn for a continuum of experience, but this is rarely possible. Levi writes how those who had been at the camp just for a short while eventually asked how long they would stay in this new mad situation. There was no verbal answer to their inquiry, but

> the old hands laugh at this question: by this question they recognize the new arrivals. *They laugh and do not reply.* For them, the problem of the distant future grew dim months ago, years ago, having lost all intensity in the face of the far more urgent and concrete problems of the immediate future: how much they will eat today, if it will snow, if they will have to unload coal. (Levi 2013, 94; emphasis mine)

Here Levi describes, first, the incongruent element between two languages: the newcomers are still bound to the so-called ordinary world and normality, whereas the older ones have embraced a new social reality. In this context, it is ludicrous, perhaps insane, to think along the lines of the old world, because the old laws and conceptualizations do not apply anymore. However, the tension between the two forms of perceiving the world is fully understandable, as William James explains. Typically, people live oriented towards the future, but their understanding is directed to the past—we need to be able to get along on a daily basis while predicting the short-term future to the best of our knowledge (James 2004). This is very human: we understand the current situation on the basis of past experiences, and through them, we anticipate the future. But the concentration camps have altered the prisoners' reality, and the mixture of human experiences does not offer a solid foundation for comprehension (not to mention survival). Those who want to live, need to live in the new circumstances.

The second aspect of the quotation above is even more philosophical: laughter is an answer to a question (how long do inmates need to stay in the camp) that cannot be answered. Of course, a historian could calculate later on how many days the prisoners typically stayed in a camp and give a "right answer" to the question. However, in the context of the concentration camp, laughter expresses that the question itself is absurd if one has embraced the laws of the altered reality. Even though the words of the question are comprehensible, they signify different things to the different language-users. Following Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1986) idea about language games, the question is as incomprehensible as the following would be to us: "Is more nuanced than common or a desktop?" Wittgenstein's idea about worldview, a form of life (see Wittgenstein 1986; Hunter 1968), is essential to understanding language and humor alongside it: worldview is the background which gives meaning to various forms of humor, and the forms of life of the "old hands" and newcomers are different when the crucial question is asked. At this point, laughter indicates an abyss between the two different worldviews.

Following Levi, the above distinction between different inmates is not fixed. There are also comforting tones in his writings, like in *The Periodic Table* (1984), where he mentions that human beings' destiny is to make mistakes—and to correct themselves (Levi 1984, 73). If we take this idea is seriously, the older prisoners' laughter is not necessarily degrading or a sign of superiority, but potentially a reminder to observe the reality from a different perspective. Henri Bergson (1913) make this kind of observation where he argues that laughter is always a social corrective: we laugh at people's flaws and through laughter punish them. But this punishment is pedagogical—it aims to help people to behave in a more human manner. (For Bergson, the ridiculous are those who act like machines whereas human beings should be flexible). In Bergson's theoretical framework, when something silly is observed, first comes the pain (through laughter) and after that immediately the cure (people will avoid looking ridiculous when they behave correctly).[7] Dry laughter in the concentration camps suggests that one should alter her or his vision of the prevailing actuality.

As hopeful as this position is, unfortunately it is implausible to claim that humor would always help correcting people. Cicioni notes that in Levi's works there is often a tragic element present. For instance, when Levi and a Polish inmate tried to share their experiences, neither could express the newly found horror (of the concentration camp) in their native language. The common ground, then, was found from the language of the camp, German: *Lager*. The language of the common enemy was the only one they used to express their situation in the middle of the suffering. There is evident irony in these conditions because the whole situation is so incongruous: concentration camps should not be possible, but they were most real for the prisoners. In addition, there is also the painful awareness when both prisoners comprehend the incongruity and how the reasons behind the incongruity cannot be reconciled. Cicioni argues that for Levi, humor highlights the tangles within human reality; life, as well as values and assumptions, is uncertain, and reality is not a coherent whole. The very same holds for human experiences, and if humor and laughter are able to reveal this absurdity of life, it may offer a salvation through accepting the contradictions and differences we all face (Cicioni 2007, 141–2; 151).

5 Pragmatist Perspectives: A Critical Synthesis

Pragmatism offers an insightful standpoint for understanding humor in the context of the concentration camps. From a pragmatist perspective, the plurality of human experiences is pivotal. Very broadly taken, pragmatism understands human agents and the world as inseparable; the world is constituted by the people living in it (see, e.g., Legg and Hookway 2020). Because the guards and inmates did not constitute a coherent whole, it is evident that humor at the camps had various manifestations and that humor was expressed in many different ways. The voices of humor were heterogenous to say the least.

---

7 Obviously, Bergson did not study humor and laughter in concentration camps, but his main idea is still applicable: laughter should be analyzed in its natural surroundings, that is, in a specific social context (see Bergson 1913).

On a general level, pragmatism is an inherently pluralistic and practice-oriented standpoint which avoids ultimate commitments without falling into uncritical relativism (Pihlström 2015b, 58–60). Following Hilary Putnam, a pragmatist approach is sympathetic to rejecting unnecessary dichotomies like those between of facts and values, thoughts and experiences, by emphasizing the significance of practice (Putnam 1994). From this position, it is possible to understand the various manifestations of humor in concentration camps and offer an explanation: humor is a plural phenomenon that can be appreciated and criticized from multiple standpoints, including for example a moral standpoint. The prisoners had their humor, but so did the Nazis. They all expressed their agency in the queer situation through humor.

The idea of plurality of experiences has been especially important for William James who did not explicitly analyze humor, but his theory about varieties of religious experience may be fruitfully applied to humor research. James presents pragmatism as a "method for settling metaphysical disputes that might otherwise be interminable" (James 2004, Lecture II), and emphasizes that the intellectual differences should be examined through practice. In this task, it is central to consider the conceivable practical effects of different positions (ibid.). For instance, James considers formal religions questionable, but sees religious experience as among the most important factors in human life (James 2014, 51; 402, see also Campbell 2009). He further claims that we should tolerate and respect those who seem to be happy in their own ways even if their habits appear unintelligible to us. The whole truth of a phenomenon is rarely in the eye of one beholder, although every perspective should be respected in an intellectual sense (James 2005, Talks to Students II). This idea is very applicable to humor research too. Humor in the concentration camps clearly shows that not all humor is humane, divine or valuable—and it is essential to take this critical stance towards humor in general.

In the field of philosophy of religion James emphasizes the significance of the "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine" (James 2014, 32). Similarly, when trying to understand humor as a personal and a social phenomenon, it is essential to try to understand the practical scope of humor and laughter, and the vast spectrum of personal experiences of humor. For instance, engaging in humorous activities that may appear entirely non-significant in any instrumental sense (e. g., sharing old jokes) may be highly important and satisfactory from a deeper, humane, perspective. It is wrong to demand that humor should lead to, say, survival to be significant. Analogously, and again in the field of philosophy of religion, James writes that religion is not for mere survival, but it must "exert a permanent function, whether she be with or without intellectual content, and whether, if she has any, it be true or false" (James 2014, 498). Religion, like humor, does not need to adhere to the demands of broader theories or official expectations. Instead, as it is highlighted in pragmatism, the functionality of the subject matter, or the practical bearing of conceptions, is much more important. Therefore, the idea that one perspective on humor would be true and others false, is dubious. Even if on a theoretical level humor can be proven to be a tool for survival, it is intellectually questionable to focus only on this aspect of humor. The possible element of survival is of course one important aspect of humor, but humor in totality cannot be reduced to this concept. In the context of concentration camps, the problem lies in the fact that then only those who survived have the opportunity to share their ideas about the functions of humor. In addition, if one does not recognize that the Nazis had a sense of humor too, then the overall conceptualization of humor becomes distorted.

Levi emphasizes the silent voices of those who did not survive (see Levi 2015). Pihlström (2020) notes that the "drowned," as Levi calls those who died at the camps, do not have a chance to express their views. In relation to this article, if the focus is solely on the survival techniques of the survivors, it is all too easy to forget that even those who were killed at the camps most likely had their way of laughing and perceiving humorous contradictions. For them, humor was not a successful tool for survival. Therefore, it is problematic to emphasize only the rescuing elements of humor. If the focus is on the survival aspect, then there is a danger of inferring that the drowned did not have a proper understanding of humor, or that they failed to engage humorously in order to maximize their chances of survival. Pihlström notes how Max Horkheimer has pointed out that the nameless martyrs of the camps symbolize a form of humanity that attempts to be seen. The ethical task of a philosopher, then, is to translate their actions to a language that can be heard (Pihlström 2010, 166). This holds for the attempt to understand humor in the context of concentration camps. In addition, if the focus is solely on the camp survivors, one easily forgets that the prison guards had also their unique sense of humor, and that among inmates, humor was plural too.

James and Pihlström are essential guides to understanding this plurality of humor even though they focus more on religions than on humor. Similarly to religious experiences, humorous observations are not precisely comments about the facts of the world, but they are related to cultural categorizations and stereotypes, and to the form of life one experiences. If humor contains any kind of truth, it is not necessarily about the world, but more about the humorist's position. Humor expresses an attitude towards the world and life in general, a worldview, one might say. Of course, a comedian can comment on various kinds of contemporary phenomena and try to ridicule, for instance, questionable political stances, but she or he expresses first and foremost her or his own attitudes. If one ridicules, say, Donald Trump or Joe Biden's politics, the jokes do not offer any "objective truth" on the subject matter. Humor is, therefore, more about value judgments than scientific truths (even if a comedian like Ricky Gervais bases his jokes on latest scientific research to ridicule religious people). A pragmatist method of humor research, then, aims at understanding the richness of the different practical uses of humor in different kinds of contexts. If we focus solely on one aspect of humor, be that for example, survival, we emphasize too much the "philosophy of usefulness," when it is fully possible that humor is not necessarily useful in any straightforward utilitarian manner (see also Pihlström 2015b, 60 – 1).

The pragmatist position should be applied to humor research on the broadest possible level. The mechanisms and functions of humor can be observed and explained "clinically," based on a wide range of empirical data, but this type of research—as important as it is—does not necessarily reveal all the relevant aspects of humor as meaningful to human beings. True, quantitative studies about humor are extremely important to understanding the precise nuances of humor, but there must be room for both qualitative and quantitative studies. The Wittgensteinian idea of forms of life and their plurality leads to the conclusion that appearances of humor in the world vary widely, and there may not be one single objective criterion according to which one thing is funny, and another is not, or that one type of humor is appropriate and another is not. Intellectually speaking, pragmatism reminds us that humor scholars should be (philosophically) tolerant of various kinds of humor and ways of understanding humor.

Levi's insights about humor are in many respects crucially different from those of Frankl's. Now, it is unnecessary to try to find out which of the explanations of humor is superior to the other, or which encapsulates the soul of humor more accurately. Humor is plural and so are its functions and significance. By combining Wittgenstein's and James's thinking, Pihlström argues that the form of life of an individual (or social group) should be understood in relation to the experiences the individuals have (Pihlström 2020). With regard to humor, a clinically formulated scientific explanation is not necessarily the best way to understand the whole phenomenon. People have various forms of life, and they live according to them, and laugh within this paradigm. Therefore, humorous experiences are various and humor is linked to the plurality of human life. This also why there are so often tensions between different senses of humor. If a newcomer to a concentration camp innocently asks when will she or he get out of the camp, and the response is laughter, there is a tension between the newcomer and the older prisoner. Then, if one wants to resolve the perceived incongruity, she or he can and should find out more about the form of life of the other. In this way, humorous paradoxes can be solved, and the tone of laughter can become a uniting element instead of separating people into different groups.

There is no need to claim that an old prisoner has a better sense of humor because she or he sees the concentration camps differently through experience. In general, it is hard to judge the sense of humor of another because it is different from your own—instead, we should try to acknowledge the other even if she or he has a peculiar taste in humor. A sense of humor is structured through individual life experiences in a communicative relationship to others, and therefore there can be vast differences between what people perceive as funny or ludicrous. A sense of humor in itself can hardly be wrong in any moral sense, however, the very foundations of a sense of humor can be criticized. If someone gets amusement, for instance, from oppressing and torturing the weak, then his foundations for humor (a form of life) is problematic. Therefore, it is possible to discuss values beyond laughter: to understand the humor of the other, one needs to understand the other's form of life. For example, if a sadistic guard (or inmate) laughs after a cruel treatment of a newcomer, there is something crucially wrong with the laughter. In this sense, even if pragmatism is an open philosophical orientation, it does not sink into uncritical relativism, and does not need to accept all the possible practical manifestations of humor as equally valuable. We cannot be silent about the problematic sides of humor, and this leads to the notion that not all humor is valuable in any humane or moral sense.

The same holds for theoretical conceptualizations of humor: it is unfair to evaluate all humor from just one theoretical perspective. This is why neither Frankl's nor Levi's position is ultimately correct, or superior to the other. They both are relevant, and they can cooperate in a critical but reciprocal manner. This openness which stems from pragmatist philosophy holds for theories of humor on a more general level. It is unnecessary to claim that, for instance, the incongruity theory is better or more objective than, say, relief theory or superiority theory. They all have something essential to say about humor, and it is intellectually dishonest to praise some theory at the cost of others. Obviously, some theories of humor explain more accurately than others certain forms and functions of humor (from a scientific perspective), but these theories do not necessarily explain the experience of humor in the best possible way. We need plurality to understand humor, and in this sense a perspective from pragmatist philosophy is invaluable for humor studies too. As Pihlström argues, pragmatism "is constructive and systematic philosophy [because it deconstructs] … pernicious traditional dichotomies and assumptions. Insofar as we get rid of them, we may reconstruct the traditional controversies surrounding them and arrive at new insights" (Pihlström 2015a, 241). Pragmatism is, ultimately, an attempt to understand the human being in the world and to understand the various ways humor was expressed in the concentration camps is a step in this direction.

6 Conclusion

This article has discussed a most sensitive subject, humor in concentration camps, from a pragmatist viewpoint. It has argued that this topic should not be considered taboo (although it should be approached respectfully) but analyzed to understand the various forms of humor present even in the most horrible human conditions. Whereas previous research has focused mainly on how humor functioned from the perspective of the camp survivors, this article has made clear that there was humor used among the guards and among those who did not survive. The plurality of concentration camp humor reminds us that not all laughter is good or helps people to survive. The unflattering sides of humor are present in these contexts.

In this article, the need for a pragmatist theory of humor has been expressed. A pragmatist position on humor helps to understand the plurality of humorous experiences without claiming that one experience is more important or richer than another. Furthermore, the fruitful ideas of James and Pihlström should be embraced more broadly among humor research too. Therefore, all the voices of survivors (in this paper particularly those of Frankl and Levi) should be taken seriously and respectfully—and one should not forget the voices of the silent, or the drowned.

In conclusion, humor is used in the entirely twisted context of concentration camps to express the human condition. Humor in these contexts cannot be understood without considering forms of life, how drastic changes from the past were, and what people expected from the future, if they expected anything.[8]

References

Amir, Lydia. 2014. *Humor and the Good Life in Modern Philosophy. Shaftesbury, Hamann, Kierkegaard.* New York, NY: State University of New York Press.

8 This research was funded by the Alfred Kordelin Foundation and the Academy of Finland. I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Sami Pihlström and Dr. Tero Vaaja for their philosophical insights that helped me to develop the arguments of this article. I am also grateful for the two anonymous referees for their critical feedback. In addition, I thank Dr. Michaela Baker for language editing.

Amir, Lydia. 2019. *Philosophy, Humor, and the Human Condition. Taking Ridicule Seriously.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Arendt, Hannah. (1963) 1965. *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil.* New York, NY: The Viking Press.

Bergson, Henri. (1899) 1913. *Laughter. An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic.* Translated by Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell. New York, NY: The Macmillan Company.

Campbell, James. 2009. "How Pragmatism Views Religion." In *Pragmatist Perspectives.* Acta Philosophica Fennica, vol. 86, edited by Sami Pihlström and Henrik Rydenfelt, 225–36. Helsinki: Hakapaino Oy.

Camus, Albert. (1942) 2005. *The Myth of Sisyphus.* Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books.

Cicioni, Mirna. 2007. "Primo Levi's Humour." In *The Cambridge Companion to Primo Levi*, edited by Robert S. C. Gordon, 137–54. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cohen, Ted. 1999. *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Critchley, Simon. 2002. *On Humour.* London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Dewey, John. (1934) 1958. *Art as Experience.* New York, NY: Capricorn Books, G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Dewey, John. (1938) 1997. *Experience and Education.* New York, NY: A Touchstone Book.

Dundes, Alan, and Thomas Hauschild. 1983. "Auschwitz Jokes." *Western Folklore* 42(4): 249–60.

Frankl, Viktor. (1959) 1984. *Man's Search for Meaning.* New York, NY: Washington Square Books.

Frankl, Viktor. (1969) 1988. *The Will to Meaning. Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy.* New York, NY: A Meridian Book.

Frankl, Viktor. (2019) 2020. *Say Yes to Life. In Spite of Everything.* Translated by Joelle Young. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Freud, Sigmund. (1905) 1968a. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious.* Translated by James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

Freud, Sigmund. (1927) 1968b. "Humour" In *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927–1931).* Translated by James Strachey, 159–66. London: The Hogarth Press.

Fromm, Erich. 1973. *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness.* New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Gruner, Charles. R. 2000. *The Game of Humor. A Comprehensive Theory of Why We Laugh.* New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.

Hietalahti, Jarno. 2015. "Laughing at Oneself: On the New Social Character." *Studies in Social and Political Thought* 25: 116–31.

Hietalahti, Jarno. 2016. *The Dynamic Concept of Humor. Erich Fromm and the Possibility of Humane Humor.* PhD dissertation. University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

Hunter, J. M. F. 1968. "'Forms of Life' in Wittgenstein's 'Philosophical Investigations.'" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 5(4): 233–43.

James, William. (1907) 2004. *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking.* Project Gutenberg. eBook. Accessed 24 July, 2020. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5116/5116-h/5116-h.htm

James, William. (1899) 2005. *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: And to Students on Some of Life Ideals*. Project Gutenberg. Accessed 22 September, 2020. http://gutenberg.org/files/16287/16287-h/16287-h.htm#II__ON_A_CERTAIN_BLINDNESS_IN_HUMAN_BEINGS

James, William. (1902) 2014. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Project Gutenberg. eBook. Accessed 24 July, 2020. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/621/621-pdf.pdf

Kinnunen, Aarne. 1994. *Huumorin ja koomisen keskeneräinen kysymys*. (English: The Unresolved Question of Humor and the Comic.) Helsinki: WSOY.

Kivistö, Sari, and Sami Pihlström. 2016. *Kantian Antitheodicy: Philosophical and Literary Varieties*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kuiper, Nicholas A., and Rod A Martin. 1998. "Is Sense of Humor a Positive Personality Characteristic?" In *Humor Research: 3. The Sense of Humor: Explorations of a Personality Characteristic*, edited by Willibald Ruch, 159 – 78. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110804607.159

Kuipers, Giselinde. 2008. "The Sociology of Humor." In *The Primer of Humor Research*, edited by Victor Raskin, 361 – 98. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Legg, Catherine, and Christopher Hookway. 2020. "Pragmatism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, Accessed 22 September 2020. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/pragmatism/

Levi, Primo. (1975) 1984. *The Periodic Table*. Translated by Raymond Rosenthal. New York, NY: Schocken Books.

Levi, Primo. (1958) 2013. *If This is a Man / The Truce*. Translated by Stuart Woolf. London: Abacus.

Levi, Primo. 2015. *The Complete Works of Primo Levi*. Edited by Ann Goldstein. New York / London: Liveright Publishing Company. eBook. Retrieved from iTunes Store.

Lewis, Marshall H. 2016. "Amelioration of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Using Paradoxical Intention." In *Logotherapy and Existential Analysis: Proceedings of the Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna, Volume 1*, edited by Alexander Batthyány, 175 – 8. Cham: Springer.

Marshall, Maria. 2011. *The Prism of Meaning. Guide to the Fundamental Principles of Viktor E. Frankl's Logotherapy*. Phd diss., Accessed 12 October 2020. http://www.ignaciodarnaude.com/espiritualismo/Frankl,Logotherapy,prism%20of%20meaning.pdf

Morreall, John. 2009. *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Norman, Richard. 2004. *On Humanism*. London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Panksepp, Jaak, and Jeffrey Burgdorf. 2003. "'Laughing' rats and the evolutionary antecedents of human joy?" *Physiology and Behavior* 79(3): 533 – 47.

Patterson, F.G.P., and W. Gordon. 2002. "Twenty-Seven Years of Project Koko and Michael." In *All Apes Great and Small. Developments in Primatology: Progress and Prospects* edited by B. M. F. Galdikas, N. E. Briggs, L. K. Sheeran, G. L. Shapiro, and J. Goodall, 165 – 76. Boston, MA: Springer.

Pihlström, Sami. 2010. *Elämän ongelma. Filosofian eettinen ydin*. (Eng. "The Problem of Life. The Ethical Core of Philosophy.") Tampere: niin & näin.

Pihlström, Sami (2011) 2015a. "New Directions." In *The Bloomsbury Companion to Pragmatism*, edited by Sami Pihlström, 238 – 54. London: Bloomsbury.

Pihlström, Sami. (2011) 2015b. "Research Methods and Problems." In *The Bloomsbury Companion to Pragmatism*, edited by Sami Pihlström, 37 – 63. London: Bloomsbury.

Pihlström, Sami. 2020. *Pragmatic Realism, Religious Truth, and Antitheodicy. On Viewing the World by Acknowledging the Other.* Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.

Plessner, Helmuth. (1961) 1970. *Laughing and Crying. A Study of the Limits of Human Behavior.* Translated by James Spencer Churchill and Marjorie Grene. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Provine, Robert. 2000. *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*. New York, NY: Viking.

Putnam, Hilary. 1994. *Words and Life.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Raskin, Victor. 1984. *Semantic Mechanisms of Humour.* Dordrecht: D. Reidel.

Raskin, Victor. ed. 2008. *The Primer of Humor Research.* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Reik, Theodor. 1962. *Jewish Wit.* New York, NY: Gamut Press.

Rorty, Richard. (1989) 1991. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ruch, Willibald. ed. 1998. *The Sense of Humor. Explorations of a Personality Characteristic.* Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Spalding, Henry. D. ed. 2001. *Encyclopedia of Jewish Humor. From Biblical Times to the Modern Age*. New York, NY: Jonathan David Publishers.

Steir-Livny, Liat. 2017. *Is it OK to Laugh about It? Holocaust Humour, Satire and Parody in Israeli Culture*. London: Vallentine Mitchell.

Thomson, Ian. 2004. *Primo Levi. A Life.* New York, NY: Picador.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1953) 1986. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Ziv, Avner, and Anat Zajdman. 1993. *Semites and Stereotypes: Characteristics of Jewish Humor.* Westport and London: Greenwood Press.