

WHY ARE THERE NO GREAT JOKES ABOUT TIME??



Well, why are there no great jokes about Time?¹ There are quite a few jokes about clocks and watches. They are not particularly funny ... but they are certainly worth a gentle smile ... like the following:

What kind of bugs live in clocks? Answer: Ticks!

Or how about this one: *What do you say when you wear your watch on an aeroplane? Answer: Time flies!*

Or how about this comedic question: *What's the problem with eating a clock? Response: Well, it's very time-consuming!*

All the same, those jokes are really about variants of time-keeping and time-measurement.² They may produce a smile or groan, in mock tribute to a bad joke. None, however, are designed to make people laugh and simultaneously think about the nature of temporality itself.

Time is far too huge, abstract, all-powerful and unstoppable to be amenable to local and immediate joking.

It's a bit like trying to laugh about God. (If depicted, both the 'Holy Father' and 'Old Father Time' are characteristically shown as venerable old men, with long white beards, who are far too august, wise, and all-powerful to be easily teased). Thus there are lots of jokes (some of them offensive) about rival religious groups and practices, as well as about various spiritual leaders. But there are not so many quips about divine power in the abstract. Still, here's one mini-story which made me smile:

An atheist scientist confronted God, saying; *'We have figured out how to make a man'*. God replied: *'Okay - let me see you do it'*. The scientist bent down and scooped up some earth. *'Oh no'*, objected God: *'You must first make your own dirt'*.

Asking about jokes makes one think about the purpose of comedy and making other people laugh. It's a very human form of interaction. That is, quite a number of other mammalian species make sounds that are indicative of mirth. They do that typically in play and (in some cases) when being tickled. Furthermore, there have also been cases of orangutans in zoos, who have laughed mightily at magic tricks, performed before them by humans. Highly encouraging to magicians!³

No other species, however, use language to communicate humour, in the way that humans do. True, our humour does not always succeed. There are cultural and other variants that affect the reception of jokes and other forms of comedy. Nonetheless, humans use humour to laugh at the unexpected, to highlight the

incongruous, to satirise one another, and to generate bonding through shared laughter.⁴

So humans laugh together. But not much about Time, or - more accurately - not much about the Time-Space continuum which frames the cosmos. It thus frames all human life and all humour too. Yet it's just too vast and universal to be locally funny. That said, here is a final sally to raise a smile: *Why did the crocodile eat the clock?* Answer: *To kill Time!* [And did it succeed? No chance!]



ENDNOTES:

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- ¹ Expanding further upon discussions in PJC, *Time-Space: We Are All in It Together* (London, 2025).
- ² For further examples, see J. Nasser, *It's About Time: An (Almost) Complete List of Time Jokes* (2013).
- ³ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laughter_in_animals (viewed 27 Feb. 2025)
- ⁴ See variously: J. Morreall (ed.), *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humour* (New York, 1986); T. Garfitt and others (eds), *The Anatomy of Laughter* (Abingdon, 2005); R.A. Martin, *The Psychology of Humour: An Integrative Approach* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006); and E. Weitz, *The Cambridge Introduction to Comedy* (Cambridge, 2009).