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A Philosophy of Comedy on Stage and Screen: You Have to be There

Shaun May

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As far as we know, only human beings have a sense of humour – although chimps might laugh when tickled, and dogs respond similarly in play, Seth McFarlane's fan-base is comprised exclusively of humans. Whilst animals and robots might feature as prominent characters in our favourite comic movies, shows and stand-up routines, we have no reason to suspect that their real-life brethren get the joke.

Drawing on the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, Shaun May attempts to address this issue – suggesting that there is something distinctive about human beings which grounds our ability to make and comprehend jokes. Guiding the reader through a range of examples, including the films of Charlie Chaplin, the stand-up of Francesca Martinez, the TV show *Family Guy* and Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, he demonstrates that in order to get the joke you have to 'be there'.

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