Contents

Preface ix

- 1 Introduction 1
- 2 What Is Humor For? 9
- 3 The Phenomenology of Humor 15
- A. Humor as a Property of Objects or Events 16
- B. Duchenne Laughter 19
- C. The Systematic Ineffability of Humor 24
- D. Funny-Ha-Ha and Funny-Huh 27
- E. The Knowledge-Relativity of Humor 31
- F. Mating and Dating 34
- 4 A Brief History of Humor Theories 37
- A. Biological Theories 37
- B. Play Theories 38
- C. Superiority Theories 40
- D. Release Theories 44
- E. Incongruity and Incongruity-Resolution Theories 45
- F. Surprise Theories 53
- G. Bergson's Mechanical Humor Theory 54
- 5 Twenty Questions for a Cognitive and Evolutionary Theory of Humor 57
- 6 Emotion and Computation 61
- A. Finding the Funny Bone 61
- B. Does Logic or Emotion Organize Our Brains? 63
- C. Emotions 67
- D. The Rationality of Emotions 73
- E. The Irrationality of Emotions 80

- F. Emotional Algorithms 83
- G. A Few Implications 89

7 A Mind That Can Sustain Humor 93

- A. Fast Thinking: The Costs and Benefits of Quick-Wittedness 93
- B. The Construction of Mental Spaces 95
- C. Active Beliefs 104
- D. Epistemic Caution and Commitment 109
- E. Conflict; and Resolution 112

8 Humor and Mirth 117

- A. The Contamination of Mental Spaces 117
- B. Mirth among the Epistemic Emotions: The Microdynamics 122
- C. Rewards for a Dirty Job Well Done 127
- D. "Getting It": Basic Humor in Slow Motion 130
- E. Interfering Emotions 139

9 Higher-Order Humor 143

- A. The Intentional Stance 143
- B. The Difference between the First Person and the Third Person 148
- C. Anthropomorphism and Anthropocentrism 155
- D. Intentional Stance Jokes 157

10 Objections Considered 177

- A. Falsifiability 177
- B. Epistemic Undecidability 182
- C. Apparent Counterexamples 187
- D. A Brief Glance at Others' Models 201
- E. Graeme Ritchie's Five Questions 208

11 The Penumbra: Nonjokes, Bad Jokes, and Near-Humor 213

- A. Knowledge-Relativity 214
- B. Scale of Intensity 216
- C. Boundary Cases 220
- D. Wit and Other Related Phenomena 246
- E. Huron on the Manipulation of Expectations 250

12 But Why Do We Laugh? 257

- A. Laughter as Communication 257
- B. Co-opting Humor and Laughter 264
- C. The Art of Comedy 270
- D. Comedy (and Tragedy) in Literature 278
- E. Humor That Heals 283

vi

13 The Punch Line 287

- A. Twenty Questions Answered 289
- B. Could We Make a Robot with a Sense of Humor? 296

Epilogue 301 References 305 Index 329