The purpose of this talk is to identify what I believe is a significant weakness in the dominant approach to humour in analytic philosophy. The dominant philosophical theories of humour — those offered by Morreall, Carroll, and Hurley et al — are all what I term *internalist* theories. This means that they understand humour as an internal process, like an emotion, cognition, or phenomenological experience. Within the philosophy of humour there is also the subject of the ethical evaluation of humour. This is the question of whether or not humour can be more or less funny based on its ethical content. My main argument is that internalist theories of humour determine that the ethical evaluation must proceed in a particular, narrow fashion where what is ultimately at issue is a subject’s illicit enjoyment. This narrow approach misses distinctly social aspects of humour which are intuitively relevant to the ethical evaluation of humour. Such that internalist theories of humour are incapable of accommodating the social nature of both ethics and humour, a non-internalist theory of humour should be pursued.

* The shape of this talk, then, will be the following
  + First I need to set up how internalist theories of humour approach ethical evaluation. This begins with a discussion of internalist theories, since that establishes what the standard is by which humour is being evaluated.
  + I draw the discussion of ethical evaluation to a point where, I argue, internalist ethical evaluation faces a particular problem. Specifically, by being stuck ‘inside the person’ so to speak, it misses some distinctly social aspects of ethics which seem to give ethical judgements their forcefulness.
  + Finally, I argue that this problem is a necessary feature of internalism, and that this is a meaningful weakness of internalism. This is to say that a good theory of humour should be able to capture the social elements of humour, and internalism cannot.
* Ethical evaluation of humour has to do with whether or not some piece of putative humour *is or is not funny* — succeeds or fails specifically as humour — based on the ethical content of that joke
  + So it’s not whether or not you should tell the joke, or whether or not jokes can be ethical or unethical in a broader sense
    - It’s whether or not the humour reaction can be merited or unmerited based on a joke’s ethical content
* Internalist theories understand humour as an internal process, like an emotion, cognition, or phenomenological experience.
  + The emotional reaction of amusement or mirth is paradigmatic here
    - Carroll writes about the cognitive emotion of comic amusement, whereas Hurley et al use the epistemic emotion of mirth.
      * While Carroll write about comic amusement the last time I saw him talk he used amusement and mirth interchangeably
    - Morreall does not identify humour with a particular emotional response, but characterizes it as a particular phenomenological experience of a cognitive shift.
  + While there are other approaches to humour — either ones that are more psychological, or ones that more strongly invoke relief or superiority theory — I treat these theories as typical because they are the most prominent. I also believe that none of these other theories deviate significantly from internalism.
  + Ethical evaluation, then, will cover whether the triggering of some internal process can be rendered inappropriate, inapt, or otherwise wrong based on the ethical content of the stimulus
    - NOTE: I am saying inappropriate as if it is normative, but prominent theorists (and here I think Carroll and Smuts) write in a way that is more descriptive than normative. Smuts speculates that only a descriptive account of ethical evaluation may be possible.
      * I will punt the descriptive approach to Q&A with the comment that I believe a perceived preferability of the descriptive approach should be taken as a point in favour the systematic problem in ethical evaluation whose presence I am about to argue for.
  + Internalist theories take the relevant process to be an automatic reaction.
* On this picture, what is wrong with unethical humour?
  + The reaction has triggered when it shouldn’t have
    - Two main theories
    - De Sousa and attitude endorsement theory
    - Feeling-centred theories
      * Gaut, merited responses
        + Prescribed responses that are not merited
        + Horror that is not scary, comedy that is not funny, can intelligibly argue by citing virtues of the thing itself
        + Responses can be unmerited for ethical reasons
        + Response of amusement unmerited because vicious
      * Carroll and Smuts, moderate moralism
        + Imaginative resistance
  + Reaction is taken to be connected to enjoyment
  + Either one has prescribed something that does not merit enjoyment or
  + There has been some sort of illicit enjoyment
  + Altogether, then, internalist theories understand humour by way of some internal process — emotion, cognition, or phenomenological experience — and this has the result that ethical evaluation on internalist theories evaluate the aptness of that internal process.
* This seems to miss something important
  + Two related angles
    - The forcefulness of moral judgements
      * More than something being technically wrong or mistaken. Moral violations are *bad*.
      * Ethical humour evaluations, however, seem to be very technical. They are about the appropriateness of the triggering of a particular internal mechanism.
      * This approach does not seem to capture a sense of badness
    - The main thing at stake seems to be the proper functioning of the person in question.
      * Their humour reaction is triggering when it shouldn’t
      * Something is wrong with the person
      * At most, something is wrong with their moral character: they are the sort of person who enjoys viciously
  + Ethics is fundamentally social, but ‘other people’ seem to be missing entirely.
    - It’s a very navel-gazing approach to morality
    - Correcting bad cases does not involve treating other people better but just in changing one’s enjoyment of the harm
* This manifests in practical discussion too
  + Aptness of laughter, aptness of enjoyment
    - Paul examples
    - Amy Schumer – Racist joke. “It’s a joke and it’s funny. I know that because people laugh at it.”
    - Frankie Boyle – Katie Price’s down syndrome son. ‘Obviously joking’
    - In each case, ethical concerns are sidelined because the humour reaction is deemed apt.
  + While critics invoke the suffering of others, what is at issue is the illicit enjoyment
    - Stacey Patton and David Leonard in Washington Post— inappropriate to enjoy when others are suffering
* I argue that this is a necessary feature of the internalist approach to humour
  + Humour just is that internal phenomenon
  + Consequently, ethical evaluation is going to primarily concern the appropriateness of that internal process
  + Wrongness is the process triggering improperly
  + Rightness involves the process not triggering
  + Humour is trapped within the body
* This misses an important dynamic of humour
  + Humour is part of how we relate to each other
    - Navigate interpersonal relationships, include and exclude people
  + Ethical concerns are related to treating others right
  + This proper treatment is an essential part of humour
    - Managing our relations with each other does not seem to be an incidental use of humour, but fundamental to what humour is. I’ve talked about this in terms of relationship management. Others (Bergson, Billig) talk about humour as being essentially disciplinary.
    - Humour, then, is *a way that we treat each other*.
    - Ways that we treat each other are subject to ethical evaluation.
  + That it’s an essential part of humour means it doesn’t just reduce to a separate ethical question
    - This is to say that it does seem to concern the ethical evaluation of humour: whether or not something is *funny*
    - The success of humour *as humour* seems to depend, at least sometimes, on ethical considerations relating to how we treat each other.
  + This indicates a shortcoming in the internalist approach to humour
  + Since internalism covers whole theories of humour, the failure of internalism suggests alternate theories of humour should be pursued

To wrap up, then, I have provided the following:

* Internalist theories
  + Internal processes
* Internalist theories determine a certain type of ethical evaluation
  + Illicit enjoyment
  + Improper triggering vs proper non-triggering
* Misses badness of unethical
  + Lack of social aspect
  + Humour gets trapped within the body
* Humour is a social phenomenon
  + Internalist theories cannot capture this social dynamic
  + Alternate theories should be pursued