In spite of – or perhaps because of – the fact that humor can be so enjoyable, it has the capacity to cause significant offense. One disagreement about the ethics of humor is whether typical moral breaches in this area are as serious as would be suggested by the outrage they often cause. Some hold that humor is a trivial matter and that even when it is errant, it is relatively harmless. Others take (purported) breaches of humor ethics much more seriously. This lecture will examine the ethics of humor and will seek to answer the question “When, if ever, is humor immoral?” Among the types of humor that will be discussed are ones that involve racial, gender or ethnic stereotypes or that offend religious sensibilities.

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Simone de Beauvoir described females as the second sex. Whether or not that description is still apt everywhere, discrimination against males is the “second sexism”—the form of sex discrimination that goes unnoticed or at least receives too little attention. This presentation will show that males suffer a number of serious forms of disadvantage and that many of these are a consequence of wrongful sex discrimination. Various objections to this claim will be considered and rejected.