



A Case for Irony (The Tanner Lectures on Human Values)

By Jonathan Lear

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Vanity Fair has declared the Age of Irony over. Joan Didion has lamented that Obama's United States is an irony-free zone. Here Jonathan Lear argues that irony is one of the tools we use to live seriously, to get the hang of becoming human. It forces us to experience disruptions in our habitual ways of tuning out of life, but comes with a cost.

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Editorial Review

Review

Photo by Dan Dry

Lear performs a valuable service. He shows us just how far the contemporary usage of irony diverges from an older, far more appealing meaning, according to which irony is a portal to self-knowledge.--Andrew Stark "Wall Street Journal" (12/22/2011)

Lear's book provides intellectual pleasure of a very high order: its distinctions are careful, its prose lucid and elegant, and its examples suggestive and well chosen...You should read this book.--Paul J. Griffiths "Commonweal" (03/09/2012)

Before we can claim to live a truly examined life, says Jonathan Lear, we need to pass the test of ironic self-scrutiny at something approaching the level set by Socrates and Kierkegaard. Following the contours of the subtle case for radical irony Lear makes turns out to be an intellectual adventure in its own right.--J. M. Coetzee

Jonathan Lear's re-reading of the significance of irony for getting the hang of a genuinely human existence is an unheimlich maneuver that brings religion and psychoanalysis into productive conversation with philosophy, and induces characteristically sharp and creative responses from his interlocutors: an exemplary instance of the virtues of the Tanner Lectures format.--Stephen Mulhall, University of Oxford

About the Author

Jonathan Lear is John U. Nef Distinguished Service Professor in the Committee on Social Thought and the Department of Philosophy at the University of Chicago. He is also the Roman Family Director of the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society.

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