

'Homo Risibilis', the Good Life and the Philosophy of Humor

Comments on the Article, "Humor and the Good Life" by Lydia Amir¹

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Humor is studied by various scientific disciplines, such as Psychology, Linguistics, Computer Science and Cultural Science. Each of them has own point of view on humor and own research methodology. However, the philosophical view on humor generalizes different points of view and allows seeing new possibility in researching for humor. The article "Humor and the Good Life" (by Lydia Amir)² is a study of the three modern philosopher's thoughts on humor and of its influence on 'good life'. On this account a new worldview is described. Called 'homo risibilis', it is considered to be one of the important characteristics of all modern culture.

It is very difficult to write on humor as the text might appear either boring or demagogic. Lydia Amir has skills, knowledge and ability to make her texts interesting, original and surprising. Apparently, her main research idea is to write the history of the philosophical studies of humor from both theoretical and practical perspectives. This article demonstrates Lydia Amir's research strategies which were used in her previous papers. She is interested in theoretical philosophy of humor if only it affects practice (life and behavior)³. She has written some papers about practical and theoretical views of Shaftesbury, Kierkegaard, Hamann⁴. Also she is writing on Montaigne, Nietzsche, Santayana, Bataille, Deleuze, Rosset⁵ but these works have not been published yet.

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² *Israeli Journal for Humor Research*, December 2015, Vol. 4, Issue No. 2. pp. 62-73.

³ See, Amir, Lydia B. Humor in Philosophy – Theory and Practice. *Philosophical Practice*, 2012, vol. 7(3): 1015-1029; Amir, Lydia B. Philosophy's Attitude towards the Comic: A Reevaluation. *European Journal of Humor Research* 2013., vol. 1(1): 6–21; Amir, Lydia B. Taking the History of Philosophy on Humor and Laughter Seriously. *The Israeli Journal of Humor Research: An International Journal*, 2014, vol. 5: 43-87. Amir, Lydia B. "A Contemporary Philosophy of Vulnerability, Fallibility, and Finitude". In *Practicing Philosophy*, Aleksandar Fatic and Lydia Amir (eds.), 57-64. Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2015.

⁴ Amir, Lydia B. Kierkegaard and the Philosophical Traditions of the Comic. *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2013*: 377–401; Amir, Lydia B. *Humor and the Good Life in Modern Philosophy: Shaftesbury, Hamann, Kierkegaard*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014; Amir, Lydia B. Shaftesbury – An Important Forgotten Indirect Source of Kierkegaard's Thought. *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2014*: 189-216; Amir, Lydia B. Shaftesbury as a Practical Philosopher. *Haser*, 2015, vol. 6: 81–102; Amir, Lydia B. "Truth in Shaftesbury, Hamann, Kierkegaard". In *Humor und Religiosität in der Moderne*, Gerald Hartung and Markus Kleinart (eds.). Wiesbaden: Springer, 2016 (forthcoming); Amir, Lydia B. "Hamannian Categories of Understanding". In *Hamann: Nature and History*, Johannes von Lüpke (ed.). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht UniPress, 2016 (forthcoming)

⁵ Amir, Lydia B. *Laughter and the Good Life: Montaigne, Nietzsche, Santayana*. Work under contract for SUNY Press; Amir, Lydia B. *Nietzsche's French Laughing Followers: Bataille, Deleuze, Rosset*. Work in Process.

The article "Humor and the Good Life" presents the results of her studies as well as some theoretical issues that have been already published in her monograph.

One of the important concepts in her article is difference between the French word "humeur" and the English word "humour". Even though their general meanings are very similar, comical connotation was put in English word by British enlightenment writers whereas French word does not have any. It caused terminological confusion in the philosophical texts which were written by French authors and by English ones. French philosophers had been using other words to mark comical meaning of the humor until the 16th century. "The modern study of humor and the good life *strictu sensu* begins with Shaftesbury", Lydia Amir writes (p. 64). Thus, we have several philosophical traditions in understanding, connoting and naming humor and humoristic things now. The article deals with the tradition originated by Shaftesbury. The author offers to consider Shaftesbury, Hamann and Kierkegaard as the points of the same line of the philosophical humor research though Shaftesbury was English, Hamann was German and Kierkegaard was Danish. Each of them caused namely the comical interpretation of the "humour" in his country.

All three philosophers saw the importance of humor for epistemological procedures. On the other hand, being religious philosophers, they should have put humor in the system of the divine ontology. However, each of these philosophers managed to do it successfully. According to Shaftesbury, humor is an effective epistemological tool to examine the truth, "for self-education and moral advice in the philosopher's inner dialogue, conversation, and writing" (p. 64). If we had not had humor, we could not understand the truth as the world's harmony, nor as human goodness, nor as God's good humor, nor as Christianity's cheerfulness. Also "humor is constitutive of the Shaftesburean good life" (p. 64). Even though Hamann, Shaftesbury's German translator, deferred on the contents of the truth, both Hamann and Shaftesbury submitted necessity of humor for testing, grasping and marking the truth. Even though the purpose was same, they used different humoristic tools. Shaftesbury used ridicule as well as Hamann used absurd. In addition, Hamann called the absurd "possibility of seeing God arise". Both the ridicule and the absurd are related to humor, which is the road to salvation. However, humor differs from irony by its positive function.

Kierkegaard followed Hamann in his views on humor and on its epistemological meaning. However, the Danish philosopher related humor to existence, but not to ontology. Humor let Christian man test the truth as well as save and correct truly faith because humor is a mask, which hides "religiousness of the true Christian" (p. 66). According to Kierkegaard, "the comic is the main tool of examination, correction, and evaluation an individual possesses for reflecting on himself, his life, and his personal experience, and for communicating this to others", Lydia Amir writes (p. 66-67). The Shaftesburean ridicule did not have absolutely positive meaning for Kierkegaard. According to him, every person is responsible for the content of the one's laughter.

All descriptions of the philosophical views on humor are very important but what is the most interesting in the article, it is Lydia Amir's vision of *Homo risibilis* as a skeptical worldview, which is predicated on self-referential laughter. This human being interpretation bases on understanding of its absurdity and ridiculousness. "In the large scale of things we and our endeavors are futile", Lydia Amir writes (p. 69). And if we face any problem, failure or misfortune, the first interpretation of reality is tragic but the next one is comical and humoristic. This worldview was not inherent to European culture until the 17th or the 18th century but nowadays it is. According to Amir, "*Homo risibilis* amounts to a harmonious congruence with myself, others, and the world, situation that all philosophies seek to establish in their attempt to overcome alienation" (p. 71).

Unfortunately, the concept of *Homo risibilis* is revealed without applying it to absurdist's experiences although they used the philosophy, like the literature, as the way of fixing their thoughts and feelings. Additionally, the author describes the basis of the worldview only as positive whereas it was the negative experiences of dehumanization during different Revolutions and World Wars that mainly caused the appearance of *Homo risibilis*. In my opinion, we should look for the tragi-comic protagonist content of our being there. Maybe if we are able to overcome the cultural injuries and to make internal and mental peace, we will cease to be *Homo risibilis*. This worldview is the form of defense to save the psychological and cultural normality and sanity after the Holocaust, I think. And it seems the only beginning of a strong, painful and difficult discussion which Lydia Amir has been opening by her concept.

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