

Shades of Schadenfreude. A phenomenological account of pleasure at another's misfortune

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ABSTRACT

In the present essay I would like to explore the different meanings of the emotion named *Schadenfreude* from a perspective integrating Plato's and Aristotle's moral philosophy with the analyses of phenomenological anthropologists such as Scheler, Plessner and Blumenberg. In the first half of my essay I will focus on Aristotle's distinction between, on the one hand, a pleasure at another's misfortune which does not necessarily obstruct pity in the opposite position and provides relief from indignation, and a malicious pleasure at another's misfortune (*epichairekakia*) understood as the opposite of envy. In the second half of the essay I will examine the link between the joy involved in *Schadenfreude* and laughter by asking whether and to what extent this contemplative emotion contributes to the emergence of a theoretical attitude.

Introduction

In recent years the study of the emotion named *Schadenfreude* has elicited keen interest among scholars of different disciplines (psychologists, sociologists, moral philosophers, philologists, neurobiologists).¹ In this article I would like to contribute to this flourishing debate by integrating the perspective of moral philosophers, focused on Plato's and Aristotle's conceptions of pleasure at another's misfortune, with a phenomenological point of view. In particular, I will take into account some analyses of those thinkers we might tag as upholders of a phenomenological anthropology: Scheler, Plessner and Blumenberg. This

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¹ See Dorfman (2013); Portmann (2000); Smith (2013); Van Dijk, Ouwkerk (2014).

offers me also the opportunity to discuss the way 20th century phenomenology can retrieve and re-elaborate ancient philosophy's approach to emotions.

I will divide my essay into four parts. In the first one, I will focus on Aristotle's distinction between a malicious *Schadenfreude* (*epichairekakia*) and a kind of pleasure at another's deserved misfortune related to pity and righteous indignation (*to nemesan*). Secondly, by referring to Nietzsche's and Scheler's interpretation of *ressentiment* as the emotion characterizing modern morality, I will try to explain why *Schadenfreude* has been reduced to a kind of malice by forgetting its link with *nemesis*. Thirdly, I will focus on the type of joy involved in *Schadenfreude*, exploring the relationship that *Schadenfreude* entertains with the three classical theories of laughter. Finally, I will ask whether and to what extent *Schadenfreude* contributes to the formation of a philosophical attitude by comparing Plato's interpretation of the famous tale of the Thracian maid's laughter at Thales's fall into a pit with Blumenberg's interpretation.

1. *Schadenfreude* between envy and pity

As is widely known, *Schadenfreude* is a German word composed of two terms: *Schaden*, which means "harm" or "damage", and *Freude*, namely "joy". Nowadays it has entered English as well as other languages such as Italian that do not have a specific word for pleasure at another's misfortunes; the only exception is French: *joie maligne*; many other languages calque from German their correspondent terms. In its turn, the term *Schadenfreude* seems to be a calque of the ancient Greek term *epichairekakia* coined by Aristotle, which literally means "being pleased by bad things".

The issue that animates the current debate on *Schadenfreude* concerns the possibility of conceiving such an emotion as related to desert and justice. Exploring Aristotle's account of pleasure at another's misfortune in this section I would like to argue that we have to admit two different shades of *Schadenfreude*. The first is connected with pity and righteous indignation, the other stems from envy.

As commentators often point out,² Aristotle develops two different ways of dealing with emotions (*pathe*). In his writing concerning ethics Aristotle looks at the way emotions contribute to acquiring virtues and consolidating habits. Conversely, in the *Rhetoric* he is more interested in the way emotions influence and modify judgment and belief. This leads him in the former to gather

² See Konstan (2006), ch. 1; Sanders (2014), ch. 4.

emotions in order to account for their interactions in the formation of an attitude. In the latter he tends to differentiate emotions on the basis of the various effects they cause us. This appears as evident when we focus on how he deals with pleasure at another's misfortune in the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics* on the one hand, and in the *Rhetoric* on the other.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6, 1107a10 Aristotle includes *epichairekakia* along with *phthonos* (envy) and *anaischyntia* (shamelessness) among those emotions not admitting of a mean because they are base in themselves. In other words, such emotions do not require an education because they straightforwardly involve morally disputable behaviours. The only thing we can do is learning to avoid them. In following pages he takes *epichairekakia* as the defective vice of indignation:

Indignation is a mean between *phthonos* and *epichairekakia*, and these concern pleasure and pain at the fortunes that befall one's neighbours: the indignant person is pained at those who fare well undeservedly; the envious person exceeds him because he is pained at anyone's faring well; the spiteful (*epichairekakos*) is so deficient in feeling pain that he even delights in it (*Nicomachean Ethics* 2.7, 1108b1-5).

Similarly, in *Eudemian Ethics* 3.7, 1233b19–25 Aristotle refers to an unnamed emotion consisting in rejoicing at the misfortune of those persons who deserve better. Such a pleasure is still treated as a defective vice, while envy remains the vicious excess. Here Aristotle not only ascribes to indignation the role of the mean, but also specifies that it consists in feeling pain either at undeserved good fortune or undeserved misfortune; besides, he individuates another connected emotion in the rejoicing when good or bad fortune is deserved.³

In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle unpacks this array of emotions meticulously without forcing them into the cage of the search for the mean. Indignation remains the pain at undeserved good fortune, whereas the feeling pain at undeserved misfortune is here identified with pity. At the same time, indignation is separated from envy because the indignant person takes into account the other's object desert independently of the condition in which she lives. By contrast, the envious person feels pain at those who are similar or equal to us.

³ Cf. Sanders (2014), p. 65-67.

She is indifferent towards desert and conversely looks at the fact that the other takes an advantage over her, that the other's good fortune could obstruct her acquisition of the same position.⁴

Furthermore, while the rejoicing at another's deserved good fortune can be said "happy for", in the *Rhetoric* the feeling of pleasure at another's deserved misfortune is taken to be the opposite of pity and clearly distinguished from *epichairekakia* understood, in its turn, as the opposite of envy. The person who feels pity insofar as she is distressed at another's undeserved misfortune «will take pleasure or be unmoved by misfortunes of the opposite sort», while «someone who is distressed at the other's acquisition or possession of something, he necessarily rejoices at its deprivation or destruction» (*Rhetoric* 1387a1-3). These two different types of pleasure cannot overlap because the former does not obstruct the capacity of feeling pity in the opposite situation as the latter does. In fact, to Aristotle, both *phthonos* and *epichairekakia* are «hindrances to pity» (*Rhetoric* 1387a4).⁵ They do not allow one to feel any kind of pain at another's misfortune at all. On the contrary, one who feels pleasure, for instance, when a killer is arrested or a tax evader is identified is still able to feel pain in cases of undeserved misfortune. Besides, notice that in the *Rhetoric* Aristotle introduces the term *epichairekakos* only to describe the opposite of the envious person: one who is *phthoneros* shows herself to be *epichairekakos* when feeling pleasure at the fact that the equals to her are in a state of partial or total deprivation of their goods or positions. The other type of pleasure remains unnamed.

In these passages Aristotle contrasts emotions in different ways. Pleasure at another's *deserved* misfortune, on the one hand, and pleasure at an envied person's misfortune on the other, respectively oppose pity and envy, but this opposition is not of the same nature of that by which pity and envy contrast with each other. In fact, Aristotle does not exclude that one who is pleased in assisting the deserved conviction of a killer could feel pain in learning that that

⁴ On this point see Fussi (2016; 2017); on the relationship between pity and pain see also Konstan 2001, in particular the appendix on page 128ff.

⁵ Not by chance, in *Poetics* 1452b34-1453a1-7 Aristotle states that in tragedy «men ought not to be shown changing from good to bad fortune (for this is neither fearful nor pitiable but loathsome) [...] any more than the very evil man ought to appear to fall from good fortune to ill fortune (for, though a putting together of this sort would have the feeling of kinship with the human, still it would not have either pity or fear; for with respect to one who has ill fortune, the pity concerns his not deserving it, and the fear concerns his being similar to us, so that what occurs will be neither pitiable nor fearful)».

punishment was undeserved. In contrasting pity with pleasure at another's deserved misfortune, Aristotle merely means that someone cannot be pained and at the same time pleased at another's misfortune. The judgment on the desert of what befalls another should be only one and coherent. Following Goldie (2000, p. 27), we may say that pleasure at another's *deserved* misfortune is the obverse of pity just as *epichairekakia* is the obverse of *phthonos*. On the other hand, both *phthonos* and *epichairekakia* contrast with pity in that they leave no room for pity in general. Hence, the contrast between pity and envy is radical. The gradual transformation of envy into an affective disposition impedes us to be compassionate persons. All this leads Aristotle to state that pity and pleasure at another's deserved misfortune are evidence of a good character, while *phthonos* and *epichairekakia* of a bad one; therefore the first two emotions are morally acceptable, the other two do not fit a decent person.

Let me exemplify the distinctions I have made so far as follows: I am indignant when I learn that the politician I voted for evaded taxes. By contrast, I am envious when I learn that my neighbour has been an election candidate and thus she could become a member of the Parliament. In both cases, I feel pain, but only in the second the comparison with my condition appears to play a decisive role in the emergence of my feeling. The second case obstructs the possibility that I could be happy for my neighbour if she effectively wins the election, whereas the feeling of envy fuels the possibility of feeling pleased when I learn that she lost the election. On the contrary, in the first case, I could still be happy for the politician if a court cleared her of any responsibility concerning the supposed taxes evasion. But I could also feel pity if another outraged person wounded the politician to punish her. Indeed, this is in no ways the right penalty for a person who commits a crime. At the same time, this feeling of pity would not prevent me from being pleased with the news that a court definitely established the liability of that politician and condemned her to an appropriate penalty.

Nonetheless, in my view the differentiation between *epichairekakia* and pleasure at another's deserved misfortune cannot be exhausted by the distinction between the impartial and the subjective evaluations of another's fortune. In feeling pleasure when a tax evader is identified, I can be influenced by the thought that I regularly pay taxes. This does not undermine my pleasure nor my indignation in learning that the politician I voted for is a tax evader. Rather, the difference between *epichairekakia* and pleasure at another's deserved misfortune lies in the fact that envy presupposes a fervent desire for

privation of another's fortune that finds its only reason in the specular desire that our equals have no access to a better condition than that of us. This explains also why the envious person uses merit just as an excuse to justify the pleasure she feels when another's fortune is scaled down.

In order to keep the two types of pleasure separate, many scholars identify *Schadenfreude* with feeling pleasure at another's deserved misfortune, and identify spite (or malice) with the feeling of pleasure at another's misfortune characterizing the envious person. Though useful, such a distinction is not so easy to maintain.

Ben-Ze'ev (2003, p. 116) thinks that «in Aristotle's view of pleasure in other's misfortune [...], the positive evaluation of the subject, which is expressed in the subject's pleasure, is compatible with the main desert claim of this emotion, which considers the object's situation to be deserved». According to Kristjánsson (2002, p. 143), the limit of this view is twofold: first of all, it does not take into account the «instances where people self-deceptively sublimate their *Schadenfreude* as a belief about deserved misfortune»; secondly, Ben-Ze'ev's problem is that «he has, subsequently, no emotion word left to refer to that of crowing over undeserved misfortune: the negative emotion *par excellence*».

This second objection can be avoided by introducing the term “spite”, as Ben-Ze'ev effectively does and Kristjánsson fails to recognize by insisting on translating *epichairekakia* as *Schadenfreude*.⁶ However, as Sanders (2014, p. 63) and Fussi (2017, p. 77) pointed out, spite somehow involves action by the patient against the target, while *Schadenfreude* does not, since it is merely contemplative.

The first objection is decisive. As Fussi (2016, p. 9) has remarked, Aristotle states that envy tends to conceal itself. Therefore, the desert claim cannot function as evidence to distinguish pleasure in another's deserved misfortune from the pleasure at the privation of another's fortune characterizing the envious person. Rather, by taking up the desert claim, the envious person masks her real feeling and shifts the focus from her subjective perspective to the object's situation.

Assuming that pity and indignation are a single virtuous emotion (*nemesis*), Kristjánsson identifies pleasure at another's *deserved* misfortune with a satisfied indignation while *Schadenfreude* with the blameworthy emotion

⁶ See also Kristjánsson (2006), p. 94–100.

consisting in being pleased with those who bump into *undeserved* misfortune. Indeed, as is already said, in the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle sees *nemesis* as a painful reaction to both undeserved good fortune and undeserved bad fortune. In this way, as Konstan (2006, p. 115) highlighted, indignation encroaches on pity. And this would explain why Aristotle seems to consider only the obverses of pity and envy when dealing with the related pleasurable emotions. However, Konstan (2006) also provides a detailed list of examples showing how *nemesis* is an archaic term that in classical Greek «overlaps considerably with *phthonos*» (ibid., p. 122).

In my view, all this should prompt us to stop looking for two different terms that respectively express pleasure at another's misfortune involving a desert claim and pleasure presupposing envy. Take as an example that my colleague's contract was not renewed: I could be pleased by that without, however, having played any active role in her dismissal. If I do not express my feeling by mocking my colleague, this pleasure cannot be classified as spite because it remains a mere contemplation of her misfortune. It is rather a clear example of *Schadenfreude* connected with a latent envy towards my colleague's academic career. This simple case illustrates the limit of any kind of account that identifies *Schadenfreude* only with the pleasure involving a desert claim, a pleasure that cannot be felt *simultaneously* with pity, but nevertheless does not prevent us from feeling pity in cases in which the other's misfortune is undeserved.

In light of this, I suggest that we can speak of malicious *Schadenfreude* for the pleasure characterizing the envious person and of moderate *Schadenfreude* for that satisfaction of the indignant person not obstructing pity in opposite situations. It is its typical passive character that allows *Schadenfreude* to be managed in a way that it is felt in cases in which misfortune is deserved or is not so catastrophic as to arouse pity. Evidently, the distinction between these two shades of *Schadenfreude* cannot be justified as only rooted in the emotions they contrast but in the way one reacts to another's misfortune. In the vocabulary of phenomenology we can render this by claiming that the distinction between the shades of *Schadenfreude* cannot be well explained by just adopting a noematic orientation. The distinction needs to be justified through the exploration of the noetic side of this emotional experience. Before doing this in the third section of this article by focusing on the type of joy *Schadenfreude* entails, in the second one I would like to consider the role

Nietzsche and Scheler attributed to *Schadenfreude* in the emergence of *ressentiment*.

2. *Schadenfreude* between *nemesis* and *ressentiment*

In this section I would like to insist on the difference between the two shades of *Schadenfreude* by exploring the distinction between *nemesis* and *ressentiment*. It is not by chance that I now use “*nemesis*” instead of “indignation” as well as the French “*ressentiment*” instead of the English “resentment”. In this way I would like to stress that at stake here is not only the distinction of the various kinds of pain on the basis of the involvement of the desert claim, the target that arouses an emotion, and the condition in which she who feels it is; at stake here is also a change of epoch, i.e. the replacement of the moral conceptual framework of the ancients with that of the moderns. The thesis I would like to defend is that pleasure at another’s misfortune has been progressively reduced to its related malicious shade because *Schadenfreude* has been seen as one of those emotions facilitating the emergence of *ressentiment*.

As in the preface to his essay *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen* Scheler pointed out, Nietzsche has borrowed the term “*ressentiment*” from French and has made it a technical term. This allowed him to keep the ambivalence of an emotion that is, first of all, «a re-experiencing of the emotion itself, a renewal of the original feeling» (Scheler 2007, p. 25), but also a negative emotion in itself, implying a movement of hostility. Scheler identifies this second aspect with the German word “*Groll*”, namely “rancor” understood as «a suppressed wrath, independent of the ego’s activity, which moves obscurely through the mind» (ibid.). The phenomenon of “reliving an emotion” is in no way a mere intellectual recollection of a previous emotion. It is rather an unconscious experience that remains at the level of emotional life. Therefore, it often «sinks the original feeling more deeply into the centre of one’s personality and concomitantly removes it from the sphere of action and expression» (ibid.). In other words, resentment is an emotion that tends to be transformed into an existential disposition overwhelming one’s entire life. It takes shape «through the repeated reliving of intentionalities of hatred or other hostile emotions. In itself it does not contain a specific hostile intention, but it nourishes any number of such intentions» (ibid.).

Nietzsche explicitly deals with *Schadenfreude* in two aphorisms of *Human, All Too Human* which apparently contrast with each other. In aphorism 103 of the part dedicated to the history of moral sensations, Nietzsche

rhetorically asks whether *Schadenfreude* is effectively devilish, as Schopenhauer holds. Following his conviction that pleasure in itself is neither good nor bad, Nietzsche (1996, p. 55) argues that «wickedness does not have the suffering of another as such as its objective, but our own enjoyment, for example the enjoyment of the feeling of revenge or of a powerful excitation of the nerves». He adds that «even teasing demonstrates what pleasure it gives to vent our power on others and to produce in ourselves the pleasurable feeling of ascendancy». Accordingly, in Nietzsche's terms *Schadenfreude* could be said to exhibit the innocent element that wickedness presupposes insofar as, in light of its passive character, it does not have the suffering of other as its own objective, but just the enjoyment stemming from feeling superiority in witnessing another's failures.

However, our attention should be drawn to the last part of the aphorism, where, after stressing that pity has the pleasure of the other as its objective just as little as wickedness has the pain of the other as such, Nietzsche observes that the two elements making wickedness a source of self-enjoyment are the fact itself of feeling an emotion and, when it leads to action, the gratification in the exercise of power. As we already know, *Schadenfreude* in no way leads to action; otherwise it develops into spite and, as Nietzsche himself appropriately points out, in teasing, mocking and derision. Furthermore, one might say that exactly the passive character impedes one who feels *Schadenfreude* to experience full pleasure arising out of desire for revenge and the affirmation of superiority over the others. Unlike teasing, *Schadenfreude* does not make the person who feels it responsible for the other's suffering, but this is also the reason why we cannot acknowledge in *Schadenfreude* the same capacity of actualizing our vital values, or our will to power.

This last consideration explains why in aphorism 27 of the famous last part of *Human, All Too Human* entitled "The Wanderer and His Shadow", Nietzsche (1996, p. 314) observes that *Schadenfreude* originates in the fact that «everyone feels unwell» insofar she is oppressed by care, envy or sorrow. The harm that befalls another makes her our equal and appeases our envy. But, also when we feel perfectly well, our tendency is to gather up our neighbour's misfortunes in our consciousness as a capital upon which to draw when we face misfortune. Thus, *Schadenfreude* becomes «the commonest expression of the victory and restoration of equality within the higher world-order too. It is only since man has learned to see in other men beings like and equal to himself, that is to say only since the establishment of society, that *Schadenfreude* has existed» (ibid.).

By so arguing, Nietzsche substantially ascribes to *Schadenfreude* a significant role in the emergence of *ressentiment* as an emotion characterizing slave morality in modern times. In his *On the Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche does not employ the term *Schadenfreude*. This can be interpreted as evidence of the fact that the feelings involved in the malicious *Schadenfreude* are substantially embedded in those of *ressentiment*. Indeed, Nietzsche stresses that *ressentiment* is felt by those beings who, denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge. This necessarily entails that the sole form of gratification at the level of the powerless is the passive, even imaginary, contemplation of others' suffering.

Aristotle held that in anger imagination produces an apparent pleasure that accompanies the pain we feel when we desire to avenge an undeserved offence. It is such a representation (*phantasia*) that properly excites us by nourishing our desire for revenge. However, since she who feels anger craves to be recognized as the author of the revenge, this pleasure cannot be seen as a kind of *Schadenfreude* implying contemplative behaviour. By contrast, as was just said, *ressentiment* consolidates passive conducts because it arises out of the feeling to be unable to get revenge actively.

As Scheler (2007, p. 29) explained, in *ressentiment* the impulse to react to an offense is «at least momentarily checked and restrained, and the response is consequently postponed to a later time and to a more suitable occasion». This is why the impulse to react is immediately followed by the thought that an immediate response could lead to defeat. Accordingly, Scheler includes *Schadenfreude* among those emotions leading to *ressentiment* even though they do not coincide with it. In other words, for Scheler, emotions such as *Schandenfreude*, spite and envy involve *ressentiment* only if «there occurs neither a moral self-conquest (such as a genuine forgiveness in the case of revenge) nor an act or some other adequate expression of emotion (such as verbal abuse or shaking one's fist), and if this restraint is caused by a pronounced awareness of impotence» (Scheler 2007, p. 31). In light of our previous discussion, we should speak of *Schadenfreude* just when our glee is not expressed in a way not aiming to actively mock our target, nor to reveal itself. In our terms, we may say that malicious *Schadenfreude* can develop to resentment insofar as pleasure in merely witness another's misfortune nourishes my sense of inferiority and impotence.

According to Nietzsche's and Scheler's analyses, in the modern times *Schadenfreude* nourishes the desire for revenge of the powerless who is not able

to effect and thus *Schadenfreude* give her the apparent, even imaginary, impression of satisfaction. In Freud's terms, we might say that *Schadenfreude* facilitates *ressentiment* by repressing anger.

From this perspective, it is evidently impossible to mean *Schadenfreude* as an outcome of the satisfaction of *nemesis*. As moral philosophers, the historians of ancient thought and philologists explained, *nemesis* is in Homer the reaction to one's *hybris*. Bernard Williams (1993, p. 80), for instance, points out that *nemesis* can be understood, according to the context, as "ranging from shock, contempt, and malice to righteous rage and indignation". Following Redfield (1975), he considers *nemesis* as specular to *aidos* (shame) insofar as both are a reaction to the violation of one's honour. The fact that *nemesis* involves all those emotions should not be thought as a symptom of ambiguity. It rather means that all those emotions can be elicited by violation of honour and customary rules, which one's sense of shame should prevent from pursuing and actualizing. *Schadenfreude* as satisfaction of *nemesis* occurs, therefore, just in particular conditions and its outcome is the opposite of that of malicious *Schadenfreude* leading to *ressentiment*. Instead of nourishing the pain by giving the appearance of pleasure, it rather provides pleasure by releasing from pain.

I will delve deeper into this last point in the next section by contrasting the different types of joy involved in *Schadenfreude* with each other. Let me now conclude by highlighting the following: in his interpretation of Aristotle's theory of emotions, Konstan (2006) adduces some relevant examples from archaic Greek literature to show that there was «a sharp decline in *nemesis* and its relatives, in comparison with their frequent appearance in archaic poetry» (ibid., p. 119). This decline favoured the emergence of *phthonos*. He takes the idea of a shift in social values from the archaic world of the epic to that of the newly emerging city-state more likely than that of Aristotle, who sees the two terms as just different in meanings.

In order to defend this thesis, Konstan adduces examples demonstrating that in some contexts, the verb *phthoneo* does not allude to envy, if this coincides with «a gratuitous or improper resentment at another's well-being», but it means rather «feel righteous indignation at» (ibid., p. 121). Besides, Konstan argues «in democratic Athens, *phthonos* tended to be associated to 'upward resentment', that is, the anger of the lower classes towards the rich, whereas in Homer, *nemesis* seems more often to express 'downward resentment' on the part of superiors – whether gods or mortals – towards

inferiors who overstep their action» (ibid., p. 122). But Konstan also notices that the difference between upward and downward resentment does not seem to be adequately to distinguish *nemesis* from envy. Indeed, Aristotle himself not only argues that «those who are worthy of good things and in fact possess them are *nemesetikoî*», which means «prone to feel *nemesis*», or better – as Williams (1993, p. 80) suggested – «worthy to feel *nemesis*»; he also points out that «the successful, too, tend to be *phthoneroî*» (Rhetoric 2.10, 1387b28-9).

As is evident, Konstan does not appropriate the distinction between anger and resentment on which the modern conception of *ressentiment* is rooted. In his view, upward resentment is a form of anger. After all, the Athenians could not envisage the possibility of establishing a democracy if they feel powerless in comparison to upper classes of noble men. On the one hand, Konstan's reflections demonstrate that even when the term "*nemesis*" falls into disuse, the permanence of the feeling that it expressed in archaic poetry prevents one from sharply differentiating resentment from anger and thereby *nemesis*. Thus, even though Aristotle's distinction between *phthonos* and *nemesis* were historically disputable, it would be theoretically decisive insofar as it attempts to keep a distinction that in modern times collapses. It seems to me that this makes Aristotle's distinction between malicious *Schadenfreude* and the pleasure at another's misfortune, while providing relief from indignation, equally decisive.

3. Malicious joy and laughter

In the general classification of emotions, each positive response could be meant as a type of joy and separated from the disagreeable feeling involving a type of sorrow.⁷ Hence, at a first glance, in the term "*Schadenfreude*" joy should be understood as a generic reference to the involvement of an agreeable feeling in this emotion. If so, it tells us nothing more on the peculiar kind of pleasure *Schadenfreude* provides us. In order to acquaint ourselves with this, we should explore more accurately that which in phenomenological vocabulary we might call the quality of the emotional act identified with pleasure at another's misfortune.

Though without the variety of unpleasant feelings, the pleasant emotions can be differentiated on the basis of the kind of change they impart on one's behaviour. The characterization of the type of joy involved in *Schadenfreude* is complicated by the fact that, as we have already seen, pleasure

⁷ See Ben-Ze'ev 2000 (p. 94), who re-elaborates Spinoza's stance.

at another's misfortune is strictly connected with the pain we feel out of envy or indignation. Undoubtedly, in both cases joy cannot be associated with mirth and elation. Since the pleasure involved in *Schadenfreude* follows pain, it does not seem suited to function just as a source of light heartedness, good spirit, playfulness or tranquillity. That pleasure is rather associated with agreeable feelings stemming from the achievement of a victory in a challenge. Besides, envy and indignation, in turn, entail two different types of result in a challenge.⁸ In indignation one challenges the other on the basis of the conviction of being right in believing that another's good fortune is unmerited. This implies that when an event balances another's undeserved success, a sense of relief replaces the pain of indignation.

In dealing with the emotion that Aristotle designates as the opposite of anger (namely *praotes*), Konstan (2006, p. 77) argues that the opposite of an emotion appears itself as an emotion, rather than the absence of that emotion. In a similar spirit, Kristjánsson (2006, p. 96ff.) identifies pleasure at another's misfortune involving a desert claim with a kind of satisfaction. After all, satisfaction is the translation Konstan proposes for *praotes*. Now, the satisfaction we feel in *Schadenfreude* derives from feeling that justice somehow asserts itself. The feeling of relief emerges from the fact that an event takes the edge off. Besides, in the case in which the restoration of justice was not expected, relief is then accompanied by a sense of surprise that makes the joy more intense. By contrast, when envy develops into malicious *Schadenfreude*, the challenge moves to a new level. The feeling of inferiority that envy insinuates in us is reversed into one of superiority over our equal bumped into misfortune. Here pleasure does not release us from pain, but rather nourishes it. This explains also why in *Philebus*, through his main character Socrates, Plato includes the capacity of being pleased by the misfortunes of those near us among the expressions of *phthonos*. Plato does not employ another term, as Aristotle does, in order to describe pleasure following from the reversal of the situation in which we feel envy. This allows him to highlight that the peculiarity of pleasure in another's misfortune is to be combined with distress. Thus, *phthonos* qua malicious *Schadenfreude* breaks with the sharp separation between joy and sorrow, showing to what extent they could be mixed up.⁹

⁸ An attempt to examine the differentiation of pleasant emotional experience is that of Ellsworth & Smith (1988), whose title inspired me.

⁹ On *phthonos* qua *Schadenfreude* in Plato's *Philebus* see Fussi (2017).

In order to demonstrate his conviction that some pleasures are combined with pain, in *Philebus* Socrates considers the case of those who laugh at the ignorance of their friends. In his view, ignorance is indeed a source of ridicule insofar as it belongs to persons who are in a state of weakness. In the opposite case, ignorance would rather generate fear and shame. In particular, it elicits fear when we think of the damage that an ignorant can cause us; instead, it arouses shame when we limit ourselves to considering the way an ignorant person could appear to others in society. Think of what a cultured person could feel when her country's prime minister blunders. In light of what I have already explained, indignation is the other emotion ignorance can arouse in the case in which it pertains to a person who has a strong position.

Nevertheless, with his argumentation, Plato inaugurates a long tradition of thought that associates the agreeable feeling involved in malice with the phenomenon of laughter. This idea is consolidated over the history of philosophy thanks to numerous thinkers. Think of Hobbes, who holds that our realization of power generates laughter along with glory;¹⁰ or Baudelaire, who describes laughter as intimately connected with the diabolic, adducing as an example the rejoicing at the sight of someone else's misfortune.¹¹ As Buckley (2014, p. 219) put it, this tradition defends the conviction (then sedimented in French as *joie maligne*) that pleasure at another's misfortune coincides with the epitome of laughter.

According to this view, we may say that laughter could unmask the envy concealed behind a desert claim. The person who effectively feels righteous indignation would not react to the restoration of justice by laughing, but just through more placid types of joy such as mere smiling. We may even explain this point by highlighting that while *Schadenfreude* as the obverse of indignation substantially consists in a type of relief, *Schadenfreude* originated by envy conversely results in gloating.

Yet not all types of laughter betray *Schadenfreude*. On the basis of what I argued in the previous section, when laughter is aimed at mocking another's discomfiture, we should more accurately speak of spite rather than *Schadenfreude*.¹² Properly speaking, laughter is a symptom of *Schadenfreude*

¹⁰ Cf. Hobbes (1996), part 1, ch. 6, p. 38.

¹¹ Baudelaire (1972), p. 144

¹² Therefore the famous catchphrase "HA-HA" with which the school bully Nelson in *The Simpsons* spots another character's misfortunes has been *erroneously* adduced as an example of

only when it is in no way aimed at highlighting another's discomfort, but just at expressing one's own interiority spontaneously and accidentally. The laughter of the person who feels *Schadenfreude* can lead to derision, but it does not coincide with it.

As Plessner (1993, p. 23) has explained, the «eruptive character» of laughing links it closely with movements and involuntary acts that express emotion. However, differently from «blushing, turning pale, vomiting, coughing, sneezing, and other vegetative processes, largely removed from voluntary influences» (ibid., p. 24), phenomena like laughing and crying exhibit an opaque character that makes them not only «affective utterances and emotional expressive movements» but also «forms of human expression and statement, a mode of conduct, kinds of behaviour» (ibid., p. 27). This implies, first, that it is not the fact that *we feel Schadenfreude* which makes our behaviour reprehensible, blameworthy or even shameful; rather, it is that we externalize this kind of joy *by laughing*. Secondly, Plessner's observation suggests that laughter is not only the involuntary externalization of an inner feeling due to loss of control, but also a moment of one's inner emotional life.

The way laughter elapses can also determine the transition from one emotion to another within the unity of emotional life. To sum up what I have amply argued, if one expresses her joy at another's misfortune by laughing in a blatant and even theatrical way, the mere contemplative and passive attitude characterizing *Schadenfreude* evidently makes way for spite. However, if one cannot help gloating, but does so in a controlled (almost concealed) way not aimed at mocking other, laughter limits itself to expressing a malicious *Schadenfreude* following previous envy. Besides, when another's misfortune provokes just smiling, it most likely denotes relief connected with the satisfaction of righteous indignation.

Schadenfreude (see, for instance, Delaney, p. 45). Often commentators also evokes the episode "When Flanders failed", where Lisa explicitly describes as a case of *Schadenfreude* Homer's taking delight in Ned's suffering for the failure of his own store, The Leftorium (see Delaney, p. 44-45; Dorfman 2013, p. 9-10; Smith 2013, p. 21-22). But even in this case Homer betrays his "shameful joy" by laughing at Flanders and mocking him as follows: «Where is this store, Flanders? The merry old land of Oz? Oh, no. The Springfield Mall. [...] Keep your pants on, Flanders! I'm wishing as fast as I can! Ooh! Heh, heh, heh, heh».
(https://www.springfield.springfield.co.uk/view_episode_scripts.php?tv-show=the-simpsons&episode=s03e03)

Still, in Plessner's view, laughter breaks with the ordinary. It awakens our attention and prompts us to reflect on our feelings. For laughing is often a source of reflection. This means that, when expressing *Schadenfreude*, laughing can also sanction the self-revelation of envy and, consequently, the acquisition of self-awareness of one's emotional life that often latently and unconsciously influences her conducts. Accordingly, we may claim that insofar as it brings laughter, *Schadenfreude* is an emotion that contains in itself the possibility of self-exhaustion. Indeed, a fitting reaction to the discovery of feeling malicious *Schadenfreude* (and connected envy) is that which leads to shame and/or self-critique. Just as in cases in which *Schadenfreude* follows indignation, self-critique could be, pragmatically speaking, a good reaction because, even though it is not blameworthy, indignation could still be harmful for one's well being.

Let me now briefly consider how the exploration of the link between *Schadenfreude* and laughter yields a helpful argument to defend an integrating view of the three motivational theories of humour in which moral philosophers and psychologists have attempted to classify various accounts of laughter throughout history.¹³

The most widespread of these theories is that which identifies the origin of laughter in a feeling of superiority. According to a standard view, Plato and Aristotle advocate this theory and consequently condemn those who in society abandon themselves to laughing at others' misfortunes. In other words, the conviction that laughter presupposes a feeling of superiority would be the condition to consider *phthonos* blameworthy, whether as *Schadenfreude* with respect to our friends (as in the case of Plato) or as *epichairekakia* (as in the case of Aristotle). Effectively, in the *Republic* 388e Plato said that the guardians of the state should avoid abandoning themselves to laughter, because this could provoke a violent reaction. Consequently, in the *Poetics* 499a Aristotle states that comedy «is an imitation of men worse than the average [...] as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly».

However, in light of what I have previously argued, we can correct the standard inclusion of Plato and Aristotle among those who locate in the feeling of superiority the origin of laughter by reminding ourselves that they wittily understood that superiority is only apparent in those who feel *Schadenfreude*. More accurately, this emotion arises when another's misfortune compensates

¹³ In my illustration of the three account of laughter I will follow Morreall (2009), ch. 1, but see also Glebatis Perks (2012) and Shelley (2003), who demonstrates how modern accounts of humour oversimplify and thus distort Plato's and Aristotle's view of laughter.

for the inferiority one feels out of envy or indignation. Accordingly, the feeling of superiority is a moment in the fluctuating challenge that we undertake with others in society. In fact, Hobbes appropriates Plato's conviction that laughter expresses our delight in the shortcomings of others in order to defend his idea that people are naturally individualistic and competitive. When in the war of all against all some events let us believe ourselves to be winning, or others losing, we are inclined to laugh. In his view *sudden glory* is «the passion which makes those grimaces called laughter» (Hobbes 1996, part 1, ch. 6, p. 38). Hobbes acknowledges that our perception of superiority is the condition leading us to laugh, but he also notices that «much laughter at the defects of other is a sign of pusillanimity» (ibid.). In other words, laughter that follows *Schadenfreude* often conceals cowardliness.

Two limits of superiority theory are those Hutcheson (1987) attempted to point out by criticizing Hobbes. First of all, we do not necessarily need to compare ourselves with others in order to laugh; secondly, it is misleading to think that whenever we feel “sudden glory”, we laugh. In fact, we can have feelings of superiority even when feeling pity, which is, as I have explained in first section, the obverse of that type of *Schadenfreude* that satisfies righteous indignation and the contrary of malicious *Schadenfreude* that follows envy.

Another theory of humour sees the origin of laughter in relief. One of the best-known formulations of this theory is that of Freud in his *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. In his view, laughing allows one to vent a state of frustration. In particular, in humour we would express our repressed energy coming from feeling emotions (while in jokes the energy comes from repressed drives, and in the comic from thoughts). From this perspective, *Schadenfreude* would be the clearest example of a merely passive reaction to an event that releases us from our frustration and that satisfies our lust and our aggressive drives in a mediated way. It is not difficult to see in Plato the involuntary originator of this theory again. Insisting on the fact that pleasure is often combined with pain as well as on the link between amusement and folly, Plato substantially suggests that relief is the resolution of a dialectical tension in one's emotional life. But, as I have already argued, in the emotional life the resolution of a tension is nothing other than a new emotion coming into play.

According to a third theory, humour emerges out of the perception of something incongruous. Kant (2007, § 54, p. 161), for instance, embraces this view stating that «something absurd [...] must be present in whatever is to raise

a hearty convulsive laugh». Here laughter appears as an affection arising from the sudden violation of an expectation. Even in this case laughing reveals to us a mixed pleasure, because the person who laughs enjoys the perception of an incongruity in the object, but her understanding finds no satisfaction. Indeed, Kant (ibid.) insists that our expectation does not transform itself into «the positive contrary of an expected object», but it must be a reduction to nothing. From this perspective, *Schadenfreude* would be elicited when an unexpected event suddenly reverses one's previous feeling. Hence, *Schadenfreude* arises from the discomfiture of people whom we envy, not only because another's good fortune is replaced by bad fortune, but also, and above all, because an event contradicts the image of the other that the entire society and us have of her. Think, for instance, of how the Thracian maid's feeling could have been modified at the fall into the pit of a wise man if instead of Thales she had seen, say, her midwife. Even though for a moment she could have felt pleasure in looking at a person with an important social role falling down, most likely this feeling would have dissipated at the thought that the person she must trust at the moment of delivery is not careful with where she puts her feet.

In conclusion, we may claim that the three classical theories of humour are not mutually exclusive.¹⁴ The exploration of the way laughter is involved in the expression of *Schadenfreude* shows that these theories can be integrated insofar as they refer to different parts or alternative outcomes of the same process. To sum up, laughter expresses superiority that in *Schadenfreude* is externalized with the aim to conceal and/or to balance a feeling of inferiority. Laughter allows one to release from the distress that competitive emotions such as *Schadenfreude*, envy and indignation cause us. Moreover, laughter often emerges when an event conflicts with the social role that I routinely attribute to those whom I envy or those who behave in a way that makes me feel indignant.

¹⁴ The philosopher who in modern times integrates the three theory of laughter is Bergson (2008). Indeed, he fosters the incongruity theory when he identifies the essence of the ridiculous with "mechanical inelasticity", but at the same time he endorses the superiority theory because he claims that when we laugh at persons who are acting like machine, we do feel superior to them. Finally, he seems to embrace relief theory when identifying laughter with a social mechanism that aggregates those who laugh at. And perhaps if he had taken into account the emotion of *Schadenfreude*, he would not have claimed that «laughter is incompatible with emotion» because «depict some fault, however trifling, in such a way as to arouse sympathy, fear, or pity; the mischief is done, it is impossible for us to laugh» (ibid., p. 43).

4. *Schadenfreude* and the philosophical attitude

In this fourth and concluding section I would like to consider the most famous case of *Schadenfreude*: that of the Thracian maid at Thales's fall into a pit while he was observing stars in the heaven. After our discussion, this specific anecdote would be more correctly described as a case of spite. However, it conceals a reflection on the condition of the philosopher that allows us to overlook for a while that the Thracian maid's laugh was an active derision of Thales, and to concentrate on the crucial question, namely to what extent laughter contributes to the education and management of *Schadenfreude* and connected feelings in a way that facilitates the adoption of a theoretical attitude.

In the digression of the *Theaetetus* in which Plato defends the life of the philosopher in contrast with that of the rhetorician, Socrates evokes Thales's anecdote. In this version, some gracefully witty Thracian servant girl is said to have made a jest at Thales's expense by stating that in his eagerness to know the things in heaven he was unaware of the things in front of him and at his feet. Via Socrates, Plato compares Thales's misfortune with the condition in which all those who engage in philosophy find themselves:

For someone of this sort has truly become unaware of his neighbour next-door, not only as to what he is doing but almost to the point of not knowing whether he is a human being or some different nursling. But what human being is and in what respect it is suitable for a nature of that sort to act or be acted on that is different from all the rest – he seeks that, and all his trouble (*pragmata*) is in exploring it. [...] Whenever he is compelled in a court or anywhere else to converse about the things at his feet and things before his eyes, he gives not only Thracian girls but the rest of a the crowd a laugh (*Theaetetus* 174b).

In phenomenological terms, it seems that here Plato describes the way the philosopher lives within the lifeworld. According to Husserl (1970, § 38, p. 145ff.), the lifeworld is the natural horizon we straightforwardly dwell in. In everyday life the lifeworld remains unthematic. In order to make it an object of reflection, one should take a distance from her ordinary way of living thus acquiring a disinterested gaze. When this happens, a theoretical attitude is adopted, but this is to the detriment of the pragmatic behaviour characterizing social life. For this generates the ridiculous character of the philosopher. From this point of view, laughter appears as belonging to the ignorant persons who are

unable to look beyond the appearances by grasping the philosopher's wisdom—a wisdom often concealed by her clumsiness in practical affairs.

In his study *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman: A Protohistory of Theory*, Hans Blumenberg points out how in the *Theaetetus* Plato had modified the original Aesopic fable, where an anonymous astronomer, who used to go out in the evenings to observe the stars, fell into a pit once as he was strolling through the outskirts of the town. Here it is a passer-by who heard his pitiful tones that came up and, as soon as he discovered what had happened, remarked to the astronomer how, while he was trying to watch things in the heavens, he did not even see things on the ground.

Blumenberg contests the reading of Plato's rehash of the tale that attributes ignorance exclusively to the Thracian maid. In his view, the reference to Thales stands not simply for the protophilosopher in general, but also, and more appropriately, for the theorist who devoted his life to the study of the cosmos. In other words, Thales is the major interpreter of the natural philosophy from which, in *Phaedo* 96a-99d, Socrates recounts to be turned away in favour of a philosophical approach focused on human affairs. Therefore, «the spatial distance and inaccessibility of the objects in the starry sky – in comparison to the nearness of practical existence's pitfalls – did not *constitute* the theorist's exoticism, but only *represented it*» (Blumenberg 2015, p. 7).

Yet, in Blumenberg's view, the Thracian maid's laughter is extremely ambivalent because, on the one hand, it announces what will reach its conclusion in the hatred that will condemn Socrates, but, on the other hand, it expresses the same realism that will lead Socrates to move from a philosophy focused on nature to one dealing with the nature of human beings. These two allusions to Socrates's life concealed in Thales's anecdote are intimately connected with each other. In fact, it is exactly the transition from an apparently futile activity like observing the stars to an activity that questions the consolidated way of living in the *polis* that generates the gradual transition from the Thracian maid's laughter to the hatred of Socrates's accusers, and consequently the development of an innocuous form of *Schadenfreude* to a dangerous form of *ressentiment*.

In other words, when the philosophers abandon natural philosophy for the political one, they do not find themselves in a better condition at all. The *polis* cannot find a philosophy harmless that first says virtue is knowledge and consequently teaches citizens to know that they know nothing: «Plato invented that laughter as a response to the sight of the Milesian philosopher, in order to

associate it with Socrates' death sentence. And it would have been no stretch for Plato's public to see the tragic aspect of the comic figure» (ibid., p. 13).

Natural philosophy could be also useful. Blumenberg reminds us of the “counter-anecdote to Plato's” that Aristotle transmitted in the *Politics* 9, 1259a9-18: since Thales was reproached for his poverty, which was supposed to show that philosophy was of no use, after he knew by his skill in the stars that there would be a great harvest of olives in the coming year, he gave deposits for the use of all the olive-presses in Chios and Miletus; when the harvest time came, he let olives out at any rate which he pleased, and made such a quantity of money that he showed that philosophers can easily be rich if they like, but that their ambition is of another sort. As Blumenberg (2015, p. 15) remarks, in this way Aristotle integrated sophism into philosophy: the philosophers are able, too, to adopt the realist attitude characterizing all other citizens in their social life, but they just do not want to. By contrast, the Socratic philosopher, as Plato presents him, can in no way behave like her fellow citizens because this would mean to accept *nomos*, to remain in the cave. More accurately, in Plato's view, the philosopher can also speak the language of citizens but in an ironic way, in order to bring her interlocutors out of the cave. Of course, one may object to Blumenberg's opposition between Plato and Aristotle that Aristotle's counter-anecdote is precisely aimed at highlighting that the philosopher should avoid appearing clumsy and arousing the laughter of the ignorant citizens; rather, she should learn how to control and guide the emotions of her interlocutors in order to awaken their souls from the intellectual torpidity in which they straightforwardly live within the horizon of the lifeworld. However, this does not exclude that the ordinary and practical attitude that the philosopher adopts as a citizen should be reversed in order to undertake a mere contemplative and theoretical attitude allowing her to focus on the essence of things, and on human nature in particular.

This last point is extremely interesting from a phenomenological perspective because it alludes to the possibility that a certain way to cope with with the emotions characterizing human behaviour in the ordinary horizon of the lifeworld unconsciously and incidentally (i.e. *en parergoi*, in Aristotle's vocabulary) paves the way for the reversal of this same natural way of living. In other words, our way of managing our emotional reactions towards what happens in our everyday lives somehow contributes to dispose us in a way that facilitates the adoption of a philosophical attitude. In light of this, the way laughter can be combined with *Schadenfreude* acquires some often-ignored

relevance. Indeed, it shows us how the feeling of *Schadenfreude* can be reversed into the one that activates a theoretical attitude.

In the published 7th colloquium of the research group “Poetik und Hermeneutik”, where Blumenberg presents his study on the reception of Thales’s anecdote, the philologist Harald Weinrich criticizes the masochism of those philosophers like Blumenberg that are so careful to restate the memory of the ridicule in which philosophy originated. In his view, the maid simply laughs at a false «strategy for happiness (*Glücksstrategie*)» (Weinrich 1976, p. 436). Her derision of Thales would be, therefore, a morally tolerable kind of *Schadenfreude* that can be easily used in the literary genre of the fable. Moreover, he notices that a fable is ambivalent insofar as it is tragicomic. We can indeed laugh with the maid at the stargazer’s false strategy for happiness, but we can also feel fear and compassion towards the protophilosopher. However, since the fable is always interpreted by philosophers and not by maids, the exegesis tends to highlight that here the higher principle is mocked by a lower principle. In this way, the meaning of the fable is charged with a resentment that allows us only a tormented laugh.

Blumenberg (1976) replies to Weinrich by contesting the transformation of the tale into an example of class struggle. He adds that the reference to *Schadenfreude* is just the most superficial aspect of the tale. The protophilosopher overlooked the obvious when he abandoned himself to the farthest phenomena; but, in so doing, he came closer to the obvious of tomorrow. At the same time, paying attention to the readers of the *Theaetetus* in accordance with the principle of the research group for “Poetik und Hermeneutik”, Blumenberg has to acknowledge that maid’s laughter gets a gruesome sound, since the readers of Plato’s dialogue know that Socrates is already dead, and that he died not by the ignorance of laughter, but by a stronger kind of ignorance. And yet, at the end of his reply Blumenberg has also to grant that not only the story of the fall of the protophilosopher is told with irritating enthusiasm by those who should have been affected by the laughter of the maid, as Weinrich holds, but even the story of this story is told by one who “actually should be affected by the laughter of the maid”.

Blumenberg downplays the fact that the anecdote deals with a case of *Schadenfreude*, whereas he insists on the increasing relevance of laughter involved in this emotion. Far from advocating a separation between *Schadenfreude* and laughter, this rather suggests that laughter denotes not only an outcome of *Schadenfreude*, but also a possible development of this emotion.

Doubtless, *Schadenfreude* can develop into spite and even resentment and hatred, as in the path that, according to Blumenberg, Plato exoterically evokes in the *Theaetetus* by connecting Thales's anecdote with the way the philosopher is seen in his social affairs. However, laughter involved in *Schadenfreude* is not only a spontaneous tool we have for mocking others; it can also be a source of reflection. When laughter operates in this direction, it brings *Schadenfreude* to be re-elaborated in a way that facilitates the adoption of a contemplative, self-critic and theoretical attitude. Indeed, as Plessner (1970, p. 24) pointed out, once we instinctively abandon ourselves to laughter, a spontaneous attention is generated that potentially enables us to shift our focus from the object that made us laugh to the reasons of the laughter. When this happens, laughter sheds light on the attitude we are adopting, on its limits and potentialities.

Doubtless, she who has adopted a philosophical attitude is not inclined to indulge in that kind of laughter combined with pain characterizing *Schadenfreude*. But this does not entail that the philosopher is unable to laugh at all. For instance, at *Philebus* 30e Socrates remarks that sometimes playfulness is a relief from seriousness. However, evidently Socrates is not referring here to that kind of relief that is detrimental of others. When at *Theaetetus* 175a-b Socrates alludes to those who «make themselves august in a recitation of twenty-five ancestors and refer themselves to Heracles the son of Amphitryon», he claims that the philosopher laughs in seeing them as «incapable of calculation and release from the vanity of a foolish soul». Besides, Socrates observes that whenever the philosopher gets to drag someone up out of the cave so that he turns, for instance, to the examination of justice itself, then he pays back the converse: «He does not give Thracian girls a laugh, or anyone else who's uneducated either – for they do not perceive it – but all those who have been reared in a fashion contrary to slaves» (*Theaetetus*, 175c-d).

As we can easily understand, getting revenge for the derision which she is condemned to in ordinary life is not the peculiar aim of the philosopher whenever she pushes someone to deal with the nature of things. However, via Socrates, Plato seems to find this reaction fitting. We have already contested Plato's claim taking as fitting laughter at the misfortunes of our enemies, like rhetoricians in this case. Instead, we might accept a suggestion coming from Baudelaire. In his essay on the essence of laughter, insisting on the fact that «the comic, the power of laughter, is in the laughter, not at all in the object of laughter», Baudelaire (1972, p. 148) observes that «it is not the man who falls down that laughs at his own fall, unless he is a philosopher, a man who has acquired, by

force of habit the power of getting outside himself quickly and watching, as a disinterested spectator, the phenomenon of his ego». Before referring to Thales's anecdote, at *Theaetetus* 173e Socrates argues that only «the body (*soma*) of the philosopher is situated in the city, not his thought (*dianoia*)». Therefore, when the philosopher laughs at her own fall, it is like laughing at the clumsiness of her body which is condemned to reside within the lifeworld. Moreover, taking the reference to the body in a metaphorical way as alluding to the everyday life of the philosopher, we might say that the philosopher can laugh at his way of taking care of ordinary affairs that she considers futile if compared to that of searching for the nature of things. This leads the philosopher to completely re-elaborate the feeling of *Schadenfreude*. Instead of being focused on the others' misfortunes in a way that generates a counter-position between the philosopher and his enemies, in this case *Schadenfreude* arises at the philosopher's own misfortune, and by extension at any event manifesting the difficulty to live into the lifeworld that characterizing *polis*, without being able to reflect on what to live means and to search for the most virtuous way of living. This being said, in conclusion we may claim that the ambivalent character of laughter does not play a decisive role in the life of she who has already adopted and consolidated a philosophical attitude, but only in the lives of those who need to be disposed to pursue this goal, in those who still live immersed in the unthematic horizon of lifeworld. For sure, the laughter involved in *Schadenfreude* could serve the desire for glory, as Hobbes systematically argued. But, thanks to the spontaneous attention it eventually can generate, the same laughter could also represent an occasion to reflect on the habits we unconsciously adopt everyday and leads to the search for an education of our emotive reactions.

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