

Ontology of laughter: social-ethical aspects

If you wish to glimpse inside a human soul and get to know the man,
 don't bother analyzing his ways of being silent, of talking,
 of weeping, or seeing how much he is moved by noble ideas;
 you'll get better results if you just watch him laugh.
 If he laughs well, he's a good man...
 All I claim to know is that laughter is the most reliable gauge of
 human nature.

Feodor Dostoyevsky

Laughter is very important emotional manifestation for human being. The understanding of laughter's nature and the determination of its main characters can't be ignored because laughter is the ability that characterizes and determines the very human way of seeing and understanding the world and the person himself. As a result of the critical analysis, such laughter features as paradoxicality, distancing, openness, freedom, sociality, connection with the sphere of morality are noted and simultaneously indicate the internal unity of consciousness and laughter nature. Laughter built into the structure of human consciousness, and therefore it acquires an ontological character. The article focuses on the social nature of laughter and its educational function. Gradually and consistently, the chain of "consciousness-conscience-laughter-shame" was built during this research. As laughter sometimes can be put in pair with evil, very often the researchers consider it sinful. It was shown that the roots of evil lie not in laughter, but in the person who manipulates its inner abilities.

Key words: consciousness, conscience, laughter, evil, paradox, distancing, freedom, power, sociality.

Problem definition. It is enough to look around to observe the dynamism of our world: the threads of love and hatred, sorrow and joy, sadness and peace, grief and inexhaustible happiness mixed with each other in a single canvas, which can be neither torn apart nor realized. One of the most striking manifestations of the human person is laughter. Despite the fact that we laugh every day, laughter remains one of the most mysterious emotions of a person. Quite difficult to give it a complete and adequate definition, since everyone laughs at something about its own, and therefore there are so many reasons for laughter. Today there is no single concept of laughter which would fully describe this phenomenon. So the questions remain, *What is the laugh? Why does a person laugh? How laughter affects our lives (not only social, or spiritual, but also physical)? What are the functions of laughter? Is laugh a purely human phenomenon, etc.?* Concerning the last issue, scientists and researchers have not reached the unambiguousness. Studies show that reactions similar to laughter are observed in such representatives of the natural world as chimpanzees, rats, dolphins [Blomqvist, Mello, Amundin 2005: 187-194; Panksepp, Burgdorf 2003: 533-547]. We must admit that they really are. But we need to be very careful to make conclusions [Provine 2017: 238-244]. First, the research in this area is processing, and we can't unequivocally judge by the reactions that we observe in animals. Second, it's hard to equate a grin with the laughter of a person, it's more likely a physiological reaction to danger. Thirdly, animals "laughter" is often described through acoustic and visual manifestations, which are part of a gaming situation, aimed for better adaptation, skill acquisition, and signal that the behavior and situation are safe and non-aggressive.

When we are talking about human laughter, we mean a deeper process, so complex and multifunctional that its nature still raises questions. Human laughter possesses not only adaptive functions but also educational, and corrective elements. It is meaningful, contextual. The laughter facilitates the internal rebirth and self-development of the human person. Human laughter is tightly connected with the spirituality and the aestheticism of the personal worldview [Gordon 2012: 62-70; Morreall 1983]. Peter

Berger notes that apes can grin, but no ape can respond to a political joke or any other sort of joke. All questions about the laughter of animals can be left to zoologists [Berger 1997: 46]. Therefore, the subject of this article is the human laughter nature.

Thus, the **purpose** of the article is to understand the laughter phenomenon, the internal unity of the nature of consciousness and laughter, to define the ontological character of laughter, to identify the social roots of laughter and to analyze its ethical component.

Development of issues under research. Studies of the laughter nature are traced back to the era of antiquity. The first attempts to comprehend the nature of laughter appear in Aristotle: “ludicrous being merely a subdivision of ugly. It consists of some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive” [The poetics of Aristotle 1902]. Throughout history, various concepts that describe the nature of laughter have been formed. The well-known Polish researcher B. Dziedzic defines the following laughter theories: the negative quality theory, or the theory of priority of the comic experimentation subject over the object (Aristotle, T. Hobbes, Stendhal, K. Yuberhorst), the degradation theory (A. Bain, A. Stern), the contrast theory (I. Kant, G. Spencer, T. Lipps), the theory of contradictions (A. Schopenhauer, G.W. F. Hegel), the theory of deviation from the norm (K. Groos), the theory of mixed type (K. Groos, A. Bergson, S. Freud, A. Lunacharsky) [Дзедзіц 1974: 12-60]. M. Eastman in the book “The Sense of Humor” gives a slightly different classification of laughter concepts. He analyzes the views of the ancient philosophers, the agnostic attitude, the derision theory, the disappointment theory, the mechanical theory, the theory of liberty, conflict-mixture theories. However, the disadvantage of each theory is a situational and limited character. It seems that each of these concepts, by fixing certain causes and features of laughter simply complement each other. Such modern thinkers as J. Morreall, A.C. Zijderfeld, P. Berger, N.N. Holland, M. Gordon, C. Peter Wagner, W. Chafe, M. Billig, P. Glenn, B. Plester, A. Ziv, Hart M. also continued to explore the nature of laughter. Among modern laughter theories we can distinguish the space-time theory of Michio Kaku [Kaku 2015]. Among the Russian and Ukrainian researchers of the laughter philosophy, we can also mention M. Bakhtin, V. Propp, S. Averintsev, L. Karasev, N. Ryumina, V. Okorokov, N. Ishchenko, V. Leshchenko, A. Sychev.

Main material statement. We are used to talk about the laughter, as something self-evident, clear and transparent. When we joke, we do not notice the laughter process, the laughter simply captures us as something so natural and inherent to us that the process itself can be compared, perhaps, to the breathing process. Maybe, the laughter is something inherent in a person, an irreplaceable piece of a puzzle, which accomplishes its essence? Perhaps this is something a priori to us, the ability that characterizes and determines the very human way of seeing and understanding the world and the person himself? The laughter, as a manifestation of our consciousness, brings to the surface what no one sees except the person by itself, which requires intellectual effort, intuition, instant perception, inner flexibility, reactivity and sharpness sensations of paradox. The laughter fixes certain inconsistencies, paradoxes, contradictions, gaps in reality. Representatives of all above-mentioned theories (no matter what nuances and reasons for the laughter appearance they note) unwittingly focus their attention on the fact that the reason for laughter is a certain inconsistency or deviation from the norm [Дзедзіц 1974: 50-54]. This feature is directly related to the *experience to differ*, which is the basis of the consciousness work [Молчанов 2004: 55]. This experience is a factor of the development of consciousness, especially its ability to distinguish the essential from secondary, real from the proper, perfect from the non-ideal, object from its meaning, signifier from the signified, spiritual from the material (physical). The phenomenon of laughter is a reaction to a certain experience of differences in behavior or situation. It also manifests itself in calembours, when we get into the situation of distinguishing the subject from its meaning, polysemy and ambiguity [Деррида 2012: 27].

Laughter is paradoxical in its essence:

- the laughter is the result of the interaction of external and internal factors. Of course, the person must get into a situation and independently identify certain paradoxes and contradictions. As a result, the same situation can cause a different reaction of observers: someone will perceive it as funny, and someone will not even pay attention to it;
- the laughter is the result of a combination of rational and irrational elements. On the one side, the person must show some intellectual effort to reveal the internal conflict of the situation [Berger 1997: 135]. On the other side, the laughter has a clear irrational background. S. Freud wrote: “A joke has quite outstandingly the characteristic of being a notion that has occurred to us

involuntarily” [Freud 1960]. The laughter is spontaneous for us as the consciousness. Psychologists affirm for a long time that the mechanisms of consciousness activity are unconscious by their nature [Агафонов 2006; Стебельська 2015: 67]. Consciousness turns into a residue that cannot be rationally comprehended, which, like the background, accompanies every ours mind action and causes the process of cognition by itself. And here again, the inner unity of the nature of consciousness and laughter arises. As soon as we begin to talk about them, to analyze, or attribute certain laws to them, we automatically encounter the incompleteness of all ours definitions that we are already talking about anything, but not about them. We find ourselves front of the distorted images of something that still hides its secrets;

- the paradox of the laughter based on the interconnection of physical and mental, physiological and psychological. P. Berger focuses on the fact that laughter is a dual phenomenon that unites psychological and physiological aspects. In this sense the understanding its unity will cause the comprehending the body-mind problem [Berger 1997: 45]. According to V. Propp, “laughter occurs when the intellectual aspect replacing the physical unexpectedly reveals some hitherto hidden flaw” [Propp 2009: 28]. We laugh when we see, for example, a person with some unusual appearance, which completely reflects the distortion of his/her inner essence. In particular, the obesity may be the result of laziness that characterizes a person as uninterested in his/her own health and form. All this leads to the idea that laughter always arises on the verges of reality: external-internal, physical-mental, rational-irrational, individual-social.

This *paradoxicality* is the link that connects the nature of laughter and consciousness.

M. Mamardashvili, in one of his articles, “Consciousness is a paradox to which it is impossible to grow accustomed”, focused on this particular aspect. Consciousness always balances on the verge of possible and impossible, real and unreal, available and proper, material and ideal. Consciousness is always an opportunity for even greater consciousness [Мамардашвили 1992: 84]. M. Mamardashvili also pays attention the consciousness always comes in conjunction with the conscience. It is enough to recall their common etymology in different languages, where conscience “correlates with general information, awareness of the man choice, and consciousness in general” [Єщенко 2011]. Consciousness is a conscience that brings to the surface all the “illnesses” of person and society, reveals their weaknesses, automatically stimulating internal rebirth on the basis of ideal structures. Through conscience, we are able to clearly define the life orientations, distinguishing between “true-false”, “fair-unfair”, “good-evil”, “honest-dishonest”. The laughter can play an identical role. It also fixes the “inconsistencies”, “cracks” of our presence in the world. And in this sense, consciousness-conscience-laughter become concepts of the one order.

Both consciousness-conscience and laughter are connected with the phenomenon of *distancing*. Philosopher H. Plessner wrote that the abilities to overcome the limits, to see the perspective, to assess the position, to approach instrumentally the knowledge of the world are purely human abilities. A person is distanced from the world, and therefore able to dominate it [Плеснер 2004]. In the laughter process, a person must also be able to distance himself from an event, a situation, another person. “Comedy can only begin at the point where our neighbor’s personality ceases to affect us” [Bergson 2003]. If a person is not removed from the negative aspects of the situation or event, he/she will not be able to appreciate the amusing and paradoxical situation. But at the same time, laughter is the rupture of this distancing, because it is such a natural and spontaneous reaction of the human body that can’t be controlled, explained. Therefore, laughter detects a certain distance between me and what we laugh at, but simultaneously erases all the borders, collapses all our manifestations and differences between me and the world, me and myself. Accordingly, no animal is able to be distancing in such way and its removal, so it is not able to laugh as much as human realize this word.

Laughter is a human phenomenon, and therefore it is rooted in the sphere of human existence. Laughter has a social nature [Morreall 1983; Berger 1997; Bergson 2003; Wagner 2000; Gordon 2013; Plester 2016; Billig 2005]. It is fair to note that no one wants and would like to laugh alone. Laughter is a way of communication, through which we convey our feelings of joy, pleasure/displeasure, defuse the situation, spend energy [Рюмина 2010: 2]. Laughter can connect people, unite them, points out common views and world outlook. Its role as an essential element of unity and understanding between people is undeniable [Lorenz 1966:284]. But it is clear that laughter can also cause conflicts if it manifests itself in the

form of sarcasm or acute irony [Plester 2016; Billig 2005]. However, it depends on the person for what purposes he/she will use the laughter.

Laughter is spontaneous and contagious, spreading like circles on the water. More than once we can observe that even at first glance not funny situation can cause our smile just because the funny thing or moment was noticed by someone else. Watching the modern shows, we can observe the appearance of an interesting trend, namely, a canned laughter. The jokes “want” support from listeners who appreciate them. This contagion of laughter even led M. Eastman to the idea that laughter has an instinctive nature [Eastman 1922: 229-230]. It is difficult to agree with such a position, as any instinct presupposes satisfaction of primarily vital and biological needs and has the survival value. In order to survive the laugh is not needed, but rather it is an excessive non-biological element, which, in contrast, can play a bad joke in critical situations. J. Morreall said that “if the traits that are preserved in a species are those which have survival value, how could something like laughter have been preserved in our species?” [Morreall 1983: 3]. Any instinct always operates under a certain clear algorithm. Laughter is always spontaneous, free, not limited by rules and restrictions.

In addition to such external manifestations, we can also observe that jokes and laughter carry out socio-regulatory, adaptive, ethical, compensatory and play functions. A. Bergson clearly wrote about the ethical function of laughter. Laughter reveals the disadvantages of society and relations between people; it moves along the edges of human relationships (on the surface), demonstrating their laziness, static character, mechanics and atomicity [Bergson 2003]. Laughter is a condition for society self-improvement. If the representatives of the society are not able to laugh at themselves and don't have healthy self-criticism, society will get stuck in the flow of their own drawbacks. Laughter is based on society (culture), because every nation laughs in its own way; but also it can change and transform human life [Окопков 2011: 53- 54]. It is a peculiar reality comprehension that detects ontological discontinuities and therefore may affect specific social transformations [Hart 2007].

Considering above-mentioned, it can be argued that laughter is the territory of freedom, where a person manifests itself in his/her fullness [Ziv 1988]. You can't force someone to laugh and define a single subject of laughter for everyone. Laughter is a completely voluntary, spontaneous, unassuming, unexpected organism reaction. In this sense, the laughter appears as a sphere of openness in which a person enters the game, revealing his/her potential and capabilities. A lot about a person can say coming out not only of his/her words, behavior, gestures, facial expressions, but also *how* and *what* he/she is laughing at. But any freedom (not arbitrariness) can manifest itself fully only through a certain coexistence/confrontation with the power. Laughter reveals not only drawbacks and negative changes in social processes, but also indicates how *it should be* and shames wrongdoings. As a result, laughter gains power over people. The highest form of human freedom is its power over itself. It is important to be able to laugh at yourself. The power of laughter spread over not only our opponents but also over ourselves.

In this aspect, the laughter nature is getting very close to the consciousness nature itself, which has always been considered through the prism of sociality, freedom, and power.

Laughter used to have an important role even in primitive societies, where a person was completely dependent on his/her environment. The mockery and the shame dumped on that one who was guilty could be such a punishment for the crime [Дземидок 1974:157; Malinowski 1945]. Again and again, the connection between laughter, conscience (consciousness), morality, and inner rebirth appears, and it looks like the threads which bind them all together. The laughter is likened to a scalpel, which opens a festering wound, and therefore automatically stimulates its healing.

So the close interaction of laughter and shame is clear [Капачев 1996]. In the research literature, the laughter often was contrasted to crying. Such opposition is not justified, because the concepts are not equal. For example, if the cause of crying is mostly suffering, then the cause of laughter can be anything. L. Karasev in the book “Philosophy of laughter” considers the antithesis of laughter is a shame, noting their close dialectical connection [Капачев 1996: 67]. They grow from one root, complementing each other. “The highest point of laughter is a laugh at itself, then the peak of shame - it will be ashamed for another” [Капачев 1996: 68]. The laughter and shame, being opposites, smoothly convert into each other. They are indicators of inner growth and research of a person. As a result, we are building a chain of “consciousness- conscience-laughter-shame”. There is a powerful ethical component of laughter and its ontological rootedness in the structures of consciousness.

Through the prism of ethical problems, laughter is often put in pair with evil, sin. Funny is considered sinful, and such unity reaches even the origins of Christian culture. But the question is: if laughter is an instrument for detecting evil (sin), then why is it automatically identified with something evil (sin)? Starting the fight against the “enemy”, the laughter automatically becomes alike it. The “witty remark” can insult another person, hurt him/her. We often can see bullying of the strong person over the weak, which is accompanied by laughter, or the “empty” laughter of the ill-mannered person. In what way something that should bring joy and pleasure is intertwined with evil? Like any complicated phenomenon, the laughter has such a contradictory nature that allows a person to use it not only for good things but also as an instrument of insulting, bullying, and humiliation. But this leads to the idea that evil is not rooted in laughter, but in the person, and his/her motivation.

Conclusions. A person is an extremely complex creature. Thinkers and researchers have not yet solved all its secrets. It is clear that a person differs from all creatures known to us through a highly organized and multifunctional consciousness. Animals have a much lower level of consciousness, only a person is able to use this tool fully. Human consciousness emanates into self-consciousness and realizes itself in science, art, literature, religion, philosophy, etc. The similar etymology of the words “consciousness” and “conscience” is not surprising. Consciousness is a conscience, through the prism of which we understand themselves and the reality which we are involved in. One of the unique consciousness manifestations is laughter. The nature of consciousness and laughter is internally unified: paradoxicality, distancing, differentiation, openness, sociality, freedom, and elusiveness - these are the main characteristics that connecting them. Like consciousness, laughter is social by its nature. In society, laughter carries out an educational function: it doubles the world, defines what *is* and what *should be*. In some way, the Truth breaks through laughter. The bonds between laughter and shame are tight. In the article, the author constructed the logical chain “consciousness-conscience-laughter-shame”, demonstrating the ethical and social aspects of this problem. The laughter appears in the structure of human existence and it is the person’s destiny, where the human nature manifests itself with the greatest completeness and depth [Рюмина 2010: 5].

Джерела та література

1. Агафонов, А. (2006). Когнитивная психомеханика сознания, или как сознание неосознанно принимает решение об осознании. Самара: Изд-во “Универс групп”, 348.
2. Деррида, Ж. (2012). Поля философии. Москва: Академический проект, 376.
3. Дземидок, Б. (1974). О комическом. Москва: “Прогресс”, 255 с.
4. Єщенко Т. (2011). Концепт “сумління/совість” в етнокогнітивному та біблійному аспектах. Режим доступу до бібліотеки: <<http://dspace.nbuv.gov.ua/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/85513/29-Yeschenko.pdf>> (2018, October, 20).
5. Карасев, Л. (1996). Философия смеха. Москва: Рос. гуманит. Ин-т, 224.
6. Мамардашвили, М. (1992). Сознание — это парадоксальность, к которой невозможно привыкнуть. Как я понимаю философию. Москва: «Прогресс», «Культура», 72-85.
7. Молчанов, В. (2004). Различение и опыт: феноменология неагрессивного сознания. Москва: Модест колеров и «Три квадрата», 328.
8. Окороков, В. (2011). Звон “машин” или власть представлений (смех как техника себя) *Дόξα*, Вип.16., 51-62.
9. Плеснер, Х. (2004). Ступени органического и человек: Введение в философскую антропологию. Москва: «Российская политическая энциклопедия», 368.
10. Рюмина, Н. (2010). Эстетика смеха: смех как виртуальная реальность. Москва: книжный дом «ЛИБРОКОМ», 320.
11. Стебельська, О. (2015). Позиції менталізму та еволюціонізму у вивченні свідомості в історії сучасної філософії. Дисертація канд. філос. наук: 09.00.05, Львів. нац. ун-т ім. Івана Франка. Львів, 2008.
12. Berger, P. (1997). Redeeming laughter: the comic dimension of human experience. Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 217.
13. Bergson, H. (2003). Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic. Retrieved from: <<http://intersci.ss.uci.edu/wiki/eBooks/BOOKS/Bergson/Laughter%20Bergson.pdf>> (2018, October, 20).

14. Billig, M. (2005). *Laughter and Ridicule Towards a Social Critique of Humour*. SAGE Publications. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, 264.
15. Blomqvist, C., Mello, I. & Amundin, M. (2005). An acoustic play-fight signal in bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) in human care. *Aquatic Mammals*, 31(2), 187-194.
16. Eastman, M. (1922). *The sense of humor*. New York, Charles Scribner's sons, 280.
17. Freud, S. (1960). *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*. Retrieved from: <<https://www.sigmundfreud.net/jokes-and-their-relation-to-the-unconscious-pdf-ebook.jsp>> (2018, October, 20).
18. Gordon, M. (2012). What Makes Humor Aesthetic? *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 2 No. 1, 62-70.
19. Gordon, M. (2013). *Humor, Laughter and Human Flourishing A Philosophical Exploration of the Laughing Animal*. Springer My Copy UK, 100.
20. Hart, M. (2007). *Humour and Social Protest: An Introduction*. *International Review of Social History*, 52(S15), 1-20.
21. Kaku, M. (2015). *The Future of the Mind: The Scientific Quest to Understand, Enhance, and Empower the Mind*. City University of New York, 502.
22. Lorenz, K. (1966). *On aggression*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 306.
23. Malinowski, B. (1945). *The dynamics of culture change. An inquiry into race relations in Africa*. New haven. Yale University Press. London-Humphrey Milford — Oxford University Press, 172.
24. Morreall, J. (1983). *Taking Laughter Seriously*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 144 p.
25. Panksepp, J., Burgdorf, J. (2003). Laughing rats and the evolutionary antecedents of human joy? *Physiology & Behavior*, 79 (3), 533–547.
26. Plester, B. (2016). *The Complexity of Workplace Humour Laughter, Jokers and the Dark Side of Humour*. Management & International Business University of Auckland Business School Auckland, New Zealand, 164.
27. Propp, V. (2009). *On the comic and laughter / V. Propp; edited and translated by Jean-Patrick Debeche and Paul Perron*. University of Toronto Press/ Toronto, Buffalo, London, 191.
28. Provine, Robert R. (2017). *Laughter as an approach to vocal evolution: The bipedal theory*. *Psychon Bull Rev.* Feb;24(1): 238-244.
29. *The poetics of Aristotle (1902) / edited with critical notes and a translation by S. H. Butcher*. London. Macmillan and Co., Limited. Retrieved from: <<https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/files/Poetics.pdf>> (2018, October, 20).
30. Wagner, C. Peter. (2000). *Let's laugh: discovering how laughter will make you healthy*. Shippensburg. PA: Viking, 190.
31. Ziv, A. (1988). *Humor as a Social Corrective*. *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum 3rd ed.* Laurence Behrens and Leonard J. Rosen, eds. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 356-360.

Стебельська Олександра. Онтологія сміху: соціально-етичний аспект. Сміх є дуже важливим емоційним проявом людини, тією здібністю, що визначає саме людський спосіб бачення та осмислення реальності, виявляє її глибини та багатогранність. Тому настільки необхідним та значущим є розуміння природи сміху та визначення його основних рис. В результаті критичного аналізу зазначаються такі риси сміху як парадоксальність, дистанціювання, відкритість, свобода, соціальність, зв'язок зі сферою моралі, що одночасно вказують на внутрішню єдність природи свідомості і сміху. Сміх вбудований у структури людської свідомості, а значить набуває онтологічного характеру. В статті зацентровано особливу увагу на соціальному характері сміху, його виховній функції. Автор поступово та послідовно вибудував ланцюг “свідомість-совість-сміх- сором”. Дуже часто сміх ставлять у пару зі злом та вбачають його гріховність. Проте в статті стверджується, що корені зла лежать не у сміхові, а у самій людині, яка маніпулює його внутрішніми можливостями.

Ключові слова: свідомість, сміх, зло, пардоксальність, дистанціювання, свобода, влада, соціальність.

Стебельская Александра. Онтология смеха: социально-этический аспект. Смех является очень важным эмоциональным проявлением человека, той способностью, которая характеризует и определяет именно человеческий способ видения и осмысления реальности, высветляет ее глубины и многогранность. Поэтому настолько необходимым и значимым является понимание природы смеха и определение его основных черт. В результате критического анализа указываются такие черты смеха как парадоксальность, дистанцирование, открытость, свобода, социальность, связь со сферой морали, которые одновременно свидетельствуют о внутреннем единстве природы сознания и смеха. Смех встроенный в структуры человеческого сознания, а значит приобретает онтологический характер. В статье особое внимание уделяется социальному характеру смеха, его воспитательной функции. Автор последовательно выстроил цепь «сознание-совесть-смех-стыд». Очень часто смех ставят в пару со злом, отмечая его греховность. Однако в статье утверждается, что корни зла лежат не в смехе, а в самом человеке, который манипулирует его внутренними возможностями.

Ключевые слова: сознание, смех, зло, парадоксальность, дистанцирование, свобода, власть, социальность

Стаття надійшла до редколегії
20.05.2018 р.