

Humour has always been a difficult term to grasp. Although it has been said that humour is a universal language, a brief study of the diverse interpretation and definition of humour across the ages will reveal that perhaps the only universal trait about humour is that it is anything but universal. Summarize the excerpts/translation from the following three authors and analyse and contrast their views on humour, in addition, you should provide your own stance on the matter.

Sigmund Freud:

It is now time to acquaint ourselves with some of the characteristics of humour. Like wit and the comic, humour has in it a *liberating* element. But it has also something fine and elevating, which is lacking in the other two ways of deriving pleasure from intellectual activity. Obviously, what is fine about it is the triumph of narcissism, the ego's victorious assertion of its own invulnerability. It refuses to be hurt by arrows of reality or to be compelled to suffer. It insists that it is impervious to wounds dealt by the outside world, in fact, that these are merely occasions for affording it pleasure. [...] By its repudiation of the possibility of suffering, it takes its place in the great series of methods devised by the mind of man for evading the compulsion to suffer—a series which begins with neurosis and culminates in delusions, and includes intoxication, self-induced states of abstraction and ecstasy.

William Hazlitt:

The essence of the laughable then is the incongruous, the disconnecting one idea from another, or the jostling of one feeling against another. The first and most obvious cause of laughter is to be found in the simple succession of events, as in the sudden shifting of a disguise, or some unlooked-for accident, without any absurdity of character or situation. The accidental contradiction between our expectations and the event can hardly be said, however, to amount to the ludicrous; it is merely laughable. The ludicrous is where there is the same contradiction between the object and our expectations, heightened by some deformity or inconvenience, that is, by its being contrary to what is customary or desirable; as the ridiculous, which is the highest degree of the laughable, is that which is contrary not only to custom but to sense and reason, or is a voluntary departure from what we have a right to expect from those who are conscious of absurdity and propriety in words, looks, and action. [...] Humour is the describing the ludicrous as it is in itself; wit is the exposing of it, by comparing or contrasting it with something else.

Thomas Hobbes:

There is a passion which hath no name, but the sign of it is that distortion of the countenance we call LAUGHTER, which is always joy, but what joy, what we think, and wherein we triumph when we laugh, hath not hitherto been declared by any. That it consisteth in wit, or, as they call it, in the jest, this experience confuteth: for men laugh at mischances and indecencies, therein there lieth no wit or jest at all. And forasmuch as the same thing is no more ridiculous when it groweth stale or usual, whatsoever it be that moveth laughter, it must be new and unexpected. [...] I may therefore conclude, that the passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmities of others, or with our own formerly: for men laugh at the follies of themselves past, when they come suddenly to remembrance, except they bring with them any present dishonour. It is no wonder therefore that men take it heinously to be laughed at or derided, that is, triumphed over. Laughter without offence, must be at absurdities and infirmities abstracted from persons, and where all the company may laugh together. For laughing to one's self putteth all the rest to a jealousy and examination of themselves; besides, it is vain glory, and an argument of little worth, to think the infirmities of another sufficient matter for his triumph.