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The Ancient Roots of Humor Theory

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Abstract

Many modern humor scholars have oversimplified their summaries of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian's views on humor, focusing on the philosophers' cautionary warnings about the rhetorical efficacy and ethics of humor. Although the philosophers did write much on the offensive nature of jests, which can be considered illustrative of superiority theory, I describe elements of the incongruity and relief theories of humor motivation in their work. There is evidence to suggest that all four philosophers found humor to be a fitting and effective response to certain exigencies. It is more accurate to summarize their views thus: Humor has the potential to be a powerful tool of persuasion, but like any potent weapon (discursive or non-discursive) it should be used with caution.

Keywords: Aristotle; Cicero; motivation theories; Plato; Quintilian.

1. Introduction

Humor scholarship owes credit to Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian for laying the foundation for the three major motivational theories. Unfortunately, many scholars only connect the great philosophers to superiority theory. For example, Berger makes the overarching claim that "The classical approach to the comic [was] essentially sour and troubled by moral scruples" (1997: 19). Chapman and Foot similarly proclaim that "humor has often been characterized as base and degenerate", citing each of the four philosophers to inform their judgment: According to the authors, Plato interpreted humor to be a "malevolent behaviour" and Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian agreed that it is "a form

of behaviour from which civilized man should shrink" (1995: 1). Although they do not offer the same interpretation of the Roman theorists, Gilbert (1997: 324), Lynch (2002: 426), and Morreall (1983: 5) privilege the view of Plato and Aristotle as superiority theorists. All such claims are reductive, however, and I explicate elements of the three major motivational theories of humor — incongruity, relief, and superiority — in the philosophers' canonical works.[1]

My purpose here is one that other humor scholars have taken up to varying degrees. For example, in his 2003 article titled "Plato on the Psychology of Humor", Shelley claims that modern accounts of humor theory oversimplify and thus distort Plato's views on the subject. Through a detailed study of Plato's writings on humor and related areas such as emotion and art, Shelley erodes the monolithic portrayal of the philosopher's negative views on humor, replacing it with what he terms a "fractured picture" of Plato's theories (2003: 363).[2] In the first chapter of *Linguistic theories of humor,* Attardo also undertakes a comprehensive survey of humor, carefully citing passages from Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian's works that do not always neatly align with the superiority view (1994: 18–32). Despite these productive pieces of scholarly revisionism, misrepresentations of the philosophers persist. I speculate that the continued oversimplification of the philosophers' views is related to the common practice of writing about each thinker separately and thereby inadvertently obscuring their collective contributions to all of the three major motivational theories. In order to promote a more comprehensive understanding of the theories' origins, I give each theory its own space in this essay, interweaving the ideas of each philosopher to re-fashion the ancient roots of incongruity, relief, and superiority.

Before making my case for the more complex view of the four ancient philosophers' theories on humor, I first clarify definitions of the three motivational theories. Incongruity theory, which is cognitive in nature, posits that amusement is derived from the unexpected. One may perceive an interaction or experience to be humorous because it contradicts past experiences, cognitive frameworks, or expectations. Relief theory argues that amusement is derived from the release of built-up emotion: as Raskin explains, "the basic principle of all such theories is that laughter provides relief for mental, nervous and/or psychic energy and thus ensures homeostasis after a struggle, tension, strain, etc." (1985: 38). The major tenet of superiority theory is that "mockery, ridicule, and laughter at the foolish actions of others are central to the humor experience" (Keith-Spiegel 1972: 6). Amusement, seen through the lens of superiority theory, emerges from elevated feelings of self-worth after verbal denigration of a target.

Though I have described them separately, the motivational theories of humor are not discrete, and several scholars argue that they should be viewed as complementary. For example, Raskin states that

the three approaches actually characterize the complex phenomenon of humor from very different angles and do not at all contradict each other — rather they seem to supplement each other quite nicely. In our terms, the incongruity-based theories make a statement about the stimulus; the superiority theories characterize the relations or attitudes between the speaker and the hearer; and the release/relief theories comment on the feelings and psychology of the hearer only. (1985: 4, emphasis removed)

Taking a different position, Morreall states that all three theories are premised on change for the "laugher": incongruity theory refers to a cognitive change, relief theory accounts for an affective change, and superiority theory incorporates both cognitive and affective changes (1983: 38–39). In sum, Raskin asserts that each theory refers to a different part of the communication model (focusing on stimulus and receiver), whereas Morreall focuses on transformations the receiver undergoes through the process of amusement.

Other humor scholars question the discreteness of the theories, not by expounding upon their complementary features as have Raskin and Morreall, but by noting overlap between them. For example, several humor scholars argue that incongruity theory is not enough to explain amusement and humor must therefore include elements of superiority or relief (see Billig 2005: 76; LaFave et al. 1976: 89). According to LaFave et al., successful humor must involve a "happiness increment" such as "a feeling of superiority or heightened self-esteem" in order to evoke mirth (1976: 86). Building on the aforementioned metatheoretical views, this essay's goal of muddying the superiority classification of the great philosophers should reveal the interrelated roots that collectively form the basis of humor motivation from ancient to contemporary times.

Because incongruity theory describes the most basic building block of humor, it is the most logical starting point for analysis. The essay will then proceed to relief, and finally on to superiority theory, providing support for each of the motivational theories in the works of the four ancient philosophers.

2. Incongruity Theory

Plato's existing works provide a measure of implied support for incongruity theory. Shelley focuses on Plato's discussion of puns as evidence that the intellect and its recognition of incongruities are essential elements in amusement.

I will add that Plato connects laughter to incongruity even in decidedly anti-intellectual encounters, for people often laugh at what is novel, or inconsistent with their existing schema. In the dialog between Socrates and Glaucon about gender equality in the *Republic,* Socrates opines that citizens will laugh at changes in society, and that such laughter should be dismissed: "[W]e mustn't fear the various jokes that wits will make about this kind of change in music and poetry, physical training" (V.452b). Although Plato provides more positive views of laughter elsewhere in his writings (in other words, he does not always view laughter as an anti-intellectual coping mechanism), this example is useful in illustrating the connection Plato draws between amusement and incongruous combinations.

Attardo references an infrequently cited passage from the *Rhetoric* to also give credit to Aristotle for inspiring incongruity theory (1994: 20). Aristotle describes a form of comedy in which a "speaker says something unexpected, the soundness [or truth] of which is thereupon recognized". The philosopher also explains that the unexpected statements should "be true without being common-place" (3.412b), thereby illuminating another link between this ancient seed of incongruity theory and its contemporary version, which requires a grain of truth in order to be amusing (Raskin 1985: 180).

Unfortunately, we cannot grasp the full extent of the Greek influence on incongruity because the second book of Aristotle's *Poetics*, a book purportedly based on humor, has not survived. Several scholars, including Janko and Cooper, have attempted to resuscitate the lost book from surviving documents that reference the original manuscript. Janko's version alludes to incongruity as an essential piece of Aristotle's original comic theories, stating that humor is derived primarily from the illogical and the unexpected, which functions to transform and distort reality (1984: 95). According to Herrick, many Aristotelian scholars, including George Campbell, Lord Kames, and Thomas Twining, believed the philosopher's existing work positions incongruity as a key component of humor (1949: 14–15). Indeed, George Campbell opines that when Aristotle discusses the "Ridiculous" in the *Rhetoric,* he is not referring to vicious mockery, but instead primarily highlighting "an incongruous combination" (1819: 50).

Compared to Plato and Aristotle, the surviving works of the Roman theorists place the most emphasis on incongruity. In *De oratore*, Cicero describes various methods through which a speaker may utilize the unexpected in humor. He catalogues different methods of comedy including mimicry, ridiculousness, distortion of features, indecency in language, and deceived expectation (*De oratore* II.LXII–II.LXIII). The first four categories belong to the realm of buf-

foonery, an unintelligent form of humor that is unbecoming to an orator.[3] The latter trope, deceived expectation, is akin to incongruity and viewed as the quintessential type of humor: Cicero states in *De oratore*, "of all jokes none create greater laughter than something said contrary to expectation; of which there are examples without number" (II.LXX). Laughter of the incongruous kind, Cicero explains, springs from feelings of surprise after having been primed to anticipate a different outcome in an interaction or event (*De oratore* II.LXIII–II.LXIV).

Cicero and Quintilian both describe more distinct forms of incongruity that involve misrepresenting one's own views or the views of another person. Cicero defines "ironical dissimulation" as saying "something different from what you think; . . . when through the whole course of a speech you are seriously jocose, your thoughts being different from your words" (*De oratore* II.LXVII). Quintilian builds on this idea, subdividing ironical dissimulation into two more precise concepts: the refined definition of ironical dissimulation refers to feigning "not to understand another's meaning", and ironical simulation refers to the more active strategy of pretending "to feel a certain persuasion" (*Institutes* VI.III.85). In more general terms, Quintilian defines irony as a type of allegory in "which what is expressed is quite contrary to what is meant" (*Institutes* VIII.VI.54), opining that when it is employed "very gravely", irony should be considered "a species of joking" (*Institutes* VI.III.68). In other words, if a speaker executes a serious delivery of an ironic statement, the jest will be much richer.

Thus far, I have described incongruities or ironies that can exist in the relationships between a speaker's successive statements, or between a speaker's attitudes and statements. There are still two incongruous humorous dyads to consider — those premised on the disjunctive relationship between the tenor of a speaker's statements and character, and those formed from a clash between a speaker's statements and the relative gravity of a situation. According to Cicero, an orator who is able to wittily deceive expectation should be adjudged intelligent and skillful. However, a speaker who has crafted a sober public persona and chooses to engage in jest will evoke even stronger feelings of amusement from the audience than will someone who jests more often. Cicero explains through the mouthpiece of Antonius:

[H]e who would be a facetious speaker, must be endowed with a natural genius for such kinds of wit, as well as with personal qualifications, so that his very look may adapt itself to every species of the ridiculous; and the graver and more serious such a person is, as is the case with you, Crassus, so much more humorous do the sayings which fall from him generally appear. (*De oratore* II.LXXI)

In this situation, it is through an incongruity between the tenor of a speaker's statements and the speaker's character that an audience can be startled into amusement.

The final incongruous coupling can best be described as contextual irony, meaning that the seriousness (or lack of seriousness) of one's discourse is not consonant with the gravity of a situation. In his analysis of Cicero's "Defense of Caelius", Volpe observes that Cicero effectively employed this type of irony in his forensic feat: "While Cicero emphasized the serious business of the jury to protect the state from dangerous citizens, he proceeded to entertain the jurors with every trick of oratory so that the trial became a better show than the games at the arena" (1977: 314). Quintilian, too, observed that one's thoughts can be "sent in another direction, by a remark being turned off from something of greater to something of less consequence; as when the person who was asked what he thought of a man caught in adultery, replied that *he was slow*" (*Institutes* VI.III.87, emphasis in original). The previous joke contains an incongruity that perhaps offered an emotional release from a stressful topic of conversation (adultery), suggesting the overlap between two of the humor motivation theories. It is to the affiliate theory of relief that I will next turn.

3.   Relief Theory

Plato and Aristotle lay the philosophical groundwork for the interplay of positive and negative emotion that comprises the inner-workings of relief theory.[4] Furthermore, Quintilian explains that speakers can use jests as an effective rhetorical strategy for improving an audience's disposition. These ancient theories prime the way for studying the affective components of humor, which contemporary humor scholars believe to be an important, if not essential, variable in humor appreciation (see Wicker et al. 1980).

In the *Philebus* Plato develops an intricate philosophy of the relationship between pleasure and pain. Although pleasure may not be directly equated with amusement, Plato considers "folly" to be related to pleasure; one may therefore conclude tautologically that amusement and pleasure also have a close connection (*Philebus* 63e). Perhaps most relevant to humor theory in this dialog is Plato's concept of the "mixed pleasures of the soul". He explains that humans will never be able to properly examine pleasure apart from pain, arguing that pleasure is released through the process of ridding oneself of pain: "[W]hen the natural state of a living organism . . . is destroyed, that destruction is pain; conversely, when such organisms return to their own true nature, this

reversion is invariably pleasure" (32b). Keith-Spiegel labels Plato's theory "ambivalence", meaning that the amused person "experiences incompatible emotions or feelings" (1972: 10); however, this characterization is incomplete. Ambivalence does not account for what Plato calls the living organism's return to its "own true nature" — what Raskin refers to as homeostasis following tension or strain (1985: 38). In other words, Plato describes not only the alternation of emotions that is part of the process in amusement (ambivalence), but also anticipates relief theory by describing the resolution of dialectical affective tension, which yields pleasure.

Cooper's reconstruction of Aristotle's theories on comedy also emphasizes the psycho-physiological effects of humor, arguing that humor can yield catharsis (1922: 61, 69). Cooper draws from Aristotle's statement that one undergoes a process of emotional exchange when viewing a tragic drama, concluding that Aristotle likely discussed the emotional component of comedy in book two of the *Poetics*. Some of the surviving passages of Aristotle's writings gesture toward this connection between comedy and a calm affective state. Aristotle states, "As to the frame of mind that makes people calm, it is plainly the opposite to that which makes them angry, as when they are amusing themselves or laughing or feasting" (*Rhetoric* 2.380b). Cooper explains the difference between emotional responses to tragedy and comedy as a contrast of homeopathy versus allopathy: Tragedy helps rid one of negative emotions through secondary exposure to their representation in drama, thereby building up one's "immunity" to tragedy, and comedy helps relieve negative emotions by substituting them with positive feelings (1922: 69).

Quintilian was more macroscopic in his discussions of the relationship between humor and emotion, writing that orators can successfully use jokes to advance an argument and cultivate an agreeable disposition in an audience. He opines that laughter "dispels melancholy affections", and can revive one's mind "after disgust and fatigue" (*Institutes* VI.III.1). Far from being a passive rhetorical device, Laughter can be a passionate persuasive force that drives out negative feelings

[Laughter] bursts forth in people even against their will, and extorts a confession of its influence not only from the face and the voice, but shakes the whole frame with its vehemence. It often changes, too, as I said, the tendency of the greatest affairs as it very frequently dissipates both hatred and anger. (*Institutes* VI.III.9)

This emotional reaction, Quintilian claims, can be used to relieve negative affect in the service of preparing people for rational discussion.

4. Superiority Theory

The previous examples describe emotional exchanges that can lead to the amusement and good feeling of all involved. Like relief theory, superiority also involves emotional fluctuations, and can yield amusement; however, a key difference between the two theories is that relief theory does not account for unequal distribution of benefits, and in superiority theory, one party is amused at the expense of another. Aristotle explains this interpersonal exchange of emotions from the victim's perspective, exemplifying superiority theory: "The persons with whom we get angry are those who laugh, mock, or jeer at us, for such conduct is insolent" (*Rhetoric* 2.379b).

Out of all three humor motivation theories, the ancient philosophers provided the most support for superiority theory, explaining why humorous scorn is psychologically appealing and articulating an ethical hierarchy of jests. This emphasis in their works potentially explains the myopic version of their theories that has circulated and re-circulated through more contemporary humor texts. Because Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian did place so much emphasis on superiority, it would be unscrupulous to ignore that body of work in this recapitulation of their writings. In the next few pages, I will revisit some of their arguments about the dangers of producing humorous discourse, also contrasting those warnings with recommendations about the types of humor that may be acceptable in certain rhetorical situations.

Plato and Aristotle were the primary figures to address the psychological inner-workings of derisive amusement. Aristotle provides this explanation for the self-serving bias that permeates much human communication

But since everything like and akin to oneself is pleasant, and since every man is himself more like and akin to himself than any one else is, it follows that all of us must be more or less fond of ourselves. [. . .] Again, since most of us are ambitious, it must be pleasant to disparage our neighbors as well as to have power over them. (*Republic* 1.371b)

Plato provides a similar explanation for the appealing nature of power and the ability to inflict pain when he describes his theory of mixed pleasures. Deprecatory humor is used as the representative example of mixed pleasures: "[W]hen we laugh at what is ridiculous in our friends, we are mixing pleasure this time with malice, mixing, that is, our pleasure with pain" (*Philebus* 49e–50a). Recognizing that humor can cruelly exploit human flaws, Plato judged laughter to be a vehicle of "ridicule and contempt" (*Republic* 5.473c).

Aristotle sought to understand the appeal of derision, and, by extension, derisive amusement; however, he does not universally condemn humor. Aristotle states that comedy is "an imitation of men worse than the average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly" (*Poetics* 449a). Although this may seem to indicate Aristotle emphasized a negative view of humor, he continues, "The Ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain" (*Poetics* 449a). Aristotle seemed to hold hope that evoking laughter through the Ridiculous did not necessarily cause pain or harm to individuals, likely because some humorous devices (such as masks) do not take individual people as their targets but are instead crafted from incongruous, imaginative combinations.

In contrast, Cicero argued that laughter is derisive when it is inspired by an abnormality and does cause pain:

The seat and as it were province of what is laughed at . . . lies in a certain offensiveness and deformity; for those sayings are laughed at solely or chiefly which point out and designate something offensive in an inoffensive manner. (*De oratore* II.LVIII)

Quintilian similarly describes laughter as a biting punishment for deviance. He states: "what is said or done foolishly, angrily, fearfully, are equally the objects of laughter; and thus the origin of it is doubtful, as *laughter* is not far from *derision*" (*Institutes* VI.III.7 emphasis in original).

While laughter may be a powerful mechanism of social control, all of the ancient philosophers surveyed here were skeptical about the efficacy of employing humor as a rhetorical strategy, for by engaging in jest, rhetors may harm others and/or damage their own ethos. Collectively, they offer ethical guidelines for humor use premised on analysis of the rhetorical situation, including verbal and nonverbal elements of the humor. Quintilian outlines the components of the rhetorical situation, cautioning that before employing humor, a speaker should consider "*what his own character is; in what sort of cause he is to speak; before whom; against whom;* and *what he should say*" (*Institutes* VI.III.28, emphasis in original). One of the most important questions to consider, according to Quintilian, is the target of the jokes. He explains, "We try either to make *others* the subject of laughter, or *ourselves,* or something that is *foreign to both*" (*Institutes* VI.III.23, emphasis in original). He classifies jokes as "gay and cheerful", "bitter", "malicious", or "inoffensive" (*Institutes* VI.III.27), thus articulating a dichotomy of hurtful or harmless

that resonates with Freud's categories of tendentious and non-tendentious jokes (Freud 1960: 96–100). Presumably, jests are acceptable when they make the speaker or an external subject their target; it is a much riskier speaker/ audience interaction when other people (especially audience members) are the butt of the joke.

. Although making others the target of the humor is a perilous rhetorical strategy, Cicero approved of deprecatory humor as a method of self-defense. Cicero explains why a humorous defense is prized: "all admire wit . . . because it overthrows the adversary, or hampers him, or makes light of him, or discourages, or refutes him" (*De oratore* II.LVIII). He continues that humor can be more effective than argument in "break[ing] the force of offensive remarks" (*De oratore* II.LVIII). Even though this type of humor is defensive, rather than offensive, it certainly has elements of superiority and maliciousness.

Within the category of non-tendentious jokes (those that are "innocent" and do not target others), Aristotle and Cicero attempt to draw the line between humor that enhances a speaker's ethos and humor that harms a speaker's ethos. Aristotle only establishes general guidelines stating that irony is acceptable, for "the ironical man jokes to amuse himself, the buffoon to amuse other people" (*Rhetoric* 3.419b; see also Attardo 1994: 20 and Billig 2005: 45). Cicero builds on Aristotle's writings, explaining that while distorting language is acceptable, distorting one's voice, look, or figure is suited to an actor, not an orator because "This kind of jesting . . . represents the morose, the superstitious, the suspicious, the vainglorious, the foolish; . . . and such kind of characters we are to expose, not to assume" (*De oratore* II.LXII). One can infer from this passage that an effective orator should craft an authentic persona, not perform an act or parody.

Even after carefully considering the rhetorical situation as Quintilian suggests, one cannot judge with certainty where the fine line between wit and buffoonery lies. Rhetoric is of course more art than science. Cicero explains the rub:

[W]e have to ask the same question here as is asked on other points, 'How far the ridicule may be carried?' In this respect it is not only directed that the orator should say nothing impertinently, but also that, even if he can say any thing very ridiculously, he should avoid both errors, lest his jokes become either buffoonery or mimicry. (*De oratore* II.LIX)

Although Cicero had previously noted that "a jocose manner, too, and strokes of wit, give pleasure to an audience, and are often of great advantage to the

speaker" (*De oratore* II.LIV), he suggests here that the most prudent rhetor will avoid the ridiculous, particularly if the ridiculous makes light of a serious issue or a subject that demands "extreme compassion" (*De oratore* II.LVIII–II.LIX).

In sum, Plato, Aristotle, and Quintilian collectively offer an explanation for the psychological appeal of deprecatory humor, observing that joke-tellers may exploit the tension between pleasure and pain in a self-serving manner. One may employ humor in a way that avoids the ethical pitfall of offending others, however. The most notable recommendation for the appropriate use of humor is to carefully consider the rhetorical situation, including the speaker, audience, context, and content of the humorous discourse. More specifically, verbal jesting and irony are seen as appropriate because those forms of humor are not used primarily to entertain the audience, but to demonstrate the speaker's cleverness. Additionally, a speaker should also present oneself in a genuine manner, and not distort one's body or misrepresent one's character like an actor. Finally, it is ideal for a speaker to avoid making another person the target of humor, unless the speaker is acting in self-defense.

5.   Conclusion

Many summaries of ancient Greek and Roman philosophies of humor categorize Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian as taking a negative view. To be sure, a large portion of the philosophers' writings on humor does address its potentially harmful consequences. But as stated in this essay's discussion of incongruity and relief, the ancient philosophers also found humor to be a fitting and effective response to certain exigencies. There is a tension in the philosophers' writing, a complicatedness that often gets ignored in concise summaries of each man's views on humor. It is more accurate to summarize their collective writings thus: humor has the potential to be a powerful tool of persuasion, but like any potent weapon (discursive or otherwise) it should be used with caution.

Summarizing the ancient philosophers' theories through the frames of the three motivation theories of humor helps add clarity to the tension of rhetorical efficacy versus ethical peril when an orator employs humor. Incongruities in humor abound in the writings of the Greek theorists, but more so in those of the Romans. Several humor scholars have speculated that Aristotle's missing second book of the *Poetics* emphasized incongruity. His praise for irony as a "gentlemanly species of jest", and his sympathetic view of the Ugly and Ridiculous

also seem to gesture in the direction of praise for the clever presentation of incongruities. Cicero and Quintilian described irony, deceived expectation, and other incongruities in more detail, often associating them with amusement. Through their writings, we learn of many forms of incongruities: incongruities between what a speaker says and the speaker's character, between what a speaker says and what the speaker actually believes, or between what a speaker says and the gravity of the situation. Whether the incongruities are discursive, speaker-specific, or context-related, these forms of deceived expectation are widely considered intelligent and acceptable forms of humor.

Incongruous humor can be a fitting response to many rhetorical situations and humor that provides relief (to either a speaker or audience) may also be used to the speaker's benefit. In the *Philebus,* Plato describes the mechanism of relief theory, writing that the tension of contradictory emotions and subsequent resolution of that tension lead to feelings of pleasure. Quintilian translates this theory into advice for speakers, stating that humor can be used to cast out negative emotions, improving the disposition of the audience.

My intention with this essay is to encourage contemporary scholars to rethink not only our narrow conception of the ancient philosophers' views of humor, but also the segmented nature of our contemporary focus. Although I have discussed each theory separately, I have also noted multiple intersections between the motivational theories. Viewing each philosopher or each theory in isolation potentially limits our understanding of the broad range of responses to humorous texts and experiences. Superiority theory abounds in the writings of the ancient philosophers, but it is not the only lens through which they view humor. Modern humor scholars, too, need to muddy our own classifications and explore the connections among the motivational theories in greater depth, applying these interconnected theories to the discourse we examine. There is a potential for great scholarly growth if we stay true to our ancient roots.

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Notes

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1. Incongruity, relief, and superiority are widely accepted as the three main motivational theories. They sometimes go by different names (i.e. relief/release or incongruity/incongruity-resolution). Scholars have also described variations on the theories. For a more nuanced description of several motivational theories of humor, see Keith-Spiegel (1972: 4–12).

2. In this "fractured picture," Shelley summarizes Plato's musings on the distinction between humor and laughter, individual differences in humor appreciation, and contextual differences that can influence ethical evaluations of laughter.
3. Cicero also discusses puns, or "plays on ambiguous words," which are unique because, like wit, they are suited to many speaking situations and demonstrate intelligence, but unlike wit, they are not very amusing (II.LXII).
4. Although Shelley does not explicitly state the connection between Plato and relief theory, he quotes extensively from the *Philebus,* noting that "Plato implies that laughter is good at least insofar as it restores the soul to a healthy condition by balancing out the ill feeling of malice" (2003: 354).

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