Planet Without Laughter

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I. The Modern Period

Once upon a time there was a universe. In this universe there was a planet. On this planet there was virtually no laughter. Nothing like ``humor'' was really known. People never laughed, nor jested, nor kidded, nor joked, nor anything like that. The inhabitants were extremely serious, conscientious, sincere, hard-working, studious, well wishing, and moral. But of humor they knew nothing. All except for a small minority who had some feeling for what humor was. These people occasionally laughed and joked. Their behavior was extremely alarming to everyone else and was regarded as an obviously pathological phenomenon. These few people were called ``laughers,'' and they were promptly hospitalized. What was so alarming about their behavior was not only the strange noises they made and the peculiar facial expressions they bore while ``laughing,'' but the utterly pathological things they said! They seemed to lose all sense of reality. They said things which were totally irrational, indeed sometimes logically self-contradictory. In short, they behaved exactly like anyone else who was deluded or hallucinated, hence they were put into hospitals.

Medical opinions differed as to the cause of this ``humor'' disease. Some doctors believed it was organic, others that it was a functional disorder; some thought it was due to a chemical imbalance, others claimed that it was purely psychogenic and often caused by a faulty environment. Indeed, to support the claims of the latter, it was definitely verified that this ``laughter'' was somewhat contagious and that certain individuals became laughers for the first time in their life only after repeated contact with other laughers. Indeed, this was another thing which made the laughers so very dangerous; they were not only hallucinated themselves, but tended to cause these hallucinations to others! Hence they had to be hospitalized not only for their own sakes, but also for the sake of society.

At any rate, the well-known phenomenon of ``contact laughter'' added much support to the theory that laughter was of psychogenic origin. But unfortunately, no psychiatrist who held the functional theory and who applied it in the treatment of laughter patients had any therapeutic results. Not a single laugher was ever cured by purely analytic means. On the other hand, those psychiatrists who used chemical therapy had spectacular results! One drug, called ``laughazone,'' was particularly miraculous. It was best administered intravenously, though it could also be used orally. The effects of only one dose usually lasted six or seven months. Almost immediately upon administration, the patient would stop laughing as well as stop this verbal activity called ``joking,'' and instead would start screaming. The screams would mount to a violent and agonizing pitch within about twenty minutes and would continue at this pitch for virtually the whole of the six- or seven-month duration. The patient would just lie there screaming hour after hour, day after day, week after week, and month after month. And the most amazing thing of all is that not once during this screaming period did the patient ever laugh or crack a joke or even smile. Yes, this drug was really phenomenal!

Yet not all the doctors were wholly satisfied. Some took the position that the side effects of this drug---namely the screaming---might be even more damaging to the patient than the original laughing. They pointed out that the patient appeared ``happier'' as a laugher than as a screamer. The opposition granted that the patient was happier in the original state of laughter than as a screamer, but on the other hand, the patient in the screaming state was less deluded or hallucinated than in the laughing state. They said, ``What use is it to be merely happy, when the happiness is based purely on psychotic delusions? Is it not better to be rid of these delusions, even if the process is painful? After all, who wants to live in a fool's paradise?'' This was a difficult argument to answer! Yet some of the doctors preferred to see their patients in their happier, more natural states of humorous psychotic delusion than in the more reality-oriented screaming states which appeared to be so unbearably painful.

Just how this drug laughazone worked was a problem which was never satisfactorily answered. All that was known for sure is that it did work. Of course there were many conflicting theories, but none of them was ever fully substantiated. One theory claimed that the laugher before treatment was living largely in a fantasy world---indeed his whole trouble was that he often confused fantasy with reality. But curiously enough, the pathology of the laugher made this confusion seem pleasant rather than painful. In other words, the laugher actually enjoyed this confusion of fantasy with reality. Now, what the drug did was to dispel completely all the patient's fantasies. Then for the first time the patient was ``deconfused''---he no longer lived in a fantasy world, but saw reality as reality really is. But the real world seen realistically was so much less pleasant and beautiful than the former world of fantasy, that the contrast was unbearable, hence produced the shock which led to the screaming.

This was one theory. Another theory claimed that the drug really didn't produce a cure at all---indeed, that to label it a ``cure'' was a sham and a delusion. All the drug did (according to this school) was to cause unbearable physical and nervous suffering to the taker, and all the patient was screaming from was the horrible pain induced by the drug. This group claimed that the only reason the patient stopped laughing and joking was that he was in extreme pain. To substantiate this theory, it was pointed out that laughers who were not institutionalized, laughers outside the hospital who got into automobile accidents or incurred other physical injuries, were often known to stop laughing for a while. Indeed, laughers when sick or in any kind of physical pain would never laugh and seldom joke. Also laughers who had just lost a husband or wife or brother or sister or child or very close friend were known to stop laughing for many months. All this evidence seemed to point out that pain, whether physical or mental, somehow seemed antithetical to laughter, and hence by analogy it seemed reasonable to conclude that the pain induced by the drug only temporarily ``killed'' but did not really ``cure'' the laughter. The proponents of this theory also proposed the hypothesis that even if a perfectly normal person---i.e., a nonlaugher---took this drug he would experience terrible pain and became a screamer, and hence that the screaming of the patients had absolutely nothing to do with being ``disillusioned'' or ``suddenly reality oriented'' or anything like that; the screaming was due only to the perfectly normal chemical reaction to the drug. However, this hypothesis was never verified nor refuted, since the screams of the patients were so alarming that no normal person would ever volunteer to try the drug himself. Thus the true action of laughazone remains a mystery to this day.

After the six- or seven-month treatment of the patient, he was, for some unknown reason, terribly run down and in a deep state of depression for several weeks, sometimes longer. After this he gradually convalesced, and his original symptoms of laughing and joking would slowly return. The doctors realized to their sorrow that the cure, though real, was only temporary, and so they put the patient through it again. They said, ``Yes, we had best give this treatment again and again until the patient gets cured permanently.'' Now, usually after about the third treatment---especially when these chemical treatments were combined with psychoanalytic treatment administered during the intervening convalescent periods---a miracle happened, and the patient seemed permanently changed. In the psychoanalytic portions of the treatment the psychiatrist carefully explained to the patient how he had been living in a fantasy world, and how when he started facing reality he would at first find it very painful. And amazingly enough, after about the third treatment, the patient actually agreed that the psychiatrist was right! He said: ``I see now that you were absolutely right. I was indeed living in a state in which I constantly confused fantasy with reality, and I moreover believed in the existence of an entity called `Humor.' Yes, I actually believed it to be something real rather than a mere figment of my imagination. But now I see the light. I realize how in error I have been! These drug treatments have done wonders in making me realize how crazy I have been! Indeed, under this drug I have seen things realistically for the first time; I see now that things are not funny! As you anticipated, doctor, my facing reality for the first two or three times was most disturbing. But do you want to know the beautiful thing of it, doctor? I am no longer afraid of reality! After facing it a couple of times, I find it is not so frightening after all! I am now adjusted to reality. To tell you the truth, doctor, I don't even think I need ever take the drug again. That's right, I no longer need it! In fact, I'm perfectly confident that I could walk out of this hospital this very day and not even be tempted ever again to engage in this pathological activity known as `humor.' Yes, doctor, I really feel like a new man! Moreover, if I were out of this hospital, I as an ex-laugher could spot other laughers and even potential laughers far better than one who has never gone through my experiences, and I could indeed bring them into the hospital for treatment.''

Well, when the doctors heard this kind of talk, many of them were delighted and promptly arranged to have the patients discharged. But certain follow-up studies gave the doctors cause for grave concern. For one thing, the ex-laughers never did bring in laughers or potential laughers for treatment. Second, there were some pretty reliable rumors that these ex-laughers, although they indeed never laughed or joked in public, did so in private and in a highly clandestine fashion. Also, when they met each other, they would go into huddles which somehow savored of the conspiratorial. And so, many of the doctors framed the hypothesis that perhaps the ex-laughers were not really cured after all, but---of all horrors---only pretended to be! In other words, it was seriously suggested that the patients, after about the third treatment, were only simulating mental health, and were being, of all things, insincere! The reason this hypothesis was so shocking is that insincerity was virtually unknown on this planet. From what little was known about the subject, insincerity itself was regarded as another form of psychosis but one which was exceedingly rare.

The question then arose: What made these ex-laughers insincere? A few of the bolder physicians suggested that it was simply that the patients pretended to be well in order to avoid any further painful drug treatments. But that hypothesis was generally rejected. The consensus of medical opinion was that insincerity was never this rational nor premeditated, but was something totally irrational and most likely caused by some chemical imbalance. Indeed, it became suspected that laughazone itself, though temporarily curing the laughing psychosis, might be the very agent which was causing the insincerity psychosis. And so the doctors sadly admitted: ``The situation is most depressing! Not only does laughazone fail to provide any permanent cure for laughing, but it seems to have this terrible side effect of producing insincerity!'' Some of the ex-laughers were recalled to the hospital and their laughazone treatments were resumed; meanwhile another drug, ``insincerezone,'' was simultaneously administered with the hopes of counterbalancing the ``insincerity'' effects of the laughazone. But a proper balance never seemed to be struck. During the convalescent periods between drug treatments, the patients were either sincere and laughed, or they ceased to laugh but displayed obvious symptoms of insincerity. In other words, no chemical means could be found which would make the patient sincerely stop laughing! Various types of cerebral surgery were also tried, but again to no avail! Nothing science could do could make these strange uncanny patients give up humor in a really sincere manner. And so the doctors threw up their hands.

I shall return later to the fate of the laugh-patients.

II. The Middle Period

The history of this planet can be roughly divided into three periods: the Ancient Period, the Middle Period, and the Modern Period. The Modern Period contained no literature at all on laughter, except in textbooks and periodicals on abnormal psychology. The Middle Period was chock-full of laugh-literature---indeed this constituted the main writings. This literature contained absolutely no material which contemporary laughers called ``funny''; indeed the writings were in a wholly sane, serious, scholarly, and philosophic mood. The writings consisted mainly of analysis and commentary on the ancient texts. Now the ancient writings were totally nonphilosophical; they never spoke about laughter or anything like that. The ancient writings were simply what the Middle Period called ``funny.'' These archaic manuscripts contained all sorts of incomprehensible contradictory material called ``jokes'' or ``funny stories.'' It was the main purpose of the Middle Period to evaluate the work of the Ancient Period. The philosophers of the Middle Period---particularly of the Early Middle Period---actually extolled the Ancient Period and referred to it as a ``golden age''---more specifically as ``the golden age of humor when men could freely laugh and joke and really enjoy life.'' These writers kept talking about the decline of laughter as a tragedy rather than as a blessing. They claimed that the ancient writings, despite their apparent irrationality and paradox, really contained an extremely important kind of wisdom. Perhaps ``wisdom'' (they said) was not quite the right word; certainly this ``wisdom'' was not the kind of knowledge which could be taught by science or reason. To perceive the value of the ancient writings required a certain almost mystical faculty called ``Humor.'' Furthermore this ``Humor'' arose curiously enough out of the very paradoxical and allegedly ``irrational'' character of the ancient writings. In other words (and this is what was found so puzzling!), Humor could not flourish in a wholly serious and rational atmosphere.

The main philosophical problem of the Middle Period was to establish whether this mysterious thing called ``Humor'' really had objective existence or whether it existed only in the imagination. Those who believed it really existed were called Pro-Humorists; those who believed it did not were called skeptics or Anti-Humorists. Among the Pro-Humorists there raged bitter controversy as to whether the existence of Humor could be established by pure reason, or whether it could be known only by an act of faith. The Pro-Humorists were roughly of three sorts; the Rational Pro-Humorists, who claimed that the existence of Humor could be established by pure reason; the Faith-Humorists, who believed that reason could be somewhat helpful but that an act of faith was crucial; and finally there were the ``Mystic-Humorists'' (known in modern times as ``laughers''), who claimed that neither reason nor faith were of the slightest help in apprehending Humor; the only reliable way it could be known was by direct perception. Reason, they said, leads nowhere. To believe in the existence of Humor on the mere basis of authority means that you obviously don't see it for yourself. To have faith in the existence of Humor; on what basis is this faith? Is this faith based on acceptance of authority? Is it based on some sort of hope that there really is such a thing as Humor? Is it perhaps that the Faith-Humorists believed that Humor, if it really existed, would be something very good, and hence, because of their desire for the good, they took an oath to themselves to conduct their lives as if Humor really did exist? Yes, this seemed to be it. But, as the Mystic-Humorists pointed out, this attitude, though well intentioned, was a sad testimony to the fact that the Faith-Humorists could not see humor directly. The Mystic-Humorists kept repeating, ``If only you could see humor directly, you would not need rational arguments nor any faith nor anything like that. You would then know that Humor is real.''

This phrase ``see Humor directly'' was particularly apt to be criticized. The Mystic-Humorists actually said: ``Yes, we can see humor in many situations. Life is permeated with humor, if you can only see it.'' The skeptical Anti-Humorists said, ``So, you claim you can see humor! Tell me, what color is it?'' The Mystic-Humorists laughed and said, ``Humor doesn't have any color!'' The skeptics continued: ``Oh, so you can see it only in black and white! Well, then, what shape is it?'' ``It doesn't have any form or shape.'' ``Then I am confused! Is humor visible or invisible?'' ``Of course it is invisible!'' ``But I thought you just said that you can see it. Didn't you say that you could see the humor of certain situations?'' ``Well, yes, I said that, but I didn't mean `see' in the literal sense of `see with your eyes.' Ocular vision really has nothing to do with it. I used `see' in the sense of directly perceive, not see with the eyes. The perception, though as direct as vision, is really through a different sense altogether:'' ``A different sense? Which sense is it---hearing? If so, what does humor sound like? Or is it smell or taste or touch or what? With which of the five senses do you perceive humor, or is it a combination of more than one of them?'' ``No, it is not any one of these five senses, nor is it a combination of them. It is a different sense altogether---in a way, it is a nonphysical sense---we call this sense the `sense of humor'.'' ``Good God, you literally mean a nonphysical sense? In other words, you mean it is something occult like telepathy or clairvoyance? But scientific integrity requires us not to believe in anything occult; hence we cannot but believe that this Humor is something totally unreal, a mere figment of the imagination.''

In vain the Humor-Mystics protested that there was nothing the least bit occult about humor---indeed the idea that humor was something occult struck them as downright ``funny.'' They laughed at the idea, and said: ``If it will help you at all, the very statement that humor is something occult is typical of the type of statement which we label `humorous' and which makes us laugh. There is absolutely nothing occult about Humor. If once you could only see what humor was, you would realize that it is the most natural thing in the world, and also that it is delightfully pleasant.'' Another thing, the so-called ``Mystical-Humorists'' kept claiming that the label ``Mystic-Humorist'' was most misleading. They claimed that there was nothing at all mystical about humor---even though it might seem mystical to those who lacked the immediate sense of humor. They said, ``Why not rather call us laughers, which is, in fact, what we are.'' And so the term ``Mystic-Humorist'' got gradually replaced by ``laugher.'' The attitudes of the Faith-Humorists toward the laughers is of considerable interest. Not all of them believed in the authenticity of the laughers. Indeed, many of them were extremely envious of those who could sense Humor directly, hence they simply refused to believe that the laughers could really do this. And in some cases they were right, for rather subtle reasons which will later appear. Now, most of the Faith-Humorists did not take a hostile, skeptical attitude toward the laughers, but believed in them wholeheartedly. They knew that the laughers were in direct contact with that which the Faith-Humorists could only reason about and accept on faith. And so they went to the laughers to be taught. Some of the laughers regarded it as their main mission in life to try to bring laughter back to mankind. They became what was known as ``Laugh-Masters'' and set up institutions---usually in the mountains or by the seashore---known as ``Laugh-Monasteries.'' To these we now turn.

III. A Sermon

The Faith-Humorists came to these monasteries to sit at the feet of the Laugh-Masters in order to learn the holy art of Laughter. The methods of instruction used by the Laugh-Masters varied considerably. There was one famous Laugh-Master, Bankoff, who rejected all orthodox methods and who indeed claimed to have no method whatever. He said, ``I think the best method is simply to amuse them!'' Many of the Laugh-Masters felt hurt that their methods were so flagrantly neglected by Bankoff, but they all had to admit that as a practitioner, Bankoff was better than any. Bankoff was what we on this planet would call a ``clown.'' It was not so much his words that enlightened people, but his actions. He would act in very strange manners. Sometimes during a serious ``laugh-sermon'' he would suddenly, for no apparent reason, do a series of somersaults, and of the thousands of listeners, one or two of them would burst out into laughter for the first time in their lives. They would say: ``Oh, so now we see what Humor really is! By God, these somersaults have taught us more than all the books we have read on the philosophy of laughter!'' Some of the other Laugh-Masters tried Bankoff's somersault techniques, but for some odd reason they could never carry it off. It somehow fell ``flat,'' and so the other Masters had to return to purely verbal methods of instruction.

Sermons were one of the standard techniques. Sometimes they did some good, sometimes not. I now reproduce one of the most famous sermons:

Oh aspirants to Laughter! You have bravely come long distances to worship at the shrine of humor. But alas, how misguided are your efforts! In the first place you insist on sitting at our feet, and on approaching us in an attitude of reverence. You think of us in some sense as ``holy men.'' And none of our efforts can convince you that the very reverential nature of your approach is the very thing which is preventing you from laughing. If only you could see the humor of the situation! You think of laughter as something solemn, and you cannot believe us when we assure you that there is absolutely nothing solemn about humor; humor is almost the antithesis of solemnity. The situation is so strange! On the one hand, you perfectly well know that we are in immediate contact with humor---that we experience it firsthand---and yet your preconceived notions of the ``theory of humor'' are so strong, so thoroughly engraved in your innermost beings, that you cannot believe the things we tell you about laughter. You think that, because you have read all the great books on the philosophy of laughter, you know more about laughter than we do---even though you know we can laugh and you cannot. You seem to think that knowledge about laughter is somehow more important than the ability to laugh. And you say that your judgments about laughter are more valid than our own. You keep saying that the ability to laugh does not enable the laugher to know what laughter really is---only ``analysis,'' according to you, will do that. You are like certain philosophers of art who feel somehow superior to the working artist and who believe that they really know what art is ``all about'' more than the artist himself. You are also like some philosophers of science who say, ``The working scientist rarely knows what science is actually all about.'' Or some logicians who say, ``Most mathematicians, even though they prove great theorems, don't really know what they are doing.'' Yes, your attitude toward us is of this nature. You worship our ability to laugh, despite the fact that we tell you that worship is entirely the wrong attitude. We grant that worship might be helpful for achieving other values in life, but laughter can never be acquired through worship. If you could only laugh at us instead of worshipping us, you would be on the right track. But you do not even understand what we mean when we say this. You insist that laughter is something solemn despite everything we say. You say: ``Just because you claim that it is not solemn doesn't mean that it necessarily isn't. It may be that it really is solemn, only you fail to recognize its solemnity.'' What can we say to you when you talk to us like this? All we can say is: ``We grant that we cannot with science and logic prove that humor is not solemn. We just know it is not. We are sorry to sound so unreasonable and dogmatic, but all we can do is to assure you that once you have acquired a sense of humor, then you will also know that humor is something which is not solemn.''

Let me now tell you in more concrete terms what are some of the errors you make---what are some of the false paths you feel compelled to follow which you so earnestly believe will lead you to acquiring a sense of humor. First of all, almost none of you is able to shake off the completely erroneous belief that it takes grim and determined effort to acquire a sense of humor. You all seem to believe that the sense of humor is something that you must somehow earn by your own efforts. You regard laughter as a reward for things you do. You also regard laughter as an act of your own---as something you actively do rather than as something which happens to you. You may find it hard to believe, but much of our laughter is involuntary. Sometimes we cannot help laughing. In some humorous situations, we are, as it were, ``overcome'' by laughter; the laughter almost comes by itself very much like hiccoughs. At any rate, the sense of humor is not something which you can acquire by your own efforts. The main place where effort comes in is in overcoming your prejudiced beliefs that effort is directly necessary to acquire a sense of humor. We understand the quandary you are in. You say: ``Well, if we sit back and do nothing, we do not find ourselves laughing. How then are we to learn laughter unless we make some effort to do so?'' We admit that this is the hardest question in the world to answer. It seems that you are trapped whichever direction you turn; if you do nothing you do not laugh, and if you do something you also do not laugh. How then are you to laugh? Yes, we perfectly understand your problem, and we wish we could give you a wholly rational answer. But unfortunately we cannot. Perhaps our inability to do so is not too dissimilar to your inability to laugh. At any rate, we cannot help you by answering this question; we can only resort to other methods. One thing, though, we feel will help, and that is to point out how most of the efforts you do make are in the wrong direction. Let me indicate four common false roads.

1. Some of you take an approach which is far too objective and scientific. You read all the literature you can find on the philosophy of humor. You perform elaborate linguistic analyses of what the word ``humor'' could possibly ``mean.'' You keep looking for better and better definitions of the word ``humor.'' In other words, you are trying to define the word ``humor'' in terms of other words whose meanings you already know. But this is utterly impossible! The word ``humor'' is simply not definable in terms you already understand. The only way you will ever find out what the word ``humor'' really means is by acquiring a sense of humor. And for this, science and logic cannot help you in the least. Please do not misunderstand; all this analytic study of humor is of great value for psychology and the theory of knowledge. But it should be undertaken after rather than before you have acquired the sense of humor. To undertake the study first will certainly not help you, and may very likely harm you. Why will it harm you? Because the very grim, serious scholarliness of your approach will put you in the frame of mind in which humor is not likely to come to you. Some of you are perhaps amazed at my phrase ``come to you''? Well, that's exactly as it is! Yes, to a large extent, humor is something that actually comes to you! This is our whole point which is so hard for you to grasp. If you would only relax, only let yourself go, only let humor come to you, then it would. But no, you grimly chase it by your serious studies, and all you succeed in doing is to chase it away,

2. The next wrong notion from which so many of you suffer is that the sense of humor is achieved via morality. You have been taught that if you lead a good life, then you will be rewarded by acquiring this sense of humor. And so you go forth doing good deeds hoping you will get this reward. But this is totally off the track! We are not against morality---most of us value the ethical life---but we absolutely insist that it has nothing to do with the quest for humor. Where did you get this false notion that you must ``earn'' the sense of humor by being good? And why do you persist in this belief? Actually the moral quality of the laughers on the whole is not significantly different from that of the nonlaughers. Of course some of us laughers are very fine people, but others are complete rascals. Morality simply has nothing to do with your problem.

3. Closely related to this is the absolutely ghastly idea some of you have been told that humor can come to you only through all sorts of gruesome ascetic practices. And so you starve yourselves, become sexually abstinent, flagellate and otherwise mutilate your bodies hoping that the intense pain you suffer will bear the fruit of humor. But it never does, and no wonder! The more you pain yourselves, the more impossible it is to enjoy humor. There is one minor exception to this; there is a thing we call ``bitter humor,'' and this does arise in response to painful situations. But this type of humor is comparatively rare and moreover is almost impossible to learn before learning the more normal joyful humor. Yes, humor is sometimes really joyful, and it cannot possibly flourish in the morbid atmosphere of asceticism.

4. The most insidious error of all is to try to learn humor by merely imitating the outward forms of the laughers! This error is so subtly deceptive and dangerous, and so difficult for us to correct! You listen most attentively to the sound of our laughter and then you try to make the same sounds yourself. Some of you are quite good at this acoustical imitation, but you cannot fool us! Even if your imitation were perfect, you still would not be really laughing any more than a parrot is able to understand the language he mimics. You ask us how we know your laughter is not genuine, and we answer, ``It simply does not sound right.'' You ask us to be more specific and to ``correct'' your laughter, or the more scientifically minded among you ask us to give you a precise acoustical analysis of the difference between genuine and imitation laughter, You ask us: ``Is the pitch wrong? Is it a question of wrong timing? What is it about our laughter which is wrong?'' You seem disappointed that we make no effort to answer this sort of question, In the first place, we cannot give you a purely scientific description of how your laughter sounds unconvincing, an acoustical sine-wave analysis is the last thing we can give. Perhaps if we put our minds on it, we could train you to laugh more convincingly, but this would be the worst possible thing in the world for you! Indeed, if you could learn to perfectly mimic our laughter, then we would have practically no means left of knowing whether or not you had a sense of humor. What you utterly fail to realize is that it is not the ability to laugh correctly which gives you a sense of humor, but the very reverse. Once you have the sense of humor, then you will automatically and spontaneously laugh correctly without your having to analyze how you laugh. Yes, we know that you have fallen under the spell of many books with such titles as ``How to Laugh Correctly,'' but we can solemnly assure you that no true laugher would ever write such a book. Indeed, such books are totally antithetic to the true spirit of humor. You must remember that the activity of laughter is only the outward form of Humor; Humor itself is something entirely within the inner spirit. And you can never attain this spirit by any amount of imitation of outward forms of behavior. Another way you try to learn by mere imitation is by this ridiculous practice of memorizing jokes. In a perfectly laborious and mechanical fashion you commit to memory thousands upon thousands of jokes and you think you are thereby acquiring a sense of humor! You call this activity ``studying''---you say you are ``studying to acquire a sense of humor.'' But these jokes are absolutely pointless for you to learn until after you have acquired a sense of humor. Without this inner sense, you cannot possibly see the real point of these jokes. True, even without this sense, you can understand the situations these jokes describe, but these situations themselves are totally uninteresting unless you can perceive the humor in them. What is this thing we call the ``humor'' In them? Since it is not a color, not a sound, not a smell, not a taste, not a feel, you wonder what on earth it could be. Some of you keep insisting that since it is none of these things, then it must be something ``mystical,'' and you cannot believe us when we tell you it is not. Once you can see humor for yourself, you will realize it is something as plain as daylight.

Coming back to the point about joke memorization, we can easily see by the way you tell these jokes that you completely fail to see the humor of them. To put the matter quite plainly, you tell them far too seriously. A joke is not something like a solemn liturgical chant; it is virtually the opposite in spirit. You tell a joke---or rather recite it---as if you had just come from a funeral! Again, it is pointless for us to give you an acoustical analysis of what is wrong with the way you recite jokes, we can only say that you should first acquire the sense of humor and then the proper way of telling jokes usually comes by itself.

The most serious offenders of you do the following: You combine the two techniques of joke memorization and forced laughter, and you are then sure you have ``arrived.'' But God Almighty, how wrong you are! You first parrot forth your ``joke'' and then parrot forth your ``laughter,'' and are then sure you have a sense of humor! You do not realize that your intense preoccupation with the mere outward forms is the very thing which has prevented the spirit of humor from entering your souls. And furthermore, you will not even believe us when we assure you that you are further away than ever. You get angry and ask us to give you scientific proof that you do not yet have a sense of humor. You absolutely refuse to trust your intuition in this matter, and you wrathfully leave our monasteries and go forth into the world claiming yourselves to be ``authentic laughers.'' Nothing sabotages our cause more than this! The skeptics who meet you are almost rightfully reinforced in their belief that humor is something which is ``a mere sham and delusion.'' The Faith-Humorists who believe that humor is indeed real, but who are envious of those who have it, and who believe that no authentic laughers exist anymore, are again reinforced in their beliefs when they meet the pseudo-laughers. Yes, the pseudo-laughers are the major cause of the disappearance of humor from this planet. We try our all to stem the tide; whether or not we will succeed, God only knows.

IV. The Great Legend

In addition to the monasteries we have described, there were also the temples---called ``Humor-Temples'' or ``Temples of Laughter.'' These were located mainly in urban areas. They were very different in spirit from the monasteries. Here the worshippers would gather once a week---on Laughday---to worship at the altar of Laughter. In the Early Middle Period, there was indeed laughter in the temples. The congregation would come and the High Priest would read the ancient texts, and everyone would have a great laugh over them. But as the ages went by, laughter disappeared more and more from the temples (as it did elsewhere in the world), and people turned more and more to the worship of laughter. They no longer laughed, but started ``praying to Laughter.''

During the Middle Middle Period, the great question of mankind was ``Why is Laughter disappearing from our planet?'' Many hypotheses were offered, but more in the spirit of ``legends'' than of scientific theories. Many were these legends, and the temples started splitting into groups depending on which legend they held to be the truth. The temples became extremely dogmatic and intolerant of each other, and religious warfare developed, each group of temples fighting for its truth. One legend, known as the ``Great Legend,'' achieved the widest popularity and soon dominated over all the other legends. Here is the Great Legend.

In the days before the Ancient Period, in the beginning, there were only two people in the world. These people---call them Adam and Eve---were brought by the Lord into the world at the same time. They were born on Laughday. They lived in total bliss in the Garden of Laughter. They lived mainly by the streams and laughed with the butterflies and sunbeams. Every day the Lord would visit them in the garden and joyfully fill their souls with His delightful humor. He loved them, joked with them, and laughed with them. Their laughter was divine. And so they spent their days in this paradise for many years, until one day a strange green animal, something like a rat and something like a skunk, with mean, small, close-set eyes, came into the garden. This animal perceived the bliss of the couple and waxed mighty jealous. He said, ``I will soon do something about that!'' and sure enough he did! He approached the couple and said: ``How can you two grown-up people live like this all your lives? You are not children! How can you idle away all your time by this perfectly infantile laughter? Don't you realize there are important duties to be done? Yes, it may be pleasant for you to fritter away all your time in laughter, but at this rate how will you ever amount to something? The Lord has given you the precious gift of life, and all you can do is to betray it in this manner? Shame on you! And the Lord---why does He encourage you in these infantilisms? Why does He persist in his daily visits, telling you all these silly jokes, and keeping you like children? Why is He afraid of your growing up? You have the bodies of adults, but minds of infants. Why does the Lord allow this? What is He afraid of? What is He hiding from you? Why does He pretend to be your friend when He is the very one who is deceiving you and who is preventing you from being true to yourselves and fulfilling your real destinies in the universe? Why do you tolerate this? There is one chink in the Lord's armor by which you can save yourselves. The Lord has given you free will, by which you can oppose Him. You can put a stop to this situation; it is up to you! Only by your own efforts can you prevent the Lord from keeping you in bondage forever.''

Thus spoke the Evil Animal. He came back to the garden day after day and slowly but surely beguiled the two Children of Laughter. Now the remarkable thing is that for the most part, neither Adam nor Eve really believed nor trusted the Animal, at least on a conscious level. They somehow did not like the Animal's looks; there was a certain expression in its eyes which somehow aroused their suspicions. And yet, the Animal said some remarkable things. In particular, they were absolutely flabbergasted to learn that they had such a thing as free will! Such a strange idea had never occurred to them before. Their lives had flowed by so beautifully, happily, spontaneously, and effortlessly that it never seemed to them as if they themselves were ever doing anything. It seemed that things were happening to them rather than that they themselves were active agents. For example, when they came within sight or scent of a delicious fruit, it seemed as if the fruit drew them like a magnet, rather than that they chose to eat the fruit! To put the matter better, it was not so much that they felt passive rather than active, but rather it was that they never made any distinction between passivity and activity. And so the idea that they could choose was a stunning novelty. It gave them an exhilarating sense of power. They of their own free will could now do things! In particular, they could, if they chose, amount to something. The question then arose: Should they amount to something? This notion of ``should'' was also quite new. Formerly, since they had felt that they were merely part of the stream of life rather than actively living it, ethical notions of ``should,'' ``ought,'' ``duty,'' etc., had absolutely no meaning for them. But now they knew better. The troubling question arose: Was it right or wrong for them to sit by idly enjoying life rather than going out and amounting to something?

Adam and Eve also for the first time began philosophizing. They believed the Animal was right in telling them that they had free will. But the question which most puzzled them was whether they had really had free will before the Animal informed them of the fact. If they formerly had free will, they certainly had not known that they had. And is it possible to be free without knowing that one is free? In other words, was it really true, as the Animal had said, that God had already given them free will, or was it the Animal himself who caused them to have free will? It seemed likely to them that having free will is really no different from believing that one has free will. They wondered whether there might not be other worlds with sentient beings like themselves, and whether these beings had free will. Adam decided that the most likely answer was that some of the beings had free will and others did not; those that believed they did, did, and those that didn't believe, didn't. They once asked the green Animal, ``Do you have free will?'' The Animal answered: ``Of course I do! And you too can have free will if you choose to.'' This answer puzzled them terribly! They replied: ``What? You say we can choose to have free will? You mean that having free will is a matter of choice?'' The Animal replied, ``Of course it is.'' Eve then protested, ``But I thought you told us that God has already given us free will.'' The Animal replied: ``In a sense He has, but only in a passive rather than an active sense. God has, so to speak, given you the potentiality of having free will. Whether you actualize it or not is up to you. God has given you the ability to make choices; He does not force you to make them. You can use your free will only if you choose to.'' Adam answered, ``But if we can choose to, that means we already do have free will.'' The Animal replied, ``Yes, it is in that sense that God has given you free will.''

All this talk puzzled the couple terribly! And thus the sciences of metaphysics and epistemology were born. Meanwhile, they had on their hands the present moral problem of what to do with their free will. Should they or should they not go forth and amount to something? They knew they were perfectly happy in the Garden of Laughter, but was their real role in the cosmos to be happy or to fulfill their duties? They debated this for many weeks, and finally decided to remain in the garden and not to amount to something. They decided to trust the Lord and not the Evil Animal. Yes, they finally realized, the Lord is their friend and the Animal their foe. And so one day the Animal came into the garden and Adam said: ``You have taught us many wonderful things. You have taught us that we have free will. Whether you have taught us this, or whether by some mysterious power you have caused us to have free will, or whether it was God who `allowed' us to have free will, or whether He `made us' have free will, or whether it is we who have `chosen' to have free will, we do not know. We do not understand the phenomenon of free will, but we now know that whatever it really is, we certainly have it. Perhaps we have chosen to have it; we really don't know. All we now know for sure is that we in fact do have it. And you are absolutely right that we can now use our free will to reject the Lord and His ways. Yes, we are indeed free to do this. But do you not realize that by the very same token we are now free to reject you? Yes, we now have the power to reject you or the Lord. And it is you we have decided to reject! Of our own free wills we thoroughly cast you out of our minds and hearts. We reject you and your ways. We will no longer heed you or your words. We cast you out of this very garden. This garden is our property; the Lord has given it to us, not to you! It is our own private property, and you can no longer be here without our permission. We have so far suffered you here only as a guest. But you are no longer a welcome guest. Begone from the Garden, and don't you ever dare return. If we ever find you here again, we will kill you.'' The Animal departed without a word, and never returned.

Adam and Eve heaved a sigh of relief. They knew that they had chosen to do the right thing. But alas, their troubles were only beginning! Although on a conscious level they had chosen to accept the Lord and reject the Animal, the poison of the Animal had entered their unconscious souls and became the focus of a vast psychic infection. This infection grew and spread from day to day. Pain entered their souls, and they could not understand why. True, they had decided to remain in the Lord's garden and not worry about amounting to something, but deep down they felt that they should amount to something. They became strangely restless and dissatisfied. Troubled thoughts crossed their minds; day by day they became more irritable and depressed. The joy started going out of their lives. They were no longer sure they were even happy in the Garden of Laughter.

Then came the Fatal Day. They had spent a long and restless night of troubled sleep. They both dreamed of going through eons and eons of time and never amounting to anything. In the morning they awoke in a state of complete exhaustion. They sorrowfully went together down to the stream and sat for hours in silent gloomy thought. The Lord came by at the usual hour, and perceived they were sad. He then tried to cheer them up with one of his jokes. At this point, Adam's nerves were strained to the brink, and he angrily snapped at the Lord: ``We are not amused! Your jokes are not funny!'' The Lord gazed at them long and sorrowfully and said: ``Very well, then, you have chosen to reject Me, my ways, and my humor. I shall not try to force these on you; indeed I could not even if I would. I cannot make you laugh, nor would I if I could. You indeed do have free will, as your great bosom pal has told you. You are perfectly free to reject my humor, and I shall never trouble you with it again. You may as well go forth and `amount to something,' which is what you deep down really want. Yes, you can amount to a great deal---indeed you can beget an entire race. You will go forth and do this. Only you and your progeny will not have me present to guide you with my humor. I will watch over you, but I will not be with you. Slowly but surely, humor will disappear from the world. Without me present to inject fresh humor into your souls, it will slowly wither away and die. Only after centuries have elapsed, when the world is at its blackest pitch of despair, when you yourselves realize your infinite need for me and my ways, then you will find the right way to call me back. And when you truly call me back, I will return. Until then, adieu!''

V. Back to the Modern Period

Thus the Lord spake, and thus it came to pass. Though laughter disappeared more and more from the world, the people of the Middle Period realized that this was a tragic loss rather than a gain, and they did everything possible to stem the tide. Only at the very end of the Middle Period did it first occur to mankind that laughter, far from being something good, was something totally undesirable. People started saying: ``Maybe we should stop trying to stem the tide. Maybe the tide is our greatest blessing, although we don't know it. Maybe it is high time that this silly archaic thing called `Humor' should disappear. Maybe laughter was all right for savages, but we are now becoming civilized!'' Yes, this is how they began to speak. At first they referred to laughter as something ``silly,'' but soon they started using the stronger word ``crazy.'' Then the idea fully occurred to mankind that humor was but another form of psychosis; laughter was a type of psychopathology. Thus was ushered in the Modern Period.

And so we are back to the Modern Period. Typical of this period is the fact that most people do not refer to the Ancient, Middle, and Modern periods by these names, but rather as the ``Psychotic Period,'' the ``Convalescent Period,'' and the present ``Sane Period.'' Yes, the world is now sane; there are very few laughers left. If only it were known how to cure them!

We go back to where we left off in Chapter I. We recall leaving the doctors in a quandary as to how to find the proper balance between laughazone and insincerezone which would make the laughers sincerely stop laughing. And the painful fact had to be faced that the laughers were not permanently curable, at least in the foreseeable future. So what was to be done? Here medical opinion split into two divergent camps, and the hospitals split into two widely divergent types. Hospitals of Type I were called ``laugh-scream hospitals''; those of Type II, ``pure-laugh hospitals.'' In the laugh-scream hospitals the doctors realized that no patients were permanently curable; hence a patient once admitted was admitted for life. All that could be done was to administer the laughazone treatment over and over again for the rest of the patient's life. The discipline at these hospitals was ironclad; no patient was ever released, and there was to be no letup of treatments. It was to be firmly and painfully realized that although no permanent cure was possible, laughazone did provide a temporary cure, and painful as the cure was, it was better for the patient to face reality and scream than to withdraw into his fantasy world of humor and laugh.

For some unknown reason, the patients at the laugh-scream hospitals did not live very long. Few of them survived the sixth or seventh treatment.

The philosophy of the pure-laugh hospitals was entirely different. They agreed with the laugh-scream hospitals that no laugher was permanently curable, and many doubted that he was even temporarily curable. At any rate, even if he were temporarily curable, was it really worth it? Why not let the patient enjoy his life; was it really all that bad that he had these fantasies? And so, like the laugh-scream hospitals, patients were incarcerated for life. But they were given no laughazone treatments---nor any treatments whatever! The psychiatrists at these hospitals said to the patients: ``You are incurable; your psychosis is hopeless. There is nothing you can do to get better. Therefore, do not try to get well; do not fight your psychosis, but rather go along with it. In other words, try to become adjusted within the framework of your laughing-psychosis. You must learn to live with it. You must learn to enjoy your laughter.'' One patient responded: ``But doctor, we do enjoy our laughter! We already are adjusted to our humor.'' The doctor, who perhaps had not quite understood him, replied, ``No, no; you must learn to live with it.'' Aside from these stupid remarks of the doctors, which, if anything, only made the patients laugh at them, the patients in the pure-laugh hospitals were very happy. Everything possible was done for them to ensure their happiness. Indeed, the pure-laugh hospitals were not really hospitals at all, in the true sense of the word, but were merely isolation centers. Their only function was to prevent the inmates from infecting the outside world with their laughter-psychosis. But everything was done to make them comfortable. They could choose to work or not to work. They were given the best food, spacious living quarters, and many recreational activities. The hospitals were usually located on huge estates, and the patients were allowed to roam the beautiful grounds. All educational facilities were provided, and each hospital had a magnificent laugh-library---all the Ancient and Middle Period texts. It was also possible for the inmates to get various higher degrees of learning---indeed most of the D.H. degrees (Doctor of Humorology) were possessed by hospitalized laughers. Another wonderful thing was that laughter tended to run in families, hence entire families were incarcerated together in the pure-laugh hospitals.

Thus the conditions inside the pure-laugh hospitals were close to idyllic, except for one thing! The lives of the patients were clouded by their realization of the horrible fate of their unfortunate brethren at the laugh-scream hospitals! Good God, they said, how unfair that our brethren are screaming themselves to death while we are free to enjoy our laughter. And so every day they held religious services praying to God to relieve the sufferings of the patients at the laugh-scream hospitals. After a while, they decided that mere prayers were not enough and that perhaps there was something they could do. And they did indeed find something to do. More about that shortly.

The laughers in the pure-laugh hospitals held the view that they were sane and the rest of the world was mad. They believed that there was nothing like a sense of humor to keep a person's sanity. Yes, they held themselves to be a sane subculture living in the midst of an insane culture. Some of the more enlightened psychiatrists actually encouraged them in these beliefs! Although they themselves knew the truth, that the laughers were mad, they felt that it was psychologically good for the laughers to have the illusion that they were sane.

One of the laughers once said to a large group of his colleagues: ``What a world we are living in! It is harder to cope with than the most despotic dictatorship. At least dictators are deliberately evil; they know deep down that they are motivated by avarice and lust for power. But these doctors at the laugh-scream hospitals! They are the maddest of all! They actually believe that they are helping their patients! How can one cope with that? Is there nothing we can do? Surely we can find something!''

And, as I said before, they did find something. In the first place, it occasionally happened that patients would escape from the laugh-scream hospitals, and they immediately rushed to the pure-laugh hospitals, where they were cheerfully admitted. This gave the pure-laugh patients the idea they were waiting for: They themselves escaped en masse from the pure-laugh hospitals, organized raids on the laugh-scream hospitals, freed all the laugh-wards, and brought all the patients back to the pure-laugh hospitals. This started the Great Decline of the laugh-scream hospitals.

Yes, indeed they declined and eventually went out of existence. Just how this happened is not fully known. It was partly the result of the raids from the pure-laugh hospitals. Another important factor was this: The laughers in the outside world all decided that it was too dangerous for them to remain where they were; they might get captured and sent to the wrong hospital. So they all voluntarily went to the pure-laugh hospitals for treatment and were all admitted. Thus came the day when no laughers were left in the outside world; the majority were now in the pure-laugh hospitals, and a minority in the laugh-scream hospitals.

Then came a breakdown in the morale and discipline of the laugh-scream hospitals. More and more of the doctors began getting disgusted with laughazone treatments; more and more decided that it really was not humane. Some of them even began to suspect that laughter was not really a sickness at all, though they dared not voice their views on pain of having their medical licenses revoked. Also, there was much outside pressure in this direction; people granted that laughter was a sickness, but felt that screaming was even worse than laughing. And so one laugh-scream hospital after another changed over to a pure-laugh hospital, until the blessed day arrived when no laugh-scream hospital was left. Now all the laughers in the world were in pure-laugh hospitals.

At this point in history, the pure-laugh hospitals got very overcrowded. Hence they spread into laugh-farms, laugh-towns, and other types of laugh-communities. The conditions in the laugh-communities were really perfect. Although the inhabitants were not free to leave, they really had everything their hearts desired. They were almost completely happy. Their only sorrow was the thought of those outside the laugh-communities who never knew the joy of laughter. What could they do about that? Just about nothing, they decided. But here providence intervened in a very remarkable way. What happened was this:

The outside world treated the laugh-communities with the greatest consideration. Indeed the standard of living inside the communities was far higher than outside. This had the extraordinary effect of producing a wholesale epidemic in the outside world of the insincerity psychosis. Yes, one by one the outsiders became insincere and pretended to be laughers in order that they might be incarcerated in the laugh-communities. These pretending laughers are not to be confused with the pseudo-laughers of the Middle Period. The pseudo-laughers were in genuine quest of humor, and thought that, by memorizing jokes and imitating the sound of laughter, they had acquired a genuine sense of humor. In other words, the pseudo-laughers never tried to deceive anyone else, but they had thoroughly deceived themselves. But the pretended-laughers of the present knew perfectly well that they had no sense of humor, and they couldn't have cared less; they deliberately lied just for the purpose of joining the laugh-communities with their high standards of living. The psychiatrists in charge of the laugh-communities were completely fooled and admitted them, but the inmates of course saw through the whole thing. But they were happy, because they correctly foresaw what would happen. What happened was that the lying-laughers being surrounded by an enormous majority of genuine laughers very soon caught the laughing sickness themselves, and in but a few weeks turned completely into genuine laughers. And so one nonlaugher after another lied his way into the laugh-communities and shortly became a genuine laugher. Then finally even the psychiatrists succumbed, and no nonlaughers were left in the world. The entire planet was now one huge laugh-hospital. The Garden of Laughter had returned and spread over the entire earth. Mankind had at last found its own weird way of recalling the Lord and His ways. The Lord's prophecy had come true.

Epilogue in Heaven

God lay luxuriously on His couch in Heaven, surrounded by His choir of laughing angels. Nemod (the green animal) lay at His feet affectionately licking His toes, and the Lord was affectionately stroking Nemod's head. One of the angels said, ``Lord, your ways are miraculous; how did you do it?'' The Lord laughed and said:

``It really wasn't all that difficult! The main problem was for me to condition Adam and Eve to believe they had free will. These humans are really amazing; they are like children! The only way you can get them to do anything is to make them think that it is they who are doing it. Their pride is so great that without having the illusion of free will, they will never go forth and amount to something. So therefore I had to program their brains so that they believed they actually had free will. But how could I do this? How could I get any sentient being to believe something this fantastic? The problem was not easy! If I had gone down and simply told them that they had free will, they would have been totally incapable of believing me. They would have looked at me wide-eyed and said: `But this is fantastic! You must be kidding! We certainly don't feel any freedom!' Yes, I had been previously joking with them so much, that rather than believe such a fantastic story about free will, they would have dismissed it as another joke (and, in a way, they would have been right!). No, I was certainly not the one to tell them. Who then should? Well, our friend here Nemod seemed just the one, as indeed he turned out to be. I had to send them someone who seemed very serious and a little frightening. But to get Nemod to do this, I first had to convince him that he had free will. How could I do this? He obviously would not believe me if I told him; he is far too intelligent. So I had to use something combining hypnosis and mental telepathy. But to do this, I had to first condition myself to believe I had free will! The reason is I had to know how it felt to imagine oneself free, in order to telepathize this feeling to Nemod. Thus I first had to program myself. This was really the most difficult part of the entire operation! You have no idea how hard it is for one to deliberately convince oneself of something one knows is false just because one also knows that this false temporary belief is useful. And I had to make sure I would not permanently have this false belief, for if I did, I would have been permanently insane, and hence the whole universe would have gone insane, and the universe and I would then have gone out of existence. So I gave myself a post-hypnotic suggestion that the moment I had succeeded in getting Nemod to believe that he had free will, I would immediately regain my sanity and know again that I don't have free will. And this indeed is what happened. Well, once I got Nemod to believe that he had free will, then I was able to manipulate him to think of himself as being `evil,' `rebellious against me,' `hating me,' and so forth. I made him think that I, being his creator, somehow felt `superior' to him and was 'lording it' over him. This naturally pricked his sensitivity into making him say: `Who does that Lord think He is? I'll show Him!' In short, he opposed me. This was crucial for my plans. Then he stole away, went down to beguile Adam and Eve. The rest of the story is familiar history.''

The angels laughed long and loud at the Lord's wisdom. One of them said, ``And you, Nemod, when did you first see through the Lord's game?'' Nemod answered:

``Not really until the Garden of Laughter returned and took over the planet. Well, at first, after the Lord hypnotized me into believing I had free will, and after He programmed me to hate Him, I indeed slunk down with very diabolical plans to corrupt the planet. The day Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, I knew I had won. And soon after, when the couple went forth to `amount to something,' I rubbed my paws in glee! And then when humor started leaving the planet, how great was my joy! My plans were working. (I had no idea at the time that all this was really the Lord's plan!) But then when the Middle Period came, I became gravely concerned about the rise of the Laugh-Masters. It seemed quite possible that they might be able to restore humor to the planet. It was I who was responsible for the existence of the pseudo-laughers. It was I who whispered into their souls that they could acquire a sense of humor by memorizing jokes and training themselves to `laugh correctly.' Yes, since humor was valued, it was essential for me to deceive the people into thinking they had a sense of humor when they really didn't.

``When the Modern Period came and people decided that humor was something `psychotic,' I was of course delighted! And when the laugh-scream hospitals came into existence, I was overjoyed! And when I heard all the agonized cries of the screamers, I jumped up and down with joy! Just think, I was responsible for all this pain! Yes, I had this power! I had opposed the Lord and brought all this suffering into the world! Yes, little me had done all this! I had really amounted to something! But then when the laugh-scream hospitals started to decline, I got extremely worried. What had gone wrong with my plans? Don't tell me the Lord was winning after all! Good God, had I really amounted to something, or had I only been fooling myself? And then when the last laugh-scream hospital had disappeared, I was in a state of total panic. And when the nonlaughers pretended to be laughers in order to enter the laugh-communities, and then became laughers themselves, I was in total despair; I knew the game was up. I no longer had a chance. So I could only gloomily wait for the day when laughter would totally return. And sure enough, it did!

``Then the truth of the whole situation suddenly stabbed me like a knife. I had been duped! Yes, completely and totally duped! I suddenly saw how all my activities which I did in opposition to the Lord were merely part of the Lord's plan! Good God, I had opposed the Lord only because He wanted me to! He had duped me into believing that I had free will and that it was I who did all the things I had done. I had been a mere pawn in the Lord's cosmic chess game!

``Oh, how I raged and ranted and fumed and shook my fist at the Lord! I vowed eternal vengeance! But while raging and ranting, I suddenly realized I was doing this only because the Lord wanted me to; it was also part of the Divine Plan. In other words, do what I would, do what I could, there was absolutely no way I really could oppose the Lord; my every action was His! Then the humor of the entire situation burst upon me! I broke down and laughed and laughed and laughed as I had never laughed in my life! I rolled over and over on the ground and laughed until the tears came to my eyes! Never before had I had such a good time and felt so deliciously free. Free will was only a nightmarish delusion, and at last I was free from this horror. And as I laughed and laughed, I became purged and purified. Evil, pride, disobedience, meanness, love of suffering---all these things were washed away by my laughter. And when I was finished laughing, I was as pure as the day I was born. Now I loved the Lord, I loved the planet, I loved the universe, I loved everything. And so I ascended Heaven and embraced the Lord. I was nine times over the Prodigal Son.''

The Lord smiled to the whole assembly and said: ``Wondrous are the ways of the Way. How happily all has turned out on this planet---just as I predicted.''