

**Moshe Zvi Marvit's**  
A COMEDODOLOGY

**THIS ESSAY WILL NOT BE FUNNY.**

Comedy is primarily a spatial function. It is spatial in that there must be a mediating, precise, distance between the subject, or comic, and the object. Somewhere between too close and too far, there is the comical. The comic—both in the active and passive sense—is endowed with the ability to see the world as a moment between these two extremes and focus in on the humorous mean. But the comic has little room in this mean. S/he takes great care to maintain a precise distance. If he moves too close to his object, there is no humor. If s/he moves too far from her object, there is no humor. Only if the comic keeps his object at an exact distance can the object reveal itself as being funny.

Comedy is not only a function of space; that would be too simple. And although every person sees herself as funny, comedy is not simple. Comedy is an elusive phenomenon that doesn't lend itself to any strict definition or philosophical account. By its very nature it is vital, unable to be fully captured by any static

restrictions. Here, that will not be attempted. Rather, the necessary conditions for the possibility of comedy will be laid out. These conditions preclude the too close and the too far. Therefore, in order to focus in on the comedic, these unfunny extremes will be examined first.

Transcendent essences are not funny. When a person abstracts an ideal from a particular thing, s/he is setting it apart as an abstract concept. S/he is setting the concept in a special non-empirical realm where s/he can meditate on it and investigate it according to the rules of logic; but s/he cannot laugh at it. This realm is the realm of ideas, each of which has objective correlates, yet each stands apart from its respective objective correlates. Geometry is an example of a system that exists in this realm of ideas. One may carefully learn each of Euclid's propositions on the triangle, polygons, the circle, and the regular solids, but until one is able to make dirty little drawings with them, they cannot be funny. Ideal geometric shapes, as such, are not funny. The same is true with everyday objects. A man may see a dog; but if s/he immediately abstracts the concept of dog, s/he can never laugh at that dog-ness. This man's object is not the particular dog, which has a name and a temperament, but only the idea Dog. Henri Bergson pulls this point in even further in his examination of comedy: "You may laugh at an animal, but only because you have detected in it some human attitude or expression" (Bergson, 62). Bergson says that comedy "does not exist outside the pale of what is strictly human" (Bergson, 62). From these two statements, he creates a definition for man that rests on man being a spirited being. Man is a being that laughs and is laughed at; man is both the subject and object of comedy.

Bergson's treatment of the objective non-human world, as a function of humanity, as a necessity for the possibility of comedy is merely another way of saying that one must bring the object closer in order to laugh at it. One cannot laugh at a flower as a flower, margarine as margarine, or a robot as a robot. One must bring it closer, to the sphere of the human. When he limits the comic and the object to the sphere of the human, he forces them to live in a very finite and contained sphere that is not large enough for the possibility of too far. The

other ways of seeing an object, clouds for instance, are beyond the possibility of laughter. If one approaches the cloud and keeps it distant by idealization, there remains no possibility for laughter. One may look at the cloud in the objective scientific way as a "visible mass of condensed watery vapour floating in the air at some considerable height above the general surface of the ground" (OED); or one may look at the cloud as a dandy poet, so as to recognize its aesthetic beauty, its loftiness, adumbrations, and texture; but until one is able to look at the cloud subjectively, seeing her imagination take shape in the cloud, the cloud is not laughable.

Another example of the too far is in Baudelaire's fictional virgin, Virginie. She is described as an angelic woman, "who perfectly symbolizes absolute purity and naiveté...bathed in sea-mists and gilded by the tropic sun, her eyes full of great primitive images of waves, mountains and forests" (Baudelaire, 150). She comes to Paris innocent and one day she catches sight of a caricature "full blown with gall and spite, just as a shrewd and bored civilization knows how to make them...full of clotted blood and spiced with a monstrous 'Goddam!' or two" (151). The virgin Virginie is unable to laugh. She doesn't understand the caricature, its double nature, "both drawing and idea" (151). She knows life through a different lens than the artist of the caricature, and it is far too far for her to laugh. But, "if Virginie remains in Paris and knowledge comes to her, laughter will come too" (151).

Baudelaire's Virginie does not coincidentally fit into this unfolding definition of comedy. He views comedy in very much the same way as Bergson. "Laughter is satanic: it is thus profoundly human" (Baudelaire, 153). Baudelaire admits of a double nature or duality to comedy, but he views it as a sort of Manichean duality—between good and evil. Just as Bergson can laugh at an animal only in so far as it is human, Baudelaire can laugh at a human only in so far as it has hints of the devil; the devil's presence being that which makes us uniquely human. In his account of comedy Baudelaire quickly seems to lose the subject of comedy behind a veil of poetic language. Throughout his definition of comedy, one can sense Baudelaire's definition degrade. It ultimately falls back on

one narrow view of comedy, that of superiority. For Baudelaire, the comic can laugh because s/he has both God and demon within, and thus s/he is superior to any given object of comedy. This view will be discussed later, but as the particular foreground.

Both Baudelaire and Bergson make clear that one must bring the object close in order to laugh, but one must do so with the utmost care. There exists only a narrow comic window where one may laugh at the object. If one pulls the object closer than this specific, yet undefined, distance of comedy, it loses its laughability. A mathematical example may help in describing the seemingly spatial realm of the funny. The attempt to find a circle, by means of a cutting plane passed through an oblique cone, is much like trying to find comedy in the objective world. If one passes a plane that is parallel to the base of any oblique cone, through that cone, then one describes a circle (A). As one sweeps the plane towards the apex, with a given pivot on one side of the cone, one passes through infinite layers of ellipses. But somewhere in that pile of ellipses there is a hidden circle. As one sweeps the side of the plane towards the apex, before converging with the apex, there is a moment where the cutting plane is subcontrariwise (at right angles with the side subtending the pivot) to the cone (B). At this moment, hidden in the infinite ellipses that exist on the passage towards the apex, there exists one circle. This geometric metaphor is apt because in the whole distance of possible ellipses of an oblique cone, there is nestled between two ellipses a different and rich world. This world is the world of circles, arguably one of the most mysterious of all plane geometric shapes.

As one sweeps the possible distances between object and subject, one also passes a hidden realm; one that, although its entrance is relatively small, its scope is enormous and its meaning mysterious. This is the realm of comedy, small, flanked on all sides by the infinite realm of the not funny. It seems that as soon as you find it, it is lost. The limited infinity of possible ellipses before one arrives at the circle and after one bypasses the circle is much like the limited infinity of the not funny. (How easily a joke or scenario can be made not funny and how often we assert that someone simply had to be there to laugh.)

They are similar on the one hand because of the “point to the heavens” ratio between the ellipses and the circle in the oblique cone, the realm of the not funny to the realm of possible comedy, and on the other hand the delicate way that the circle and the comedic are each lost if not kept at a precise distance. Once one achieves the precise and proper relationship between the cutting plane and the cone, there is this one circle. The existence of this one circle, hidden among such a multitude of ellipses, illustrates how at a proper distance an object can completely change its shape to a harmonious and unexpected new shape. But as quickly as the circle emerges from the ellipse, it disappears. The comical realm can be lost with the same ease. With a word, a passing thought, lack of concentration, the slightest movement can lose its tenuous grip on the comical.

But geometry is not funny. Let us then pull it in closer, bypassing the comical realm for now, and investigate the other extreme. The other extreme is the too close. Too close occurs when the object is not objectified enough, but rather pulled into the subjective sphere. In this sphere, the object is linked with the emotions of the subject. The object can induce fear, pity, sorrow, joy, and any other of man’s possible emotions. Ideals, as such, are not in this realm of emotions.

If a man now came upon a dog, and the dog’s innards were hanging out of its open stomach, the man would probably not be able to laugh at that dog, even if it were exhibiting human qualities. The word “probably” must mitigate because for some individuals a bleeding dog would not in any way impinge upon their emotions. For those individuals, the bleeding dog would not be too close for them. For most, it is precisely the humanity of the dog, which Bergson claimed was necessary for comedy, which now makes comedy impossible. For in this instance, the dog portrays another side of humanity, the side of suffering. And in its presence, comedy is not only hidden, but the very thought of it brings a sort of disgust.

The subjective sphere is not limited to emotions; it is a sort of ad hoc term that includes emotions, the ego, and anything else an individual may say are his “internals.” Shakespeare does not often induce laughter in the modern reader, but his scenarios are apt when discussing comedy. An example of the too close that is not strictly emotional is the interplay between King Lear and his fool. A king’s fool exists only to make the king laugh. But throughout the play, King Lear is unable to laugh at his fool because every comment and every joke and every song is far too close. This is shown numerous times, but especially in what could have been one of the most humorous scenes in this dark play, when the fool sings a song, and the king remains unable to laugh.

Fool: Sirrah, I’ll teach thee a speech

Lear: Do

Fool: Mark it, nuncle:

Have more than thou showest,  
Speak less than thou knowest,  
Lend less than thou owest,  
Ride more than thou goest,  
Learn more than thou trowest,  
Leave thy drink and thy whore  
And keep in-a-door,  
And thou shalt have more  
Than two tens to a score.

Kent: This is nothing fool.

Fool: Then ‘tis like the breath of an unfee’d lawyer, you gave me nothing for’t.

[to Lear] Can you

make no use of nothing, nuncle?

Lear: Why no, boy; nothing can be made of nothing.

Fool: [to Kent] Prithee tell him, so much the rent of his land come to; he will not

believe a fool.

Lear: A bitter fool.

(Shakespeare, King Lear, I.4.113-133)

This exchange between the king and his fool, where the fool repeatedly laughs at the king’s gravest mistakes in doggerel and then tricks him into repeating his oft repeated maxim that “nothing can be made of nothing” (Shakespeare, I.1.90; I.4.133), shows that the fool is far too close to the king’s self for the king to laugh.

In the too close and too far laughing is not an option; that is clear. But the question remains, why do these differences make any difference in regard to comedy. The answer is hinted at above in Bergson’s treatment, in the idea that comedy is human. Comedy demands a level of understanding. One must understand the object, but in understanding it, one must see that there are two objects. There is the object proper that is the object of comedy and then there is also its background. This background is a sort of comic grammar or horizon. It is that which allows the object to transcend itself. In language, there is meaning to the term, ‘dog’. There is also meaning to the sentence, “The dog is barking at its shadow.” The sentence has more meaning than the mere aggregate of its words: ‘the’-‘dog’-‘is’-‘barking’-‘at’-‘its’-‘shadow’. There is meaning in the relation of these words to each other that forms a sort of background for the words to stand in front of, in unified meaning. In seeing an actual dog barking at its own shadow, a similar comic background appears. The dog stands awkwardly in front of its background. This movement of object and background, as will be shown later, produces the comic distance. This relation between the object of the comedy and its background, if it is proper, sets the object at the required distance from the subject.

Bergson went further with his definition that comedy is a function of humanity. He defines comedy as a function of humanity, when the human is functioning like a machine. He terms this, “Automatism” (Bergson, 76), and applies it to comedy: “The attitudes, gestures, and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine” (Bergson, 79). This theory, in its construction points to something similar to the idea of background. The application of Bergson’s theory makes this abundantly clear. Bergson gives many examples of this idea in action.

Now, take the case of a person who attends to the petty occupations of his everyday life with mathematical precision. The objects around him, however, have all been tampered with by a mischievous wag, the result being that when he dips his pen into the inkstand he draws it out all covered with mud, when he fancies he is sitting down on a solid chair he finds himself sprawling on the floor, in a word his actions are all topsy-turvy or mere beating the air, while in every case the effect invariably one of momentum. Habit has given the impulse: what was wanted was to check the movement or deflect it. He did nothing of the sort, but continued like a machine in the same straight line. (Bergson, 66)

This and most of the other examples that he gives show the same thing: that the “mechanical inelasticity” (67) or lack of malleability, in a situation where humans are exceedingly capable of it, creates comedy. The picture that Bergson repeatedly creates is simply one of a background of ideal humanity, with a sort of robotic man or something slightly less than human as the object or foreground. The object, for Bergson, must have this robotic quality to it. But this robotic quality is merely one way that the object can be defective in order to be adequate yet inadequate for its background. In his examples, Bergson recognizes that the object that is juxtaposed on the background must have qualities in relation to the background in order to be congruous with it, but it must also be unable to interact unmediated with that background. The object cannot be wholly different than the background or else there will be simple dissonance. Similarly, the object cannot fit perfectly into the background or else there will be no interplay between object and background. But Bergson takes one specific example and generalizes; he bases everything on automatism and allows it to stand as the general theory of comedy. What he does not recognize is that not all humor is predicated by Mr. Bean et al. In his treatment, Bergson creates the picture but repeatedly falls short of making the definition.

A deeper look into the background shows that the background in comedy is always the same one. It is a background of humanity that he inferred in his examples. It is everything that the subject’s human experience has gathered in

order to create a static, stable, still picture of “human.” The object, in order to be funny, must have traces of humanity in it; but it must also have apparent shortfalls. The object cannot be at home in this background. At once it becomes apparent that the juxtaposition of the object with the background is a product of human intent. And in this interplay between background (humanity) and object (particular human like object), in the attempt at natural union (an unnatural human action), the subject recognizes one vital other. The subject sees himself in this other. He sees himself not as the artisan sees himself in his artistic creation, but rather as a tense being incongruous with itself. “Laughter is the expression of a double, or contradictory, feeling...” (Baudelaire, 156). The subject converses with this same-other towards the same ends as any person converses with an other. When the other is an actual other person, one uses language in order to fill the gap between the two individuals. When the other is a person who doesn’t speak a common language, one uses the common physical language of pointing and tracing phantom objects in space in order to fill the gap between them. When the other is the same-other of comedy, one cannot use language because there is no need to bridge as wide a gap as between two others. The same-other is, in a way, a subjective creation and is not as other as another actual person. Language, then, is at a loss at what to signify and instead laughter is used as an interrelative mode of conversation, if it can indeed be called conversation. It is a primitive form of communication, requiring no specific language or understanding to laugh. Laughter, as such, is a signifier that is more symbolic than language. In language, a word may have many meanings, but in a sentence it conveys at most a few specific meanings. Language is somewhat ambiguous as a mode of communication, but it still carries with it relatively precise meanings by containing in it close correlations between words, or processes, and objective correlates. Laughter, insofar as it is intentional and signifies, is more nebulous than language. The laugh is like a symbol, pointing towards a general meaning. It fills the space between two individuals with an emotion, a feeling, a mood. It speaks, but it does so imprecisely.

If we now move on to either extreme of that which is beyond the possibility of comedy, this idea of background and our so-called conversing with it will further ground itself. When something is too far, too abstract, to be funny, the object is still held in front of a background, but everything is different. If one takes the abstract idea of the triangle, then the object is still the object; but it is not a particular object. This triangle represents all triangles of its category, i.e. isosceles, equilateral, scalene, etc. The object is a universal. As background one does not spread humanity behind the triangle, but rather one spreads the system of either Euclidean or Non-Euclidean geometry that respectively gives the triangle meaning beyond itself. This background, then, is also a universal. Between the universal background and universal object there is perfect congruence. There is no dynamic, awkward, interplay between the object and background. In this perfect fit, there is no room for laughter. The object and its background fit, failing to create any same-other relationship.

A similar process occurs in the too close. Both the background and the object are universals. The background, though, is again a background of humanity. The object, in these instances, is a moment of humanity. In the example above of the bleeding dog, the object proper was not this particular dog, but rather the universal, Suffering. When the object is too close, what is meant is that the object is a universal that has a perfect fit into the higher level universal, humanity. The lower level universals in most instances are either any of many possible emotions or one's self, which one posits as a universal. An example of having one's self as the object can be seen in the example above in King Lear's interaction with his fool, and throughout the entire course of the play. Thus if you sweep the spectrum of too far to too close, the background and the object each transform in character. The background changes, from abstract universal to humanity, in the transition from the too far to the distance of possible comedy, and it remains as humanity. The object changes from universal to particular human-like object to a universal moment in humanity.

This view of comedy demands a deeper investigation in order to show itself as having working certainty, as opposed to merely being a probable account,

however subtle that distinction may be. This investigation should begin with many examples in a variety of comical experiences, including jokes, dramas, pictures, the absurd, etc., to illustrate how in each instance that we laugh we laugh in accordance with the way comedy is defined above. This investigation will not be performed here. Rather, we will shift our focus to the ironic. Irony negates and supports this theory of comedy and without a general understanding of irony, comedy loses its grounding.

Under the rubric of comedy there is the ironic. Irony is a periscopic form of comedy. It follows the same relations as comedy, only with a different subject and different object. For the comic, the world is real; its things are real; its relations are real; and the comic is real in relation to the world. For the ironic individual, the world is false; it is made of shadows. Things are real, they are sensed, but they are without essences. S/he believes that the world is as real as it can be; that is, it is without meaning. The chair is real, the table is real, people and relationships are real, but they are all without meaning. Real is without its metaphysical significance. Behind these essenceless things is the grand empty background of humanity. It is an ideal which others see and that the ironic individual can recognize as being seen, but it is obviously false. It is like the background to a play. The actors act as if it is real and act in accordance with it, but the ironic sees it as being as it is: essentially empty. Not only are the objects and the background false, but his self that views all this is just as false. This is the periscopic nature of irony. The self for the ironic individual is split. The self looks at the self that views the world. Thus the necessary distance between subject and object that created the conditions for the possibility of comedy is still applicable, but in a more indirect manner. The object can be what would have been too close or too far to the subject in the comical realm and yet now remain ironic. A person who steps in dung will not be able to find it funny, but s/he may be able to see irony in it. Graham Greene relates an example of irony opening up the possibility to laugh at a time that would otherwise be improper. In *The End of the Affair*, the protagonist begins laughing after the only woman he has ever loved dies. He does so through irony. "I thought of Sarah dead upstairs and Henry asleep with a silly smile

on his face, and the lover with the spots discussing the funeral with the lover who had employed Mr. Parkis to sprinkle his door-bell with powder. Once in the blitz I saw a man laughing outside his house where his wife and child were buried” (Greene, 118). A man can laugh at his dead lover, a man can laugh at the bombs falling before him, and a man can laugh at the cemetery where his family lies, all through irony. For the ironic carries with it a physics without regard to its metaphysics.

A further example of this can be found in history. Ball and Lilly wrote an article on one of the first and longest lasting controlled substances in America, margarine. This article examines the American view of margarine from 1881 through the 1950’s, the years that it was a controlled substance. Margarine was viewed as an evil. “Popular figures including Mark Twain denounced it as another sign of the artificiality of modern life, and governor Hubbard of Minnesota called ‘oleomargarine and its kindred abominations’ a ‘mechanical mixture’ created by ‘the ingenuity of depraved human genius’” (Ball and Lilly, 492). Upon reading, “The Menace of Margarine: The Rise and Fall of a Social Problem,” one may laugh. It is funny to think how such an innocuous substance was viewed with overarching fear and overt contempt. Now, in the twenty-first century, we have a 50-year buffer since margarine has been accepted as a legal, relatively benign, and non-evil, substance. In conversations with Dr. Ball, he said that the margarine dilemma was a serious matter and not something that one would have laughed at in the 1890s. But, he acknowledged that even in the 1890s, some recognized the irony of the problem and therefore could laugh at it. This is the unique character of the ironic person. Through irony, the ironic person can find humor and laugh where others cannot.

In Thomas Wolfe’s novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*, Wolfe describes this unique perspective through one of his few ironic characters, Luke.

Thus, listening to an old lady of the church, who with all her power of persuasion and earnestness was unfolding the dogmas of Presbyterianism to him, he would lean forward in an attitude of exaggerated respectfulness and attention,

one broad hand clinched about his knee, while he murmured gentle agreement to what she said:

“Yes?...Ye-e-es?...Ye-e-e-es?...Ye-e-es?...Is that right?...Ye-e-es?”

Suddenly the demonic force would burst in him. Insanely tickled at the cadences of his agreement, the earnest placidity and oblivion of the old woman, and the extravagant pretense of the whole situation, his face flooded with wild exultancy, he would croon in a fat luscious bawdily suggestive voice:

“Y-ah-s?...Y-a-h-s?...Y-ah-s?...Y-ah-s?”

And when at length too late she became aware of this drowning flood of demonic nonsense, and paused, turning an abrupt startled face to him, he would burst into a wild “Whah-whah-whah-whah” of laughter, beyond all reason, with strange throat noises, tickling her roughly in the ribs...

His quality was extraordinary; he had something that was a great deal better than most intelligence; he saw the world in burlesque, and his occasional answer to its sham, hypocrisy, and intrigue was the idiot devastation of “whah-whah!” But he did not possess his demon; it possessed him from time to time. If it had possessed him wholly, constantly, his life would have prevailed with astonishing honesty and precision. But when he reflected, he was a child-with all the hypocrisy, sentimentality and dishonest pretense of a child. (Wolfe, 211)

In this scene, Luke not only finds humor in the serious matter of religion in the Deep South, but he also mocks the ideas of reverence towards elders and civility towards women. He lives in a culture where these concepts are held in the highest esteem and are guiding principles to life, yet it is as if Luke were alongside the reader reading the book. For Luke all is a “burlesque,” all is ironic; all is a laughing matter.

This description of irony seems as if it does not follow the “spatial” argument about comedy. Nothing seems too close and nothing seems too far to be ironic.

This is both true and false. It is true in reference to the distance between the subject and the object. With the ironic individual, there is a new distance that must be considered. That distance is between her personal self and her self that views the world. Hegel describes this position of the ironic in his lectures on Aesthetics: “The next form of this negativity of irony is, on the one hand, the vanity of everything factual, moral, and of intrinsic worth, the nullity of everything objective and absolutely valid. If the ego remains at this standpoint, everything appears to it as null and vain, except its own subjectivity which therefore becomes hollow and empty and itself mere vanity” (Hegel, 66). Hegel’s view of the ironic has merit, and indeed does describe irony and the ironic individual in a fairly accurate way, but the lack of self-unity that he mentions briefly is not explored satisfactorily (Hegel, 159-161; 243-244). Hegel’s disunity is a concept that he leaves open and can be interpreted as the split between selves that the ironic person must have in order to create the conditions for the possibility of irony.

Without a complete exposition of the ironic self-split, the phenomenon is difficult to describe. It may prove more useful for this overview to borrow a ready-formed idea of a multi-self and employ it, drawing distinction when the ironic selves differ from the borrowed view of selves. William James talks of a person having many selves (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, chapter X). There are the “I” and the “Me”. The “I” is the essential self, whereas the “Me” is as a self-constructed mask/filter that stands before the “I”. This split is much like the ironic split. The “I” is the ironic individual’s true ego, his protected self, while the “Me” is the self that stands in front of the world. The distance between the “Me” and the world, or the object, does not effect the possibility of irony. In contrast, the distance between the “Me”-object and the “I” follow the rules of comedy. If the unity, “Me”-viewing-the-object, becomes either too close or too far from the “I”, irony is lost. This relation can be understood better in its parts.

The world, and therefore the object and background, is inherently empty and meaningless. The self, split, has two functions in relation to the world. The

“Me” watches the world, takes part in it, locates the object, and focuses. The “Me” can be affected by the world, but ultimately these effects are inconsequential; for that part of the self, which would feel the world stands, back. It is the “I” that watches the “Me”-world relationship. The “I” is relatively consistent in keeping the “Me”-world at a proper distance, making irony possible at every moment. The “Me”-world remains at this distance from the “I”. It is possible, though for the “Me”-world to be too far or too close to the “I”. In these instances, the extremes are extreme. For something to be too far, it would simply have to make no sense to the “I”. The “Me”-world would have to be a chaotic, senseless, essenceless being that the “I” cannot comprehend. Alternately, the too close is also a sort of ultimate and extreme instance. The “Me”-world would have to be close enough that the “Me” coincides with the “I”. Hegel predicts that this is the ultimate destruction of the self for the ironic person, describing it as “the dissatisfaction of this quiescence and impotence” (Hegel, 66). He marks a tension that develops in the ironic soul, pulling the individual to penetrate its subject in search of meaning, while irony keeps the individual at an impassable distance. Perhaps. What is certain is that the ironic individual cannot find humor when this occurs. These two cases are the limits of irony. They buttress the statement: Anything can be ironic, and thus laughable, if arranged properly.

Anything can be ironic and therefore laughable precisely because of the emptiness of the world for the ironic individual. The world has no meaning and therefore no real guiding principle. Everything that happens occurs by chance. But since the “Me” always stands before the world, watching it, the world always occurs to him. He cannot help but believe that by pure chance the world is directed towards him. It is the principle of Harmonious Chanceness of irony (or, if you prefer the Greek, the principle of Ananchastic Tychism). He knows that the world is not actually directed towards him, for that would be to admit of meaning; but it appears as such. If a man is walking somewhere and a bird releases droppings on his head, through the Harmonious Chanceness of irony, the ironic individual can find humor in the situation. There was no real cause that caused the bird to drop excrement on him. He was simply walking; the

bird was flying; the bird's bowels produced waste; they moved; the wind blew; and suddenly he has a semi-solid greenish white quarter ounce of shit in his hair. The event occurred by chance, but since it occurred to him, it cannot but seem directed and harmonious. Bergson gives a similar, more serious, account that is in accordance with this phenomenon in his *Creative Evolution*. In his discussion of order and disorder, Bergson relates the story of a soldier who was struck by a piece of shrapnel and thought it funny. The soldier found it ironic that with all the bullets flying, shot with precision, he would be hit by a randomly strewn piece of metal. The man, one can only imagine, was in great pain, and yet could still find irony in the situation. This example that Bergson gives illustrates this very principle of irony. It is the harmonious chanceness of irony. It is as if the whole world were acting as if it knew.

With this fundamental principle in place and the necessary conditions for comedy in general, one can now laugh. A more precise exposition is in order, but one must take care not to impose too much precision, or else the comedy itself will be lost. One may change the metaphor in order to view comedy from another angle, but a metaphor is necessary. Without such an aid, the matter becomes abstracted and there remains no difference, in abstraction, between the funny and the not funny. In those instances, one can speak with certainty, but the matter is lost. In this treatment, only one thing remains certain: this essay was not funny.

Comedy is primarily a gravimetric function. It is gravimetric in that there must be a mediating, precise, weight that prevents the object from weighing down the subject. Between too heavy and too light, there floats the comical. The comic is endowed with the ability to see the world as a moment between these two extremes and focus in on the humorous mean. But the comic has little room in this mean. *S/he* takes great care to maintain the precise levity. If the object is too heavy, there is no humor. If the object is too light, there is no humor. Only if the comic keeps his object at an exact gravity can the object reveal itself as being funny.

Comedy is not only a function of weight; that would be too simple. And comedy is rarely simple. Oftentimes it's not even funny.

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