



## Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic

Henri Bergson

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Philosopher Henri Bergson was best known for his works on intuition, consciousness, time, and creative evolution. His writings included Matter and Memory, An Introduction to Metaphysics, and Creative Evolution, and he was said to have influenced thinkers such as Marcel Proust, William James, Santayana, and Martin Heidegger. After a career as a professor at the College de France, Bergson turned to diplomacy and writing, and was deeply involved with the League of Nations. While he won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1927, for a time his writings were shunned by devout Catholics.

In Laughter, Bergson considers the meaning of the comic element in forms and movements, situations, words, and character. He regards the comic as a living thing with a logic of its own. It requires an absence of feeling, "something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple." It must have a social signification; it must be within the human realm. Above all, since laughter inspires fear, the comic is seen as a check on our more eccentric impulses. Bergson wrote: "In laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate and consequently to correct our neighbour."



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