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Being and Humor

Sydney Harvey

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Written under the direction of Professor Dr. Clancy Martin

Philosophy Department

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Abstract

Being and Humor is an original philosophic thesis exploring the connection between the study of phenomenology and the human concept of humor. Humor is the cure for the ego with out losing ones persona; but it is dependent from the world, it is not attached to perception or the will of the human mind. Humor is pure awareness. Mindful humor can relieve anxiety. Humor is a rational reaction to irrational thoughts. Humor is developed through a mindful understanding of your angst. Mindfulness is developed through a clear rational understanding of a situation or idea.

Chapter 1

Mindful Humor and Angst

Humor is the cure for the ego with out losing ones persona; but it is dependent from the world, it is not attached to perception or the will of the human mind. Humor is pure awareness. Mindful humor can relieve anxiety. Humor is a rational reaction to irrational thoughts. Humor is developed through a mindful understanding of your angst. Mindfulness is developed through a clear rational understanding of a situation or idea.

Humor

In order to understand the connection between humor and mindfulness and the vital influence humor has on anxiety we must first understand humor itself. Humor is a unique quality of the human mind. Inanimate objects and animals may be found humorous but this is merely the human mind placing the humor on to the object, it is a projection. For example a glass cup will never be humorous by its self, only when the human being acknowledges this cup and reflects on it may the cup become humorous. The cup may be in an unconventional shape, it may be cracked and spilling water down the shirt of the drinker, it may be obnoxiously large but it can only be seen humorously by the human mind. The same explanation can be applied to animals. Other than the primate there has been no interaction between animals that we perceive as a humorous contemplation.

The reason that human beings are exclusively capable to experience humor is possibly due to the actual process or fundamental necessity for humor. The first step to a humorous contemplation is to first be a capable rational human being; the next step is to understand what it means to be a human being. The Humorous person or even just a person capable of a humorous thought must be accessing a truly human experience. This means is that humor is created

through a purely human experience and this human experience is the development of the human differentiating their self from the external world around it. Once the humorist person can acknowledge the difference between their body and everything else they can begin to develop emotion towards the external world. They will reflect on the external world and contemplate its connection to their self. This thought process is absolutely natural to the human mind and happens almost instantaneously once the external object is experienced. The problem emerges when we put too much of ourselves in to the external objects or situations. We let our emotions get the best of us and there is no greater enemy to humor than emotion¹.

Humor demands pure intellect, it is a reaction of the mind that lives in a liminal pathway between self induced emotion and pure awareness². The human mind can fluctuate between emotion back to reason, it can look at the world with the deepest reaction and then lift the veil and see everything as it is bare or without emotion. This is why humor is a human experience, the human mind creates an ego and the human mind, even the most trained humans, can not completely relieve themselves from that ego. Once they access this absence of emotion they reflect on the world and find humor, they reflect on their irrational actions and find humor. The moment the spectator takes their personal reflected emotion out of the situation the dramatic experience will transform into humor. For example if we consider arachnophobia, the irrational fears of spiders, we can see this theory clearly. The person who suffers from arachnophobia will demonstrate great emotion when coming into contact with a spider, screaming, sweating, jumping etc. The spectator of this scene will probably find humor in the extremely over dramatic reactions of the person suffering from arachnophobia. This example sheds light on the same process that occurs in a typical human beings mind once they dramatize any situation weather

¹ A direct reference to Henri Bergson "*Laughter; The Comic in General*", 1901

² Pure Awareness for this thesis will be defined as being consciously aware with out ego.

“irrational or not”. If we considered the typical fear in the same way as the irrational fear we would all react calm, rational and approach each situation with a flexible and humors view. Dramatizing a situation will bring you further away from humor and will distract the mind from reality.

The humors person must not only be aware of their human experience in the world but must also be aware of all other human experiences. In order to actually produce humor and not merely receive it, the comic³ must create a universal liminal pathway. The comic takes universal fears, anxiety, drama etc. and leads the viewer to humor. This is where the true connection between humor and humanity lies. The comic must be an expert on the human condition. It is one thing to understand and recreate a human experience but the comic seeks the truth of the situation and makes light of the universal human ego. For example almost all human beings have an irrational belief that they will never die; even though we witness death everyday and know it is inevitable, our ego takes over our actual reality and we deny our own death. A comedian would take this ego centered general emotion towards death and make fun of it, essentially giving the audience a reality check and bringing them closer to the actual truth. Comedian Louie CK does this exact thing when he performed a stand-up routine about death. He tells a story about a time he revealed the concept of death to a fellow neighborhood kid to upset him after the child informs him of his new bike. But in doing this he simply states the fact, Louie performs, “You’re gonna die someday. He said, what? No I’m not and I said, yes you are everybody dies. You’re gonna die, and your moms gonna die, and your daddy’s gonna die. He was really upset and he starts running, its still funny to me.”⁴ That was it he simply told the truth, everyone will die and he explained it in a personal story. That simple phrase although completely a reality, is

³ A person who is devoted professionally to humor

⁴ Louie CK, Live at the Comedy Store, January 27 2015

so absurd to the human ego that Louie CK caused an outburst of laughter from the entire audience by just stating this one fact about life. There is power in humor, death is morbid and depressing but it can also be hilarious because it is a universal concept. Everyone knows they will die but when you are forced to face this concept and reveal to yourself the absurdity of the fear of death you will laugh. Louie CK goes further in his routine by explaining how the mother of the child came to his house to punish him for telling her son that everyone dies. He further perpetuates the absurdity of the human ego when he says that the mother of the child attempts to argue with him, for her child's sake, that not everyone dies. After Louie questions her logic she quickly realizes that "she is on the wrong side of the argument" and that she is creating further damage by continuing to preserve this lie.

Why can the comic find truth and reality while others prefer to live in fantasy? What is it exactly that allows the comic to jump from drama and ego centeredness to humor and pure awareness? The humorous person has an intellectually stable mind that depends on chaos and elasticity. Chaos is a state of order where chance is supreme. Elasticity, in reference to the human mind, is not only an ability or awareness of the natural chaos of the eternal world but elasticity allows the human to adapt to the unexpected change. Chaos and elasticity benefits the humorous person because if we can conceive that the external world is constantly changing and is changing to a rhythm that we can not predict but we know that we have to adapt to each change that comes we are closer to reality. The mind that rejects change does not eliminate the change it is merely unprepared for the change. For example the philosopher Henri Bergson wrote a book about the philosophic concepts of the comic, in *Laughter* he discusses in great detail the theory of elasticity and its opposite form rigidity. To first illustrate the humor of a rigid mind Bergson uses the example of a man tripping on the street and him being laughed at by the people

surrounding him. Bergson explains that it is not the sudden change in movement of the man that causes the laughter but the spontaneous element of the change. Bergson states:

He should have altered his pace or avoided the obstacle. Instead of that, through lack of elasticity, through absentmindedness and a kind of physical obstinacy, *as a result, in fact, of rigidity or of momentum*, the muscles continued to perform the same movement when the circumstances of the case called for something else.⁵

The Humor of the situation lies in the man's inability to adapt to his surroundings. If he had acted through elasticity he would have realized the chaos in simply walking on the street and that he must never assume that the path will always be clear. His mind and body acted rigidly, and in this case was literally unable to move.

Elasticity and rigidity have a direct connection to the ego and pure awareness. In order to act with rigidity one must push their ego onto the external world. A rigid thought derives from preconceived notions of how things have been in the past, or even an expectation of how they should be. Both past memory and future expectation only actually dwell within the mind of the individual. This is where the flaw in rigidity resides; the ego-centered person makes the mistake in thinking that they can predict the actions of the external world. When the new situation calls for adaptability the rigid person is at a loss.

In an involuntary element of change, if a person is not elastic they will assume or presuppose their situation or even generalize what an external object is. This is harmful for both the comic. The rigid person sees life first with essence, preconceived notions given to us by our

⁵ Henri Bergson, *Laughter; The comic in General*, 1901

ego, and ignores the actual existence of the object or situation. They will not see each situation and object as a unique and particular occurrence. This would not be a problem if the world was determined and we had no reason to question the future but unfortunately life is chaotic and the successful human will adapt.

It takes a humorous person to identify the rigidness. Once the comic does it can then recreate a ridged mind set and exaggerate it to reflect the absurdity of rigidness to the audience. If we were to look at one of the most famous comedian of all time, Charlie Chaplin, we can recognize that his success and universal appeal is his understanding of the elastic mind verses the rigid mind. Chaplin often played characters in silent films that would be constantly in trouble or making mistakes, the character would always have a difficult time understanding their surroundings. For example in Chaplin's most famous film *Modern Times*, the humorous character works on an assembly line, but is constantly causing trouble. His character screws bolts down to pieces of metal as they pass by, but the comic is unable to keep up with the machine, this is not because the speed of the assembly but do to Chaplin's own personal distraction. The character can not release himself from his ego; he has to scratch his underarm, his boss speaks to him over the shoulder, a fly lands on his nose, and he allows himself to become distracted from his task and holds up the entire factory. This is humorous to the viewer because the comic appears to be incompetent, the viewer thinks to themselves, "why cant this man ignore these distractions, doesn't he know that he will ruin the assembly line?". The viewer is forced to be fully aware of the situation from the absurdity that the comic creates out of the scene. He allows the chaos to control him instead of adapting in order to complete his job.

Chaplin's films were written and directed by him, his rigid character has become a stable in the world of comedy because of the characters infamous inability to adapt. The films were

black and white, silent and made just under a century ago but they still inspire laughter to this day. The films also surpass race, gender and culture this is because Chaplin's character, the rigid ego centered screw up, is universal and relatable to all humans. Chaplin is a perfect example of the comic's deep connection to humanity, not many forms of entertainment can be so diversely understood.

Humor has now been established to be an exclusive component of the human mind, it is processed through the conscious mind that is aware of its place in the world and humor is a pathway from an ego-centered awareness of the world and a pure awareness of the world. Humor brings the mind to pure perception of situations by not believing that it will know the situation before it occurs. The key to humor is in its dependents on chaos and its ability to adapt.

Mindful Humor

Now that we have a better grasp on humor it is important to really tie down its philosophic use. We will consider how our understanding of humor and the human mind can affect our search for knowledge. The intricate connection between humor and non-humor deserves a more systematic exploration. The difference between the rigid mind and the elastic mind may be cut through by humor and create the perfect recipe for a comical performance, but what may be more interesting is how these two concept reflect a mindful humor and contributes to our instinctual pursuit of enlightenment.

The opposite of a sense of humor is a hard fact, as in an unbending idea, a fact can be real to a mind whether or not it is true. A rigid mindset not only includes a inability to react to change it also focuses on an idea of perfection and create a tension when that perfection is not achieved. Tension is a tightness of the mind that takes it further from an elastic idea or action. In particular rigidity can appear in an ego-centered idea of perfection of oneself and pushes to hard to achieve

an extreme result. We are very aware of our own disappointment or inability to achieve our perfect standard. This awareness, which is subconscious, then reflects onto the conscious state and this causes angst. We refuse to find absurdity in our quest for perfection, instead the rigid now anxious person will blame their inadequacy on external circumstances. The cure to this problem is through humor. For example I am very worried that this thesis will be bad.

Subconsciously to protect my ego my mind will tell me that the thesis is bad do to unfortunate circumstances beyond my control. On a conscious level I will develop stress and anxiety because I have no way to avoid circumstances out of my control and I am confused and feel that I have no power in my own life. If I consider this fear through humor and receive an awakened realization I will see that the thesis is bad because I am spending more time watching Netflix than actually reading the text.

Humor allows us to develop an understanding of how things work, how reality works and this is obtained through a perception of the world unburdened by the ego. Humor is the knowing that we don't know, it is the opposite of hard fact. There is no fact; no right or wrong. Humor fluctuates and this demands chaos. Humor allows us to look at life with out ego to see what is actually there, then develop ego and this will help ourselves find truth and the actual reality of our goal. This is a exact reflection of Existentialism, Existence then essence. The comedian starts with existence; this is why they are elastic and not rigid. The humorous person must first enter a situation with no preconceived idea. This will allow the mind to truly see the situation outside of their thoughts and feelings.

Existence, Perception, Phenomenon. If we begin with a sense of humor right at the point of existence than our initial perception will not be bias we will have a pure vision. Then once we receive the material thing or object of our vision we will have a grasp on what it

actually is absent of ourselves. This is the first step to enlightenment, enter the world bare and observe actual reality. Then once you truly understand (or see) the object or situation then you can find the humor in its seriousness or its extreme approach. All things should be considered with humor so one does not fall into the game of hope and fear or self-delusions.

Angst

We have successfully achieved a philosophic understanding of humor and its connection to enlightenment. In order for our humor to solve the problem of angst, we must first explore the core elements of anxiety. Philosophy Søren Kierkegaard worked heavily in the subject of anxiety in particular his book *Fear and Trembling*⁶ successful the connection between faith and anxiety. Faith driven angst will prove to be the most adequate for the healing approach of humor.

Kierkegaard presents what he calls the faith paradox. To explain simply; if Sydney does something against the universal/ethical (empirical world), then we say or rather hope that she is acting for the sake of god/the absolute/herself. There is no middle ground between the universal and the absolute. You cannot look for the answer to your faith in the universal, if you attempt this faith will be destroyed. You can only have faith in the absolute because the absolute is completely personal it is all ego.

The universal is the awakened realization the absolute is the ego. The absolute is aggression and the absolute is not intelligible to any other person, there for it must create aggression, which then creates rigidity. Aggression forms in our minds when we know something but have no way of explaining it to others. Kierkegaard states in his book that we have no way of explaining the absolute and that the absolute is us, god, ego, existence, etc.

⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 1843

The problem now with faith, from a philosophical humorous perspective, is that it is a incorrect outlet to escape aggression. It is an incorrect way to explain what is going on, just like my subconscious that was trying to spare my ego by telling me that my inadequacy comes from unavoidable external sources. Faith is incorrect because there is no real reasoning behind it. Humor is the correct outlet from aggression because it allows us to see what is actually there. Humor can only exist through the empirical world. If aggression can only be developed from our ego, which is the absolute internalizing and making things more complicated than they are, then it appears to me that aggression is created through ego, absolute, and fueled by blind faith which essentially creates our angst.

Mindful humor and Anxiety

The Buddhist monk Chögyanm Trangpa use to lecture on the effect of humor on enlightenment. During his lecture he mentions, “The separation between “you” and “I”, you and your world, you and your god, is cut through by a sense of humor”⁷. This one masterful quote seems to sum up the entirety of the phenomenology connection between humor and enlightenment. When Chögyanm Trangpa says “you” and “I” he is referring to the human mind and the human ego. You and Your world refers to your mind and your ego and how it reflects on the external world it sees. Finally you and your god refer to ethical standards or understandings you develop outside of empirical knowledge. These three phases are cut through by humor because if we begin our trek for knowledge through the elastic state of humor we will always begin at existence. The human mind can only transcend from step to step by truly understanding the step that can before it, you are guaranteed pure awareness when you start your experience with humor.

⁷ Chögyanm Trangpa, *Self-Existing Humor*

In summation; Humor is nonaggressive it is a non-dramatic sense of existence. Dramatic tendencies develop from an ego-centered existence. Ego centered existence creates aggression or angst. Aggression comes from the inability to explain one's thoughts or actions. Nonaggression is an awakened realization. Therefore if a non-neurotic existence is humor and a non-neurotic existence is nonaggression and nonaggression is an awakened realization then humor is an awakened realization.

Chapter 2

Stand-Up: Existentialism and Comedy

The study of phenomenology is to create a better understanding of how the human brain evaluates its environment and how it manipulates its environment to form a personal reflection in one's own life. While it is known that the theory of existentialism was developed through phenomenology and thrives on the mere definition of ones "reflected self," it may also be true that modern standup comedy follows in the shadow of phenomenology, almost mimicking the theory of existentialism through the act of impromptu performance. The comic is born on the stage every night; each performance is a particular and unique existence. The chaotic rhythm of the performance is only tied together by an end goal, which is to evoke laughter from the audience. Each joke has a general idea, but the method, change, and the delivery of the joke must and will change every time it is performed. The comic pushes her life and views onto the audience to arouse their own dormant consciousness. In order for the comic to be successful, she must create a performance that is completely unique to her life, but at the exact same time and capacity, she must make that experience universal to all human beings. She will change her performance so that it better fits into the atmosphere of the room. The comic above all is seeking truth. All standup comedy is an act exploring and celebrating truth. This truth is subjective, but that does not diminish its power. Each subjective truth of the stand up comic is created for humanity from the world. The stand up comic is an existentialist; she seeks essence the moment of existence.

Chaos, Entropy, and Freedom

The stand up comedian depends on the concept of chaos. Not only is it pivotal for the art

of comedy to reflect on a none determined environment, but it is essential in the actual act of improv comedy to produce a new and improvised experience each time. The stand up comedian has no script and no director on the side of the stage leading the content. Once the comedian enters the stage, she is entirely on her own. Each performance is pushed into existence without a determined path.

Chaos is commonly referred to as a state of order in which chance is supreme. Chaos occurs to the existentialist at the very moment she realizes her freedom. Once the existentialist refutes determinism, she is in a total state of chaos, or she has now come to terms with the possibility of disorder. To really understand this comparison between human freedom and chaos, the theory of entropy must also be discussed. Entropy is the measure of the disorder in a system; it is the measure of disorder within the chaos. If the existentialist and the comic strive in chaos then it would stand to reason that they would both reject a determined existence or act. The determinist, on the other hand, relies on her connection to the universal, a system with order and a direct conclusion.

The stand up comedian finds relief in chaos and comfort in the highest entropy. The standup comic is allowed to re-perform the same joke; in fact, they are often asked to by their audience. But, the joke is constantly changing and developing with the life of the comic. Standup has no script; each joke is merely a general idea that changes within each particular performance. But, if we take a closer reading of chaos and entropy, there may actually be a hidden design. Entropy can only measure the amount of chaos that can occur to reach the same outcome (the energy in the scenario remains the same). This may be physical evidence of the limited influence or the limited freedom we believe we have in our existence. Our freedom may only consist in the choice of which way we will achieve our destiny. I do not commit to the theory of

determinism but must acknowledge this flaw in my reasoning. Unfortunately, this is exactly the problem with existential theories. Existentialism may not defeat the determined outcome; it merely gives the acting object the illusion of freedom by picking the road but not the destination. The destination is certain. To argue this point, I may need a conformation from God or an ultimate being, which I am certain is not coming anytime soon. The problem is that existentialism cannot refute or prove the complete theory of determinism. We cannot know there is a god; therefore, we cannot say there isn't. This, then, becomes a metaphysical question of faith or God, which we do not have the time to fully acknowledge here.

While the stand up comedian may not have a scripted performance, they do have a determined or preexisting theme or topic. They have a definite destination, but the comedian will find an impromptu route to achieve the humor of the topic. The chaos merely exists in the steps taken to achieve the anticipated joke. The entropy of the stand up comedian would measure any variable in the room the comedian can not control, which would effect her performance. For example, the demographic of the audience, the time of day, the temperature in the room, the mindset of the comedian during the telling of a joke, all uncontrolled variables add greater chaos to the stand up comedian's performance. But, this is not a problem for the comic, as I have stated earlier; the stand up comic thrives on this constant change of direction. If this comic wanted to perform the exact same words every night with usually the same reaction, this comic is in a fundamentally wrong environment. The stand up comic craves chaos; chaos is freedom; and freedom is laughter.

Humanism. The existentialist has an ethical responsibility to humanity; this responsibility develops through a complete understanding of her freedom. Jean Paul Sartre states this point,

quite simply, in his essay *Existentialism and Humanism*⁸ when he writes, “In fashioning myself I fashion man”. Once the existentialist understands her connection to humanity, her freedom now becomes the freedom of all. This intense connection may cause her to question every choice and move she makes. The existentialist deals with this impending responsibility with the total feeling of nausea; the comedian, on the other hand, deals with her responsibility to humanity with humor. Making fun in a satirical sense of her surroundings relieves the comic from her risk of nausea. The comic realizes absurdity of essence; in understanding myself, I understand man. But, the comic’s reaction to freedom and deep understanding of her surroundings seems to be a much more of a virtuous reaction than the regular existentialist. If we consider Jean Paul Sartre’s essay *Existentialism is a Humanism* further we can note that the existentialist reacts to their responsibility of freedom by acting in what they believe will benefit humanity. To explain this in a short and consistent way, Sartre explains that the existentialist will not necessarily worry about the actions of others because she cannot control them. Instead, the existentialists, with any virtue, will act within themselves in a way that they believe will help benefit a better humanity. For example, the existentialist will not steal because, by stealing, she introduces this immoral act into the world and can therefore not refute others from stealing from her. This virtue-based morality is purely based on actions. Dialog is not at all essential; in fact, I believe it is completely left out.

The stand up comedian finds half of her virtue in her own actions, but the rest of her virtue is sharing her actions or observations with others so that they may also understand the absurdity or injustice that she sees. For example, if the comic was standing on a street corner and a bag of money literally fell from the sky, first, I’m sure she would comment on the irony of money falling out of the sky and then become suspicious of her environment. This initial

⁸ Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, 1968

reaction allows her to think deeper about the situation she is in. Next, the comic, if she is virtuous, will decide not to take the money, she would probably then walk away from the situation and write about it later that night. Finally, the stand up comedian would perform the situation, giving her experience life again she is reflecting her personal life to an audience that is eager to listen. She may joke about the probability of the situation, but she will, of course, share with the audience why she didn't steal the bag of money that fell from the sky. Maybe she will discuss whom she believed lost the bag of money:

Why are people still using canvas bags with big green money signs painted on them to carry around their money? Now with apple pay you don't even need a wallet to buy things, maybe this person is afraid of technology or maybe they are a Mennonite? Either way If I took the time to collect all of my money and place it into a canvas bag that I decorated and someone just stole it after I dropped it out of a window I would be pissed. I don't even think you can buy bags like that any more.

The existentialist and the comic may have had shared the same occurrence, but the modern existentialist does not believe it is her responsibility to tell others of her virtuous act. The comic feels obligated to not only discuss the idea of stealing, but she will do it in a way that may makes it look so absurd to the audience members that they never think of stealing the say way again. Of course, this was a very silly example, but the idea behind it is clear. The comic and the existentialist reflect on their freedom, and in this reflection, they find responsibly to humanity. It is only with the comic though that the responsibility creates a dialog with humanity.

Humorist Existence Without Ego

The comic depends on uncertainty, she demands a constant change in the world or her material will run flat. The existentialist, although suffering from nausea, would not have it any other way. For the existentialist to lose her freedom would simultaneously lose her existence. The very concepts of improve faces that exact same freedom, literally meaning with out preparation. In Jean Paul Sartre's novel *Nausea*⁹, the main character Roquentin acquires his existential freedom all at once when he begins to see the world abstracted from its essence. "It is out of laziness, I suppose, that the world looks the same day after day. Today it seemed to want to change. And in that case anything, anything could happen". If we consider this quote further, we can find that Sartre is making a very subtle observations abouthumanity. When he writes that it is out of laziness, he is inferring that all human beings have the ability to see the world in a different way, or better yet to see the world as it truly is.

Although Sartre did state that existentialism isn't for everyone, he did not mean that everyone did not have the capacity for it. In his novel, for reasons unexplained, his main character starts to see the world around him stripped away of all preconceived perceptions, he sees the world and each object in the world completely abstracted from its essence. This, of course, causes great turmoil for Roquentin; it is commonly understood in modern psychology and philosophy that we need to categories our environment in order to function. But, is it possible to get close to abstracted existence?

This is what I believe is the ultimate goal of the comedian; to view life first through humor which essentially means with out ego. In eastern philosophy the humors person has been viewed as being an enlightened person. In order to see the world abstracted from essence you must see the world abstracted from yourself. To remove your ego from your perception you must

⁹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, 1938

begin each experience with a humorist mind set. The modern Buddhist philosopher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche argues that humor is the first step to actual awareness in his work *Self-Existing Humor*, “ First you need a sense of humor, which is based on an understanding as to how things work.”¹⁰ The reason that Trungpa Rinpoche believes that the first step to enlightenment is through humor is in fact because of the exact chaos that the comedian depends on to survive. The comics connection with uncertainty allows her to be the perfect contender for enlightenment. This is not to say that all comedians are enlightened in any sense. This does however mean that the human with a humors nature is more inclined to view the world with the mind set that nothing is definite and therefor I can have no preconceived notion of anything, because there are no patterns of existence.

Once you can view the world with out any certainty you will find it very easy to abstract your ego from your perception. If you yourself know nothing to be certain then all of the information you have gathered may help you function in the world but it will not dictate how to view the world or even understand the world. Now that we have our ego out of the way we are free to see each object and situation as it is absent of essence. The benefit of viewing the world with out ego is that now when you experience an object or a situation the essence of that object can and will be different each and every time you encounter it. Life becomes much fuller and exciting, life is a constant surprise and thrill. The comic more specifically the stand up comedian interacts with the none egotistical way of life more than any of her other humors counter parts. The stand up comedian literally takes everyday typical life and sees it new and different, each experience to the stand up comic is a particular unique phenomenon, this allows them to find the absurdity in reality. The stand up comic takes their abstracted experience and shares it with the

¹⁰ Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, *Self- Existing Humor*, 1973

audience to create humor out of chaos. What could be more comical than understanding that every single object and situation has absolutely no relation to anything other than your mind; this is absurd, this is terrifying, this is hilarious.

Audience Influence

Although the comic can create a humorous reaction from a particular absurd experience it is imperative that the experience first be of a general idea that derives from the outside world. For example a comedian would not get very far discussing an imaginary film they dreamed about where none of the characters spoke a language and all of the shapes and figures were abstract. The audience must be able to follow the comics reasoning by being able to identify the experience of the comic to their own life experience. This proves to be one of the most difficult aspects of stand up comedy. Also for the existentialist the general idea is a tricky matter. A generalization can very quickly lead you to determinism. This is due to the fact that if we can recognize two or more objects as having like qualities then we may not be identifying them as particulars and therefor we may not be identifying them by their existence but instead we first see their essence. But this can easily be avoided; if the similarities develop after the object has been identified as an individual then the existence may not be lost. For example if I was to look over at a round orange object and notice its small size, pick it up and smell it, open it and tastes its juice and notice the change in texture it would be safe to identify this object as an orange. I have seen oranges before I have memories of oranges but it was not until I examined the existence of the orange object in the world that I realized it essence of being an orange fruit. In order to consider this point further it is important to understand the process of western phenomenology, which is the theory that Sartre derived his modern existentialism from.

Phenomenology was formed dually through philosophers Martin Heidegger and Edmund

Husserl. Heidegger's philosophic study of phenomenology was focused on the human beings personal reaction to the world, the human beings "Da-sein" which can literally be translated as "being-in-the-world". The "Da-sein" involves both the human beings personal facticity and the personal existenz. The facticity of the "Da-sein" can be defined as any innate fact about the human being, for example the day one is born, or like Heidegger would say the day one was thrown into the world, would be a condition under the umbrella of ones own facticity. The human being has nothing to do with her own facticity nor can she change it. Existenz is made up of the personal choices one makes with in their life. The existenz of a being has to do with what they themselves create out of their life, essentially it is their freedom. Both the facticity and existenz of ones "da-sein" balance together to form a human beings own personal phenomenology.

The actual "Da-sein" can be defined by Heidegger's standards under, the authentic living and the inauthentic living. Both of these subcategories are better understood through the realization of "mitda-sein" and its affect on the "da-sein". The "mitda-sein" commonly referred to as the "others" or the "they", is used by Heidegger to explain the importance that society and community have on our own "being-in-the-world". The authentic "Da-sein" understands the importance of the "mitda-sein", but still does not allow it to take over their existenz and is still able to make their own choices. This balance is the key to comedy, the comic must understand her own freedom but more importantly she must understand how that freedom is effected by the outside world. If we just examine this theory with in stand up comedy we could theorize that the comic is born the instant she enters the stage. From that moment she is not in charge of anything but her own actions. Her "da-sein" is literally her presence on the stage. Her existenz is reflected in a performance she reveals her experience through a verbal joke. She exists on the stage and

then she creates an essence from past experience that enters and acts with the current moment.

Jean Paul Sartre uses a great deal of Heidegger's phenomenology in his development of existentialism, he is literally referring straight back to Heidegger with his famous phrase "existence precedes essence". In order to have "da-sein" and essentially a phenomenology you must first and foremost be in the world. Life is created and the creation has no say what so ever of this chaotic phenomenon, this reflects onto the practice of stand up between the birth of a being and the birth of an idea. The crowd is the world (mitda-sein), the joke is in existence only during the moment it is told and ceases to exist once a new joke is born. (Exist then create essence). Existence cannot have essence with out the influence of an outside world. Standup comedy cannot exist without an audience influence. During the act the comedian will fluctuate depending on the reaction of the audience, thus changing the essence of the routine.

Part of the draw that existentialism as a philosophy has on people is its familiarity, all conscious human beings experience a level of existential thought, and most are just unaware of the terminology. This is the same reason that people enjoy stand up comedy, because they can relate to the human experience of the comedian. They are amused when the mutual experience is explained in a new and inventive way. The process of the actual stand-up performance follows the very same parameters of the western phonological authentic existence. The authentic comic will allow the audience (mitda-sein) to interact with her performance but she will not change her ideas or observation to avoid offending the audience.

Authenticity

Stand-up comedy is a rare and unique form of performance that is one hundred percent authentic. The comic is completely responsible for what happens on the stage. Although there are

outside forces, these forces cannot effect the actual self determined choices of the comic. The comic has not script there is no director or writer pushing ideas and themes down onto the comic. She decides what she will discuss and then she gets on the stage and performs. Not only will she perform a completely unique act she will do so with out apologies.

Jean Paul Sartre is an existentialist, which means he believes over everything, being-in-the-world is to have existence preceding essences. Life begins with facticity, this can never be changed we are thrown into existence without any choice of weather we want to exists or not. From that point on, including youth to an extent, every decision and choice made in our life is completely our own. You are accountable for all of your actions unlike your facticity, but your existenz is made up of all of the decisions you have made of your life, this is all by your own “da-sein” and from being in the world. By using Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative Sartre demonstrates the importance of making no excuses with in your life. It is important to make a world you want to live in, every decision that you yourself makes shapes the world around you and creates society and contributes to your “mitda-sein”.

Just like the modern existentialist the stand up comedian makes no excuses. The responsibility of the comic is always understood. If you are daring enough to enter a stage with just your own thoughts alone then you are completely aware that you hold the sole responsibility of these choices. This is one of the most powerful ideas to come out of modern existentialism and this idea just so happens to also be the epitome of the stand up comic. It is a common understanding that the comedian can get away with anything. It is her very job to question and make fun of all. For example if the president of the united states were to pull the skin next to his eyes to thin there appearance and then begin to speak about his bad driving skills while using a Chinese accent, we might break out into a third world war. But there seems to be a true freedom

for the stand up comedian, it is of bad taste to go to a comedy show if you are easily offended. The comic is allowed and almost deemed by society to say what ever she wants and if she is a comic with any grit, she does. The comic by nature will not apologize for what they may say.

If however the comic denies this responsibility to be authentic then by Jean Paul Sartre terms she would be acting in bad faith. A great deal Of Jean Paul Sartre's work can be derived back to Martin Heidegger, with his notion of "bad faith", it is very easy to see that Sartre is relating this directly to Heidegger's idea of authentic and inauthentic "da-sein". To demonstrate a being in the world who is acting in "bad faith" or a inauthentic "da-sein" Sartre uses the example of a woman being courted by a man. This woman completely understands her situation knowing all that will soon be expected of her, she will need to decide if she would like to actually be with this man or not. She is pretending or acting intentionally naïve towards the actions of the man to ignore the fact that he is interested in her, but the fact that she is aware of his interest means she is acting in bad faith by leading the young man on and lying to herself. She is reducing every intention of the man to be thought of as only the mode "in-itself". She acts further and primarily more in "bad faith" when the young man grabs her hand, she then forces her mind to believe it is functioning on all intellect; she has separated her body from her mind. She is basically pretending that everything happening is happening to her, that she has no part in it. She is making the holding of her hand as being the same as the innate facticity of her birth. Finally, She is acting in "bad faith" by combining her facticity and her transcendence, or Heidegger's facticity and existenz, there is no balance between the two for her. She believes that her being in the world is her facticity, this is an act of "bad faith". Being inauthentic and not choosing for herself but using time or the influence of others to make the decisions for her.

The very act of stand up would disappear if the performer acting in what Sartre believes

to be bad faith. If the comic relies completely on others and outside forces to achieve humor she will always fail. The comic must be brave and authentic in her approach. All humans live a life separate from each other, but they find a particular interest in the comic because of her commitment to truth. The comic lives and experience life closer to enlightenment without ego and therefore her truth must be more virtuous.

The Poet and The Comic. Emerson once said if you want to understand truth do not look to the philosopher, look to the poet. I believe this statement is true, but I would like to add one more person to this theory; the comedian. The poet just like the comic looks at life with a present and natural point of view, the poet and comic are living and understanding humanity in a pure awareness. All other human beings are mere recreations or a mimic of these two artist. Everyone else only feels an imitation of what the poet and the comic create naturally. This is why the audience is so enamored by the comic, the audience cannot view the world as purely as the comic. No one else is human enough to feel, this is because most people lie in their perception and depend on their egos, and they are lead by their memories to paint their word. Most people live in bad faith they are inauthentically seeing their environment and if they do by chance view their environment authentically they will refuse to understand the situation without there ego. This inauthentic existence is why all people should live humorously. But the poet and the comedian live outside of this veil the true artist must feel the moment at hand and reject their ego, the present is the only truth to the Comic. The poet like the comic looks at life abstracted from her self. All written poetry is an attempt to recreate an object or an experience only instead of a performance, like the comic, the poet explores this reflection of reality through written word. Unlike the comic when the poet performs, if she chooses to, her act is now a recreation of a recreation of an initial experience which may actually bring the poet further from the truth. Many

philosophers starting all the way back to Plato believed that the more a moment is realized the more inauthentic that moment becomes. This I believe Sartre would agree with, it is important to understand the initial moment and to analyze its influences onto your existence but if this moment is continued to recreate itself, every time it is reread, the moment becomes weaker and the perception becomes something entirely new each time it is performed.

Conclusion

The comic and the existentialist in many ways are indistinguishable. Both the comic and the existentialist depend on chaos to create their freedom. Although the freedom may only go so far, it is not clear if the determined aspect of the existentialist and the comic is defeated by the acceptance of chaos or if chaos only confirms that the end result of the comic and the existentialist will always be the same. Unfortunately human beings have not and may never be able to understand if our lives are determined or not. This question has bothered philosopher since the beginning of the discipline. However the end result whether determined or not does not really matter to the comic or the existentialist, for the existentialist the end result is not important the important part is all of the steps that the individual took to achieve the end result. In the case of the comic, she would hope that the end result is determined; her end result is laughter and a completion of a general idea.

The comic uses her freedom and general determined idea to express her ethical responsibility to humanity. The comic is driven to the stage and to the audience merely because she wishes to help the audience. The comic sees the actual world absent of herself and that allows her to understand the absurdity others miss due to ego. The comic is morally virtuous in her attempt to educate her audience.

The steps that the comic takes in order to achieve enlightenment is build right into her nature. It is natural for the comic to question everything; it is natural for her to seek change and new ideas. This is due to the fact that her discipline is based on the concept of chaos. The very act of being funny is a re-creation of the existential world. Almost like existentialism taking another form and only being described through an action; the action of stand up. The comic lives without ego, she understands her environment with out her selfish perceptions clouding it. This is essentially the most important aspect of existential thought. This is why we commonly refer to existentialism as existence then essence. Because the first step to freedom is to understand that all objects are unique and demand their own individual consideration.

The audience for the comedian is essentially the same as the world for the existentialist. During a stand up routine the comic and the audience are all that exist. First the comic must arrive onto the stage then she shall create her essence, her routine, but that essence will and must be affected by her audience. Just like the existentialist being affected by her world. The “da-sein” and the “mitda-sein” and her existenz must all fit together to form her relation in the world.

While it is important for the comic to acknowledge her audience and change the speed or delivery of jokes to better suit them, she should not change her ideas entirely. The comic must stay true to her initial feeling and ideas that she wishes to get across to the world. She must not make excuses for her actions and performance. She must be brave and authentic; she must not act out in bad faith. It is important that the comic not only feels her emotions on stage but she is relating them properly to her environment. She must have a plan and the plan must be chaotic. This might all seem confusing but to truly understand yourself and your relation to the world around you, there must be a clear exploration for self-affirming knowledge.

Finally I have come to the conclusion that the comic and to be more specific the stand up comic is the most human and enlightened person. The comic lives in the moment, every joke and every second counts when she is attempting to evoke emotions from a live audience. The comic sees the world just as the existentialist does; first and foremost with a pure perception, with just the experience of existence, then after exploring the object and or idea the comic creates meaning from it. Only now this meaning is much closer to the truth. The comic understands the object absent of herself and this gives her the freedom of pure awareness. She does not pretend to understand by living in bad faith, she does not inauthentically understand by placing her ego into the object, she simply looks at the world finds existence understands it for what it truly is and then creates humor out of its absurdity.

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