

Laughing Between the Lines: Metaphor and Metric in Nicolaus of Cusa's *About Mind*

by Dennis Small

This is an essay about jokes, about “time-reversal” in jokes, in particular. The issue can be posed from the outset in the following terms: The fact of the matter is, as many people have noted, man is the only animal who laughs. Some people might argue that other species are also capable of laughter. In the cases of some relatively humanized animals, it is perhaps arguable that they are capable of some sort of laughter. But I don't think anyone would disagree that man is the only animal who is capable of actually making a joke, that is, to say something which induces laughter in others.

This is not the same as laughing *at* something. We often laugh at animals: you can have puppies that act in a very cute way, or you can laugh at the stupidity of some animals, or things of that sort. But to laugh *with* is different: to laugh over something that is said or done. The fact of the matter is, that only man is such an animal.

One of my points is, that it is precisely this which makes man *imago viva Dei*. It is another way of saying the same thing. It is this, that makes man as in the living image of God, as distinct, for example from computers. Now, a computer can never make a joke; you might have discovered this. Why? What is it in the difference in the make-up of the human mind versus the make-up of a computer, on this specific point of

humor? What is at issue here?

I will address what the actual issue is in jokes, and in particular, in puns, from the standpoint of “time-reversal.” There is a fundamental quality involved in joking, and especially in the delivery of the “punch line” in a joke, the point at which the joke itself is enunciated—which is not anything specifically said, but rather an insinuation of something unsaid—which is what is actually humorous. In other words, the joke is not what is named or said directly; it is what is left unsaid. It is that which lies beyond the realm of names, and language as such.

For example:

I am sure you are all familiar with the case of the guys who went hunting, the three professionals: one was a doctor, the other was a lawyer, and the third was a mathematician, specifically a mathematical probability theorist. They went hunting for geese.

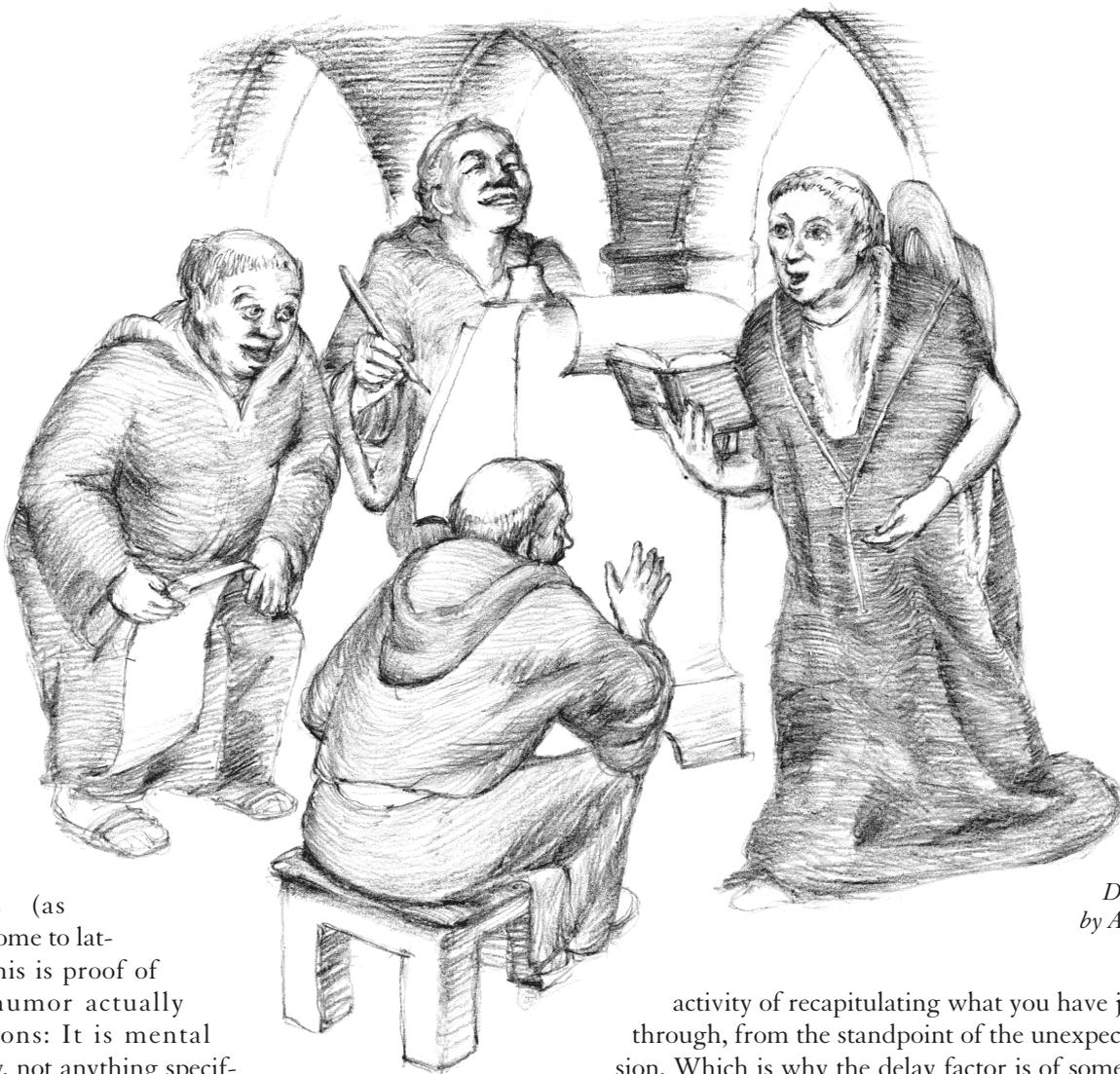
So the doctor gets out there, and he's the first man up. Now he's a doctor; he may be a skilled surgeon, but he really doesn't know a whole lot about shooting. So he picks up the shotgun: Blam! It's about ten yards to the right of the target. “Damn. Missed.”

Then the lawyer comes up and says: “No problem, I can do this.” He pulls the shotgun up and: Blam! Ten yards to the left. “Damn. Missed.”

Finally the mathematical probability theorist stands up. And he shouts: “Got 'em!”

I'm assuming you had a delayed reaction here; and that's what's interesting, because that's how the mind

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*Drawings
by Alan Yue*

works (as we'll come to later). This is proof of how humor actually functions: It is mental activity, not anything specific that is said. After all, who could imagine that the two words "Got 'em," could be funny? What is funny in saying the words "Got 'em?" Is there anything funny about the words "Got 'em?" Not particularly.

What is it that makes it funny?

To actually get at the underlying, epistemological issues behind this, the fundamental philosophical questions, we are going to need to briefly review a few salient points about the concept of time-reversal. Because, as you may have noticed, what was actually humorous here, was the totality of the joke as viewed retrospectively from the punch line. There was nothing particularly funny about the course of the joke itself. The humorous thing comes in, as your mind recapitulates everything that it has just walked through, after the conclusion. The conclusion isn't funny. None of the points along the way are funny. The whole thing strung together isn't funny. What is funny, the humor, is what is unsaid, which is the mental

activity of recapitulating what you have just walked through, from the standpoint of the unexpected conclusion. Which is why the delay factor is of some interest in this, in how it works. Because it is your mind retracing its own steps: that is "time-reversal."

'Time-Reversal'

Let me tell you what I *don't* mean by time-reversal, and what I *do* mean by it.

If you look at Lyndon LaRouche's writings on the issue of time-reversal,¹ you will note that the phrase he actually uses is "time-reversed causality." You may have noticed also that, over the last several years, LaRouche has stopped using the word "negentropy," and instead has insisted on using the expression "not-entropy," or "not-entropic," or "anti-entropic." He has explained that the reason for this, is that the word "negentropy" triggers an association in the mind of people who have read Norbert Wiener and so forth, of a concept of entropy *going backwards*: in other words, simple entropy in reversed time. And that is not what LaRouche means by "not-

entropic”—he is not talking simply about taking entropy, and standing it on its head, or taking a video clip of something that is entropic, and playing the reel backwards, that kind of time-reversal.

What he is talking about with “not-entropy” is something completely different. He is talking about a different process of development, which is completely contrary to the concept of the physical universe as described in “entropy.” And he has deliberately chosen to use the phrase “not-entropy,” or “anti-entropy,” to force the individual, each of us, to create in our own minds a *positive* concept, which cannot be reached by simply trying to explain it *negatively* in relationship to entropy.

Now the question of “time-reversal” is similar. Time reversal is *not* the arrow of time which marches along chronologically, like a metronome (1, 2, 3, 4, . . .), going in the opposite direction. It is not a linear concept of time, put in reverse. That is not what we are talking about; we are talking about something completely different.

We are talking about a concept of time that actually functions at two levels simultaneously—two different types of time. We are talking about the time of that which is created, of the phenomena which occur, as in a chronological time; simultaneously considered with the time of that which creates them, that is, of the hypothesis relative to the theorem-lattice² which it has created. The time of the hypothesis is everywhere present in every moment of the development of the theorem-lattice. As the causal factor, it is equally present at points A, B, C, D, E, or F, in what is otherwise chronological time.

So, the time of the hypothesis is in that sense *eternal*, relative to the entirety of the time of that which it has created.

Let us look at the matter this way. Leibniz says the following, on the subject of time and space:

Space is an order of coexistences, as time is an order of successions.³

“Space is an order of coexistences.” In other words, Leibniz is saying that the physical universe is not composed of physical objects banging around in space. Rather, space is actually relative; there is no distinction, there is no way of cleanly separating out space and the material objects “in” it. There is no three-dimensional, empty spatial Cartesian coordinate system, within which material bodies are banging around. Rather, Leibniz says, space is an order of coexistences—it is the way that coexistence is ordered. It is an ordering of physical space-time. And he says similarly, “time is an order of successions.”

In his 1714 Letter to Remond, Leibniz says:

Space, time, extension, and motion are not things, but well-founded modes of our consideration. . . . The source of our difficulties with the composition of the continuum, comes from the fact that we think of matter and space as substances. Whereas, in themselves, material things are merely well-regulated phenomena. And space is exactly the same as the order of coexistence, as time is the order of existence which is not simultaneous.⁴

So time is not the clicking off of the clock or the metronome. The only thing that time is, says Leibniz, is the order of existence which is not simultaneous. So already, in Leibniz, we have a completely relativistic concept of time and space. But to more thoroughly grasp the concept of time-reversed causality, we have to go back to Plato’s solution to the paradox, or the apparent paradox, of the One and the Many.

The One and the Many

Do not think of a One as the aggregation or assembling of a Many, to get a picture of the totality. That is not the idea. Rather, think of a One as the causal singular concept which uniquely explains, or causes, all of the specific things, or Many, which are created. You want to think of the One as the hypothesis, which is at a different level of existence, a higher level of existence, than all of the particularities of the phenomena which it is explaining. So, you have a multiplicity of phenomena, either of experiences or of material objects, if you care to view it that way, which produce these experiences. And the concept of a One, is that hypothesis which, through mental action, you create and which is the causal explanation of the Many. The One functions or exists at a totally different level than the Many. You cannot get to the One through any aggregation of the Many.

Similarly, you cannot have a concept of time as it relates to the One, within the same general bounded universe of the Many. You are talking about two completely different levels of existence.

This is what LaRouche frequently refers to in terms of the idea of a theorem-lattice, and then the hypothesis which creates a succession of such theorem-lattices. Within the realm of the specific theorem-lattice, or that which is created, you have what could be called chronological time, time which is clicked off like a metronome. This time seems to march fairly regularly forward—from past through present into the future—through that time as it exists within the world of the created.

However, if you look at that exact same process from the standpoint of the hypothesis which created the theorem-lattice, then you are looking at a concept of time

which applies to the totality of that which has been created (the Many). And the time of the hypothesis is, on the one hand, *eternal*, or everywhere present within the time of the many, but it is also *simultaneous*. It is neither before nor after; it is neither later nor earlier; it is simultaneous and eternal at the same time. It affects all parts of that which is changing, but it is that which does not change through all change.

One of the most useful examples of this conceptual issue, is the famous Heraclitus question: Can you step in the same river twice? If you view “the river” as your sensory experience of whatever the river is made up of—the water, the pebbles, the bank, and so forth—it is clearly the case that you cannot possibly step in the same river twice. If you define “the river” as what you are experiencing, what you experience one minute when you stick your toe in, and then you come back a minute later or even a half second later, and you stick your toe in again, it’s a completely different river. Nothing is the same; everything has changed. The water has gone by; the pebbles have moved a little bit; the wind is blowing differently. Everything is pure change. So what is it, then, that allows us to say “this is a river.” What is it that makes it a One, a Unity?

We are clearly forming a mental concept, a construct, a hypothesis, which is a One, relative to the Many which we are perceiving. That One is somehow unchangeable through all change.

The same thing applies to human identity. You say the word “I.” But what do you mean by “I”? Do you mean the “I” that you perceived at the moment that you began to utter that one-syllable word; or the “I” when you finished enunciating that one syllable word? Because everything has changed inbetween. You’ve moved a little bit; all of your atoms and molecules have moved; everything around you has moved; your internal, somatic experience of yourself has changed; you are probably a little hungrier than you were the instant before; you may be more thirsty; hotter or colder. Everything has changed; nothing is the same. So what, then, gives you the right to say “I”?

It’s an interesting question. What is identity? What is that One which is the same throughout all change? This is the concept of the One and the Many, and it starkly poses the issue of two distinct levels of time which exist simultaneously.

To quote directly from LaRouche on this subject:

Given: a series of events, each and all consistent with a specific theorem-lattice. These events are located in time and place. The relevant theorems are determined by an underlying hypothesis. In what part of that span of time and place, does that hypothesis exist? The hypothesis never

changes during any part of that span of space-time; it exists, “simultaneously,” in all the places and times defined by that theorem-lattice, but is confined to none of them. Meanwhile, that hypothesis is the *necessary and sufficient cause* for the selection of all of the theorems adopted as propositions for the occurrence of the events. In this respect, as *sufficient and necessary cause*, the hypothesis has the form of the *Good*. . . .

Thus, rather than the “Dr. Dolittle Push-me/Pull-me,” fairy-tale myth of mechanistic causality, commonly taught in schools today, we must have the sense of efficient relationship among past, present and future, as implicit in the Platonic notions of *hypothesis* and *Good*. If one says, from this latter standpoint, that the future shapes the present, or that the present shapes the past and future, it is only in the Platonic sense of hypothesis and Good, that such an efficient role of time is to be premised. It is through the relatively timeless hypothesis which shapes past, present, and future, that these three aspects of a continuing process behave as if they might be efficiently interactive at all times. They do not interact directly, of course!⁵

So, this is no simplistic, reductionist idea of time, such as: “Oh, yes, the future acts on the present and the past.” That is not what is happening. LaRouche emphasizes that it acts “as if” that were the case, and the reason that is so, is because what is *actually* acting efficiently in the past, the present, and the future of the chronological time of the created theorem-lattice, is a different order of time, that of the hypothesis, which is eternal or timeless relative to the past, present, and future of that which is created.

This brings us of necessity to Plato’s presentation of knowledge and the Good, in his famous discussion of the “Divided Line.” It is necessary to briefly review this, in order to address our next topic: Nicolaus of Cusa on the issue of how you know what you know, on time-reversal, and on the relationship of all of this to the all-important issue of jokes.

Plato presents his discussion of the “Divided Line” in Book VI of the *Republic* dialogue. The basic point that Plato makes is, that knowledge works by a process of successive development of new, overall concepts, or Ones, which explain the Many which are the objects of mental experience. The way that the mind works is, that it takes as its raw material, first, the simple perceptions that come from the visible world, the images produced by sensible objects. And from those perceptions, those images, the mind constructs a hypothesis, an explanation, a single, unique One, of what it is that is producing all of those sense perceptions. And this is what Plato describes as the process of hypothesis formation.

Plato goes on to explain that the mind works to see, in the world of the intelligible, much as the eye sees in the

world of the visible. The visible world is illuminated by the sun; the intelligible world, the world of ideas or of thought, is illuminated by the Good. He says: Think of the Good as akin to the sun, which illuminates everything around it, but is not that which it illuminates.

Plato then explains that we form an initial hypothesis about the nature of even an object—because hypothesis formation is involved even in the humble task of conceiving of an object as such, and calling it an object. For example, a river: that is a hypothesis; you are saying that there is some Unity there. Or, when you say “I,” the implicit assumption of using that word is that there *is* such a thing as a Unity, there is such a thing as an “I.” There is a One, which doesn’t change throughout all of its specific manifestations.

Plato elaborates, saying that, in the world of the intelligible, the first objects of the understanding, or the first class of intelligible things, are those concepts that come from the physical world. But the mind then constructs an actual universal object, distinct from the specific things which it is observing. This is what he calls a thought-object, or a Form, or Idea. And the mind forms such a hypothesis, or Idea, in the world of the intelligible, regarding that which it is observing, that which it is taking as its object of thought.

Plato then describes the way the mind, in addition to constructing specific hypotheses to explain specific things, clearly demonstrates a capability of developing an ongoing series of such hypotheses, and that capability, which itself produces hypotheses, is a higher hypothesis. So, you have a whole nest of hypotheses, which is produced by a higher hypothesis. And then, too, the ordered set of these higher hypotheses, is in turn produced by a mental faculty, which is hypothesizing the higher hypotheses. So, you are talking about a level of causality existing at a higher level than the simple objects which are perceived.

Plato is getting at the idea that, if you simply describe the world in terms of the space and the time of that which is created and apparently exists around us, you are missing the essential point. What you have to do is to look behind this, to the causal hypothesis which has created that array, and which leads you to a different concept of space and to a different concept of time.

Curvature and Metric

This raises the crucial question of metric or measurement. How do you measure these distinctions, or these differences in space or in time?

LaRouche argues that, if the chronological time of the created, that is to say, the time of the theorem-lattice as such, is not the same as the time of the hypothesis which created it, and other theorem-lattices, then

that difference has to be measurable:

Time is not an absolute, but only the name conveniently assigned to the experience of change.⁶

This is very similar to Leibniz’s formulation. The time of the hypothesis, the way you measure time in the domain of the hypothesis, of the One, is different from the measurement of time in the lattice itself. The time of the hypothesis enfolds within it, includes within it, that which then becomes unfolded as the time of the lattice.

This issue of *enfolding* and *unfolding* appears in many theological writings, including those of Nicolaus of Cusa. For example, Cusa explains that God enfolds within himself the totality of the created physical universe which He unfolds. But that unfolding, simply observed as an unfolding, is not in fact the enfolded totality which is within God. In other words, God and the physical universe He creates are not the same thing. You cannot say “God equals the entire universe”—which is the pantheist view. You are talking about two completely different levels of existence, of Creator and the created.

What LaRouche stresses, and this gets to the heart of the matter, is that, if you are talking about two different ways of measuring time, of two different ways of conceiving of it; if it does not function as a single, strictly chronological, metronomic time; then you have to be able to *measure* the difference, in some sort of an experiment, between what the perceived results would be based on the linear or the chronological time of the created lattice, and the measurement of time from the standpoint of the hypothesis.

This is the same issue posed by C.F. Gauss, Bernhard Riemann, and others in their study of curvature. Take the case of a plane surface. The metric, or the unit of measurement, on a Euclidean plane surface is, as we have all been taught, that “the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.” A related, axiomatic feature of this metric applied to a plane surface, is that the sum of the internal angles of all triangles adds up to 180 degrees.

That is fine and good, so long as you are on a flat surface. But what if we are not on a flat surface, but, say, on a spherical surface, which of course has curvature?

If that were the case, how would the distinction manifest itself? Well, it would show up in the fact that the shortest distance between two points on a sphere, for instance, is not a Euclidean straight line, but is actually measured by an arc of the great circle cutting the sphere at those two points. Thus, in the case of a spherical triangle, the sum of the internal angles does *not* add up to 180 degrees. And the shortest distance is the one which connects two points by the geodesic, that is, the shortest distance on a curved surface, which in this case corresponds to an arc of the great circle which goes through the center of the sphere.



So even in this very simple example of different curvatures, there is a difference of metric: your unit of measurement in one geometry (a flat Euclidean surface), is different than your unit of measurement in a spherical geometry. You don't measure with the same units, because your unit of measurement in one case is itself already curved. The same principle holds in the more complex case of surfaces of *changing* (i.e., non-constant) curvature—which more closely reflect the nature of the real physical universe.

The same issue of metric applies to time. And, LaRouche argues that, if this is in fact the case, the difference between the two metrics is of necessity measurable. We can't simply assert that there is the simple chronological time of the Many, and that there is also the time of the causal One which produces the Many; this distinction must be measurable:

The measurable impact of "time-reversal" must necessarily lie within the conceptual bounds of the crucial discovery at the center of Riemann's habilitation dissertation. In other words, applying those methods of C.F. Gauss's general principles of curved surfaces (which Riemann incorporated

in the method of his own discovery), there must be a measurable difference in the implied curvature of physical space-time, reflecting the action of time-reversal upon the function as otherwise determined. ["Time-Reversal," p. 39]

In other words, the distinction has to show up in the realm of that which you can empirically measure. This is not empiricism; but, the distinction must manifest itself empirically. When you measure, you are never directly determining what you think you are measuring; the only thing that you are actually measuring, is the difference in two possible curvatures, which you have under consideration. And the difference between the two, is what you actually measure.

LaRouche applies this concept of time-reversal to Classical music compositions: if causal time-reversal actually exists, he notes, then there is a difference in the performance of a piece of music, as performed from the standpoint of causal time reversal, compared to a straight galloping through.

Now let's look at the issue of jokes from this standpoint, and perform some measurements of time-reversed

causality. Here's one experiment:

You surely have heard the story of the Texan farmer who went to Israel, and was visiting a kibbutz there. He was talking to an Israeli farmer, who was saying to him: "So, this is my farm. All the way over there: 100 yards. Big! That way 200 yards. Really big! You like it?"

And the Texan says, in his characteristic drawl: "Well, back where I come from, I got a spread, and you know, my farm, why, you can get in your pick-up truck, and you get in that truck, and you drive, and you drive, and you drive. You drive all day, and you're still not at the end of the farm. And you go in the other direction, and you get in that truck, and you drive, and you drive—you spend the night—and then you drive another day, and you're still not at the end."

And the Israeli guy looks at him, sympathetically, and says: "Oy. Yeah, I once had a truck like that."

So, you see, it's measurable.

Mind Is the Metric of the Universe

Let's develop our science of measurement a bit further. For this, we have to turn to Nicolaus of Cusa, and in particular a dialogue of his, which in Latin is called *Idiota, de mente*, and which in English has been translated as *The Layman: About Mind*. It is a relatively short dialogue. It was written in 1450, and is part of a trilogy of three dialogues. (By the way, Cusa's *De docta ignorantia* was written in 1440, a decade before this dialogue. So, this is after the fundamental breakthroughs he made in science and theology presented there.)

All three of Cusa's "Layman" writings are in the form of dialogues, in which a layman, a common man, turns out to be far more intelligent than the philosophers with whom he speaks. The layman is, in fact, the voice of Cusa, the voice of the actually insightful person.

The first of these is *The Layman: About Wisdom*; the second, *The Layman: About Mind*; and the third, *The Layman: About Experiments with Weight*. Let's look at the second one, on the question of Mind.

Cusa begins by saying that the word in Latin for Mind, *mens*, actually comes from the word for measurement, *mensurare*. That is lawful, he explains, because the nature and characteristic of Mind is that it measures. Mind is that which embraces, or enfolds, all "Exemplars." By "Exemplars," Cusa is expressing a concept similar to Plato's use of Forms or Ideas. He is talking about a One, a mental construct which is a One, which explains the causality of the Many which are merely experienced:

LAYMAN: Mind is that from which comes the limit and measure of all things. In fact, I propose that mind, *mens*, is so called from measuring, *mensurare*.

PHILOSOPHER: Do you think that mind is one thing, and soul another?

LAYMAN: I surely do. For mind subsisting as such is one thing, another when embodied . . . [so] mind is the same as the soul of a human being.⁷

This is of some interest; for, in Cusa's treatment, Mind and the human Soul are equivalent. This recalls LaRouche's frequent insistence that Reason is not something to which you have to *add agapē*, to get the right recipe for Man in the living image of God. Reason, if conceived of as logic, certainly is inadequate; but the actual, Christian-Platonic concept of Reason, is of necessity one with *agapē*. Properly conceived, there is no distinction between the Mind and the Soul. Cusa elaborates:

The power I call "mind"—the power in us which embraces conceptually the exemplars of all things.

What is this idea of the "exemplars of all things?" Cusa says that the important point about measuring and embracing is, that that which is finite can only be embraced, or understood, or measured, by that which is infinite. You cannot measure something that is infinite, with something that is finite; you can only measure the finite as a component or a part of the infinite. The infinite does the measuring. And that's what Mind is. Mind is the image of God, in the sense that it carries out measurement of that which is relatively finite with respect to itself; but man's Mind itself is measured, in turn, only by God, by that which is infinite relative to it.

Cusa proposes that we think of the world in terms of Exemplars, and those things which are Images of those Exemplars. When I say Exemplars, you can, for these purposes, replace it with Plato's concept of Form, the Platonic concept of Idea. Cusa develops the following approach in *About Mind*, to locate the relationships among, on the one hand, the Exemplar, or the Original, of something; and, on the other hand, its Image (SEE Table I).

First we have God's Mind (1), or simply God, as the Original of all originals; and we have its Image or reflection (in first approximation, just think of this the way you would normally think of the word "image"), which is Man's Mind (2). Then, Cusa says, if God's Mind is the Original, what God's Mind has created, the total created world (3), is an image of its Creator. And finally we have the "conceptual world" (4), by which Cusa means something akin to perception, which, in turn, is an image of the actual physical created world.

This gives you a sense of the totality of the universe

TABLE I. Relationships of Exemplar and Image in "About Mind."

	Exemplar/Original	Image
Original	(1) God's Mind	(3) created world
Image	(2) Man's Mind	(4) conceptual world (perception)

which Cusa is examining, for the purposes of determining the meaning of "knowledge" and "measurement." In it, all Originals or Exemplars measure their Images; they are the standard against which you measure the image, which tells you to what degree the image does, or does not correspond to the original. Cusa says, for example, that clearly God's Mind measures Man's Mind, and also measures the created world, because the original, that is to say, the creating hypothesis, is the standard against which its creation is to be measured.

So God's Mind (1) measures both Man's Mind (2), which is made in His image (it is the image of God, and therefore God measures that), and also the created world, the physical universe (3). Man's Mind (2) in turn measures the conceptual world of his perception (4). In other words, your mind allows you to measure that which you are perceiving, the images which you have. And, similarly, the created world, the physical universe itself (3), is the original with respect to its image (4). So (3) measures (4); in other words, physics measures mathematics, for example. The physical universe is the only way to measure the accuracy of mere images or representations of that universe, such as mathematics.

However, the really interesting point, Cusa emphasizes, is that (2) is also the measure of (3): *Man's Mind measures the created world*. Man's Mind is part of the created world, of God's created universe; yet it is also the measure of that created world. That is to say, Man's Mind is relatively infinite compared to the created world. It is the highest expression of God's created universe, says Cusa: it is part of the created universe, but it is its highest expression. And therefore, for that reason, since it is the Exemplar, or the Original, or the measurement of the created world, Cusa says, *Mind is the metric of the universe*. The only way to measure the universe, is with the human mind. It is the relative infinite compared to all the rest of creation around it.

In other words, *knowledge is totally subjective*. There is nothing that is known, other than man's own mental activity in hypothesizing a mental object, which is a causal explanation of perceived events.

So, for Cusa, Mind is the metric of the universe, and it is this which makes Mind *imago Dei*.

Why? Because Mind elaborates concepts that are not in the sensible, not in the world of sensation. Mind alone does this. Cusa in fact attacks Aristotle for proclaiming falsely that, "to understand is an accident." Cusa says it is not an accident, but it is rather exactly that quality of elaboration of concepts that distinguishes Mind from everything around it:

Something is present to mental intuition which was not present to sense nor to reason, namely, the exemplary and incommunicable truth of the forms which are reflected in sensible things.

Cusa further argues that it is this quality of mind, which gives life to the individual person, and gives him a soul. The body, for Cusa, is a necessary vehicle for the soul: he is by no means a Manichean, viewing the world as divided between good and evil, where the good is the immaterial, mental side, and everything that is physical or material or body is bad. Whereas the Manicheans believed like the Gnostics that the material created universe was "bad," or evil, Cusa says exactly the opposite: that it is good, and that the body, the physical material body, is the necessary vehicle for this unique quality of mind, which is man's soul:

PHILOSOPHER: Aristoteleans say that the intellect, which you seem to call mind, is a power of the soul, and that to understand is an accident. But you say otherwise.

LAYMAN: Mind is a living substance which we experience as our interior speaking and judging. Mind is more like infinite substance and absolute form than all the other spiritual powers in our inner experience. Its function in this body is to give it life and because of this it is called soul. Mind is a substantial form or power. [*About Mind*, p. 53]

How does this mind, or soul, give life to man?

Our mind is the image of that infinite being which enfolds all images, just as the first portrait of an unknown king is the model of all the other copies which can be painted from it. Knowledge of God, his "face," is accessible only in mental reality whose object is truth. It is not further accessible except through mind so that mind may be the image of God and of all God's images following upon the exemplar itself. [*About Mind*, p. 51]

Cusa doesn't leave it at that. He goes on to explain what he means by this mental capability of understanding that which is beyond the sensible. He says the mind is capable of making, from the Many, a One, in the same way that a musician or a sculptor makes a One out of a Many:

For the eternal mind acts as does a musician who wants to make his concept perceptible. He gets a plurality of sounds and puts them in a fitting harmony. . . . Plurality of things proceeds from our mind. Mind alone counts. . . . We say something is one from the fact that mind understands a single thing once and individually. [*About Mind*, p. 59]

And again:

Unity precedes all plurality, and this is the unity which unites, the uncreated mind in which all is one. After the one comes plurality, the unfolding of the power of that unity. [*About Mind*, p. 61]

Thus, for Cusa, the act of creation by Mind—the creation of a concept of a One, out of a Many—is an act of imposing boundaries, that is to say, of measurement. Out of the totality of an undistinguished Many, the Mind forms a One: that is imposing a boundary, that is measuring, that is telling you where something begins and ends. The Mind says: it’s this, and not that. Cusa draws a further parallel with sculpture: Mind’s creativity is like the work of a sculptor, who takes a block of marble and delimits it, imposes boundaries, where the actual beautiful shape is to be formed. That is the act of mind.

Cusa’s Epistemology

This brings us to the core of Cusa’s *About Mind* dialogue, where he presents his elaborated theory of knowledge, of epistemology. In many ways reminiscent of Plato’s famous “Divided Line” exposition, Cusa’s argument takes us further. In Cusa’s conception, Mind takes itself as it’s own object; in other words, it makes its own subjective construction of thought-objects, the object of knowledge itself.

The way Cusa develops this, is as follows. He posits that there are three steps, or levels, of human knowledge, which he describes in terms of four parameters (SEE Table II).

First, we must look at what the *object* is that the Mind is studying (A). Second, what is the *nature* of this object that mind has before it (B). Third, we want to consider the *power employed*, the mental power or faculty employed: what is it that is being wielded by Mind in its study (C)? And, finally, what is the *result of this activity*, in terms of what we

know and what we don’t know (D)?

Cusa begins with the first level of knowledge (1). Here, the objects that Mind is looking at, are sensible things, the objects of the senses, things which are tangible. The nature of these objects is that they are material, and that they are changeable—in fact, they do nothing but change, like Heraclitus’s river. The power employed in this first level, is that of Mind. And the result, in terms of our resulting knowledge, Cusa describes as conjecture. Here, he explains, we know only the changes which occur; we don’t know things in themselves. And under these circumstances, measurement is in fact very imprecise. If we can only measure things that are only changing, there is not much precision that we can get out of our measurements.

Here are Cusa’s own words about this first level of knowledge:

Since mind gets only the notions of sensible things through these assimilations, in which the forms of things are not the true forms, but clouded by the changeableness of matter, therefore all such notions are conjectures rather than truths. This is why I say the notions which are obtained by rational assimilation are not certain—they are in accord with images of forms rather than with truths. [*About Mind*, p. 65]

In his ascending quest for knowledge and truth, in typical Platonic fashion, Cusa poses the second object of Mind (2). From the first level, we are able to generate a concept of the Exemplars, or the Forms, which we in turn take as an object of Mind: for example, the idea of a

TABLE II.

		(1)	(2)	(3)
(A)	Object of Mind	sensible things (circle)	Exemplars/ Forms	unity beyond all variety
(B)	Nature of the object	material; changeable	immaterial; unchangeable; of the One (relation to God)	Mind’s own power as the assimilation
(C)	Power employed	Mind	Mind looking at its own immutability	Mind as <i>imago Dei</i> ; simplicity; intellect
(D)	Result	conjecture	concepts/names; mathematics	intuited Absolute Truth

circle. This is not a specific circle, not a specific sensible object, but the concept of the Exemplar of which the specific circle is the image. So, the objects of our mental activity, in this second level, are the Exemplars, or Plato's Forms.

The nature of these objects is that they are immaterial—they are thought-objects, not material things—and they are unchangeable. Here we have a concept of a relative One: it doesn't change; it is not the changing specific objects, or the perceptions we have of them; it is an unchangeable, immaterial Form, and that is what Mind is looking at.

What is the power employed here? Cusa says it is Mind looking at its own immutability. This poses the challenging question: what is the power of Mind, which Man clearly possesses, that does not change through all change?

The result of this exercise, at this second level, is that Mind generates concepts, or names, and it gives names to things. When we *name* something, we are pronouncing a relative universal concept, a One, about that object, which is beyond change. For example, we say: "this is a piano." We are *not* saying: "this is 7 trillion, 459 billion molecules organized in the following form, and when someone plays a key, there are the following 936 quajillion interactions." No. We just say: "this is a piano." So, to name something, is to refer to precisely that immaterial unchangeable aspect of it, which derives from the Exemplars, not the sense object. Cusa explains that this level is a lot like mathematics, and he emphasizes that this is *not* the same thing as the truth: we are not yet there.

In reference to this second level, he says that measurement here is more precise, since it gets us closer to the truth, it gets us to the Exemplars. But we are not at truth yet. What Mind is examining is not matter, it is different from matter itself, but it is roused by the images of matter. Cusa puts it thus:

Beyond this, our mind, taken not as immersed in the body it animates but as mind in itself (though joinable to a body), looking now to its own immutability, makes assimilations of forms taken not as immersed in matter but as they exist in and of themselves. Mind now conceives the unchangeable quiddities of things using itself as instrument without any bodily spirit. For instance, it conceptualizes the circle as a figure from whose center all lines drawn to its circumference are equal. No circle existing outside the mind in matter can have this mode of being. For it is impossible that two lines drawn on a material surface be equal, and even less possible that such a circle be drawn. So, the circle in the mind, is the exemplar and measure of the truth of the circle on the floor.

Thus we say that the truth of things exists in the mind in the necessity of connection, that is, in the way the truth of

the thing demands, as was said about the circle. Because the mind makes these assimilations in itself and separated from matter, it assimilates itself to the abstracted forms. In accord with this power it constructs mathematical sciences with their certainty and discovers that it has power to assimilate itself to things insofar as they exist in the necessity of connection and to construct concepts. The mind is roused to these abstractive assimilations by phantasms or images of the forms. It acquires these images through the assimilations made in the sense organs, in the same way as a person is moved by the beauty of an image to ask about the beauty of its original. [*About Mind*, p. 65]

But, I emphasize, this is not yet truth, although it is a higher level and closer to the truth. Before, we only had conjecture; now we can actually name something. We've generated a One; we have a concept, a universal. But that's not enough.

Cusa says that in the third level, Mind takes as the object of its study "unity beyond all variety" (3). The nature of the object which is being studied, is Mind's own power as the assimilation of the One—in other words, Mind's relation to God. The power of Mind being employed to examine this idea of unity beyond all variety, which is employed here and only here—not earlier—is Mind as *imago Dei*. Cusa otherwise calls this Intellect; it is what Plato calls Reason. Mind is not in the image of God, unless and until it is examining the world and itself from this standpoint. And the result of this exercise is what Cusa calls "intuited Absolute Truth."

Cusa's argument is that all of levels one and two only participate in the truth: we are getting closer, but it is not yet the truth. It is only when Mind studies its own unity as *imago Dei*, that it is capable of actually constructing concepts of the Original One, that is, of God. And this, and only this, is actual intellect, and therefore actual truth.

Let's study Cusa's formulation:

Up to this point the mind is not sated by this way of knowing for it has no intuitive grasp of the exact truth of everything. Rather it intuits the truth in a certain necessity determined for each thing—insofar as one thing is this way, another thing that way, and any one of them composed of its parts. Mind sees that this way of being is not truth itself but a participation in truth—so that one thing is truly this way, another truly that way. This otherness cannot be compatible in any way with truth in itself, taken in its infinite and absolute exactness.

Mind looks to its own simplicity: not only as separate from matter but as unable to be communicated to matter or united to it after the fashion of form. Then it employs this simplicity as an instrument so that it may assimilate itself to everything not just as separate from matter but in a simplicity that cannot be communicated to matter. In



this fashion mind grasps everything intuitively in its own simplicity. There the mind grasps everything intuitively without any composition of parts—every magnitude in the mathematical point and the circle in its center—not as one thing is this and a second that, but as all things are one and one all.

This is the intuitive grasp of absolute truth; when someone in the manner just mentioned sees how entity is shared differently among all beings and then in the way we are discussing grasps intuitively and directly absolute entity itself beyond all participation and variety. Such a person would certainly see everything beyond the determined necessity of connection which he saw in variety. And without it, in an utterly simple way he would see everything in absolute necessity, without number or mag-

nitude or any otherness.

Mind uses itself in this most exalted way insofar as it is the very image of God. God who is everything is reflected in mind when it, as a living image of God, turns toward its exemplar by assimilating itself with all its effort. In this fashion, it grasps intuitively everything as one and itself as the assimilation of that one, through which it constructs conceptions of that one which is all. [*About Mind*, pp. 65-67]

That is Nicolaus of Cusa's concept of *imago Dei*; and that is what he means by measurement. That is what he means when he says, Mind is the metric of the universe:

So every mind, even ours, though created below all others, has from God that, in the way it can, it is a perfect and living image of the infinite art. Therefore it exists as three and one; it has power, wisdom, and the connection of both in such a way that, as a perfect image of that art, once stimulated it can make itself even more and more like its exemplar. . . . Once stimulated [it] can always make itself more conformed to the divine reality without limit, even though the exactness of the infinite art stays always unreachable. [*About Mind*, p. 87]

This now allows us to consider the concept of time. For Cusa, Mind as the image of the infinite, has a concept of time which is eternal. This eternal time unfolds in the time of creation, perfecting itself in that process:

Mind is the image of eternity, but time is its unfolding, though an unfolding always less than the image of the eternal enfolding. . . . So our mind remains unmeasurable, indefinable, and unlimitable by every reason. Only uncreated mind measures, limits, and defines our mind. [*About Mind*, p. 93]

So Man's Mind is the metric, as the relative infinite of the entire created universe. And the metric of man, that

by which man must measure himself, is God, and concretely, Cusa argues, Jesus Christ. Only the infinite measures the finite, and it is that which determines time as well.

Jokes As Metaphor

Armed with these tools, let us proceed to the task at hand.

Since we've been speaking of theological matters, I presume you are familiar with the story about the incident between God and Satan's hordes, his bunch of little devils. What happened is that the devils, on Satan's instructions, one day grabbed a bunch of broomsticks and punched holes up into heaven. God was riding around on his horse, as he often did and, presumably, still does, and he of course came across this hole punched in the floor of heaven. He got really angry and he told his minions: "Fill this thing up right away. It's unacceptable; this pot-hole has got to be fixed up."

So they scrambled around and they did it. And the devils down below were pleased by what they had done, but also a bit nervous, because God was starting to get angry. So they went running back to Satan, and Satan told them: "Don't worry. I want you to go out there tomorrow and make a bigger hole."

So these little devils with their broomsticks—bang, bang, bang—made another hole and ran off again.

God came riding by on his horse—a white horse, of course—and saw this big hole, got quite angry, and said: "This is completely outrageous! I'm not going to tolerate this. I'm boss here. This stuff stops. This gets filled up. And that's that."

The little devils got quite frightened this time, and went running back to Satan: "What are we going to do now? He's really getting angry. This can't continue." Satan said: "Don't worry about it. It's all bluff. Nothing's going to happen. You go out there and make a huge crater, that's what I want you guys to do."

So they obediently went back, and punched a gigantic crater in the floor of heaven.

The next morning, God of course ran across this thing—he almost fell into the damned hole. And he yelled: "That's it! That's the last straw. You've had it. Your day of judgment has come, and that's that."

The devils rushed back to Satan in a panic: "Boss, we're finished! It's all over; we're in real trouble. He says that our day of judgment has come, and that he's

going to sue the pants off us."

Satan replied: "Him? He doesn't even have any lawyers up there."

Let's return to the issue of the measurable effect of time-reversed causality. LaRouche has explained this concept using the case of music. But it also applies, rigorously, to the question of jokes. In music, LaRouche has noted, a polyphonic idea is presented. You have a series of such concepts. Your mind, at the conclusion of the piece of music, replays for itself—in memory only—the entirety of the piece. It simultaneously hears the totality of the piece, both in succession, and not in succession.

Obviously, you can only do this in your mind. You can't hear the totality of a piece in actual audible performance, because if all of the notes were played simultaneously, it wouldn't exactly be a piece of music. So in Mind one relives, and works through, the relationship between the whole, the totality, the One, and everything that is enfolded in that One, which is then unfolded in the process of the performance of the composition.

Furthermore, each of the concepts that are developed in music, are themselves metaphors: they are in-betweenness, they are not specific things, they don't have names. They exist, they can be identified, but they are not nameable: they are ambiguities. LaRouche explains:

How are singularities, such as metaphors, afforded discrete distinctness within the mind? The answer from any literate person should be: by the juxtaposition which we term irony: a "double meaning," the which can not be resolved deductively. ["Time-Reversal," p. 40.]

This double meaning, or double entendre, which is something that means two things at the same time, makes your mind think of both simultaneously. This is precisely what happens as well in good humor, in jokes, in puns especially.

The Layman: About Jokes

Recently, I made a remarkable find: It turns out that Nicolaus of Cusa wrote a fourth dialogue, called, *The Layman: About Jokes*. Even more remarkably, this one wasn't written in Latin (conveniently), but in English. In this heretofore unknown manuscript, Cusa posits that there are four, distinct qualities of a good joke.

The first is *ambiguity*. This is most clearly evidenced in puns. What is a pun? A pun is a word, or an audible sound which your mind simultaneously interprets in two ways. It is two things at the same time, and the humor lies precisely in the ambiguity of the relationship of those two things. The joke is the punch-line, which hits you at

the end, forcing you to recapitulate what you've heard, but listening to it simultaneously from two different standpoints. It's just like a piece of music: You hear the totality simultaneously in memory.

There are good puns, there are bad puns, and there are mediocre puns. Here are a few mediocre ones, to exemplify the point:

This is the case of the guy who goes to his psychiatrist, and says:

"Doc, I'm really having a lot of problems. I can't figure out who I am. One moment, I think that I'm a wigwam; the next moment, I think that I'm a teepee. I don't know what's going on."

And the doctor says: "Well, it's obvious. You're two tents."

I think we can agree that that was mediocre.

I have another one, which I would also call mediocre. It's actually in the form of a riddle:

Question: What lies on the ground, 100 feet in the air?

Answer: A dead centipede.

Decidedly mediocre.

But, what's going on, even with these mediocre jokes? Do you follow what's happening in your own mind, for example, with the silly riddle about the centipede? Your mind reviews and reexamines what it itself went through up until the punch-line. And you find that you were led down the primrose path. You were led along, by the way the sounds evoked a certain concept in your mind, which turned out to be a complete dead end. Because you had started to think: "Okay, it's lying on the ground, but it is 100 feet in the air." And then when someone says, "well, it's a dead centipede," it's as if you just hit a cement wall. And you say mentally, "Oh, come on!" Obviously, you had been tricked into thinking about the matter *wrongly*. Intentionally tricked to think wrongly. And the humor is when you look at your own process of mental activity, and say: "Aha! Boy, that was pretty dumb."

That's what actually goes on in a good joke: ambiguity. It is something that is two things at the same time; otherwise it is not humorous. That's what a good pun is all about.

This already takes us beyond Cusa's second level, the level of names, computers, and so on, where things are only what they are. When you give something a name, as in a computer, it either is or it isn't. It's A, or it's B; but it can't be two things at once. So you have immediately ruled out, at this level, that which is distinctly humorous, that is to say, distinctly human. This is why computers

can't crack jokes, nor translate. Jokes, at least many good jokes, cannot be translated, for the same reason that a computer can't crack a joke: it's not *imago Dei*. Nor can a computer translate, for exactly that reason: it cannot get the ambiguity of language. A computer will be literal; it will transliterate, but it will not translate.

There is a second quality required of good humor, which Cusa wrote about in his long-lost *The Layman: About Jokes*—the quality of *surprise*. A good joke has to be not only ambiguous, it also has to have a "punch-line," a surprise, at the end. It's called a punch-line, because you feel like you've just been hit: you were going in one direction, mentally, and all of a sudden you realize you are somewhere else completely different.

What this does, is it forces your mind to go through an instant re-run, in memory, of what it had gone through until that point. And when mind takes its own motion and action as the subject of contemplation, then you've really got a good joke. Because, what you are actually laughing at, is yourself. You are laughing at the two different ways your own mind works, simultaneously. Thus the punch-line is, on the one hand, "eternal" relative to the time within the telling of the joke, but it is also "simultaneous." In other words, it functions like a hypothesis, or like a good piece of music.

The element of surprise forces your mind to complete the sentence with the unsaid word. It fills in the blank. And when it fills it in in one way, or fills it in in another way, that's the humor of the matter. For example:

There's the case of the two guys, one a slightly older gentlemen, the other a younger man, who just turned forty. And the older guy says: "Don't worry about it. After forty, you almost make love every day."

And the younger fellow, his eyes turn big, and he says: "Really? No kidding? What a relief!"

And the older guy answers: "Sure! On Monday, almost. Tuesday, almost. Wednesday, almost. Thursday,"

So, what's going on in that joke? Well, you were thinking certain thoughts, weren't you? But then the punch-line came along.

There's another one, which I like because it exemplifies the element of surprise:

There are two couples, older folks. They've been friends for a long, long time, and they play cards a lot. One of the guys had gone through a very difficult period; he'd become very forgetful; but this evening he'd just played an incredibly good game of bridge. So during the break, the wives get up, go into the

kitchen to make coffee, and so on. And the one fellow says to his friend:

“Boy, you are really in great shape. You didn’t miss a move tonight; you remembered everything. What’s going on with you? What’s happened?”

His friend answers proudly: “I took a memory course. It was terrific: I learned a lot about my problem, and I’ve mastered it completely.”

His friend responds: “Really? What was it called, what was the name of the course?”

The first guy says: “Ummm, umm, what do you call those plants? You know, with thorns, and those fluffy flowers?”

His friend says: “Rose?”

The first guy gets excited: “Yeah, yeah, that’s it! Hey, Rose, what was the name of that class?”

Now, the good thing about that joke, is that it has a double punch-line. You think that the joke occurs when he first says, “Umm, umm,” and can’t remember the name. Up to there, that’s sort of silly, and not a very good joke. You might laugh politely. But it turns out that that wasn’t the joke, was it? So it has a kind of double-punch line, a double element of surprise, in that one.

Now Cusa, being a man of great philosophical insight, realized that it was not adequate to simply have the elements of ambiguity, and of surprise, in jokes. There is a third, crucial quality to a good joke: it has to lead the listener to some insight into the human condition, or his own mind, or other people’s minds. It has to ennoble the person; it can’t just be vulgar. There are some jokes which are, admittedly, slightly ribald, and that’s okay, if it actually leads to your mind’s ennoblement. Similarly, jokes that make fun of certain attitudes or mental abilities and so on, are okay if they force you to reflect on yourself, or other people, or your foibles. But it is not good humor to just make fun of a whole class of people, or nationalities, or things like that.

To put it in Platonic terms, a good joke has to generate motion toward the Good. It really does have this function: it must force you to reflect on the human condition. It has to be like Classical tragedy in that sense, that it presents something which leads you to think in a different way about yourself and the world—and not just at someone else’s expense.

I’ll give you an example of a bad such joke, which does *not* lead you to insight. Every nationality and ethnic group has jokes of this sort: In the United States, there are “Polack” jokes. Others have “Newfie” jokes. Well, in Colombia, there are “Pastuso” jokes: Pastusos come from Pasto, in the south of Colombia. Every culture has these jokes, where you goof on somebody else in order to feel

superior and snicker—“heh, heh, heh.” For example:

There was a bank robbery in Pasto, and they brought in the country’s greatest detective, a Colombian Sherlock Holmes. He studied everything: footprints, fingerprints, etc. And he emerged after weeks and weeks of study to report authoritatively: “There is one thing that I can state with certainty about this crime: this heist was carried out by Pastusos.”

“Ohhhhh,” the media intoned, “how do you know that?”

“It’s simple: there are two tunnels, one to go in and one to come out.”

Now that joke is really not fair, because:

Everybody knows that if it had been Pastusos who committed the crime, there would have been only one tunnel: they would have walked in, and tunneled out.

Let’s look further at this question of insight into the question of ideology, into how people think:

You’ve heard the story of the young Jewish man, who’s about to get married. He has studied up, but he still has a couple of religious questions for the rabbi, before he gets married, because he needs to know the do’s and the dont’s, the rules, and how you do things, and so on. So he goes to the rabbi, and says:

“Rabbi, at my wedding, do you think, could we have dancing?”

Rabbi: “Absolutely not! Dancing is prohibited, just read the Talmud. It says—absolutely no dancing. What kind of question is this?”

Young man: “I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I’ve got one more, though.”

Rabbi: “Okay, what’s the question?”

Young man: “Well, when we get married—I know, not before, but after we get married—rabbi, my new wife and I, can we have sexual intercourse?”

Rabbi: “But, of course. Of course. This is one of the purposes of marriage.”

The rabbi goes on to give the young man a whole lecture, explaining that the Talmud says this, it says that, procreating and having a family is good, and so on. “Of course you can have sexual intercourse, no problem.”

Young man: “One other question. When my wife and I are married—not before, I know, but after the wedding—when we make love, can we do it face to face, you know, looking?”

And the rabbi says: “Hmm. This I don’t know. I’ll check; come back tomorrow.”

The rabbi goes home, he reads, he studies the Talmud, his sacred books. And he's going crazy, looking; he stays up all night, looking all over, in his books. And when he returns the next day, he's a total wreck. He's a rabbi, so he's been through a lot; he's getting older, so he's a wreck from staying up all night reading through the Talmud to try to find out what it says, yes or no, on the question the young man asked.

So when the young man returns, the rabbi says: "I looked everywhere, read everything, and it doesn't say. So, if it doesn't say you can't, okay, you can do it."

Young man: "Terrific, this is great. But I still have one last question. When we get married—after, not before, I know—I know we can make love, I know also it's okay, we can look a little. But besides that, can we do it, you know, standing up?"

And the rabbi answers, angrily: "Absolutely not! It could lead to dancing!"

So, you see the problem with fundamentalism.

That joke went over very big when I told it in a recent cadre school in Mexico—everyone got a good belly laugh out of it. But this next one, curiously, produced a somewhat different response:

This is the story of a tour of heaven. A bunch of new people have just arrived, and St. Peter is going to give them a tour, show them around, give them some orientation. On the left, they came across a group in deep, religious prayer. Holy, holy people, and St. Peter said: "Here we have the Muslims who made it up here; they are a deeply religious people."

In the next area, on the right, they see a group of people reading, studying, very erudite. St. Peter explains what was already pretty obvious: "These are the Jews."

Then they come up to a third area with a closed door, and St. Peter says: "Shhhh! Quiet!"

One of the new arrivals asks innocently: "Why? What's the problem?"

St. Peter: "It's the Roman Catholics, and they think they're alone."

This, of course, poses some very deep theological issues, which we won't attempt to address here. But, you do see, it's often easier to laugh at others, than at yourself.

The fourth quality of good jokes, as explained by Cusa in *The Layman: About Jokes*, is the question of *delivery*, or execution of a joke. Everything is in the delivery and timing: there are some people who are capable of taking a bad joke, and making it worse; of they can take an actually credible, decent joke, and completely destroy it, through delivery. It's murder. That's a different kind of execution.

Delivery and execution are very important. Why?

Because what you are doing, by delivery, as with a good raconteur, is, you are inducing the listener to get involved in the level of time of the chronological sequence *within* the story. You are deliberately inducing the listener to think *wrongly*. That's what you are trying to do. You get them involved in the time within the joke, and then you bring to bear, at the right moment, with the right timing, the time from outside the joke. You bring in the hypothesis, and from that standpoint you force the listener to look at the time within the joke, that he has been taken into.

So you have to pull your listener into the story: it is extremely important to deliberately lead them towards a false conclusion. You can't laugh in the middle of your joke; you can't giggle along the way; you don't want to break the spell. If you've ever heard a really good raconteur, this is what they do: they spellbind you. Why? They deliberately pull you in; they are deliberately pulling a trick on you, which you will eventually laugh about, if you have any sense of humor about yourself.

In this sense, good jokes really are like Classical tragedy, which gets you emotionally involved from the standpoint, simultaneously, of the errors of thinking of the characters of the play, and also from a higher standpoint of a potential solution to the events unfolding. So you are both emotionally involved from the inside, and looking at it from a higher level from the outside, and you are examining the mental processes of the players on the stage, to see what the flaw is that is going to lead them to the ineluctable tragedy. So it works on two levels of time: a great tragedy employs this concept of time-reversed causality, about the audience's own way of thinking. You look at your own errors of thought from the conclusion of where that is leading you, in order to learn how to change them.

Since we are on the theme of religious jokes and delivery:

Did you know that, as you get up to the pearly gates, there are actually two lines up there for the men? One of them has a big sign: "Henpecked men." The other sign says: "Non-henpecked men."

So, recently, a journalist went up to do an interview, and found, of course, that the "henpecked" line was really long, while there were only two guys standing in the "non-henpecked" line. So the journalist, being a bright, bushy-tailed go-getter, goes up to one of the two guys in the short line, and asks enthusiastically: "Excuse me, sir. And why are you here?"

The fellow answers: "I don't know. My wife told me to stand here."

The other relevant point is that any attempt to explain a joke, kills it: all of a sudden, it's not funny. When you dissect it, it's not funny any more. If you have to tell



someone, explain to them, what the punch-line is, when you have to explain it out, you kill it. It's like taking a living body and turning it into a corpse. You dissect it: that may be useful, but you will never understand what it is that makes it live by dissecting it. The same principle applies to jokes.

Only man laughs. Only man creates jokes. Because only man is capable of that unique activity of creative mind, which creates an ambiguity of the unsaid, the unspoken, and the unsayable—which is humorous. It is the motion of mind, that is the metric which is used to measure the components. And therefore, it is the same thing to say that man is the only animal who laughs or makes jokes, as it is to say *imago viva Dei*. It is *that*, that capability of mind, which creates humor, and enjoys humor, which makes man in the living image of God.

You can understand this abstractly or theoretically, but you can also understand it by observing it in children. One of the most fascinating and enjoyable points in the development of a young child, is when they are learning what a pun is, or a joke. It is really quite humorous to watch the mind of the child discover this. What happens is, that it begins to dawn on the child that there is a whole

reality behind language, which is unseeable, unnameable, untouchable, and unperceivable—but it is real, and it is really funny. And the child goes crazy—he or she usually gets very repetitive, and silly, and you have to listen to the same joke seven hundred times, over and over again. But it is an amazing discovery nonetheless, because the child really sees what's going on: he is observing his own mind at work. That is, the object of thought is his own mental creative activity.

What is the function of teasing? Teasing is very useful with children. I don't mean nasty, or mean teasing, but teasing that induces a child to do two things. First, he learns to not take himself too seriously. To be able to be loose. And second, he learns to not take things literally. This is most important.

What is teasing? Teasing is when you say something that is not true, when you say an untruth on purpose, *not* for the purpose of torturing the child or making him feel terrible, or confusing him, but to get him to understand that what you mean, is not literal. For example, if the child says something, you answer with something completely preposterous about the child, or about the other parent, or about anything at all, and you say it

with a totally straight face. And then you watch the little wheels turning, until the child gets it: “Oh, that’s a joke!” If they can laugh at you and at themselves that way, and use their mind for judging things—that not everything they see or hear is literally true—this is tremendously important.

It is also the best antidote to paranoia. Paranoia is when you take things literally, when you think that people mean literally what they say, and you interpret the world from this nominalist standpoint. Things become only what their names, or labels, are. The best way to deal with this problem in a child, of paranoia and insecurity, is to get them to be able to be loose enough so that their thinking is such, that they are always looking for ambiguities. “Now, wait a minute, wait a minute. Are you teasing, or aren’t you teasing? Does it work that way, or doesn’t it work that way?” You don’t want to confuse the child, you don’t want to pretend that the world works magically, when of course it works scientifically, but you want the child to be loose enough so that they are always thinking and evaluating: “Wait a second, now. Let *me* think this through, and figure out what’s actually going on behind the mere words.”

It is the action of mind in considering options—not learned *things*—that is truly human.

And this, of course, is why a computer can’t think, and it can’t make jokes, and it also can’t translate, in point of fact.

So, what, then, does this discussion of jokes tell us about what we are here for, what human identity is, and in whose image we are made? A frequent form of the question is: Do we live for the future, do we live for now, or do we live for past generations? In fact, you have to live your life in such a way that you are simultaneously living for the past, the present, and the future, by living at the level of the higher hypothesis. Live such that everything that you do is maximizing the Good in all chronologically past time, the Good in all chronologically present time, and the Good in all chronologically future time. You are living simultaneously on all of these levels.

LaRouche, in his essay on time-reversal, says the following:

When is the future? At what point in time? Similarly, what is the beginning-point in time from which to define the cumulative past with which the future is to collide? The answer to this seeming paradox, was already known to Plato, by Augustine of Hippo, and therefore, also, Thomas Aquinas: *All time is subsumed under a general regime of simultaneity!* The highest expression of *change*, is that lattice of higher hypotheses which expresses the transfinite notion of hypothesizing the higher hypothesis. What underlies that lattice? That lattice is underlain by what Plato

distinguishes as *the Good*. In the *analysis situs* of hypothesis, that Good is “simultaneously” efficient in all times and places which might exist. Thus, in those terms of reference, the past and future, as hypothesis, are existent as efficient agency in each present moment. [“Time-Reversal,” p. 42]

With that scientific view in mind, we have the basis and the tools for understanding what is, of necessity, the most important question for all of us: What is human identity, what is the meaning of life? One must live in such a way as to give meaning to all past, all present, and all future existence, simultaneously. And, in this regard, I think the proper conclusion is the beautiful statement of Leibniz: “One is obligated, in conscience, to act in such a way that one can give an accounting to God of the time and power He has lent us.”

If such an outlook permeates our lives, we are on the pathway of searching for Truth, and will have a laughing good time in the process. Not so the formalists, the fundamentalists of all stripes, who are uniformly hostile to humor—and Truth. Which brings me to my concluding comment on precisely this point:

There was recently one helluva dispute among a group of ten rabbis. All distinguished scholars, they could not reach unanimity on a particular theological point. The majority of eight could not convince the two hold-outs: they argued, they explained, they pulled out the Talmud to prove their point. All to no avail.

Then, as the leader of the eight was making his most incisive and convincing argument, citing from the well-worn Talmud in his hands, one of the two minority rabbis prayed to God: “Please, God, give me a sign to confirm that I am right.” Out of the blue, a bolt of lightning struck a nearby tree stump, reducing it to smoldering rubble.

“All right, all right,” the leader of the majority faction sputtered. “Eight to three.”

NOTES

1. Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., “The Essential Role of “Time-Reversal” in Mathematical Economics,” *Fidelio*, Winter 1996 (Vol. V, No. 4).
2. For a discussion of hypothesis and theorem-lattices, see Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., “U.S. Law: Neither Truth Nor Justice,” *Executive Intelligence Review*, Aug. 23, 1996 (Vol. 23, No. 34).
3. G.W. Leibniz, “Third Letter to Clarke” (1716), in *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. by Leroy E. Loemker (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), p. 682.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 656.
5. LaRouche, “U.S. Law,” *op. cit.*, p. 27.
6. Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., “On the Subject of Evolution: The Descent from Bush to Man,” *Executive Intelligence Review*, Nov. 15, 1996 (Vol. 23, No. 46).
7. Nicolaus of Cusa, *The Layman: About Mind* (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), p. 43, and subsequent citations.