

Max Furlaud

THE WORKINGS OF WONDER

Man's life on earth is the funniest thing that ever happened. It is the most loving and ingenious comedy turn ever staged, with the most spectacular and delightful ending ever conceived. It is the best and biggest joke ever told. Man, however, seldom gets the point of the joke until he is dead.

In fact, if he did get the point of the joke, he probably would die. It would sink through his heart like the point of a sword and he would just expire . . . of wonder, of relief, of love, of belly laughter infectious as the plague. Or maybe he would succumb to the calamity of enlightenment, death's most rare, elegant and painful form.

At any rate, if we all got the joke, humanity would not survive in its present state. Worldly authority, and the thrust of revolution which it contains and feeds upon, would collapse in a fit of the giggles. Man simply cannot afford to get the point of the joke. He must remain its beloved butt for ever, until the final slapstick whack. And like the butt of any joke only more so, he must ponder, worry, try to figure everything out, and think and think and think.

Since the first flicker of history, he has been thinking so continuously, so plentifully, that by now his thoughts

wrap up the ecosystem in a squirming tarpaulin, with no visible seams. They permeate the clouds. They pollute the seas. They soil the beauties of the valleys when the evening falls. They filter out the grand bronzed meaning of our grandfather the sun. All equally false, all equally useful in particular circumstances, in our flesh they take root, becoming by degrees the tissue, cartilage and bones of our existence, the structure of our lives. And upon our skill in modifying this structure to suit our successively emerging needs depends our ability to find the meaning, generosity and gaiety of our existence upon earth.

So the art of thought, which is the art of life, begins with the art of changing your mind. If you wish to remain undivided, at one with your physical and mental energy, if you wish to avoid unnecessary inner conflicts that waste your wits and enthusiasm, you must learn to die to old mental structures and be born to new ones. You must learn to do this not just once, as in spiritual or psychotherapeutic conversion, but again and again and again. You must learn that what used to appear true in one stage of your journey is no longer relevant in the next stage.

And someone who can bend their mind to the changing thrust of their own impulse is able to move with

particular ease among the vicissitudes of this world. Partly this is a matter of toughening up, of the beneficent results of the gymnastics of creative selfishness. Being somewhat naked and truth-burned in the company of others who are buttoned up in hot, cozy flack suits, not to mention shining armor, naturally makes a person spare and resilient.

Mainly, however, his apparent good fortune springs from the very nature of experience. The Here and Now, that moving point where our senses rub up against the scalding surface of eternity, is fundamentally the same for everyone everywhere always. But it also contains intermittent, occasional events which are different for each of us at different moments.

These occasional events include a few rare peak experiences in which some people seem sometimes to touch the Ultimate Reality, with its blinding light-beyond-darkness, and eternal love. They also include a great many valley experiences in which people are often inspired by visions, voices, small upliftings, premonitions and chance encounters. These occasional happenings, whether we know it or not, are what give direction to our lives. Their essential characteristic is astonishment. As soon as we are no longer open to being surprised by them, as soon as we accept some scientific, psychological or religious explanation for them, the wrap of our thought shuts them out. There is no room for them. They go away. They don't come back.

So while our minds are naturally preoccupied with causality, the phenomena which have the greatest effects upon our organism as a whole are by their very nature acausal, and this paradox is enough to drive anyone crazy. They begin as babies to build little skull-shaped houses on little family islands in the midsts of its deep, mysterious waters. They go on as children and adults to construct paper bridges of thought from the lost past to the non-existent future. They avoid the present as if they would drown in it, which as infants they almost did.

Indeed, had we not all had the good sense, when we were tots, to close ourselves off to the forbidden wonder of the Here and Now, we should have perished. To survive, we had to have the humility to pretend to surrender to the deception of thought as if it were solid reality. We had to accept imprisonment in the institutionalized darkness of our environment in order to acquire the alibis, aliases and disguises we needed to grow up. Like spies dropped by obstetrical parachute into hostile territory, we had to appear to abandon our true identity. But in point of fact we never really did lose our primal capacity for the wisdom of innocence. Below the reach of thought it remained with us, like a chromosome-sized prince zippered up in a microchip-sized toadsuit in the secret depths of our heart. It resides in us still, a secret link to the old block of eternity's computer. It is the seed which makes every human being potentially different from every other, and whose sprouting and

flowering and fruiting and seeding when we are big and strong, is the true story of our earthly existence.

And there is such power in this green fuse within us! If we have the luck, and the right sort of naivete, and the right sort of cunning, boldness and timidity, to permit its unfolding, how our lives change! If we have the trust and the wit and the letting-go and the cynicism to do what we want to do with adult judiciousness in the usually foolish and infantile order in which we want to do it, how naturally kind the universe is to us, at least for a while! What strange and marvellous things begin to happen inside of us, and outside too! It is as if the revolution in our hearts were synchronized with the revolution of our planet. Nothing can resist us. Suddenly, there are co-conspirators everywhere. There are angels in the seaweed, in the glitter of the mountain peaks, in the teeming counter-culture of our dreams, in the smiles of strangers and in the attentions of new teachers. For now we are hungry for new thoughts to protect our growing organism. And the teachers - psychotherapists, gurus, priests lovers - are hungry for us, for compulsive reasons of their own which we may subsequently discover when we become teachers in our turn, which we probably will.

At any rate, the fishers of men hook us. If we happen to fall for the right bait and get the right teachers, we acquire new mental structures which give us space to grow. But then, in the course of time, the new

limits prove insufficient or ill-fitting. Our organisms begin to feel pinched again. The colours fade. Though we are probably not back where we started from, the compass of our wonder no longer functions and so we can no longer find our own way. All that remains to show us where to go are the necessarily obsolete accounts of the journeys of our new guides, and the even more superannuated travel instructions of the long dead saviours of mankind. We are rather like citizens of some new nation where, after an exciting struggle and some exhilarating celebrations, the old despots have been replaced by new commissars. Unable to afford the agony of a new uprising, we learn to bear the daily pain of a new tyranny. We drift from the mystery of faith to the narcosis of belief. Our faces acquire the deadpan expression, and our bodies the strained appearance, which accompany organismic deadlock. Our every word and action become a trifle more wise, humble or jolly than we really are. Having been hatched out of one egg, we are now prisoners in another, in which we may well remain, be we leaders or followers, until we die.

Or maybe not. For if we stay in self-awareness, if we attend to the wriggle of our desiring, neither anticipating nor denying it, if we sink into ourselves to finger the shispered hieroglyph within us which contains the instructions for our use, if we grope in the general direction of our secret slithery yearning, then eventually we may slip free once again. By degrees, through the pain

of mindful experience, we will learn what the mind can never teach us and we can never teach anybody; we will learn the geography of the land which lies beyond thinking. We will see that the pieces of thought's swirling jigsaw only appear to coincide. Observed from the angle of our heart's lens, they are seen to be on different planes. They have eternity between them. They have us between them. And with this realization something altogether odd may happen to us. A sort of electrification may occur in the marrow of our mind's bones, and in our physical spine as well. It will be as if we had grown a wire of faith on which to link together, like a string of pearls, the amazing nonsense of our happenstance. And then, quite unexpectedly, like a silent clap of thunder, a light may go on in our hearts.

Now the light in your heart may be a very tiny little thing, a funny little thing no bigger than the pip of a cherry. It may go off from time to time. It may sputter out, like a reluctant Tinkerbell, just when you think you need it most. It may remain extinguished for hours or months. Furthermore, it will have cost you so much! In order to acquire it, you will have had to abandon hope in the wisdom of mankind. You will have had to give

up the luxury of quoting other people. You will have had to learn to be what you are and say what you know. When you don't know anything, you will have had to learn to shut up and listen, suffering fools gladly and tolerating sages as best you can. You will have had to be inconsistent. You will have had to be wrong. You will have had to be unpopular and nonconformist. Perhaps the world, which is populated exclusively by secret agents who represent the same power as you do, may in its own sweet time conform to you. Perhaps, on the other hand, it may not, as your fellow agents are suspicious of folks who might blow their cover. However, you won't mind too much, thanks to the funny little light in your heart, which will warm you and relax you. Though you are an awkward, simple person, there will be something graceful and debonair about you, for you will know that the world beyond the land beyond the frontiers of your mind lies right between your ribs.

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