

I am a human being, so another of my special qualities is the ability to laugh. Laughter begins powerfully in childhood and if we can keep it going into old age we have probably had a good life. To lose our natural tendency to laugh heartily would be at least as disastrous as losing any of our other special qualities of humanness.

Way back in Blog 7 I toyed briefly with the idea that I could be thought of as a machine. I say ‘toyed with’ because I have learned from the most astute observers of human nature that this ridiculous idea is also one of our best triggers for spontaneous laughter. Unforeseen lapsing into a mechanised version of humanness, with robotic reactions and movements, is one of the sights that makes us laugh.

Our sense of humour naturally pokes fun at rigidity. Caricatures and cartoons exaggerate human failings in a mechanical way such as wheels falling off, a boat sinking, or a train wreck about to happen. Engaging with the mindless, mechanical, figure that keeps bouncing back (re-appearing or repeating words), re-activates our sense of humour from childhood. The Jack-in-the-Box is the mechanical metaphor for this effect. Ridiculously inappropriate actions by a solemn, absent-minded, official or the ‘snow-ball effect’ when one mishap is heaped on another, over and over, are other examples.

One of McGilchrist’s associates in arguing against an overload of left-brain attention is John Cleese, the writer and actor who is famous for his comical creations. He emphasises the need for spontaneity, unpredictability and imperfection that are challenged by political correctness, bureaucracy and taking ourselves too seriously. I think of him when I appreciate the subtlety of a good-humoured insult or appreciate irony and sarcasm, thanks to my right-brain knowing that the meaning I make depends on the context in which the words are spoken.

Too much left-brain attention not only kills humour – it inhibits all Creativity. The fear of not being in control and the desire for clarity and predictability narrows our mind and restricts our Intelligence. Spontaneous laughter has been described as a ‘momentary respite from reality.’ As with other human necessities, we don’t make it happen – we allow it to BE. It is part of our BELONGING, being much more likely to happen in the company of other people.

The evidence that laughing heals many of our ailments is everywhere. The deeper issue is that these special qualities of humanness that I am describing all emanate from a place beneath our conscious awareness. The emotions that shape our conversation, the lively **spirit** and implicit knowledge that guides our understanding, and the natural ability to laugh, are what I call the substrate of our Creative mind.

Left-brain attention does not fuel this Creativity that we need. For one thing it’s too quick and jumps to conclusions. Creative works may look as if they just happened, but they come only after prolonged effort. To understand anything worthwhile is a slow process that takes hours, days and weeks, including bouts of total inactivity or aimless play – and overnight sleeps.

We can take the time we need, trusting in the **breadth** of mind that our right-brain attention gives us, because the evolutionary changes that are happening are not trivial – they are profound. Laughing out loud is one of the ways we can **appreciate** the enthusiasm of the human **spirit** as it flows in the space beneath our conscious awareness.