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Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic (Dover Books on Western Philosophy)

Henri Bergson

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Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic (Dover Books on Western Philosophy) Henri Bergson
In this great philosophical essay, Henri Bergson explores why people laugh and what laughter means. Written at the turn of the twentieth century, *Laughter* explores what it is in language that makes a joke funny and what it is in us that makes us laugh.
One of the functions of humor, according to Bergson, is to help us retain our humanity during an age of mechanization. Like other philosophers, novelists, poets, and humorists of his era, Bergson was concerned with the duality of man and machine. His belief in life as a vital impulse, indefinable by reason alone, informs his perception of comedy as the relief we experience upon distancing ourselves from the mechanistic and materialistic. "A situation is always comic," Bergson notes, "if it participates simultaneously in two series of events which are absolutely independent of each other, and if it can be interpreted in two quite different meanings." The philosopher's thought-provoking insights (e.g., "It seems that laughter needs an echo. Our laughter is always the laughter of a group.") keep this work ever-relevant as a thesis on the principles of humor.

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