

Cosmic Humor

Once at the muddy building-site of the First Goetheanum in the foothills of the Jura Mountains in Switzerland, Rudolf Steiner, balancing on one foot as he pulled on his boot before a photographer pleaded, "Don't take my picture like this or all the anthroposophists will be hopping around tomorrow on one leg!"

Although his writings and lectures often give the impression of a cold, Germanic esotericist, anecdotes concerning *Herr Doktor's* life reveal a very outgoing, warmhearted soul. Still the results of Steiner's spiritual research seem to many readers to entertain little room for humor. It is therefore striking to note that humor plays an essential role in anthroposophy.

As an artistic expression of his world view, Steiner carved a thirty-six foot tall wood sculpture entitled, "The Representative of Humanity." In this monumental work which though little known in art history, ranks as one of the greatest wood carvings of the Western world, Rudolf Steiner placed a curious winged being above a group of five larger figures. This hovering creature with a playful smirk on its asymmetrical face, Steiner referred to as "Cosmic Humor." Looking down upon the action below, this figure implies the importance of a sense of humor even in the face of the world's great mysteries.

The statue was intended to stand as a backdrop on the stage of the First Goetheanum, a theatre and lecture hall, called by the newspapers of its day the "Anthroposophic Temple." This building, based on principles of sacred architecture combined with Steiner's own brilliant innovations, burned down on New Years Eve 1922-23, before the wood carving was finished and set in place. The "Representative of Humanity," or "Group" as it is often called, can be seen today in the Second Goetheanum, near Basel, Switzerland.

The central figure of this group sculpture is the striding representative of humanity, Christ. Its eyes radiate compassion and its furrowed forehead reveals the two-petalled brow *chakra*. Steiner said of this figure that its mouth must express itself as an organ for speech rather than a mere opening for

taking in food. The sculptural forms of the chest must demonstrate outflowing love, as the left and right arm suggest balance between the heights and the depths.

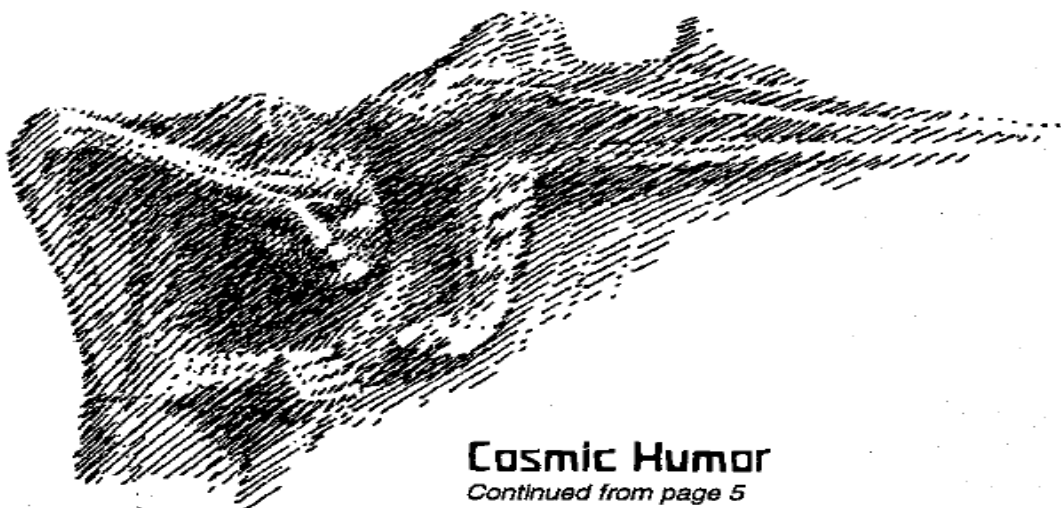
In a cave below this central Christ figure is a hideously gnarled creature, called Ahriman, after the ancient Persian spirit of darkness. This being works in the world driven by the desire to turn humanity into machines, both physically and spiritually, and to reduce everything to statistics, equations, and atoms through materialistic thinking. Chained to his cavern by bonds of golden light, Ahriman is overcome by the love streaming toward him from the central figure.

High above is Lucifer doing a falling back-flip over the upraised left arm of Christ. Lucifer, the "Light Bringer," is restrained from his godly enthusiasm and upward spirit flight by the selfless wisdom of the representative of humanity.

Lucifer wishes for humanity all the spiritual gifts and capacities of the gods with no responsibility for others or the earth. These two counter forces, Lucifer and Ahriman, are usually portrayed as a single opposing force—the devil creating a dualistic world of good versus bad. However, Steiner saw evil as being possible in two directions balanced only from a central point, as on the cross-beam of a scale. For example the extremes of cowardice, on the one hand, and foolhardiness on the other, are balanced by courage as a virtuous middle ground. Steiner saw illness in this way as well, with "cold" or contracting diseases (sclerosis) as one extreme and "hot," expanding illnesses (inflammation) as the other. Health occurs as a balance between the two opposites. This is the human condition within a threefold universe—finding the mean or harmony between opposites.



Representative of Humanity, wood sculpture by Rudolf Steiner.



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Steiner says that this was known in ancient traditions: "The pupils of the Mysteries were shown that free will can only be developed if a person is in a position to go wrong in one of two directions."

Next to the "Group's" central figure, one sees both Ahriman and Lucifer repeated, this time working together. Steiner suggested that the three temptations of Christ in the wilderness, immediately following the baptism in the Jordan, were first directed by Lucifer, then by Ahriman and Lucifer together, and finally by Ahriman. One sees these three archetypal temptations confronting the central figure from all sides.

These tempting influences work within our daily lives, pulling us to and fro. It is a great mystery that we need this situation in order to choose and strive to achieve true human freedom. What often is the only hope and help within this constant struggle is a sense of humor.

Rudolf Steiner recommended to the first Waldorf teachers that each day's class lesson should bring the children to the brink of tears over the human drama, but also students should laugh and live in to the full joys of life. This breathing in and out of the soul is essential to the child's developing individuality and sense of freedom.

As we gather in our study groups and meet in our lectures, workshops, and conferences to deepen and expand our work in anthroposophy a truly far reaching commitment we ought not forget the humor that lightens and ever shines on our way.

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