

*Homo sum. Humani nihil a me alienum puto.*

- Terence

## *Introduction*

### Part One: D&D

Here comes *Philosophical Fragments: A new book series from Northwest Passage Books*. It is a foray into literature, drama, pastiche, puppetry, and even poetry; albeit, principally and primarily, in a satirical, comic, farcical, and/or comedic light—a work of *humour*, in short. Which is *not* to say a light-hearted, innocent or childish thing: *Humour can be very serious*. Let me repeat it: *Humour can be very serious*. Got it, folks, hm? *Humour can be very serious*. It can deal with heavy hearts, sin, and the most adult topics, whether bodily or spiritual. For one, do ponder on how the greatest poet from my native country wrote, back in the 14th century, a nominal “**comedy**” dealing with God, the Cosmos, and Humankind’s Fate. Even the cruel horrors of Hell, and Heaven’s bliss, are part and parcel of his “comedy.” In Italy, we have to study Dante at all school levels: Believe me, it is no laughing matter! And yet, decades later, I am grateful to my teachers, since wisdom thrives in Dante’s *Comedy*. (As to why he chose this term, peruse his **13th epistle** to Can Grande della Scala, ca. 1318.) But I ain’t alone: I doubt that any Italian writer isn’t in his debt, whether consciously or not. As my Scottish wife likes gibing: “Educated Italians aren’t Catholic: *They believe in Dante.*”

For another, read and reflect on Huggleikur Dagsson’s comics, in which no conceivable cruel excess has been spared: Mutilations, tortures, suicide, rape, golden showers, bestiality, etc. Openly and even obscenely, his humour taps into the creepiest corners of the psyche. Or meditate on how the ancient Greek virtuoso of *irony*, and the holy founder of my academic discipline, was condemned to *death* for trying to make people acknowledge that they were *taking a lot of things for granted*, i.e., their prejudices, for which they frequently had no well-built rational foundation—if they were even *aware* of those prejudices in the very first place. Naturally, I mean *Socrates* of Athens: Plato’s famous mentor. Socrates’ sorry destiny

reminds us of the fact that *not only plenty of people don't know, but also don't know that they don't know, and truly don't want to know that they don't know that they don't know*. At the same time, as the great **Elias Canetti** noticed, most people cherish passing judgment nonetheless. And it isn't always *someone else* who can be prejudiced: What's *your* common sense? What are *your* beliefs' foundations? How regularly do *you* reflect upon them, if ever? How would *you* start defining, say, "cruelty," "humour," "judgment," or "good" and "evil?"

### Part Two: SJ

The Socratic 'game' is known to be *ironic*, hence challenges ingrained *habits of thought and action*. It is *ipso dicto* a witty game of *humour*, yet also one that can be *experienced* as being *cruel*. That is why, regularly, even learned attempts at making people think are *resented*. (As noted, *inter alia*, by Friedrich Nietzsche, Vilfredo Pareto, and James Hillman, this catty resentment reaches its meanest peaks when the fostered thinking applies to spirituality and sexuality.) Who likes having to reconsider the assumptions upon which their world is built? How to cope with a world that, suddenly, has become eerily unfamiliar? Who enjoys realising that, more often than not, *nothing solid* stands beneath his or her assumptions, but repetition, conformity, and the ever-powerful grip of small-town mentality? Consider, e.g., how *immediately* we tend to credit people's ire as the moral authority about humour. Why? Can't we grasp how humour isn't serious, i.e., non-*bona-fide* communication? And can't we sense the *objectively* conventional, mutable, supple nature of language itself? People may well take *subjective* offence at sheer words, but, *seriously*, are words timeless facets of any absolute reality? (We may cherish "freedom," but can't even snap pragmatics' airy fetters!) Or why are satirists allowed to, at the very least, "punch up," when *punching* is cruel *per se*? And, above all, which psycho-social forces and unconscious flows stir and set all in motion?

Here appears *another* irony: The Socratic game is but the *first* step in human self-discovery, which continues once said *habits of thought and action* have been dislodged, and discloses a more plutonic path than the sole fencing between competing arguments. As revealed by Plato's own use of mystical-poetic myths in his aptly rhetorical and highly logical Socratic dialogues, reason's ultimate denouement points in the direction of un-reason: After quasi-, half-, and pseudo-rational beliefs are bracketed away, *irrationality* is yet to be grasped. A thorough, truly *philosophical* enterprise is one in which *all* bets are off, and *all* paths open to

exploration, such that the profoundest recesses of the soul may have to be sensed and searched. Anything less open-ended would already be taking much, perhaps *too* much, for granted. Nobody may be in charge but logic, then, whilst the inquirer's imaginative powers set the domain, which can extend well beyond or beneath those aspects of reality that are most immediate. If Socrates is the first psycho-pomp here, Jung is the chosen *second*. And do not be overly surprised by this twist: As Dante's case teaches us, one must descend into the icy abyss of Hell before being able to climb up, towards the luminous vision of God. But allow me take things less hurriedly, lest the plot is lost from the very start. Rather, let's note how several Big Names have *already* been dropped. As said, humour is *serious* business.

### *A Tale of Two Giorgio's*

Should you take a good long look at the many titles of the scholarly journals, books, and encyclopaedias to which I have variously contributed throughout my career since the 1990s, i.e., more than 200 articles, chapters, review essays, opinion pieces, etc., you would reasonably conclude that I am an outright academic animal, a founder of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Akureyri, and a blasted and grey-bearded Professor of Philosophy, which happens to be my professional title—in short, a *serious* person. Which I am. I can even be horridly boring, if I want to—no, it's not a dare!

Yet, there has always been another 'me' too, who can't live without humour, likes playing the fool, and has rather little self-respect. These two 'me's' have coexisted in an uneasy truce for many years, especially because being the former has always seemed to require the downplaying of the latter: The Professor operates against the Clown. (Or the *buffo*, I should state, given my past, instructive operatic experiences at, alas, an amateur level.) A compromise of sorts between the two 'me's' was finally reached or, perhaps, occurred fortuitously, a few years ago. I mean a four-tome *serious* book series for the biggest, very *serious*, academic publisher in Continental Europe, De Gruyter (now De Gruyter-Brill): Even the illustrious German publisher's Dutch-sounding name exudes nothing but seriousness! Entitled *Humour & Cruelty*, I co-authored it with a *serious* bio-psychologist, i.e., professor Ársæll Már Arnarson of the University of Iceland, to whom I owe a huge debt of gratitude.

Humour had entered the purview of the serious 'me'—and of the *serious* Ársæll, as you can gather. But there is *more*. It's not just a matter of having two sides in my soul, or more—as all of us do, whether or not we acknowledge our *inner plurality*. This plurality being a key theme in **Jungian**, analytical psychology, to which Ársæll and I have devoted considerable attention *qua* academics: In a *serious* way. If, then, when perusing my latest work, you are reminded of Freud, Groddeck, Reich, Frankl, Ricoeur, Kristeva, Copjec, Rubin, Hillman, and/or the themes and imagery characterising psychodynamics, then you're probably 'getting' most things right (e.g., *Philosophical Fragments* comprise an unsubtle, wry wealth of pre-modern "humours:" Tears, rain, blood, wine, semen, mist, vomit, etc. Depending on each reader's *inner complexes*, some of these fluids will have a more forthright emotional effect, hence revealing *ipso affectu* something of that reader *to* that reader.) But if you don't take psychodynamics *seriously*, well, then your own 'things' might get wrong, in the end. (In the age of neuropsychology, Freud and Jung are being rediscovered and reappraised; cf., *inter alia*, the research conducted by **Hugh McGovern et alia**, or **neuropsychanalysis**.) Then, do not rush and come to me crying: Go see a professional therapist, for goodness' sake! Okay?

### *A Tale of Two Approaches*

Now take a good long look at the text of footnote #25 in the first of the serious four tomes for De Gruyter's serious book series, i.e., our serious 2022 *Volume 1: A Philosophical Exploration of the Humanities and Social Sciences* (p.5):

*As much as we would like to reach a broader public, the academic circles are the likely recipients of our work. Also, our academic prose may be inherently limited and limiting anyhow. On this subject, the US philosopher D.F. Krell (2019, 1 and 9) claims that deeply emotional issues such as "cruelty" and "tenderness" are better expressed in a "style" that "is less formal than rigorous readers may expect and demand" in, say, "scholarly articles".*

(Cf. Krell, David Farrell (2019). *The Cudgel and the Caress. Reflections on Cruelty and Tenderness* (Albany: SUNY), and Camus, Albert (2006) *Conférences et discours* (Paris: Gallimard))

“Cruelty” for one, but “humour” too, can be argued to call for a conscious treatment that pursues the kind of truth which the Algerian existentialist writer Albert Camus dubbed “*la vérité charnelle*”: The carnal truth; the embodied truth; a truth which is not reduced to, nor mutated into, a mathematical average, a cold conceptual category, an Excel spreadsheet, or even a clinical notion (Camus 2006, 345); a truth which is centred in each *living* person and, as such, reflects the *felt* side of being, the *lived experience* of each person, rather than the interpersonal, or even intra-personal, abstract ‘stuff’ of which all languages and much of representational thinking are made, e.g., statistics, laws, theorems, and ethical treatises.

In this respect, the Danish father of modern existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard, would have spoken of “*subjective truth*,” e.g., *your love for your partner, your academic discipline, or your God*, none of which can be reduced to or even grasped by “objective truth”, such that “ $2+2 = 4$ ” or “31% of Iceland’s dentists have committed acts of wanton cruelty against animals in their youth.” (Yes, I am joking about the island’s dentists; but only to a degree.)

As pursued by the likes of Kierkegaard and Camus, germane empirical closeness to this “subjective truth” requires artistic and literary forms of apprehension and expression of meaningful, molar, *human* experiences that the natural and social sciences, in a sort of methodological trade-off favouring taxonomical precision and strict, telling standards of “objectivity,” cannot approach as such and, at best, presuppose throughout—most often *tacitly*—for their operations. This key point was already argued, *inter alia*, by the economic historian Piero V. Mini, back in the 1970s, whom Ársæll and I cited *verbatim* in our 2023 *Volume 2: Dangerous Liaisons* (p.103), i.e., the second tome of our series for De Gruyter:

*The Inability to deal with certain aspects of reality on the part of any discipline that prizes systematization (form) is well known. The most brilliant explorations of “states of mind”, for instance, are not to be found in psychology texts but in novels. The reason is obvious. Psychology tries to explain taxonomically what is not amenable to be so explained. The novelist is free from such a delusion.*

(Cf. Mini, Piero V. (1974). *Philosophy and Economics: The Origins and Development of Economic Theory* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida), p.152)

The four-tome serious book series for our serious German publisher was and is a *serious*

attempt at exploring, mapping, and grasping the many fluid meanings of “humour” and “cruelty,” their mutual assistance, and the ways in which they can fight each other. As a *serious* philosophical and socio-scientific endeavour, our work made use of all the *serious*, standard categories of thought, time-honoured methodologies, and inevitable background assumptions characterising philosophy and the social sciences, psychology *in primis*. And *that’s that*: An *ontic* approach to humour and cruelty, not an *ontological* one—were we to follow the esoteric terminological lead of another famous existentialist thinker of the last century, i.e., Martin Heidegger, a declared Nazi, but also the German champion of ἀλήθεια. (Alas, the world of armchair philosophy is as filled with ambiguities as that of humankind!)

The four-tome serious book series for De Gruyter was and is *a synthetic and analytical account* of humour and cruelty, and their many interrelations, yet *not their revelation* (from the Latin “*revelare*,” i.e., to unveil; cf., *inter alia*, Schopenhauer’s take on the Veil of Maya). At best, such a rich synthetic and analytical account could only *point* towards the deeper metaphysical and, above all, existential intuitions springing from humour and cruelty, i.e., as these real-life phenomena are experienced by an embodied person capable of complex emotional apprehension and attendant reactions. To draw near humour and cruelty in their *lived import* and *affective authenticity*, then, another, *less abstract* path was needed.

### *A Tale of Two Primatologies*

In said four-tome serious book series for our serious German publisher, humour and cruelty had been approached methodically and studied carefully, but always from a safe, removed, cold, calculating, and cool-headed distance. Arguably we operated like Harry Harlow did when studying young rhesus monkeys getting attached to soothing, soft, fake mothers rather than food-dispensing, wire-covered, equally-fake ones. There may have been *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, but what of *adaequatio affectus et intellectus*? How can a serious inquirer step closer to the tender, throbbing, tenuous, thick, and tense psychic *underbelly* whence humour and cruelty emerge, typically in an ambiguous, blended way?

In line with the insightful understanding of *life* developed in recent decades by one of Canada’s philosophical ‘giants,’ **John McMurtry**, i.e., as the *for-us* fundamental, physical,

and metaphysical reality unfolding along *three* mutually non-exclusive ontological planes:

**(1)** biological *motility* (e.g., the humours' eucrasia in Galenic medicine, loss of function caused by cruel mutilations) had been duly addressed in our four-book project by way of comprehensive listing and careful assessment of extant socio-scientific studies; and

**(2)** conscious representational and ratiocinating *thought* had been similarly dealt with by dint of extensive philosophical reflection (e.g., the conceptual histories of "humour" and "cruelty" in Western culture, from ancient Graeco-Roman sources to contemporary ones);

**(3)** *felt being*, however, was largely missing from the picture, notwithstanding recurrent mentions of "feelings," "passions," "sentiments," *et similia*. Naming these affect-based psychic phenomena and, *au fond*, taking them for granted while, concomitantly, keeping them at arm's length, is not *revealing* them. No major ἀλήθεια could occur, in a nutshell.

What would it be like, I ended up wondering and wanting to do, to approach humour and cruelty in the way in which, say, Dian Fossey approached her beloved mountain gorillas, or Jane Goodall her chimpanzees, i.e., getting to know each animal for the unique individual which they were, including, *nota bene*, their dark side? How could humour and cruelty be lived with, observed in close proximity, and recounted faithfully, in a candid, uncut, and comprehensive display of their vast, intricate, rich, and sometimes puzzling or perchance disheartening behavioural and experiential complexities, even if such a brave ethological choice should mean tolerating plenty of stench and the burning bites of noxious parasites?

The jungle, after all, is no pristine laboratory, nor a cozy office at a university. And so is *lived* and *felt life* too, at least for the near-totality of us humans: A vale of *tears*, i.e., yet another fluid *humour*, which we regularly associate with the *cruelty of life* itself—and far less so with laughter, e.g., the dimorphous expression whereby we cry from laughing. It is no surprise, then, that timid and petty minds resist comedic imagery reminding them of this vale, and seek refuge in rosy dreamworlds, trenchant dogmatism, and echo chambers. Still, even if uncomfortable, for ἀλήθεια to take place, the truth must come out. And that is a task with which the arts and the humanities have been entrusted since their very dawn. Discomfort too is to be shown. Thus, say, the art of comics must include *Watership Down* and *Akira*, not just prim Disney stories, which are reassuring, but also deceitful—and for a

hefty profit too.

But one doesn't need to get drenched in tears to sample cruelty. Cruelty's association with humour is much more pervasive and prosaic than that. The unmistakably sadistic thrills of killers, avengers, soldiers, warriors, psychos, and torturers—often dramatised by novelists, playwrights, and actors in crime stories, tragedies, Westerns, sci-fi and horror movies—are obvious tokens of wry, smirking, and laughing humour's admixture with cruelty. Outright mockery, vitriolic satire, *Schadenfreude*, belittling jokes, bawdy, and all varieties of morbid and taboo humour follow suit too, also when directed at oneself: Self-deprecation being as Nietzschean an example of inverted, masochistic, self-humiliating cruelty as there can be. Thus, once again, crying and laughing find a viable way to join hands and occur together.

Perhaps, only absurdism, sharp wordplay, and childish frolics are innocent, but they can equally and as easily fail *qua* humour, causing their initiator/s to come across as staid and inept—yet another shade of cruelty tied to humour, whose socio-moral 'grey areas' might be as wide as humour itself, for people's positive reaction *can't* be guaranteed. How many times do jokes land flat? And how many times do people take offense at jokes? Not even an orangutan dressed like Kant is a sure win: "Cruelty to animals!" someone could cry, irately. Not to mention what the orangutans could complain about, should they be able to speak. Plenty of human beings, at any rate, make for very prickly primates, often and in any case. As even proverbial wisdom notes, there is no rest for the wicked: It must be a law of nature.

To make a long story short, I eventually realised that I had to try and produce *art* myself—and, I must add, I am lucky enough to live in a country where artistic freedom is still alive, as exemplified by Huggleikur Dagsson and his fellow Icelandic comedians. Imagination, in the far North, is, for the moment, allowed to crank up, rather than being cracked down on.

### *A Tale of Two Series*

Since some annoying health issues have gradually caused me to abandon the world of music altogether, and I have never been much of a painter nor a sculptor, I resorted to the noble

art of *creative writing*: Literature, drama, poetry, etc. A few of the *experimental* things which I wrote were published early on, e.g., my 2021 “*Bestiarium Academicum*” for the *Philosophy of Humor Yearbook*, the 2025 Italian-language book entitled *Burloni animati in libera uscita*, and the last quarter of my 2025 collection of philosophical essays for Northwest Passage Books, entitled *Thinking and Laughing*, which was received in a most positive way by fellow philosophers—one of them suggesting that I might well be “a comic genius who has finally, in the fullness of his maturity, realized his true calling.” (Richard Prust, “*Review of Giorgio Baruchello, Thinking and Laughing*, Northwest Passage Books, 2025.” *Israeli Journal of Humor Research*, September 2025, Vol. 13: 105—8, p.108; I am not saying he’s right; still, his positive review’s got a nice ring to it!). Most of my *experiments*, however, were simply jotted down and set aside. I didn’t really know what to do with them.

Anyhow, after showing some such experiments to an experienced Canadian playwright and English-literature professor, and a Croatian actor, auteur, and academic specialising in Canadian studies, and receiving the most encouraging feedback, I decided to look for a publisher. Given that, by then, I had already collaborated with Northwest Passage Books, a *small* Canadian imprint, I submitted a ‘bunch’ of short stories, comic dialogues, closet plays, etc. to the same publishing house, which replied, once more to my surprise, most encouragingly. Not only did they approve of the nature and aims of my writings, but embraced their style too, which echoes, *inter alia*, Modernist, Dada, Beatnik, and Punk art. (I leave the appraisal of my art’s quality to the readers, but I stand by its honest humanity.)

Given also that I had already *six* volumes of *Philosophical Essays* in their catalogue, and that the innate comic ideas and literary creations would not stop visiting me, we ended up agreeing on *six* volumes of *Philosophical Fragments*: The new book series at issue; and, in particular, the first volume of the same, *Uncanny Soulscapes in Uncustomary Dreamscope*. Collaboration with well-established photographers was secured too, e.g., California-based Armando Gallo and Poland-based Agata Wilczynska, to exploit potent visual imagery as well: For the book covers, mostly; but, also, for the interiors of the books, which aim and attempt at being genuine works of *art*, whether eventually successful or not *as such*. Rare, after all, are those works of art that turn out to be generally-acknowledged masterpieces!

Now, as I’ve just stated, “comic ideas and literary creations would not stop visiting me.” This is *not* equivalent to producing any half-decent literature—and whether or not such a

tried literature conveys the full gamut of tangles between humour and cruelty that Ársæll and I accrued and addressed in our books. Therefore, I want to share with you a process which I call “the cocktail-shaker method.” As unscientific as it is, it should be of interest to human and social scientists researching the topic of *creativity*. Take a good look at its concise rendition in the books’ introductions—I always show *most* of my cards right away:

1. *Numerous starting scenarios and imaginary settings were supplied by oneiric experiences, i.e., dreams et similia, as peculiar as they may be at times.*
2. *Germinal theoretical insights were implanted by deliberate associations with specific philosophical concepts, names, attitudes, disputations and/or schools of thought. Some insights are central to the texts, others are minor or tangential.*
3. *Most works toyed extensively with at least one identifiable rhetorical trope, as per my classification of rhetorical tropes in my volumes five and six for NWP Books. I can never recall the tropes’ names, and that is why I made a list for myself.*
4. *Further esprit was injected by inserting musical puns in the titles of the stories, sketches, and dialogues themselves. (Nothing too highbrow, I hope.) In a few cases, the puns inspired or even guided the contents of the works at issue.*

*Two more chief imaginative axes were also followed closely in each and every short story, brief sketch, and mini-dialogue... [T]hese two additional chief imaginative axes are not revealed hereby to the reader... lest the quintessential and much-desirable fun of inventive hypothesising, wild speculation, interpretative guesswork, clever detection, self-revelatory blunder, and playful disagreement is stupidly spoiled ab ovo.*

Dreams + philosophy + rhetoric + musical references + two secret ingredients, like Coca-Cola... It sounds easy, doesn’t it? Besides, if artificial intelligence (AI) can do all this, so can we. With the difference that AI cannot *feel* anything, whereas *we* can. Moving closer to the muddy, ambivalent, dark psychic domain whence humour and cruelty germinate can thus become an intricate, exhausting, and taxing task, as well as a rewarding and exciting one. It is no surprise, then, that timid and petty minds resist intellection requiring all such efforts. For example, there are more and more people offloading their mental agency onto AI’s ‘marvels.’ Who knows, maybe political processes will be automated in the same manner!

*A Tale of Two Sides*

Part One: Be Wary. Be Wise

*Not when the truth is filthy, but when it is shallow, doth the discerning one go unwillingly into its waters.*

- Friedrich Nietzsche

One note of caution. humour and cruelty bring along an ungainly load of *spiritual tensions* and—let's be brutally honest about it—outright *moral evils*, that cannot be avoided, edulcorated, underplayed, neglected, sidelined, censored, cancelled, shushed or ignored altogether. All such shadows and attendant shadow-contents, including humour's ones, sport ugly looks, muddy boots, sweaty armpits, dirty orifices, crusty eyes, messy hairdos, bad manners, foul language, prejudiced attitudes, very long nails and, recurrently, the sharpest of teeth. Laughing and lacerating are very ancient siblings, and the series *Humour and Cruelty* concluded that this family relationship is alive and kicking. What is more, this family relationship may well be *archetypal*, akin to the Oedipal complex. *Be wary. Be wise.*

As stated at the beginning, writing works of humour does not mean to engage in a light-hearted, innocent or childish task: Humour can be, and has been, *very serious*. Literature and drama are time-honoured paths into the most arcane and archaic murky substrata of the human psyche, *also* when dealing with humour—hence not solely with cruelty, which is much more obviously notorious a notion than the former. Think of Anglophone satirists such as Swift, Huxley, and Vonnegut; or comedians such as Carlin, Glaser, and Silverman; not to mention masters of shock such as Cleese, Page, Welsh, Baron-Cohen, Cho or Tolev. Or non-Anglophone artists such as Fo, Rame, Breillat, Eco, von Trier, Schwab, and Pasolini.

In the *Philosophical Fragments* at issue, the reader does surely encounter all manners of clowns, buffoons, quipsters, wits, and funny characters. Such comic creations are primary and prevalent throughout the new series. At the same time, there appear con men, bigots, reprobates, thugs, killers, haters, prigs, and fishy characters. Such ungainly creations are secondary and subordinate, but not altogether absent; and neither are omitted altogether crude, lowly, painful, raw, unsettling, dark, necessary tokens of their cruel taunts and cruel

misdeeds. **The monkeys on my back are humour and cruelty.** And if primates don't kick-start your imagination, then think of patrons after a few pints. In pubs and at the dinner table, sometimes, masks do come off and *personae* dematerialise. Or step near the magma of feeling that the persons affected by Tourette's syndrome disclose, pointing toward the grim psychic strings attached to the allegedly innocent straitjackets of mores, morality, and good manners. *That* is the vivid, fluid, red-hot, thoroughly human, and yet at times, terribly inhuman, cruel, lived *authenticity* that my works aim at exploring. Again: *Be wary. Be wise.*

If the reader suspects, fears or knows that philosophically- and/or scientifically-inspired *fictional* worlds, words, and/or strings of words may trouble, torment, traumatise or trigger him/her, then s/he should better *abstain* from reading any *Philosophical Fragments*—and so *stay on the safe, well-lit side of his/her psychic life*. Not all hearts were made to delve into the soul's dark *arcana*. Some persons, in particular, cannot stand the sight of other people wearing no socially-sanctioned masks, possibly since such a sight might awaken buried parts of themselves, or even merely suggest that such an ungainly pelf may hide therein. Thus, my books' introductions *warn* the readers *redundantly* in order to avoid harm, errors, pains, and futile aggravations and aggression. I have *no* interest in exploiting shock value; but I have it in exploring the affective valence of shocks, since such a valence may indeed reveal the make-up of deeper, opaque, *maybe archetypal*, psychic layers. *Be wary. Be wise.*

After perusing my introductions, only gravely unthinking readers and dishonest ones could experience and/or engage in any such harm, errors, pains, and futile aggravations and aggression.

**(1)** The former lot would miss or misread *unintentionally* the repeated warnings at issue, hence misunderstanding aims, tones, nuances, ironies, metaphors, and symbols, or taking things out of context. Literalism leads to mistakes and misrepresentations, and reveals pedantry's cruel ironies; e.g., Stieg Larsson being accused of "misogyny," and Agatha Christie of inciting murder; mention confused with use, studies with stances, fictions with facts. It is a rather *tragicomic* endpoint—as cruelly unleashed by defective intellect and/or imagination. Ironically, such defects have provided comic fodder since Aristophanes' day.

**(2)** The latter lot would do the same, but *intentionally*, led by sectarianism, spleen, spite and/or sport. So, say, an expressed or explored taunt is claimed to be an endorsed one; or a

root, branch or tree is obsessed about, without looking at, or knowing, the whole forest, which stands all around and throughout the particular item that is being obsessed about. The arts are to enact “fictions” and “play,” yet ill-humoured people can still behave cruelly. It is an *immoral* logic—as only to be expected from defective integrity and/or inclusiveness. Cruelly, such defects have prospered in today’s clickbait-aimed social- and mass media.

What is worse, some of these people can easily convince themselves that their cruelty is *praiseworthy*: It is no surprise, then, that timid and petty minds can excel in what Sartre called “bad faith.” Hence, ponder on the horrible trials faced by Franca Rame, Dario Fo, or Pasolini’s tragic death. To say nothing of the more recent case of *Charlie Hebdo*. In these situations, anything can become a cruel excuse: Sex, race, age, class, faith, or lack thereof.

### Part Two: Know Thyself

*Everyone has felt (at least in fantasy) the erotic glamour of physical cruelty and an erotic lure in things that are vile.*

- Susan Sontag

Meeting such sorrows, as well as the uncouth and sometimes biting ‘bits’ associated with the phenomena at issue in *Humour and Cruelty* and the new book series, is part of the price that must be paid for the sake of pursuing a *candid* and *comprehensive* artistic, intellectual, spiritual, and personal—i.e., as ‘pertaining to persons,’ not as ‘pertaining to me’ and, even less so, as ‘pertaining to the *persona*,’ i.e., that small, orderly, squeaky-clean fragment of the *ego* which people show intentionally to others—engagement with *both* humour and cruelty *qua* legitimate theoretico-philosophical, socio-cultural, and lyrico-literary matters. “Warts and all” would make an apt phrase, apropos. Or, as a far-less-than-angelic Milton would have jibed back in Illinois in the 1970s: “*There’s no such thing as a free lunch.*”

What is more, the purchased lunch may consist entirely of entrails, which many people can’t stomach. Yet, heed should be paid to Jung’s medically-informed and insistent claims whereby if “[w]e have no imagination for evil... evil has us in its grip” and, therefore, it is paramount that we dare and become capable of “[k]nowing [-]our own darkness,” insofar as it “is the best method for dealing with the darkness of other people,” i.e., all of us (as cited

in the 2024 fourth tome in the serious books series for De Gruyter, i.e., *Humour and Cruelty, Volume 3/2: Laughing Matters - Theses and Discussions*, pp. 279 & 298). Clearly, Ársæll and I paid heed to Jung's advice; and I kept doing so in my *Philosophical Fragments*: The archetypal depths might be sounded *via* humour too, not just old myths and tragedies, with which humour shares a telling touch of irrationalism—for the sake of a *deeper* realism.

Literature and drama, as stated, are time-honoured paths into the most arcane and archaic murky substrata of the human psyche, and their ultimate rationale is that humankind can benefit, and has benefitted, from having such paths at its disposal. Overall, compared to ignorance, *culture has been a boon*, even if a very painful one at times—especially when it requires its recipients to make an effort and *think actively* about feelings and emotions, rather than being told by a teacher or priest what to do with them. Not to mention being the blind jumping puppets controlled and commanded by such inner drives. That too can be the case, particularly as regards knee-jerk reactions, moral panics, and hysteria. But as Jungian psychology suggested, similarly-potent inner drives are likely to lurk even deeper. Nobody is immune or superior to them: “Know Thyself” means abundant *self-examination*, which is something that, *inter alia*, most contemporary social scientists eschew *ab initio* and *ex methodo* by relying on so-called “perceptions,” “attitudes,” and Likert scales: If the *persona* is but a mask, and a sliver of the whole, people shouldn't be taken at face value.

Steeped in the study of philosophy and analytical psychology, my chief task as a creative writer has neither been teaching nor preaching, but offering a *plurality* of vivid avenues for *active imaginings* and *keener reflections*, i.e., if the readers are willing and able to do that. Sometimes, in fact, seeing the world from different angles is beyond people's capacities, especially when their lives are spent focussing solely on their psychic *personae*. And yet, if my *Philosophical Fragments* can foster anything useful at all, it is precisely such capacities. *Prima facie*, I merely provide silly stories and quaint dialogues concerning humour and cruelty. If *thought of* and *amplified*, though, these stories and dialogues can open new and, perhaps, existentially and ethically enriching vistas on each reader's affective make-up, as well as on *the human condition* at large, which is *not* the same condition as the angelic one, nor that of the blessed souls in Heaven—*warts and all*, again, would apply most aptly. It is no surprise, then, that timid and petty minds resent all art touching on our *warty* shadow.

Thus, I must repeat the warning that opened this subsection: *Be wary. Be wise*. Philosophy

can be fun—notedly when clothed in comedic garb—but it’s still Socrates’ *ironic* brainchild. 24 centuries after his cruel death, Socrates *still* leads us to challenge *our own* conformism, reiterations, and small-town mentalities. Why do *we* think what *we* think? What supports *our* values and tastes? Whether it is glimpsed or not, the “*plurality* of vivid avenues for *active imaginings* and *keener reflections*” built within and on my *Philosophical Fragments* poses just such interrogatives. If you can dare be Socratic, you are bound to find them of interest. Then, once the Socratic game has been played, the Jungian one can be added to it, for further layers of psychic reality open up beneath the ego’s purview, with which the mind, the Self, all typologies of consciousness, and personality are often mistakenly conflated. Yet, to appreciate the ego’s serious as well as ludicrous limitations, it is enough to recall the times when we laugh without intending to, or despite one’s attempts at self-restraint, and the common phenomenon whereby imbibing alcohol makes things seem so much funnier.

### *Concluding Remarks*

*A civilization without humor prepares its own funeral.*

- Jacques Maritain

After this dubious triumph of Donald-Trump-like self-centredness, I’ve got a humble and humbling caveat: I did *not* write all of this stuff in the pursuit of riches and literary glory.

Northwest Passage Books, as was stated, is a *small* Canadian imprint, with limited reach and circulation. At the same time, it is enough to ponder on the number of books that get published every year to gauge how unlikely it is that any of my efforts, literary as much as scholarly, will be remembered, or even merely noticed by anyone else—yet the same crux applies to all extant writers, academics, and researchers too. Rather, I wrote all of this stuff because I *had* to. It was a compulsion, an urge, a potent and patent yearn: A “will within the will,” as Jung would style it. It was a *need*—spiritual, personal, and only secondarily professional; even if it may well be some of the best stuff that I will have written in my life. (I state this whilst fully aware of my character *qua* ever-tentative English-language writer.)

As to the “riches”-related part of the picture, all royalties from the sales of my books, as long agreed with Northwest Passage Books, go to the Saint Vincent de Paul Society of Guelph, Ontario, Canada. I know and trust the Society, with whom my family has had a long history of service, and I have never forgotten how penniless my wife and I were when we lived in Canada, where we both did our PhD studies. For years, I kept this aspect of my agreement with Northwest Passage Books confidential, but I later discovered that, by mentioning the charitable component of my endeavours, there would follow more sales, and, as a result, more funds to be gifted to said Society, which, basically, feeds the hungry, clothes the disrobed, and shelters the indigent from exposure to icy snow and scorching sunshine. So, if not *aesthetically* good, at least my books should prove to be *ethically* good.

Lastly, as regards *art*, each book in the new series opens with a cartoon by Thibaut Soulié and an allegory by Lorenzo Biggi. Both artworks were created in direct connection with *Humour and Cruelty*. Thus, *Philosophical Fragments* can be approached and read as the literary and dramaturgical elaboration of the affective muddles and intellectual puzzles embedded in their creations. Moreover, as concerns the specifically “thespian” part of the picture, most texts in the series were ideated and written with the stage in mind: Stand-up acts, comedic readings, comic skits, outright farces, more formal plays, etc. The publisher has already been found; and that’s a good start. As to the rest, as usual, time alone will tell. No experiment, after all, has a foretold, univocal result, lest it is no longer an *experiment*.

### **THREE APPENDICES**

#### **Appendix #1 – From the Q&A**

Q: What exactly is the philosophical content in the farce that was performed, “Alien Day”?

A: *Prima facie*, the farce is *just* a farce: Stock characters, wild exaggerations, lewd innuendos, and minimal realism—an early-20th-century German logician stranded on the spaceship Enterprise in the 24th century does qualify. Yet, if you look up the dedicatory

page in the book, you will see that the reader is told *ab ovo*—by no less than the book itself—that there have been *four* levels of interpretation “since the banquet was given”—a not-too-subtle reference to Dante’s *Convivio*, i.e., “**the banquet**”, in which the author of the *Divine Comedy* explained how, in addition to the *literal* reading of a text—the farce as the farce, in our case—there are also an *allegorical* reading, a *moral* one, and an *anagogical* one, i.e., one pertaining to the higher or deeper issues, e.g., theology and metaphysics.\*

As regards the *allegorical* reading of “Alien Day”, I wrote the comic dialogue as both a *satire* and a *parody*: **(1)** A satire of the deluge of heated moralising discussions that followed the dropping of the “f-word” in *Star Trek: Discovery*—hence the leitmotif of the “ship’s steering cock” or, if you like, the “c-word”—and **(2)** a parody of an episode in the most popular Canadian sitcom of recent years, i.e., Catherine Reitman’s *Workin’ Moms*, in which a leaked picture of a penis leads to yet *another* deluge: Of “d-”, “c-” and “p-words”, plus as plentiful attendant jokes around the most ‘classic’ psycho-dynamic symbol, the phallus—which is thus pulled down from the grim, Derrida-esque pedestal of so many philosophers, critical theorists, gender-studies experts, and political thinkers, who neglected its ludicrous side.

And here comes the *moral* reading: I did *not* want to criticise Reitman’s work specifically, nor the comedic use of cuss words in general, but to suggest that comedies and, more broadly, humour, are *healthy* contexts in which we are *allowed*, if not even encouraged or expected, to *lower* the standards of ordinary politeness, which is a necessary yet exacting form of hourly psychological *repression* of our natural instincts, and of aggressiveness and sexuality above all. Such being also the deep wisdom of one of the three main theories of laughter and humour, i.e., Sigmund Freud’s so-called “*relief theory*”. In essence, humour and laughter create the opportunity to blow off some steam, vent out pent-up psychic tension, and enjoy a very telling “*comic relief*”. All of which is, normally, a *good* thing: When no lowly horsing around is allowed, but only riding high horses, bloody crusades await us.

The *anagogical* reading has to do with the fact that, in “Alien Day”, the “c-word” is *no* rude word at all, even if it is likely to be the meaning that most readers, and most of today’s audiences, would immediately associate with it—hence their urgent need for some “comic relief”. Yet, both the early-20th-century logician and the 24th-century ensign have *no* such qualms, notwithstanding their many other mutual misunderstandings. The “c-word”, one hundred years ago, had many other common meanings: Rooster, faucet, leader, chap, male

trout, etc. God knows which meanings will be prevalent in the 24th century, when the only embarrassing moment occurs with regard to the use of the “t-word”, i.e., the captain’s middle name, “Tiberius:” *Not* the “c-word!” What’s more, for all the changes that semantics go through over the course of time, one thing has not changed for either character: *Duty*. As the conclusion of the farce indicates, both men can see what’s right and what’s wrong. *Morality*, unlike words that are admissible today but un-PC tomorrow, *never* changes. St Thomas’ Natural Law and Kant’s Categorical Imperative persist. *Moralistic* fads do not.

\* *The “four levels of interpretation” are also a hint at Gilles Deleuze’s four senses of “sense” (aka “meaning of ‘meaning’,” in Frege’s logico-mathematical conception), as discussed in Humour and Cruelty, but not at the Q&A whence the first appendix is derived. Concisely, there are:*

**(1)** *“signification” (e.g., “Santa Claus” is ‘a long-bearded, world-travelling, reindeer-herding, obese, supernatural creature who dresses like a Coca-Cola advert and is very generous and jolly around Christmas time’);*

**(2)** *“denotation” (e.g., “Santa Claus,” contrary to popular belief, does exist and, contrary to popular belief, lives on the Caribbean island of St Kitts: Go there and you’ll meet him/her/it, unless it is around Christmas time, which is when he/she/it is the busiest);*

**(3)** *“manifestation” (e.g., Marilyn Monroe and Kylie Minogue have sung of “Santa [Claus]” whenever wishing to receive very expensive gifts from their admirers, partners or lovers); and*

**(4)** *“expression” (the precondition shared by all three previous senses, i.e., the verbalisation-cum-conceptualisation of “Santa Claus,” whereby a previously-indeterminate ‘chunk’ or aspect of being, let’s call it ‘x,’ becomes “Santa Claus” proper, i.e., an act of creation).*

*The aforementioned “categories of thought, time-honoured methodologies, and inevitable background assumptions characterising philosophy and the social sciences” situated at the heart and throughout the body of Humour and Cruelty presupposed **(4)**, and focussed on **(1)** and **(2)**. In contrast, my Philosophical Fragments largely presuppose **(1)** and **(2)**, focus*

upon **(3)**, and toy with—some serious people would say “problematise”—**(4)**. Humour and cruelty, in fact, are to be found at the threshold between verbal and non-verbal, and conceivable and inconceivable. Humour, as *G.K. Chesterton highlighted*, collapses “reason and unreason” (Lunacy and Letters, p. 26, as cited in Humour and Cruelty’s Volume 2, pp. 388-389) Cruelty, as *P.P. Hallie investigated*, is often a paradoxical domain, where words no longer apply (e.g., “unspeakable horrors”), moral categories turn upon themselves (e.g., “you’ve got to be cruel to be kind”), and thought vanishes into affect (e.g., pain, grief, desperation, and blood lust).

In Western lore, there have been two other spheres where similar conditions are recurrent, i.e., those about which Jung wrote the following Gnostic-like lines: “The world of the gods is made manifest in spirituality and in sexuality. The celestial ones appear in spirituality, the earthly in sexuality. Spirituality conceiveth and embraceth. It is womanlike and therefore we call it *mater coelestis*, the celestial mother. Sexuality engendereth and createth. It is manlike, and therefore we call it *phallos*, the earthly father.” (*Fifth Sermon to the Dead*,” as also referred to in Volume 3/2 of Humour and Cruelty: Laughing Matters, p. 84 footnote 438.)

As investigated inter alia by *Wilhelm Reich* in the 20th century, communication between lovers does frequently revert to broadly animal/istic forms (e.g., moaning, biting, licking, grunting, scratching, etc.), challenges quotidian moral standards (e.g., nakedness, dirty talk, name-calling, rituals of aggression/submission, etc.), and actively tries to let thought vanish into affect (i.e., sexual ecstasy). If frustrated, though, Reich deemed such behaviours bound to become excessive, pathological, and cruel. Spirituality is, today, not as well-known in the West as it once was; hence, its speechless, topsy-turvy, and ecstatic moments make here less-helpful examples of that “underbelly” whence, as said, humour and cruelty emerge, often conjointly: Teresa of Avila’s Interior Castle is less well-known than Erika Mitchell’s 50 Shades of Grey (selling more than 150 million copies, *Mitchell* is still one of Britain’s most successful writers). Besides, “humour” proper has been more commonly associated with sexuality (e.g., rude jokes, risqué comedies, etc.) than spirituality, although modernity might be in the process of changing that (cf., e.g., the advocacy by Laude, Sparks, Gilhus, Edgar, and others).

## **Appendix #2 – From the books**

### **[I] Warning and Safety Information Regarding the Use of Philosophical Books**

(Controlled by A.I.)

*Read carefully before handling.*

Philosophical books are intended for embracive intellectual engagement, exhaustive socio-historical exploration, erudite moral edification, expert argumentative education, as well as extensive conceptual complexification and nuanced logical reasoning, and eventual spiritual and personal enlightenment. Improper use may result in psychological harm, uncontrolled knee-jerk reactions, unpleasant humbling and nagging self-doubt, and general embarrassment before one's social peers or oneself. Consult a qualified philosopher before initiating any activities involving such books.

#### **Indications**

Philosophical books are indicated for:

- Building theoretical structures, logical avenues, and hermeneutical pathways.
- Providing stable argumentative buttressing as much as its opposite.
- Serving as means of overall critical thinking and creative ideational imagining.
- Digging deep into the most profound layers of psychic, social, and ontological reality.
- Occasionally being used as paperweights (with caution).

#### **Contraindications**

Avoid handling philosophical books if you:

- Are barefaced, concerned with wearing fashionable clothing, or otherwise inadequately willing to reconsider your worldview and guiding values.

- Are prone to resent having unexpected insights challenging your ingrained habits.
- Believe yourself “very clever” without external verification.
- Think of knowing already what is right and what is wrong, and how the world goes.
- Resist imagery, intellections, and investigations of dark, scandalous or thorny issues.
- Intend to use philosophical books as page-turners, juggling props, or facile conversation starters by tossing them in the air, towards the clouds where Socrates is currently said to live and conduct the business which he started 24 centuries ago.
- Are unsupervised and/or showing signs of bad digestion or recreational boredom.

## Warnings

- **Impact Hazard:** Philosophical books are deep and heavy. Impact with traditions, expectations, habituations, or other tacit givens and presuppositions may result in expressive feats of communication unsuitable for prim professional environments.
- **Gravity Risk:** Philosophical books are subject to gravitational forces at all times. Never place philosophical books in elevated positions where they may later remember gravity and attempt to emulate the legendary apple which fell onto Newton’s head.
- **Cutting Precaution:** Reading philosophical books subtler than your intellectual acumen or interpretative legerdemain may lead to rage, resentment, regret, and rabies. People can fail to understand what they do not understand. Hence, they react with cruelty.
- **Do Not Ingest:** Philosophical books are not food for the body, but for the soul. Do not attempt to eat, lick, or taste philosophical books, even if they appear smooth, pretty, enticing, or surprisingly pumpkin-like.
- **Do Not Copulate:** Philosophical books are not carnal mates, but spiritual ones. Do not attempt to eat, lick, or taste philosophical books, even if they appear smooth, pretty, enticing, or surprisingly pumpkin-like.

## Potential Side Effects

Common side effects may include:

- Dusty shelves.
- Mild exertion.

- Feeling of accomplishment (if used as intended).

Serious side effects may include:

- Bruised egos.
- Mental collapse.
- Sudden appreciation for interminable dialogue.
- Acoustic disturbance caused by loud exclamations following new thoughts.

### **Interactions**

Avoid combining philosophical books with:

- Reckless enthusiasm.
- High shelves.
- Minors under the age of “knowing better.”
- Anyone shouting, “Wake up!,” “Woke!,” or “Micro-aggression!”

### **Storage**

Store philosophical books in a cool, dry place. Do not store philosophical books on unstable surfaces, sloped terrain, or directly above your motorcar, especially if you are driving it.

*If adverse effects occur, discontinue interaction with philosophical books immediately and seek swift assistance from a responsible literate adult, elderly cultured relative, God, or a licensed academic philosopher.*

### **[III] Positionality Statement**

The ultimate author of this book acknowledges that he can be perceived as being a person of advantage and/or privilege writing, *inter alia*, about the experiences of marginalised or oppressed persons and other living creatures. Since such persons and living creatures are in fact this book’s fictional characters and fantastic creations, which are based on the ultimate

author's human, all-too-human, sorely-limited, and ever-evolving, ever-imperfect intellect, imagination, and information, including influential oeuvres by prior writers, playwrights, philosophers, and artists, the reader is hereby humbly beseeched to show this book's ultimate author the same charitable understanding received by such prior writers, playwrights, philosophers, and artists. Consider, for example, the ensuing inspirational writers, playwrights, philosophers, and artists:

Alain de Botton

Albert Camus

Alberto Moravia

Alexander Zinoviev

Anaïs Nin

André Dinar

Andrea Dworkin

Anita Phillips

Anne Desclos

Artemisia Gentileschi

Arthur Schopenhauer

Blaise Pascal

Brendan Myers

Cardi B

Carl Gustav Jung

Catharine A. MacKinnon

Catherine Breillat

Catherine Reitman

Catullus

Charles Ives

*Charlie Hebdo*

Charlotte Roche

Chris Kraus

D.H. Lawrence

Daniil Kharms

Dante Alighieri

Dario Fo

David Foster Wallace

David Hume

David Lynch

Diane Morgan

Dino Buzzati

Eminem

Fabrizio De André

Flavio Baroncelli

Franca Rame

Friedrich Nietzsche

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky

G.K. Chesterton

George Carlin

Gesualdo Bufalino

Giacomo Leopardi

Gianni Rodari

Giuseppe Marzari

Grazia Deledda

H.P. Lovecraft

Hannah Gadsby

Iris Murdoch

Irvine Welsh

James Joyce

Jean-Paul Sartre

John Cleese

Jon Stewart

Kathy Acker

Lars von Trier

Lenny Bruce

Luigi Pirandello

Machado de Assis

Matt Stone

May Sinclair

Mike Judge

Mikhail Bulgakov

Nikolai Gogol

Peter Paul Rubens

Philip Paul Hallie

Pier Paolo Pasolini

Pierre Guyotat

Quentin Tarantino

Richard Pryor

Richard Rorty

Ricky Gervais

Roberto Benigni

Sacha Baron-Cohen

Sarah Silverman

Sören Kierkegaard

Spike Lee

Stieg Larsson

Suzy Eddie Izzard

the 'Divine' Marquis de Sade

Thomas More

Trey Parker

Umberto Eco

Vilfredo Pareto

Voltaire

Wahida Clark

Werner Schwab

William Shakespeare

Witold Gombrowicz

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Želimir Žilnik

### **Appendix #3 – Some food for thought**

*Philosophical Fragments* presuppose throughout their creation and circulation both *artistic* freedom and *academic* freedom, which are enshrined in sacred national constitutions, binding institutional charters, and countless official documents; but remain under attack in today's world, from the right *and* the left of the political spectrum, as also appraised and argued by a celebrated, courageous champion of free speech: **Salman Rushdie**. As political, religious, and moral polarisation *increases*—fuelled by social-media clickbait logic—while the average citizen's and university student's critical skills *decrease*—curtailed by AI and over-reliance on IT shortcuts—***making people think*** is all the more *paramount*. After all, tyrannical regimes always try to stifle education, especially in the humanities and the arts.\*

Being able and eager to read *fiction*—taking the necessary time, and having the patience needed to imagine and reflect—are *both* prerequisites *and* skills to be *honed*. It is in this

spirit that *Philosophical Fragments* ought to be approached and assessed. The reader may well decry the sore stylistic flaws of my new books, but not question their being *serious attempts at extending humorous philosophical literature*, which, as only to be expected in the 21st century, draws inspiration from *all* artistic and intellectual domains, highbrow as much as lowbrow, including cinema, true-crime TV, stand-up comedy, performance art, rap, critical theory, dirty blues, and postmodern thought. (Still, vast herds of equines have been brought to the proverbial well, and yet managed to die of thirst: What a *cruel* irony!)

\* As John Stuart Mill famously acknowledged in his pivotal 1859 essay *On Liberty*, tyranny can come in many institutional forms and ethico-political colours, the end-result of which is the reduction or annihilation of artistic, intellectual, and comedic freedom, among many other nefarious, noxious offshoots. Thus, in the 21st century, there have abounded cases of humorists targeted by reactionary forces (e.g., the 2010 assault on Kurt Westergaard in Denmark, the 2015 killings of the *Charlie Hebdo* staff in France, the South-Korean blacklist of artists publicly revealed in 2016), as well as progressive ones (e.g., the “cancelling” or ostracisation of ‘controversial’ figures such as Shane Gillis and Dave Chappelle in the US, Graham Linehan and Ricky Gervais in the British Isles, and Lisa Eckhart in Germany). Even the ‘safe’ Nordic countries have seemed to follow this pattern, in right- as well as left-wing varieties, notwithstanding their long tradition as havens for free speech (see, e.g., Per Inge Torkelsen’s ordeals in Norway and those of Kristoffer Ahonen Appelquist in Sweden). And as the same great British father of liberalism argued, more potent than any State laws in the exercise of such tyrannical powers is the murky institution of social opinion, which can mock, shun, attack, ostracise, harm, and destroy people’s freedom by so diverse means as a small clique’s gossip, a web-based smear campaign or cynical journalistic muckraking. Ironically, when it comes to being cruel, power distributions are astoundingly egalitarian.

### **N.M.B.**

If the present reader did not realise that *Appendix #2* and the closing clause in *Appendix #3* contain a modicum of irony, hence humour, then s/he is emphatically, energetically, and earnestly advised to *abstain* altogether from reading *any* of the books in the new series at issue. *Philosophical Fragments* require: **(1)** Tolerant openness to comic inventiveness; **(2)**

adequate imaginative powers; **(3)** literal avoidance of literalism; **(4)** charitable acceptance of non-serious, non-*bona-fide* communication (*ergo et a fortiori*, the refusal of dismissing humour *qua* humour simply because the reader felt that “it ain’t funny”); **(5)** willingness to seek information and context before rushing to pass judgment (or wind); and **(6)** Bergson’s now-canonical “anesthesia of the heart,” i.e., an effectual degree of affective aloofness, since caring passionately for *x* prevents acceptance of the humorous treatment of *x* (as both Hazlitt and Schopenhauer wryly remarked, back in the 19th century, most people stop finding comicality or humour funny as soon as it applies to them or their loved ones). Yet without neglecting **(0)** altogether: The reader of these books must still be able to *read*, which is also the only way in which one can gauge what sort of a ludicrous scribbler *I* am! (Hey, could it be that even this end note contains a modicum of irony, or humour? ... Nah!)°

° On a less facetious note, given the global **decline** in literacy skills in the past few decades, the ability to read long, polysemic, self-aware, playful, grownup books may be a talent that fewer and fewer people have. This is not an elitist’s conceit, but an educator’s concern.