

Acknowledgments

This is our second volume devoted to the study of the concepts of 'humour' and 'cruelty', and we have already committed to writing a third. Inevitably, we have had ample opportunity to brood over the notion that the two of us, as authors, have set ourselves up for a very cruel joke. Perhaps no one will be remotely interested in this colossal undertaking which has taken years of our lives and a decent portion of our already-fragile sanity. Imagine two expectant middle-aged academics pouring over a text for months on end, hoping that their book will make an impact, only to have it collect dust in some library, or worse, inside a warehouse. Is it all for nothing? Just some frantic wriggling of two occasionally sentient hominids soon to be dead and forgotten? A cruel joke, indeed.

Cruel humour makes light of both our suffering and meaning in life. Given that the former is inescapable and the latter elusive, humour may serve as an important coping strategy in helping us navigate the adversity as well as the absurdity inherent in the human condition. But then submitting meekly to suffering or giving up on existential meaning is by no means an obvious and flawless recipe for a good life. Thus, we have come to the conclusion that hope and faith are, as it happens, the only credible ways forward. Promisingly, in this respect, many valuable souls have already demonstrated their faith in our project. Therefore, let us make proper use of these brief acknowledgments and display in print our most sincere gratitude and appreciation.

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Very special thanks go to the noted French cartoonist Thibaut Soulcié, who provided us with an English-language version of a clever creation of his. As the reader will hopefully be able to gather at a later point in this book, his depiction of a bittersweet clown confronted with a cruelly impossible humorous task is the iconic rendition of several important themes running throughout this volume. Lastly, we must express our gratitude in the most emphatic manner to our spouses

and families who put up with the inexorable exhaustion, tension, and disruption that our prolonged and painstaking scholarly venture brought into our lives. They were instrumental in keeping us and our project going—through their love, encouragement, selective indifference, tolerance, and ... humour.

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