

## Brief Remarks on Part 2 of *Volume 3*

The present physical (or electronic) tome is the last step in a long and extensive academic project that began in 2019. As we launched into the philosophical exploration of humour and cruelty, little did we know of all the relevant materials, research avenues, underlying themes, associated topics, surrounding controversies, higher aims, and vast wealth of insight and instruction awaiting us along the way. In the end, one planned book became three; and the third book in the line became a two-part instalment. Let us briefly acknowledge all of these steps.

*Humour and Cruelty, Volume 1: A Philosophical Exploration of the Humanities and Social Sciences* (hereafter *H&C1*) instantiated a massive *Begriffsgeschichte* of the two titular concepts and of their mutual criss-crossing in the history of the Western humanities and social sciences. In addition, it developed an argument in defence of polysemy, based upon the philosophy of the great 20<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian polymath, Michael Polanyi.

*Humour and Cruelty, Volume 2: Dangerous Liaisons* (hereafter *H&C2*) followed, this time offering an in-depth study of these two notions' mutual and mutually supportive combinations, i.e., humorous cruelty and cruel humour. In the process, it excavated and emphasised a rather unsettling truth: humour, in all likelihood, always contains a modicum of cruelty, predominantly of the callous type, whether we are aware of it or not.

Lastly, *Humour and Cruelty, Volume 3: Laughing Matters* (hereafter *H&C3*) came into being and, as stated, ended up being split into two parts.<sup>1</sup> Part 1 provided a simpler and synthetic overview of the *Begriffsgeschichte-cum*-Polanyian-reflections that had been produced in *H&C1*, while further adding concise scholarly references to the overall picture, especially with regard to depth- and clinical psychology, 20<sup>th</sup>-century Marxist thought, neo-Thomism, existentialism, feminism, and select recent studies in the philosophy of humour and its cognates (e.g., irony and laughter). In this way, Part 1 sets the stage for Part 2.

All readers who are familiar with *H&C1* are therefore free to focus on Part 2 if they so wish, but they must be aware of the specific function and subsidiary features characterising Part 1. As its bookish and self-ironic subtitle indicates, Part 1 comprises the actual *prolegomena* to Part 2. In particular, Part 1 contains the full, longer, and more detailed introduction to *H&C3* as such. Therefore, the present reader, even if s/he is familiar with *H&C1* and/or *H&C2*, is positively and emphatically advised to peruse that bulkier introduction, especially as regards grasping the

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<sup>1</sup> When we write “here” in “this book” or “the present book”, we mean Part 2 of *H&C3*. When we write “volume”, it means *H&C3* in its entirety.

overall nature of *H&C3*, its distinctive hermeneutical and evaluative characteristics, the deeper rationale for the controversial topics and issues that it explores, the purpose and relevance of its many detailed footnotes, and our own sense of humour. What you can read below, then, is a much shorter and veritably succinct summary of the main contents of the remaining sections of *H&C3*.

Part 2 of *H&C3*, i.e., Chapters 1 through 3 in the present book, crowns the whole multi-volume endeavour by discussing, first of all, the mutual conflicts between humour and cruelty: cruelty against humour, and humour against cruelty. Potent and patent enmities to mirth and jollity are retrieved from a variety of socio-historical contexts, ranging from early-medieval European monasteries to the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* massacre. Along the way, special attention is paid to the cruel humour and humorous cruelty arising thereof, insofar as such phenomena can reveal critical aspects of today's liberal (or neoliberal) socio-economic order. Two such aspects loom large in this respect: the incongruities between orthodox economic thought and ordinary economic life, especially *vis-à-vis* their eco-systemic preconditions; and the uncertain limits to personal freedom, including the core value of free speech, particularly though not exclusively in connection with the sexual sphere.<sup>2</sup>

In parallel, settings and circumstances where humour has been used as an instrument to cope with suffered cruelty, whether natural or human in origin, are also retrieved and discussed. These too vary greatly and encompass domains such as hospital wards, 20<sup>th</sup>-century Jewish ghettos, paediatric clinics, crime scenes, and contemporary funeral homes. Following that, as explained in the introduction to Part 1, the last chapter of this book covers our own hard-won concluding reflections.<sup>3</sup> In it, the key information and the key insights that we have come across in all three volumes—both in the main text and the many detailed footnotes—are recollected, rearranged, and recombined so as to enhance and expand upon the available conceptions of both 'humour' and 'cruelty', while paying distinct attention to their mutually conflictual aspects, which are the focal point of Part 2.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Readers who may be disturbed by prurient topics should stop reading the book now.

<sup>3</sup> *We make very few trenchant statements. Studying cluster concepts such as 'humour' and 'cruelty' has taught us much epistemic humility* (see Chapter 1 of Part 1). As if being ludicrously fallible was not cruel enough already.

<sup>4</sup> As done throughout our volumes, *we highlight concepts or ideas by means of single quotation marks and words by means of double ones*. Whenever no special emphasis or distinction between concepts (or ideas) and words is needed, then no quotation marks appear. Also, single quotation marks can indicate non-literal usages of certain terms or linguistic expressions.

In other words, roaming across the conceptual space constructed by our trilogy in general and Part 1's four chapters in particular, we integrate the materials presented and discussed in Part 2 and reset the most significant information and insights, i. e., as these were accrued and reflected upon throughout our intellectual exploration, yet at a higher level of philosophical awareness and axiological assessment, which is rooted in *life-value onto-axiology* (LVOA; as also duly explained in the introduction to Part 1).<sup>5</sup> In this respect, special emphasis is placed upon the psychological, theological, ethical, and metaphysical roots of humour—and its cruel rejection.<sup>6</sup>

The present book's dedication, acknowledgments and bibliography are exactly the same as in Part 1. The present additional introduction, table of contents, back-cover abstract and closing index, instead, are not. As to Chapter 1, 2 and 3 in this book, they are entirely original and, as the reader will easily gather, substantial, at least in terms of sheer length, theoretical analyses, and attendant footnotes. As kindly indicated by two anonymous referees, the conscientious thoroughness and encyclopaedic character of our study are, possibly, genuine points of strength of our extensive research on humour and cruelty. That explains why, after all, we were invited and encouraged to transform our original manuscript into, eventually, *four* physically distinct books. We do hope that our readers will share these anonymous referees' positive appraisal of our prolonged and painstaking efforts.<sup>7</sup> If they will not, then the readers can still enjoy the fact that, as far as the present authors are concerned, working so hard turned out to be a really cruel joke.<sup>8</sup>

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5 Since Part 1 and Part 2 belong to the same volume, we write hereby "trilogy" and not "tetralogy".

6 These roots are discussed to different levels of detail, due to the book's inherent emphases.

7 Let it be repeated that we, as authors of these books, are able spot all kinds of imperfections inside them, most notably when it is far too late to do anything about it. A cruel irony indeed.

8 As discussed in *H&C2*, the guilty pleasure of *Schadenfreude* is a common combination of humour and cruelty.

