



University
of Glasgow

Hanscomb, S. (2008) *Can you imagine ... ? Comedy, philosophy and the foolosopher.* Cafe Philosophy

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/54616/>

Deposited on: 29th November 2011

Can you imagine ...? Comedy, philosophy and the 'foolosopher'

'Reality is the leading cause of stress among those in touch with it.' (Lily Tomlin)

'Our laughter is our acceptance of the thing in its incomprehensibility. It is the acceptance of ...a world that is endlessly incomprehensible, always baffling, a world that is beyond us and yet our world.' (Ted Cohen¹)

How many Heracliteans does it take to change a light bulb? None, it's changing anyway (anon)

I'm sitting in the front row at the Comedy Store in London. I'm nervous. Socrates is on stage. He's in full flow and looks like he's about to start engaging with the audience: "Where are you from and do you think virtue can be taught?" - that sort of thing. I'm saved at the last though, and not for the first time. Just as Socrates has me in his sights Diogenes wanders up on all fours, contorts his face and leaves his smelly calling card. Some people are disgusted and leave, some fall about laughing, Socrates looks resigned and produces a plastic bag and spade from his robes. Other acts appear from back stage to see what the fuss is about. One slips over in it and is spared a bloody nose only by springy facial hair. Just as I'm about to see who it is, I wake up.

My interest in the relation between philosophy and comedy does not stem originally from a list of attributes or roles they share, but rather from an intuition that something important is implied by the fact that they might share anything at all. I will begin with a quote that captures this central intuition from Robert Nye's novel *Falstaff*.²

Philip of Macedon kept a court fool.
Philip of Macedon kept a court philosopher.
Philip of Macedon was wondrous wise.
Philip of Macedon would have been wondrous wiser to have kept one man: *a foolosopher*.
Father, I stand on my head and I turn *your* world upside down.

... Father, has anyone ever worked out why - of all those 100 knights who set out from king Arthur's court to seek the Holy Grail - it was Parsifal who found it?
Parsifal.
The name means *Perfect Fool*.

¹ *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters*. University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 60.

² pp. 347-9

If there is any truth in this it is ill-defined. I suspect there is, and I suspect it's something that can be illuminated by an analysis of points where the world of 'wise men' (specifically philosophers) and world of humorists meet. My investigation will start by surveying and offering a loose taxonomy of philosophy's uptake into comedy by comedians and comedy writers like Monty Python, Woody Allen, Douglas Adams, Steve Martin, Harold Ramis, Bill Hicks and Mark Steel. After an initial and brief consideration of laughs to be found in philosophy (okay, yes, I know, how could this be anything but brief) I will then pursue two lines of enquiry that I hope will flesh out the intuition that has inspired this essay: the first, under the heading 'Can you imagine?' asks what philosophy and comedy have in common; and the second - 'The return of the foolosopher'- speculates on the possibility of a virtuous type associated with a form of life that combines the two.

Philosophy in comedy

As far as intrusions of serious or academic ideas into other genres, and in particular popular culture go, philosophy doesn't fair too badly. With comedy perhaps its most persistent and explicit appropriation has been via Monty Python. 'The Philosopher's Drinking Song' is perhaps the best known,³ their sketches included a couple of philosophers' football matches and the appearance of Karl Marx on a quiz show, and their increasingly serious interest in philosophical subject matter is revealed in *The Life of Brian* and *The Meaning of Life* (e.g. the philosophical discussions restaurant). More recently, some of the most impressive and direct comedy-philosophy crossover material can be found in the *Mark Steel Lectures*.⁴ Stand up and writer Steel humorously explains the ideas of various thinkers and activists including Aristotle, Descartes, Paine and Marx without unduly compromising accuracy or a sense of their significance. A filmmaker and former stand up who famously combines philosophy and humour is of course Woody "I'm not afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens" Allen. Philosophers are regularly name-checked, and philosophical ideas are at the heart of works like *Hanna and Her Sisters*, *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, and the short play *Death*.⁵ In a sense though (a sense I'll say more about shortly) all his films count since he is the embodiment of existential self-alienation. Two other brilliant comic take on big, existential questions have been the David Nobbs BBC sitcom *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin* and Rolf de Heer's 1994 film *Bad Boy Bubby*.⁶

³ Aristotle, Aristotle was a bugger for the bottle, and Hobbes was fond of his dram; Rene Descartes was a drunken fart: "I drink therefore I am" etc.

⁴ On BBC radio and TV between 1999 and 2006.

⁵ Which can be found in his book *Without Feathers*.

⁶ A note of caution: you have to wait for the comedy in this film, and it's a relief when it comes. The first part is depressing and potentially disturbing and we can't be surprised when later on in the film an enlightened Bubby describes God as a 'useless cunt.'

More recently existential alienation and anxiety are not only central to the plot of David O. Russell's 2004 American film comedy *I♥Huckabees*, but are dealt with by name and in an analytical fashion.⁷ One of the stars of *Huckabees*, Lily Tomlin, is known for insightful philosophical one-liners like 'we're all in this together, by ourselves', 'reality is nothing but a collective hunch', and 'forgiveness means giving up all hope of a better past'.

A couple of films, the plots of which pivot on philosophical thought experiments, are one time philosophy major Steve Martin's *All of Me* (where two identities - a male and a female - inhabit the male's body, and which also stars Lily Tomlin) and *The Man with Two Brains* (where the male lead falls in love with a brain in a vat and looks for the perfect body to transplant her into). Also dealing with personal identity is Harold Ramis' *Multiplicity*, and his excellent *Groundhog Day* is premised on Nietzsche's 'eternal recurrence'.

In comic literature Douglas Adams deserves a mention for ideas like the ego-shrivelling 'total perspective vortex' and the veggie-challenging animal that wants to be eaten (both in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*), and various topics and arguments from applied ethics and political philosophy regularly appear in the satirical work of Lenny Bruce (freedom of speech, pornography), George Carlin (Marxism), Bill Hicks (drug and gun legislation, freedom of speech, pornography, abortion, paternalism, euthanasia, creationism, business ethics⁸), Ben Elton (business ethics, the environment, drug legislation), Mark Steel (Marxism, economic philosophy, sexism), Mark Thomas (business ethics), Michael Moore (business ethics, gun legislation), *The Simpsons* (business ethics, sexuality and politics), *Seinfeld* (amoralism, acts and omissions (Good Samaritan Law), feminism), *South Park* (freedom of speech, sexual politics, genetic engineering), Rob Newman (anti-capitalism), and Marcus Brigstocke (environmental ethics). Hicks, perhaps, needs special mention because a posthumous compilation of his routines is actually called *Philosophy*. In this case the term is slightly misleading in that it refers more to the "here's my philosophy" sense of the term than its more formal meaning. But it is nevertheless true that Hicks, as indicated, is constantly addressing topics of interest to applied ethics, and sometimes – though admittedly with plenty of comedic licence - he argues philosophically. That he was also a lonely, introspective, rebellious figure in the mould of great existentialist thinkers like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche is relevant as well (more on this later).⁹

Counting applied ethics topics as philosophy runs the risk of lumping in any intellectual or political subject matter under this banner. This is a tendency of popular philosophy books and one I'd prefer to avoid here. There are examples of genuine ethical/conceptual enquiry in the work of the those

⁷ I am tempted also to mention here Buzz Lightyear's existential crisis in *Toy Story*.

⁸ When I refer to business ethics I mean issues that fall under the heading of marketing communications like the creating of wants and vulnerable consumers; and also fair trade, externalities and employee relations.

⁹ Henry Rollins (self-confessed *Übermensch* wannabe) could be described in a similar way.

listed, but books like *The Simpsons and Philosophy*,¹⁰ *South Park and Philosophy*¹¹ and *Seinfeld and Philosophy*¹² can stray beyond this, or quite often philosophical analysis is being applied externally, as it were, to the characters and plots in question. Once in this realm, then pretty much any richly detailed text (comedic or otherwise) can be seen as philosophical in some respect or other. I'm not unsympathetic to this approach at all, but equally I need to keep this investigation within reasonable boundaries. Those boundaries are, I hope, clearly enough demarcated by paradigm cases of philosophy references and/or analysis in comedy such as Monty Python, Mark Steel, Steve Martin, Harold Ramis, Woody Allen, and *Huckabees* examples previously mentioned. In these cases comic artistes have been possibly educated in, and certainly moved and intrigued enough by, unambiguously philosophical subject matter that is central to a specifically philosophical canon and to current, specifically philosophical, academic interests. From there the circle extends to the unmistakable existential reckonings of, say, Douglas Adams, *Reginald Perrin* and *Bad Boy Bubby* (and perhaps Bill Hicks and his one-time imitator Denis Leary), and then to the social-critiquing/applied ethics territory typified more by generic intellectual ethical and political deliberation than by a specifically philosophical theory and methodology.

Comedy in philosophy

It's worth inquiring at this point: are philosophers funny? The short answer is no. Were I being glib I might suggest we can laugh *at* some of their ideas – George Berkeley, behaviourism and certain post-modernists, to name a few – but rarely *with* them. But nor, of course, do we expect to. In the first place most philosophers these days are academics, and the university is a serious place. It aims at truth and practical solutions, not at entertainment. In the second place, the subject matter of philosophy has a quite particular weightiness to it, and if we are to attach a tone to the theories it throws up (and indeed its conspicuous lack of sturdy theories in the face of massively important questions) it is one of anxiety and gloominess more than anything (e.g. determinism, the death of God, scepticism, moral relativism). In short, laughs are at best an epiphenomenon of philosophy and academic pursuits in general, not their aim. If a form of emotional response is aimed at then it's something that must be provoked by breakthroughs of understanding - 'eureka' moments of insight and sometimes, we can hope, wonder (though these are more common in natural science than philosophy I suspect).

Philosophy and other academic work is not art. Basic to art is its immediate and often emotional impact on its audience, not through intellectual

¹⁰ William Irvin et al (Eds.), 2001

¹¹ Robert Arp (Ed.), 2006

¹² William Irvin (Ed.), 1999.

understanding but through the artistic form. Jokes and humour have fairly clear forms; central to them are techniques designed to elicit laughter for its own sake. Most who write about the nature of humour agree that it requires exaggeration, incongruous events and unexpected twists. To make people laugh you build them up to anticipate one thing then deliver another. Academic work on the other hand aims not only to intellectually illuminate, it aims to do this by reductive methods. Reductive methods are intellectually taxing; they doggedly engage reason like nothing else. Twists and incongruity of the kind found in humour are singularly not on the agenda. Academic rigour is the virtual opposite of artistic immediacy.

The long answer is that some of us will at times have laughed along with certain philosophers. There are of course bound to be many examples I've forgotten or not come across, and I should add that here I'm not referring to how funny philosophers can be when teaching and lecturing.¹³ In terms of their writings, however, Jim Hankinson's excellent *Bluffer's Guide to Philosophy*¹⁴ is worth mentioning, even though I suppose it's more a work of comedy than an introduction to philosophy. Within philosophy 'proper' the following rant by the sane (but rejected and embittered) Nietzsche on marriage in *On the Genealogy of Morals* would not sound out of place in a Hicks or Leary routine:

... every animal abhors ... every kind of intrusion or hindrance that obstructs or could obstruct this path to the optimum ... Thus the philosopher abhors *marriage* ... - marriage being a hindrance and calamity on his path to the optimum. What great philosopher hitherto has been married?

Heraclitus, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer - they were not; more, one cannot even *imagine* them married. A married philosopher belongs in *comedy*, that is my proposition - and as for that exception, Socrates - the malicious Socrates, it would seem, married *ironically*, just to demonstrate *this* proposition.¹⁵

One point to make about this is that Nietzsche, especially by today's dry and exacting standards, was not a normal philosopher. Deliberately provocative books, written in unusual styles, on a wide range of subject matter that included cultural critique and autobiography place him apart from orthodox academics.

A second point is that this passage isn't exactly a classic from the otherwise well-paved-over pages of the *Genealogy*. In his writings Nietzsche regularly takes time off, becomes carried away with himself. Included in his works are plenty of passages that are unimaginable in modern academic philosophy, and this is one of them. It's emotional, and it's very personal. Like art.

My overall point is that where we find humour in philosophy it's usually in the context of 'time off' or an aside. Given what I've said, this is to be expected;

¹³ Often very funny in my experience.

¹⁴ Oval Books, 2007 (New Ed.). Though this is admittedly a comic rather than an academic introduction.

¹⁵ *On the Genealogy of Morals*, p.543 (in Kaufmann (Ed.) *Nietzsche: Basic Writings*)

in fact it's just obvious. More interesting is that in comedy too we sometimes find that philosophy (or other intellectual material) can be set aside from the central form of the comedy. A pattern that can emerge is an oscillation (sometimes uneasy, sometimes not) between the funny material and the philosophical material; a situation epitomised by Hicks who, on a number of occasions when he started getting intellectually deep, felt the need to inform his lulling audience that there were indeed 'more dick jokes on the way.' (A line which itself raises a laugh and thus buys more time for his intellectual train of thought.)¹⁶ Performers like Henry Rollins, Mark Steel, Michael Moore and Mark Thomas sometimes seem to have dropped the comedy altogether in favour of polemical essays, rants and investigations. We might even suggest that some of Python's later work promotes thought-provocation over laughs.

Unlike with philosophy though, this is not a requirement. As I hope the examples previously listed and discussed demonstrate, philosophy can simply provide good comic material. In fact the seriousness *itself* of philosophy can enhance the comedic effect, as we will see in the next section.

Can you imagine ...?

What allows for this alliance between philosophy and comedy? There are two, related, reasons I want to highlight: the first is a shared interest in extreme, ridiculous and surprising scenarios; and the other is an attraction to the dark underbelly of the human condition.

As the Nye quote indicates, both philosophy and comedy are in their own way transcendent; they benefit from the occupation of rare or high ground from which to assess, tease, cut down to size, ridicule, or put to shame fuzzy, unproven, blinkered or arrogant people, policies and points of view. They share a methodology that licences disruptive or even subversive perspectives on the everyday behaviours and assumptions that we are routinely immersed in. Comedy shares with philosophy a predisposition to strip the world naked. Once skilled observation, satire, sarcasm or surrealism sink their teeth into a subject it is unsettled and transformed, much as the rational basis for our deepest beliefs are when faced with philosophical scepticism.

What gives comedy this licence? It seems to have something to do with the power that absurd and caricatured situations have to make us laugh. As Freud explained it,¹⁷ part of the appeal of jokes and other forms of humour is that they liberate us from the constraints of culture and material or logical necessity. They offer us 'can you imagine?', 'did you ever notice?', or plain silliness (ranging from slap-stick to the meaningful spontaneity and chaos of

¹⁶ Ben Elton has used a very similar line in his 1989 tour. (I'm not sure if this was inspired by Hicks or just a coincidence.)

¹⁷ See *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious* (1905)

Dada, surrealism and absurdist theatre¹⁸). Academically speaking, if ‘did you ever notice?’ has parallels with the social sciences (especially psychology), then philosophy is surely the place to look for ‘what if ...?’ and ‘can you imagine ...?’. Consider thought experiments and analogies like Plato’s cave, the Cartesian dream and demon devices, Locke’s intelligent parrot, Hume’s botch-job gods, Schopenhauer’s porcupines, Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence, Neurath’s boat, Thomson’s famous violinist, Rawls’ veil of ignorance, Nozick’s experience machine, Putnam’s brain in a vat, Dennett’s ‘Where am I?’, Harris’ survival lottery, Searle’s Chinese room, philosophy of mind’s zombies and mutants, Goodman’s grues and bleens ... It’s a long list. Philosophy not only likes to perform its analytical task by laying-bare the essential features of life via such bizarre examples, in doing so it often guides us to some bizarre and disturbing conclusions. It’s a violent business.

Comedy too can be violent. Its equivalents of this extreme methodology include the visual caricatures (or grotesques) of Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu* plays (and the John Clancy’s excellent recent adaptation *Fat Boy*)¹⁹; cartoonists like Ralph Steadman and Steve Bell (‘If’ in *The Guardian*); puppeteer and cartoon impressionists like *Spitting Image* and Parker and Stone; satirists like Bill Hicks and Chris Morris; films like *The Life of Brian* and *Bad Boy Bubby*. The subject matter of these pieces need not be philosophical, but that comedy practitioners might be drawn to such subject matter becomes all the more understandable, even predictable.

The other central feature that I see comedy and philosophy as sharing is a partial upshot of this first one. The violence spoken about requires some kind of response; perhaps some kind of consolation or even protective device. Laughter can be just this. As a comedian you are perhaps more inclined to be drawn to and flirt with such questions because you are equipped with a way of dealing with them, and sharing this with an audience adds the protection of solidarity. Comedy becomes a form of ‘release’ for (often) unconscious anxieties in the face of life’s metaphysical horrors and absurdities: death, the contingency and fragility of our values and projects, our ultimate aloneness, the teleological bereftness of the universe and so on. ‘The secret of comedy is sadness. Bleakness’ says Eric Idle²⁰, and in the words of one contemporary philosopher,

Humour in general and jokes in particular are among the most typical and reliable resources we have for meeting these devastating and incomprehensible

¹⁸ Two relatively modern examples of subversive and surrealist comics are the late American comedian and actor (and situationist?) Andy Kaufmann, and Britain’s Simon Munnery (*League Against Tedium*)

¹⁹ Sitcoms like *The Young Ones* and *Bottom* continue the tradition of the ‘grotesque’, as do Peter Jackson’s first two films, *Bad Taste* and *Brain Dead*.

²⁰ *The Road to Mars* (London: Boxtree, 1999) p.30

matters. ... When we laugh ... we can dwell with the incomprehensible without dying from fear or going mad.²¹

A focus on philosophical subject matter can also turbo boost the incongruity or 'derailing' factor found in so much comedy. Through the law of three; 'and then I got off the bus',²² or some other device the audience is built up to expect one thing but another is delivered, and this is particularly effective if it involves an emotional shift as well. Consider the following passage from Denis Leary's 1992 Edinburgh Fringe routine (and subsequent book) *No Cure for Cancer*.

Soon - very soon - after you have a kid there's an immediate slap in the face. Reality cologne. Life is no longer about luxury. It's not stereo's and CD players and Jeep Cherokees. It's the basics. Food and shelter. Hot and cold. Sleep and faeces. Urine. Blood. Then there's a wave that washes over you. You find yourself in a dimly lit room, late at night, staring down into the crib whispering. "Look at this. Look at this creature. Look at this sinless, cold-sober, empty little vessel ... waiting to be filled up with ingredients ... and it's up to me and my wife. We can fill him up with anything. Love or hate. Or indifference." Then it's just a short hop, skip and jump to the other line of thinking: "Oh. Now I see. Now I know why I have a responsibility to the planet. Because I want my son to have a better life."

I'm not a guy who gets involved. I deal in angst. I deal in cynicism. I vote. But I vote pessimistically. I reserve the right to keep my distance. To judge. To point my finger and parade.

Now I realize if I want to change the world, if it can be changed, I've got to get involved. I've got to get my hands on civil rights and all those things I supposedly believe in ... So that maybe - twenty-five years from now - he can turn to me one day ... and say "You know something, Dad? I really like this place." And I can honestly answer: "Well, son. I did my best."

And other times I think: "Hey, fuck him."
I didn't break the planet okay ... ²³

²¹ Ted Cohen, *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters* (University of Chicago Press, 1999) pp. 40-41

²² Stewart Lee and Richard Herring (*This Morning with Richard not Judy*). Lee and Herring are sometimes the Penn and teller of comedy – exposing simple tricks and formula. In this case you casually talk about something you did the other day that is odd or gross (for example, if I say “The other day I was reading in a men’s magazine about growing rates of testicular cancer and decided to have a bit of a feel around for any ‘unusual lumps’ ...”) the audience expects the setting to be private and the humour to be observational and satirical, but are derailed by this punch line (“... so anyway, ten minutes later I got off the bus.”). The other example he refers to is a story about dodgy and dangerous goings on in school followed by the punch line “and that was just the teachers.” Though obviously not in the forms described here, the BBC news quiz *Have I got news for you* is very fond of this style of joke.

²³ pp.119-120

The humour here comes from the distance between the expectation and emotion that is built up in us and the one that is inspired by the punch line; between a religious-type solemnity and caustic flippancy.

The Return of the Foolosopher

'I stand on my head and I turn *your* world upside down.' The comic is in a privileged position for making people think, for becoming a foolosopher. Of course, it doesn't have to be philosophical subject matter or even philosophical method that provides the material for your intelligent and controversial comedian, but I hope that what I had said above shows that the two have a natural affinity. Even if empirical investigations of government and business is the subject matter of Michael Moore, Mark Thomas, Mark Steel etc., the more comedic they are, the closer they tend to come to the *spirit* of philosophy; its 'what ifs...?', its contrived hyperbole, its desire and ability to shock.

I will finish with what I see as a paradigm case of a foolosopher – Bill Hicks. Perhaps most notable about Hicks from a philosophical perspective is how much he has in common with more radical philosophers like Socrates, Kierkegaard and especially Nietzsche. Socrates was an irritant, a 'gadfly' eventually swatted by the state; Kierkegaard was a harsh social critic whose writings and way of life were 'calculated to make people aware'.²⁴ Nietzsche, as previously discussed, really was a highly emotional and expressive writer whose form is often as important as his content. He wanted to provoke and to make us 'uncomfortable'²⁵, to make us radically reassess our lives and think for ourselves. 'Nietzsche called a spade a spade. He attacked authority, not only with indignation but also with relish and rudeness'.²⁶ In so doing his writings are not always consistent and can be 'perplexing', politically dodgy, even 'horrifying'. Part of the explanation for this is the underlying intention; not to generate a systematic philosophy or set of values, but to encourage us to acknowledge and question the social, psychological, ideological and biological powers that shape our lives, and to take creative ownership of those lives. This method is made explicit when towards the end of the first essay in the *Genealogy* he shifts register, interrogating and baiting his hypothetical audience, beginning with

Would anyone care to take a look into the secret depths of how *ideals are fabricated* on earth? Who is brave enough? ... Very well! Here you have an unobstructed view into this dark workshop. Wait just another moment, my dear Mr Daredevil

²⁴ *Journals*. The establishment (in the form of *The Corsair* magazine) eventually turned on him as well.

²⁵ 'To make the individual *uncomfortable*, that is my task.' (cited in Solomon, *Living with Nietzsche* p. 7)

²⁶ Solomon, op cit, p.6

Curiosity: your eyes must first get used to this false shimmering light ... There! All right! Now tell us! What is going on down there? Describe what you see ...²⁷

Hicks was fond of this approach as well. Be sceptical of the government's line, he tells us, look again at what went on in Waco. Forget all the fuss, take another look at *Basic Instinct*. That's right, it's a 'piece of shit, and that's all it is'. He knows because he sees through his 'squeegied third eye', and in a way similar to Nietzsche's relationship to Europe, Hicks wanted to 'wake America up', to 'plant seeds', to make people think and take responsibility. He was polemical, he would challenge the establishment (business, government, media, the Christian right), he didn't get into as much trouble as Lenny Bruce, or Socrates, but he was nonetheless highly controversial. Nietzsche's target was virtually as big as they come – the Western mindset and its philosophical origins - but Hicks' too was pretty sizable – a 'sleeping', dumb and hypocritical America. And like Nietzsche he settles on no system; he doesn't offer the Marxism of Carlin or Steel, or the environmentalism of Elton or Brigstock for example. Instead things stay slippery. Just as you're reaching a point in his routine where you think he's going to offer an ideological solution, humour – often quite silly - kicks in (don't offer euthanasia to old people, put them in the movies to die in action scenes; pro-lifers should picket graveyards instead of abortion clinics). You have to work it out for yourself.

In my concluding remarks I want to suggest that the philosophical comic is an impressive person in quite a distinctive way. I have argued how humour allows them, like Nietzsche's Dionysian, to affirm 'all that is questionable and terrible in existence'²⁸; and I have indicated – in the Nietzsche/Hicks comparison - how their polemical wings can share much in terms of style and substance, but perhaps their greatest virtue is the harmonizing of a kind of dual perspective; an ability to creatively harness what is divergent in these two domains. In a very important sense humour and philosophy, though they share a lot, are moving in diametrically opposite directions. In laughter, comedy undermines all pretensions to transcendence, rightness and superior perspectives, but in so doing affirms our immediate, interpersonal, bodily, visceral, intuitive, organic existence. Philosophy, on the other hand, undermines the lived experience through scepticism, reductionism and dry analysis, but in so doing affirms the importance of, and our affiliation to, seriousness and the search for truth. One is an art form, the other scholarly. I think that it is in light of this we can rightfully be impressed by the person who embraces and masters this antinomy, and indeed maybe this has something in common with what Nietzsche meant by 'style'²⁹:

²⁷ p.31 (Oxford University Press)

²⁸ *The Twilight of the Idols* (Penguin) p. 39

²⁹ Which has something in common with what Richard Rorty calls 'irony' (in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (CUP, 1989)). A similar account is offered of the approach of collector of

... the art of dividing without making inimical; mixing up nothing, reconciling nothing; a tremendous multiplicity which is none the less the opposite of chaos – this has been the precondition, the protracted secret labour and artistic working of my instinct.³⁰

‘Philip of Macedon would have been wondrous wiser to have kept one man: *a foolosopher.*’ Maybe, and maybe wiser still if he had himself aspired to be a foolosopher king.

Stuart Hanscomb
University of Glasgow, Dumfries Campus, UK.
stuart.hanscomb@glasgow.ac.uk

anomalous phenomena and critic of the scientific establishment Charles Fort (Simon Wilson, ‘Laughing with Charles Fort’, *Fortean Times*, 242, November 2008).

³⁰ From *Ecco Homo*