

# Humor and Education: A Demonstration

By Colin D. N. Jones



A Senior Essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Integral Curriculum of Liberal Arts.

---

Tutor Steve Cortright, Advisor  
Tutor Ted Tsukahara, Advisor

Saint Mary's College of California

April 9th, 2019

## Prologue to the “Editor’s Preface”

The paper you are about to read is convoluted by design. It tries to “talk” with itself as you read it. It was written to be like a puzzle box, made with different interlocking parts. Some parts may seem, at times, to be at cross-purposes with another’s positioning, but nevertheless they fit together into a whole. Other times the reader may be tempted to parse apart the thing as geological layers—I beg you not to! If it does seem segregated into “layers” of text, I ask you please instead to consume the essay like a layer cake, each layer of red-velvet clauses and cream-cheese commentary as something boring and uniform without the adjoining layers. Which is not to say I promise this to be a good cake — only that I baked it to be so, and if I missed the mark know that I was at least aiming for the *good*, *true*, and, I hope, the *beautiful*.

Surrounded by scientism<sup>1</sup>-ists, ideologues, and postmodern relativists who may see little more than historical value in the Great Books, I felt I needed to defend the education that has so positively changed my life. As Nabokov is reported to have written *Lolita* as a love letter to the English language, I attempted to write a love letter to the dialectic of the Great Books that not only sung them praises, but defended them against their subtractors. I dreamt of a rough concept — a mere “thought that could dream about a thought”<sup>2</sup>—of a piece of writing like a Chinese finger-trap; an argument in which any rational criticism of it had to, as grounds for the criticism, concede to the argument’s larger conceit, even with valid rejection of the argument’s individual points. This paper, like the true form of all love letters<sup>3</sup>, is then a kind of trap. I hope that it smells more of honey to the reader than of vinegar, but its effects on the senses are now out of my hands: *iacta alea est*, as the saying goes, and we must now ‘cross the Rubicon’ together into that strange land of thought. And if that won’t do:

“If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended,  
That you have but slumbered here  
While these visions did appear.  
And this weak and idle theme,  
No more yielding but a dream”<sup>4</sup>

Yours, *semper fidelis*,

---

<sup>1</sup> David Arndt, *Questions of Truth: A Genealogy of Liberal Education*, 2019

<sup>2</sup> Frank Ocean, “Siegfried”, *Blonde*, 2016

<sup>3</sup> Here I choose to vaguely cite *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* as sources.

<sup>4</sup> William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Act V, Scene 1

~C.D.J.

### Editor's Preface

As do most recursive, self-important attempts at academia<sup>5</sup>, this paper began as an attempt to improve upon a system of thinking contemporaneously *en vogue* with the established, scholastic authorities of the age. Often, the pretenders to the intellectual throne cite great personal urgency in their quest to up-end the world of notions established around them. Immanuel Kant famously proclaimed that, by Hume, he had been “awakened from his “dogmatic slumber” as the impetus for writing his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Socrates himself (or Plato's-self) claimed he engaged in his rousing dialogues to resolve a seeming logical inconsistency visited upon him by the Oracle at Delphi: he, a man who knew he knew nothing, was also somehow the wisest of all the Greeks. So perhaps this paper has failed in its original aim simply because its author, *I*, have no greater mission to fulfill.

Although self-assured, this paper lacks entirely that element of divine *anointing* that drove past, great authors to overturn the systemic notional dictate of their age in favor of some more enlightened dictate. Within these pages, the reader will not find astounding revelation. Instead, this paper stands upon a simple thesis, hypostatically formed from three questions: 1) who should be taught the liberal arts, 2) what should be their contents, and 3) how should this task be accomplished?

Again, perhaps another reason for this essay's<sup>6</sup> utter failure as high-minded philosophy rests in the uninspired simplicity of its task. No attempt to define the liberal arts was set out at the beginning of this work; such definitive work was deemed unwarranted by the author. Other, more acute and rigorous authors have forded that flooded path already, and despite (or

---

<sup>5</sup> C.F. Montaigne, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault, Chomsky, *et al.*

<sup>6</sup> Read as: attempt.

perhaps, ‘informed by’) icarian failure here, this author also knew his limits: no attempt to define the liberal arts better could be undertaken here. The task here was far more pedestrian, regardless of its infeasibility: direct the liberal arts, as hypostatically enumerated above, in the face of a looming challenge to their form. Restated for laconicism: “how does one teach when meanings change?” or, for the atticly minded: “how does one effectively educate in an age of relativistic, postmodern, verastically-entropic reinterpretations of intended meanings carried words, deeds, and symbols?”

For these reasons it should surprise no one that attempts at such a thesis failed, however pompously assured the author was the topic and of his own paltry skills for the task.

But hold fast, dear reader! For while this author’s mission lacked vision, was far too simple to ever carry the day, and its craftsman lacked the necessary skill to infuse the proper *animus* into his beloved homunculus — and thus this paper was doomed to failure — this enunciation is not a declaration of surrender. Instead, this forward is to explain to the reader how Fortuna herself selflessly intervened to save the poor sod of a writer who set out to do the work of a scholar whilst possessing the wit of a gadfly<sup>7</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup>Allusion. What does it mean when a thing is alluded to? It is less coarse to the mind's palate than a simple citation, but it is something more novel than a mere copy.

When an *allusion* occurs, an author nods to an earlier primary text in some way that is supposed to carry significance with it, in the nod itself. In this way, an *allusion* can be thought of as a repetition of object or action names, or *signs*, that by using other *signs* as their *referents*, say something new through the action of referencing.

A concrete definition of ‘something new’ must be supplied that explains what the *allusion* induces. For this term, the Kantian model of *data* and *information* presented in his *Critique of Pure Reason* will be explored. With these terms as a guide, the nature of *allusions* may be properly anatomized. After examples have been correlated with the terms in use, limits to the efficacy of *allusions* will be argued. Specifically, what will be argued is that for *allusions* to work with the terms described, it is required that objective meanings exist to *signs*, and that a view of *signs* that endorses the fundamental subjectivity—or relativity—of *signs*’ meaning disallow the efficacious use of *allusions*.

When discussing ‘meaning’ of a *sign*—‘sign’ taken here simply as the name of anything—one is referring to whatever cognitive content is carried- (or triggered-, or contained-, or summoned- the reader may decide at their leisure whichever) by the *sign*. After all, names to things are only useful for communication, either with oneself or with others, and that which never need be spoken of requires no name. To speak *signs* then is an effort to communicate or express, and what is communicated or

While wracked with the despair of failure this author was presented with a nigh-perfect demonstration of the argument of the paper. By fortune alone this demonstrative example of an answer to the thesis's restatement (i.e., "how does one educate in an age where the meaning of words and deeds have become relative to the mind of the observer?") was provided, which this author will now reproduce, translated, as a submission to fulfill the Senior Essay requirement of Saint Mary's College of California's Integral Liberal Arts Program — as, to scholarship, the introduction of some long-lost work surely ought to substitute for some pithy, novel thought, especially a work of so great a magnitude as this, in recognition of the arduous labor that went into recovering it. To ensure that there is no question as to the unique and authentic nature of the work, a short description of how the work was found shall be provided:

One day when I was in the Fruitvale Flea Market in Oakland, a boy came by to sell some notebooks and old papers. As this author is very fond of reading, this author was moved by natural inclination to pick up one of the (more aged) volumes the boy was selling, and this

---

expressed must be some content contained in the speaker's mind. This content of the cognition is described by Immanuel Kant as *data* and *information*.

Kant defines *data*, as 'mental content' supplied by the senses in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, noting:

"The person blind from birth cannot form the least representation of darkness, because he has no relationship with light; [...] All concepts of negations are thus derivative, and the realities contain the *data*, the material, so to speak, or the transcendental content, for the possibility and the thoroughing determination of all things." [CPR, A575/B603]

This *data*, when spoken of in reference to no one person's particular experience, but to the cognitive content expressible as a whole, is what he then terms *information*:

"The observations and calculations of astronomers have taught us much that is worthy of admiration, but most important, probably, is that they have exposed for us the abyss of our ignorance, which without this *information* human reason could never have imagined' to be so great; reflection on this ignorance has to produce a great alteration in the determination of the final aims! of the use of our reason." [CPR, A575/ B 603]

*Information*, then, is likened to a *data* that can be "taught", and thus is communicable, and therefore is a common property. One speaks of an individual's *data*, but *information* totally. Likewise, it stands to reason that *information* is what is shared by *signs*, as names, by their very nature, allow multiple individuals to reference the same *information*. Another way of expressing this would be to rhetorically ask, "how does one know what is being named when another person names a thing?" Through some common cognitive content, no doubt. Because *data* is what individuals use as cognitive content, what is carried by speech in *signs* must be the depersonalized version of this mental content, or *information*.

author saw that it was written in characters that this author recognized as Spanish. And as this author recognized but could not read it, a translator was sought after and found (at the taco truck), who could decode the script. However, the translator soon found reason to laugh: “Señor,” he said, “this is not Spanish, at least, not any kind that is spoken today.”

The kind taco truck vendor explained that the ancient volume was in a type of argot created by the Moriscos of Spain before their ejection from the peninsula in 1609. It involved the recording of Arabic characters into the Latin script of Spanish, then re-recorded left-to-right using an amalgamation of Spanish and Arabic grammar. Undeterred by such a quirky setback, and, spurred on by Fate and Destiny, this author proceeded to threaten the kind impromptu-translator and the neighboring halal shawarma truck vendor with calling Immigration and Customs Enforcement,<sup>8</sup> unless the pair worked tirelessly throughout the evening to produce a working translation of the mysterious text. By morning the hunch, and this author's

---

<sup>8</sup> Twice in Cervantes's *Don Quixote* does he highlight the exploitative class structure existing in Spain prior to the expulsion of the Moriscos in 1609. In chapter IX of the First Part, Cervantes recounts how he neither was the initial recorder of Don Quixote's history, nor the proper translator of the work, both of whom are described by Cervantes as alternatively “Arab” or “Morisco”. However, Cervantes insists that he “is deserving of continual and memorable praise” due to the “toil and effort” he put into finding the history of Don Quixote (pg. 66). His claim is in direct contradiction to the happenstantial ease of discovery later presented to the reader in chapter IX, where it is revealed that Cervantes stumbles upon the manuscript in the Alcaná market of Toledo and pays a Morisco to translate the work for him—all the while boasting of how he swindled both the boy who initially discovered the manuscript and his translator (pg. 67, 68). In this whole instance Cervantes casts himself as not only taking advantage of the boy and the Morisco, but hoping to capitalize off of Benengali's work while denigrating him: “If any objection can be raised regarding the truth of this one, it can only be that the author was Arabic,” (pg. 68). Cervantes draws attention to the injustice of Spain by establishing his own inconsistency in the value of the claims he makes: claiming other's labor as his toil; lauding a work and deriving fame from it, but insulting its author; etc..

For a proper allusion to Cervantes's commentary on Spain's exploitative relationships, several tasks must be accomplished. First the same basic form (of, in this case, the passage) ought to be replicated while placing them in a such a context that draws attention and reveals new *information*. This is the reference to the *signs* used to construct the original work, either in whole or in part. A 1:1 replication (a word-for-word, grammar-intact copy) is not necessary, nor desired. Instead, a new rationale—provided by the original signage's context and its new iteration—that establishes to the reader that the writer is commanding them to recall the original *such that* it provides novel information is the aim of allusion. Proper presentation of the *imitation* of the original (i.e., presentation of the imitation such that the imitation of the original in a new context now provides the reader with novel information) is what necessarily be considered next; however, this presentation vitally relies on prior-established ratios of information in the mind of the reader, and the constancy of meaning of *signs*.

painstaking effort, had paid off: the title of the mysterious transcript was revealed to be none other than *The Philosopher's Second Part "Περὶ ποιητικῆς"*, *Translated with Commentary by Cide Hamete Benengeli, an Arab Historian*. Although incomplete, due in part to a minor argument and a hurried phone call to law enforcement, this author is proud to present so well conceived and executed a translation of this long-lost work.

As stated earlier, this recovered work, diligently restored here by the author's scholarship and toil, will serve as the demonstrative part of this paper's thesis. Its monumental importance should be clear to any person who reads it — though the translation be incomplete, pending the search for another shawarma vendor with tenuous legal status. Likewise should be obvious the pertinence and efficacy of the work towards demonstrating the paper's thesis, and justify the awarding of no less than a bachelor's degree to its scholarly savior.

Enjoy,

~Colin .D. Jones, a Heartbreaking Scholar of Staggering Genius<sup>9</sup>

**Colin D. Jones Presents: *Aristotle's "Poetics, On Comedy"*, *Translated from the Original Greek with Commentary by the renowned Cide Hamete Benengeli, an Arab Historian***

### **Cide's Commentary**

1. Al-ḥamdu li-llāhi rabbi l-ʿālamīn...<sup>10</sup> ...Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, who has blessed his servant such as to bring the work you now read into your hands. Long have I pained over the commentary you now compliment me by reading, and longer still has the work which it stands upon been waiting to be read again by the eyes of the Faithful. For, while a copy was rumored to have once been held in the Bayt al-Ḥikmah<sup>11</sup> in Baghdad, the work I present to you has been

---

<sup>9</sup> Allegoric paratextual nod to the allegoric paratext<sup>1</sup> contained in the title of *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, a pseudo-memoir by Dave Eggers. The self-styled autobiography is best remembered for teaching Americans *caveat lector* in an age where people forgot the *Odyssey*.

<sup>1</sup>A ten-dollar word found in Mikke Jensen's defense of Eggers (2014. "A Note on a Title: A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius" in *The Explicator*, 72:2, 146–150.)

<sup>10</sup> 2nd verse of the first sutra of the Quran

<sup>11</sup> The so-called "House of Wisdom" in Baghdad, a repository of medieval and classical writings preserved and translated into Arabic.

considered lost by all peoples — both to the Faithful and the Infidel — since the destruction of that holy House by the Seljuk Turkmen<sup>12</sup> so long ago. A copy was thought to be in the library of Caliph Al-Ḥakam II — along with a Commentary by Abu-al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn-Aḥmad ibn-Ruṣhd<sup>13</sup>, as he was writing his famed translations of Aristotle — but alas, not a trace of his work on the subject survived the fall of Qurṭuba to the Conquistador armies in their “Reconquista” (of a realm that never belonged to them)<sup>14</sup>. Rumors of rumors of half-finished transcriptions of it had persisted for generations before, masha’Allah, I was granted the honor of bringing it, with my humble commentary, to you: the lost second half of *Poetics, On Comedy!*

2. But who am I, dear reader, to bring such an astonishing claim before you? And what right have I, a poor Moorish historian, to present the most sought after book of philosophy with my own commentary? Indeed, I am unworthy. My claim and right instead is predicated on the will of God, who saw fit to deliver this lost masterpiece to my hand. To assuage my readers and convince them of my worth, I will devote a few humble words of my commentary to the description of how this text found its way to my possession, how it was translated, and my pure hopes for the future of this long-lost work.

---

<sup>12</sup> This is incorrect. The House of Wisdom was destroyed during the Siege of Baghdad in 1258 by Hulagu Khan and the Mongolians (“The Mongol Invasion and the Destruction of Baghdad”. *Lost Islamic History*. Archived from the original on 2016-08-14. Retrieved 2014-10-27.). It is unclear whether Benengeli is mistaken about the circumstances of the repository’s destruction or whether he is misidentifying Mongolians as Turkmen.

<sup>13</sup> Known in the West as “Averroës”, Ibn Ruṣhd was an Islamic polymath famous for his translations of and commentaries on Aristotle’s work.

<sup>14</sup> Some information must be supplied here, as some references Benengeli makes fall outside of the Integral Program’s generally accepted body of knowledge. The Arabic “Qurṭuba”, the modern Spanish city of Córdoba, was the city where Ibn Ruṣhd was born and primarily wrote. At the time of Ibn Ruṣhd’s life, Qurṭuba was the center for Intellectualism and scholarship of the Muslim world. In his time belonging to the Almohad Caliphate (an Islamic theocratic state based out of Marrakesh in North Africa), the city had once been the capital of its own state—the Caliphate of Qurṭuba—before instability triggered by the crusades launched to retake the peninsula from the Muslims (the “Reconquista”) caused the old Caliphate to descend into civil war. Despite the chaos of “Taifa” period caused by tribal civil-war, the city of Qurṭuba survived as a center for learning and the arts until its capture and transformation into *Córdoba* by King Ferdinand III of Castile in 1236. As an Arab historian of Spain, Benengeli would be well-aware of this information—although the exactness of his knowledge of the period could suggest a speciality—or, perhaps, reverence of—the period.

3. My name is Cide Hamete Benengeli, and I am the last Moorish historian left in all of the lands of southern Iberia, Andalusia. I write this by my hand in the fallen kingdom of Córdoba. The Conquistadors, long ago, supplanted the love of philosophy in this land with strict adherence to their theocracy. Now, the turtledoves of my beloved Córdoba sing in the darkness cast by the shadows of the Conquistador's castles, the gardens and fountains they swam and sang from tainted with the foul stench of smoke rising from the artisan workshops that have grown to choke the Guadalquivir river. In these new factories of cobblers and metal workers, gold and silver from *Terra Nova* flows pure and shimmering like the Guadalquivir once did. The cries of slave auctions of the Portuguese drown out the sweet music of the turtledoves and pierce at all times the gentle repose of any *siesta*. I have read in the philosophy of my beloved Ibn Rushd's *Fasl al-Maqal*<sup>15</sup> that God has made the world perfect for mankind, and that serves as a proof of God's existence outside of the holy *sutras* of the Quran. His arguments, though as clear and irrefutable as when they were written some five-hundred years ago, move me less as I ponder what has happened to the home of Ibn Rushd.

In ancient times before the fall of the last Muslim Emirate in Granada, we Moors ruled all of Spain, our rule a Golden Age of enlightenment. The barbaric Christian kingdoms that had come to dominate the peninsula in the absence of Rome were defeated by the armies of the Faithful, and a new civilization was wrought out of the banks of the Guadalquivir and the hills of Toledo. Baths, madrassas, and many brilliant mosques, decorated with the infinite brilliance of shapes cast from Euclid's *Elements*<sup>16</sup>, were raised all throughout the purple twilight of Spain. Doctors, philosophers, algebraists, and poets crowded the streets of every city. As the Quran

---

<sup>15</sup> *Fasl al-Maqal fi ma bayn al-Hikma wa al-Shariah min Ittisal*, often translated as *On the Harmony of Religions and Philosophy* or *The Decisive Treatise, Determining the Nature of the Connection between Religion and Philosophy*, the English title is often shortened to *The Decisive Treatise*.

<sup>16</sup> Traditionally, mosques were forbidden to be decorated with images or icons of religious significance, as they are viewed as a form of idolatry. Instead, mosques were traditionally decorated by geometric artwork and fractal patterns. The Mezquita de Córdoba, a moorish mosque-turned-cathedral in Córdoba, has many brilliant examples of this.

dictates, a kindness was extended to slaves<sup>17</sup> that was unknown in our modern, the barbaric, or even Roman eras of rule. All ruled from the Caliphate of Qurṭuba, our Moorish age brought light to a world God has cast in darkness for its barbarism, and thus rewarded savagery for savagery.

And, standing tall among all these brilliant lights of mankind, was my mentor and guide, who this work owes great credit in spirit: Abu-al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn-Aḥmad ibn-Ruṣhd. Though his name has mutated since he has wandered in the gardens of the Alhambra, going from “Benraist” to “Avenris” and even “Aben Rasaan” and “Filius Rosadis”, a hundred years to become, as the Conquistadors say, “Averroes”<sup>18</sup>, the wisdom he breathed into the pages of his works still preserves something of that lost Golden Age of the Moor in Andalusia. He is known best to the Conquistadors for his laborious and inspired commentary on Aristotle, the father of logic, although perhaps his greatest contribution to mankind was the 1180 *Tahafut al-Tahafut* he wrote in defense of philosophy against the the polemics of al-Ghazali, who argued that the laws of nature themselves were whimsical things, subject to the Faith, and not the will of God forever, but only from moment-to-moment. Indeed, al-Ghazali’s incoherent attacks against logic remind me vaguely of something an old Greek had once argued, that the laws of the universe were subject to the whims of man *via* his perspective. I imagine al-Ghazali thought as much when he formulated the motive behind his attack on philosophy, save that he allowed only the opinions of imams, and not all men, to shape the world.

4. But alas, even these philosophical debates are long removed from the Cordoba in which we now live! In their *Reconquista* of Al-Andalus<sup>19</sup>, the Conquistadors scattered and destroyed not

---

<sup>17</sup> *Quran* 4:36 “And serve Allah. Ascribe no thing as partner unto Him. (Show) kindness unto parents, and unto near kindred, and orphans, and the needy, and unto the neighbour who is of kin (unto you) and the neighbour who is not of kin, and the fellow-traveller and the wayfarer and (the slaves) whom your right hands possess.” (Muhammad, and M. Pickthall. “The Quran.” *The Quran, Sura 4, Verse 36*, Tufts University, [www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2002.02.0002%3Asura%3D4%3Averse%3D36](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2002.02.0002%3Asura%3D4%3Averse%3D36).)

<sup>18</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Averroes’ Search, The Aleph*, 1949

<sup>19</sup> The Moorish name for the realms under their control on the Iberian peninsula.

only the *taifas* that had succeeded the Caliphate of Qurṭuba, but also ground to dust that last Moorish Emirate, son of Spain, that clung to the cliffs of Granada and offered refuge for the Faithful. After the defeat of the Emir in 1491, the Moors were forced by the Conquistadors to convert to Christianity. The scholarly works of Ibn Rushd were barred from us, as they discussed the true Faith, and we Moors were severed from the fountainhead of knowledge, and were not even allowed, as we were even under the barbaric Almoravids, to debate the merits of Arabic works. With the imposition of the Christian Mass, spoken in Latin, even our own language — the Arabic of Al-Andalus — was taken from us. Without language or works, we Moors became deaf to knowledge, and unable to speak our most complex thoughts; we soon forgot what little we remembered. For this reason, I wish to leave Andalusia. The Conquistadors gutted the mosques and palaces of Alhambra and La Mezquita and built churches inside of them, just as they effaced knowledge from the Moors' heads; they have placed themselves in the bones of Al-Andalus, and live among the corpses of the Golden Age of Qurṭuba.

The fallen state of my land and my Moorish people is in part the reason why I write as well: it is from an urge to leave that I took action allowing me to stumble on this most miraculous discovery before you. You see, dear reader, I have long since dreamt of the day where I may find passage and livelihood in the last stronghold of wisdom left in all of Al-Andalus: the city of Valencia, Venice of Ibera. In Valencia, knowledge is remembered, not forgotten, and we Moors have not become walking ghosts. Alas, this dream has long eluded me: I am poor. The histories I write sell to none in my native Arabic, and even in my Spanish they sell only to other Moors. I am forced to find work in my native Andalusia as a scribe, and have never had the funds necessary to move to that hallowed city, Valencia. All this may soon change though, as I discovered something that will earn me fame even among the Conquistadors.

5. I was in the market place in Córdoba. A boy came by to sell some old parchments and dusty vellums to a silk merchant. As I am very fond of reading—and even more fond of finding a work that, if translated, may earn me my bread—I was moved by natural inclination to pick up on the older scraps the boy was selling. I saw immediately that they were in characters I knew to be Greek. Since I recognized but could not read it, I searched for a Grecian Jew—one of those descendants who fled the fall of Constantinople to the armies of the Faithful led by Mehmed the Turk in 1492—who might still understand the characters of his ancient mother tongue, and who could speak Arabic or Spanish, and who could read it for me. It was not difficult to find this kind of interpreter, for even if I had sought a speaker of a better and older language... well, he would have spoken that language to, now that I think about it<sup>20,21</sup>. Either way, I eagerly convinced this

---

<sup>20</sup> An allusion to Hebrew, spoken by the Jews who were merchants in Córdoba. This itself is an allusion to the allusion Cervantes makes in the original text by his hand.

<sup>21</sup> The conditions under which all cognitive content as *information* is carried by *signs* is as the *sense of referents* of *signs*. If this were not so, *information*, mental content, would be unpegged from the human experience, and names could not be applied to things. Gottlob Frege defines several of these terms in his essay, *Sense and Reference*. In the essay, Frege outlines the relation between *sign* and a *sign's* meaning by cataloguing how a *sign* carries *information*: “A proper name (word, sign, sign combination, expression) *expresses* its sense, *refers to* or *designates* its referent. By means of a sign we express its sense and designate its referent.” (Frege, *Sense and Reference*, §33) To Frege, a name designates a referent (an object, real or theoretical) of which some sense is expressed. This expressed sense can be nothing other than cognitive content, or else it could not be communicated by the name of a referent. This expressible cognitive content, belonging to no individual uniquely, is correspondent with Kant's *information*. Because a *sign* expresses the sense it carries to all recipients, it must contain that part of cognitive content that is not dependant on the faculties of any one individual. Frege's *sense* is Kant's *information* because of their (i.e., Frege's *sense* and Kant's *information*) mutual independence from the individual, itself a kind of objectivity.

It bears noting that the equivocation of *information* and *sense* above is not to exclusively how cognitive content is handled in speech. The mental image, or the subjective “conception” (Frege, *Sense and Reference*, §29) of a referent must also necessarily be cognitive content, but because it is also necessarily tied to the individual and is not itself communicable, it is *data*. One may always describe one's conception of a thing, and that is expressible, but what is not expressible is the image in their mind. Only the *sense* of a *sign* is relatable, the *conception* no more transferable than saying “chocolate” teleports chocolate into the hand of the listener. The meaning of a *sign* described as *information* then is neither the referent of the *sign*—as the chocolate bar designated is not transferable itself by the utilization of *signs*—nor is it the conception of a *sign*—as the mental image of a referent is no more transferrable than the chocolate bar itself. the *sense* of *sign* chocolate bar is what is communicable, insofar that a recipient of the *sign* “chocolate bar” knows what is being carried by the *sign*.

---

What, then, occurs when an author makes an *allusion* to an earlier work? It is not as simple, as Frege puts it, as having “signs of signs” (Frege, *Sense and Reference*, §28). Instead, an *allusion* creates a new meaning of the original *signs* referenced through their relation in a new context.

Take, for instance, an author’s use of the Socratic epitaph “gadfly”. It is one matter to reference gadflies, or compare one’s self to a gadfly with no possibility of context to allow for an *allusion* to be presumed, but another matter entirely occurs when it is clear that an author is creating an *allusion* to the Socratic defense in *Apologia* 20e. The defense of Socrates in *Apologia* and this specific humbling comparison possesses a certain kind fame onto itself, an *information* carried by the *sign* bolstered by context. To hear the phrase sends a buzzing in the receiver’s mind, and a new sequence of events occur:

1) the recipient of the *allusion* registers the *information* carried by the *sign* itself, along with its original use in the *Apologia*

2) the recipient of the *allusion* registers the *information* in the the context of the *sign* that is different than the original, context, thus recalling different *information*

3) the *information* of the *sign* and its new context are put in a new relation, unique from the original alluded to, but cannot be *data*.

Recall that *data* belongs to individuals, but *information* is communicable. When an *allusion* is made by an author, an intentional act is taken to communicate specific *information*, i.e., the compilation of *information* of the *sign*, its original context, its new context, and the relation between the *sign*’s meaning and its contexts. This *information* is not *data* because it is communicable by the author, and so is not subjective as a *conception* would be. Instead, the *allusion* is objective, as it exists separately from the individual and may be communicated and referenced independently from individuals.

However, what is revealed by this is more far-reaching than merely establishing *allusions* in the class of objective phenomena. The establishment of *allusions* and the *information* they convey as objective also necessitates that the meaning of the original *signs* that which they stand upon are themselves not open to a plurality of interpretations. If that were the case, *allusions* would fail to function.

If an *allusion* is an intentional act of communication, then the author is conveying *information* that is not subjective, or relative to the mind of the recipient. *Information* is exactly the opposite, as a gadfly is a gadfly, regardless of what an individual’s experiential *data* of the gadfly is. The *sign* gadfly carries with it meaning as *sense* that is an expression separated from an individual conception, even if an individual conception limits the individual’s ability to understand the *information*. Someone who has never read, or does not recall, the ‘gadfly’ comment made by Socrates in the *Apologia* will necessarily be excluded from the *information* contained in the *allusion*. Similarly, someone whose subjective interpretation of the text has them decide no importance to the *sign* ‘gadfly’ will also not be capable of receiving the *information* conveyed by the author—but that is no evidence that there was nothing to convey, anymore so than missing a baseball thrown to a first basemen means that there was no ball thrown.

*Allusions*, then, necessitate not only an objective meaning to themselves, but an objective meaning to the *signs* that they stand on. If a particular dense student understood Socrates’s self-deprecation as boasting, and the student presumed ‘gadfly’ were a welcome aid instead of a nuisance, then any attempt made by the author to communicate *information* would fail. This leads to one conclusion: *allusions*, as a special activity undertaken with *signs*, require objective meaning to explain them as phonema. Further, this shows that *signs* themselves have objective meanings, or else the author utilizing *allusions* would have concrete material to work with. These conclusions disallow the inherent relativity to the meaning of *signs*—that is, the meaning of *signs* cannot in any case be exclusively subject to the perspective of any individual. This is not to allege that ‘relativity’ itself does not exist, or that differing interpretations cannot

interpreter to read me the volume I had purchased; he opened it to the middle, and let out a hearty laugh. When I asked him what he found so funny, he replied it was something written in the margins of the book. I told him to tell me what it was, and he, still laughing, related that a Franciscan monk named Adso had saved the book from a monastery fire, after a blind Benedictine monk named Jorge<sup>22</sup> had tried to destroy the book by eating its pages and lighting the library it was housed in flames. “Interesting,” I said confused, “but I see that the book you hold is not in a monk’s stomach, nor is it burned.” The Jew smiled and answered that, well, the Benedictine monk was in fact described to be blind, after all. He had consumed the wrong pages and burnt the wrong library in his haste, it seemed. Curious as to what would cause such bitter madness, I asked the Jew why it was so important for this book to be burned. He flipped through the marginalia of the book and frowned. He could not find any reason for the matter. My interest slowly waning, I asked the Jew the title of the book. Again, he had trouble finding the title, for it seemed the book was a continuation of a prior volume: “*Having concluded an overview of [...] tragic and epic forms of poetry [...] higher forms of imitation, I speak now to fulfill the initial proposal of this treatise and provide a full account of poetry; [...] that nature of comedy...*” At his words my whole attention was immediately seized. It was unmistakable. This was a work by the Philosopher, by Aristotle himself! And, if I could hope...

I paid the Jew handsomely to translate the rest, and lodged with him at his home to ensure the work was a diligent translation of the text with no whimsy of the translator in evidence present. His work lifted my spirits over the next few days—spirits that were, inshallah,

---

occur subject to the understanding of any one individual. However, what cannot exist, if *signs* convey *information*, is the subjective pliability of that *information*, for it would no longer be communicable at all.

<sup>22</sup> “Adso of Melk” is the supposed author for the source of Umberto Eco’s *Name of the Rose* (1980), purported in that work to be the author of a manuscript (Le Manuscrit de Dom Adson de Melk, traduit en Francais d’apres l’edition de Dom J. Mabillon [Aux Presses de L’Abbaye de la Source, Paris, 1842]). It is likely that Adso of Melk never existed, and almost certain that he never possessed a copy of Aristotle’s second book of the *Poetics*.

in sore need of lifting. Soon the work was complete, and I held in my hands—by the labor of my own genius alone—a breathtaking work. Aristotle’s Second Book of the *Poetics, On Comedy*, was now no longer lost, but in my hands. Thinking of my beloved forefather, Ibn Rushd, I saw fit to follow in his place; while I might be but a poor historian compared to that Golden Age polymath, I would use all my skill and wisdom to write an accompanying commentary to the *Poetics*, from which you now read. With this commentary, I hope to win praise among Conquistadors and Moors, Christians and Jews, alike. With its success, I will find myself worthy (and worth-y) to travel that path north of Andalusia into the golden city of Valencia, and dwell among the free in the last free realm in Iberia.

6. I praise God, lord of this universe and many others, in thanks for allowing me this opportunity, and I ask the Prophet and Ibn Rushd to pray on my behalf, inshallah.

***Poetics, On Comedy***

§27.

Having concluded an overview of the trite nature shared between *tragic* and *epic* forms of poetry that stood as a stumbling block before higher forms of imitation, I speak now to fulfill the initial proposal of this treatise and provide a full account of poetry; having moved from first principle of the subject to the subject’s own epitome, that nature of *comedy*. With some perfunctory remarks on the iambic genealogy of *comedy*<sup>23</sup> and the mysterious origins<sup>24</sup> of this Daedalic art already established, what is left is now to give *comedy* the same treatment as those lower forms of imitation earlier addressed: the number and nature of constitutive parts; the causes of success and failure in them; the objections of the critics, and the solutions in answer to them<sup>25</sup>.

§28.

---

<sup>23</sup> *Poetics*, 1449a25

<sup>24</sup> *Poetics*, 1448a30

<sup>25</sup> *Poetics*, 1462b17

All *ποίησις* is either non-mimetic or mimetic in nature<sup>26</sup>. Recall that imitation is a part of human nature, natural to man from childhood, and the first way man learns<sup>27</sup>. Men naturally delight in accurate representations of *τὰ φυσικά*, since seeing the representation of a thing is at the same time learning about it. This point is easily demonstrated: as all names signify solely by convention<sup>28</sup>, no knowledge of the thing-itself is gained from a name alone (i.e. learning so-and-so man is named 'Socrates' tells us nothing more about so-and-so man's properties or constitution). What is learned with a representation of that-there man is the association of the sign 'Socrates' with the facsimile of so-and-so man; m "that-there" man becomes "so-and-so man" only after association with the sign "Socrates". A more accurate representation of 'Socrates' allows one to learn more of the thing-itself-Socrates<sup>29</sup>, and thus men delight more in the accurate facsimile of of the thing-itself-Socrates than they do in the more-ugly or more-beautiful Socrates himself. However, while men cannot learn from a name alone, as it is only the sign of thing-itself, and not even the facsimile, men do learn by the combination of signs which, collectively, are significations of representations. The subject-sign 'Socrates' combined with the predicate 'is dead' is not the representation of the thing-itself-Socrates; how can it be, when it is not a facsimile of the thing-itself of either the man, Socrates, or Thanatos? No, instead the statement 'Socrates is dead' is a report (representation) of the thing-itself signified by 'Socrates', and the report itself a representation of Thanatos, not the god himself. All predicated subjects in speech are, then, representations of representations. The representative power of speech explains why men delight in performed *ποίησις* over mere conversation: it is the square of a representation occurring naturally in conversation, squared once again. Such is

---

<sup>26</sup> *Tractatus Coislinianus*, (I)

<sup>27</sup> *Poetics*, 1448b5

<sup>28</sup> *De Interpretatione*, 16a27

<sup>29</sup> As there is more true *data* in an accurate and rich representation than there is in an inaccurate and poor representation.

the case with mimetic *ποίησις*, or, *representation of representations of a signifier*. By contrast, non-mimetic *ποίησις* is always a report that does not seek to square the representation of a signifier, and thus, is is but a paltry square of a square.

§29.

All non-mimetic *ποίησις* is divided into histories or instructions<sup>30</sup>. Non-mimetic *ποίησις* is imitation that seeks to narrate, rather than embody. Plato puts true words in Socrates's mouth when he has him claim, in Book III of the *Republic*, that,

if the poet never disguised himself, his entire poem would be narration without imitation<sup>31</sup>

And further, using Homer as an example:

If Homer said that Chryses came with a ransom for his daughter to supplicate the Achaeans, especially the kings, and if after that Homer had gone on speaking, not as if he had become Chryses, but still as Homer, you know that it would not be imitation but narration pure and simple<sup>32</sup>

When the *ποίησις* takes on this narrative quality, it becomes historical, if it describes actions that actually did or are presumed to have been taken in the past, or instructive, if the actions are to take place in the future. Thus, there can be no such things as “future histories”, only instructions, which act as models of actions to be brought to pass in the future.

Histories seek to delight men by teaching them what happened in the things with internal principles of motion and rest, things physical as opposed to mathematical or intellectible<sup>33</sup>, before their time, or during their time when they were absent. Histories may be simple or complex. A simple history happening in a man's lifetime while he was away would be, for example, reports received by a returning Athenian merchant that Socrates was indicted and found guilty of impiety<sup>34</sup>, while a complex history happening before a man's time would be

---

<sup>30</sup> *Tractatus Coislinianus*

<sup>31</sup> Plato, *Republic*, Book III, 393d

<sup>32</sup> Plato, *Republic*, Book III, 393d

<sup>33</sup> τὰ φυσικά

<sup>34</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 24–27

Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* told to a young boy. Histories need not be true to reality to be historical—such as the above example of the *Iliad*—but rather need be only a narrative that happened prior to the time telling of the *ποίησις*.

Instructions seek to delight men by presenting a representation of a task completed. The end of each instruction is to present a representation so perfectly that all recipients of the instructions will learn to do the task themselves. A word more deserves to be dispensed here: it is not entirely clear whether a successful instruction ends in the task-itself or the *imitation* of the task-itself. For, while after the instruction dispensed to the recipient, the recipient is expected to complete the task by learning from the instruction, it is unclear whether the task set forth for novice by the journeyman's instruction is the *same* task performed by the journeyman. Obviously, the history recorded would be “the novice learned the task from the journeyman, and then accomplished the task”. Grammatically, each sign of ‘the task’ in the history is equivalent, as it may be replaced in the second clause with the pronoun ‘it’ and be understood. But this history is equally as valid as the following: “the novice watched the journeyman dig a well in the front yard, and so was able to dig a well in the backyard”, in which the phrase ‘dig a well in the backyard’ does not designate the first task, and thus cannot be supplanted by the pronoun ‘it’. If a liberal view is taken of the task, then it may be said that the phrase ‘the task’ does not denote the circumstances of the task but the task-itself, and therefore the second history may read, “the novice watched the journeyman dig a well in the front yard, and so was able to replicate the task in the backyard”. However, the task accomplished elsewhere is *not* the same task, no more so than point A on one terminus of a line segment is the same as point B on the opposite end. They are only both belonging to the same category of *geometric object*, but may be substituted for the pronoun ‘it’ no more than Socrates's left and right hands may be. But enough of this here; more on this will be said later in my third book of the *Poetics*, on

non-mimetic *ποίησις*. For the moment let it rest that of instruction there are two divisions (or one division into two parts): didactic and the theoretical. The above histories exemplify the didactic instruction, the remainder of this work will exemplify the theoretical.

§30.

Mimetic *ποίησις* is divided into narrative and dramatic<sup>35</sup>. Dramatic *ποίησις* is the kind that directly represents action, and is divided into comedy (the highest form of *ποίησις*), tragedy, all-part-plays (lit. *παντόμιμος*), and satyr plays. All-part-plays or *mimes* are executed by a single actor who delivers a truncated version of an otherwise well-known drama, and are the lowest form of *ποίησις*. Their end is to aid in the recollection of representations of representations of signs. Satyr plays or *tragicomedies* are the comic adaptation of epic or tragic dramas and, like the mime, rely on the audience's prior familiarity with tragedy, on which they are based for their humor. The end of *tragicomedy* is to complete the cathartic action in the soul began by tragic dramas and left incomplete, so as not to drive the audience into too deep a despair.

*Tragicomedies* are the next lowest form of *ποίησις* after *mimes*, as they, too, rely on the familiarity of the audience with a work of tragedy. However, while they deliver less delight to men than pure comedy (due to their taint of tragedy), they operate much the same as comedy does.

Tragedy has already been discussed at length. Recall that it removes the fearful emotions of the soul *via* compassion and terror<sup>36</sup>. It is the next highest form of drama beneath comedy; while the *tragic* walks the earth, a blind Oedipus among us, the *comic* lifts us up with wings fashioned from the waxing and waning of mankind's condition. It is thus for this reason that comedy is referred to as the Daedalic art, while tragedy is referred to as the Oedipean (and

---

<sup>35</sup> *Tractatus Coislinianus* (II)

<sup>36</sup> *Tractatus Coislinianus* (II)

the epic, of course, the Homeric). Tragedy aims at correcting the proportion of fear<sup>37</sup> and pity in the subject's soul towards an object (which are afterward considered "purged"): *fear* in the audience that they may end up as the subjects of tragedy (that, at any moment, their lives may be upturned by a Messenger of some dark secret, as Oedipus's was)<sup>38</sup>, and *pity* at seeing a man no better or worse than ourselves, that is, a man not preeminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune is but a product of his circumstances and a flaw of his character<sup>39</sup> (and of initial good circumstances, as can be observed by the fall of Oedipus the king). Arousing these emotions, tragedy aims to cleanse and purge them from the soul of spectators through imitation of a serious action complete in itself, utilizing language with the pleasurable accessories of rhythm and harmony, in a dramatic form<sup>40</sup>. Tragedy's mother is thus *grief*<sup>41</sup>: through terror and shared sadness at the spectacle of fate before the audience, men may be cleansed of like anxieties by the shared grief of a subject not-unlike us.

### **Cide's Commentary**

7. What is a commentary? What is its form and purpose? Does a commentary add to the text beneath it, like layers on cake, or does, through an admixture of new thoughts does it, like a pigments on a easel, create something new from the combination of its part?

My beloved Ibn Rushd was most famed for his commentaries. Indeed, the Christians remember him primarily for this. What great value is in Ibn Rushd's addendums to Aristotle, though? Did the Christians—far removed, in the early days of their church, from the judicious syllogisms of the great Philosopher—need more explicating than what was presented in the text itself? But if that is true, what then is the value of the text of Aristotle itself if, to be understood, it

---

<sup>37</sup> *Tractatus Coislinianus* (II)

<sup>38</sup> *Poetics*, 1452b25

<sup>39</sup> *Poetics*, 1453b6

<sup>40</sup> *Poetics*, 1449b28

<sup>41</sup> *Tractatus Coislinianus* (II)

required more from a Moor who lived twelve hundred years after the penning of it? And, to repeat the question above, is the text still the same text when it has been commented on?

There must be some attempt to answer these questions before proceeding along with a commentary of any fashion—for no other reason than that man attempting to craft a thing he knows nothing about gives up his share of creation to Fate, and can say with no certainty that he has knowledge of his craft, but at best a knack.

8. For our first consideration, it must be judged whether or not a commentary adds to a text when it is applied. At first, reasons abound to make this seem most correct: any commentator is, quite literally after all, adding more words atop the words already spoken by the primary source. If Aristotle says “the final cause of a thing is its purpose”, Ibn Rushd would be adding words no matter their content; hence so that if Ibn Rushd disagrees with the Philosopher, e.g., “the final cause of a thing, as Aristotle understood it, was its purpose, but the final cause of a thing is actually the natural laws of the universe becoming manifest, and so the purpose alone belongs to God”, then the commentary has added words, if not expanded the understanding. The same would occur if Ibn Rushd agrees with the Philosopher: the underlying meaning of Aristotle would be changed.

But this last point creates a conundrum for our exegesis on commentary. For, while it is clear that Ibn Rushd added words, he did so by denying the conceit of the primary text and supplanting it with his own. His addition of words was in reality, at best, a substitution for the original conceit, and at worse a denial of the conceit, and thus a kind of subtraction from the primary text. Still, it may be maintained, the primary text was not lost in this, even if its conceit was rejected; a reader may simply elect not to agree with the judgement of the commentator, and reject Ibn Rushd's commentary. But now the reader would be as if two *jinn*, one made of smoke and the other made of fire, were perched atop the reader's shoulders and whispered in

their ears; one *jinn* would whisper the *sutras* of the Quran into one ear, while the other *jinn* whispered the words of Satan into the other ear; of course, the reader would recognize the *jinn*<sup>42</sup> whispering the *sutras* as the *jinn* to heed, and reject the *jinn* who works as an agent of the Evil One—but this rejection does not change the circumstances by which the reader heard the *sutras*. In fact, it is obvious that the acceptance of the *sutras* brings new idea with it now, as with hearing good *jinn* alone receiving the *sutras* might be a mild experience in the mind of the Faithful, while with the addition of the bad *jinn* the experience would change from mild to a *jihad*<sup>43</sup> for the soul of the listener. A commentary, then, cannot be seen as mere addition, as adding stone to stone would be, but rather a commentary is something that fundamentally changes the work it comments on.

Of course, this is not always evident. When Ibn Rushd writes of Aristotle's first book of *Poetics*, he comments thus on concepts alien to him<sup>44</sup>, *tragedy* and *comedy*: "*Aristu gives the name "tragedy" to panegyrics and name "comedy" to satires and anathemas. There are many admirable tragedies and comedies in the Quran and the mu'allaqat of the mosque.*"<sup>45</sup> Here, no clear disagreement with Aristotle is in fact portrayed. The Philosopher may in fact agree that *tragedies* are a kind of panegyric and a *comedy* is a kind of satire. The issue: this commentary is in fact incorrect; the terms *panegyric*, *satire*, and *anathema* are not equivalent to—and so a substitute for—*tragedy* and *comedy*, but merely similar to them. A *tragedy* is more than a

---

<sup>42</sup> One of the classes of intelligent beings in Islam along with humans and angels.

<sup>43</sup> Lit, "struggle", particularly one with a religious connotation.

<sup>44</sup> It is generally thought that at the time of Ibn Rushd, dramatic performances were widely unknown in the Muslim world. Islam's prohibition of idolatry disallowed depiction of the Prophet Mohammed or God, and there are no extensive records of dramatic acting taking place in the Muslim world prior to 1200 CE. Jorge has his version of Averroes completely bemused by the concept: "The night before, two doubtful words were had halted him at the very portals of the *Poetics*. Those words were "tragedy" and "comedy". He had come across them years earlier, in the third book of the *Rhetoric*; no one in all of Islam could hazard a guess to their meaning." (Jorge Luis Borges, *Averroes' Search, The Aleph*, 1949) The view taken up here is that Jorge's vision of pre-*Reconquista* Spain is more or less accurate, and that Averroes and the wider Islamic world was truly ignorant of dramatic acting.

<sup>45</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Averroes' Search, The Aleph*, 1949

speech in praise of a thing, and a *comedy* is more than a mockery. Even in the case of explication of terms, a commentary alters the reader's experience of the primary text, and in some cases, muddles the conceit of the later.

9. Commentaries then fundamentally alter, instead of add, to the primary texts they stand on. For this reason, my commentary here will stick to some general rules in its treatment of the underlying text:

1.) Explication will be avoided as much as possible, as even a correct explication will necessarily alter the meaning of the underlying text.

2.) Possible points of confusion will be addressed only when the issue at hand is one of translation, and then only when the meaning of the original words remain intact. If the relation among words in the original is lost in the translation, e.g. a pun in the original failing to be a pun in the translation, then this will be noted, and a replacement in kind will be produced.

3.) The commentary will reflect on, instead of interpret, the text wherever possible. The impression produced by the text will be the matter of the commentary, so as merely to add to the primary text, and avoid distorting it. The commentary will then be “Cide’s meditations on Aristotle’s *Poetics, On Comedy*” instead of “Cide’s interpretation of Aristotle’s *Poetics, On Comedy*”. Inshallah, this will guide me not to make the mistake of my predecessors, and gut an alien idea, replacing it with native ones, as the Conquistadors have done with us Moors and our mosques.

***Poetics, On Comedy:***

§31.

*Comedy* is an imitation of an action that is ludicrous (in its proportions) and imperfect (in its mode of presentation); of sufficient length; in embellished language, the several kinds being separately found in the parts of the play; directly presented by persons acting, and not given through narrative; and, through pleasure and laughter effecting [sic] the purgation of the like

emotions<sup>46</sup>. *Comedy's* mother is laughter; the correct relation of meaning to signs<sup>47</sup> is restored by its presence, which is the soul's acknowledgement of correctness or incorrectness.

Laughter may take many forms, all species of the same five genera: the belly-laugh, the chuckle, the snigger, the gahah, and the unintentional fart. Each genus of laughter is a different expression of the soul<sup>48</sup> expelling corruption from the body brought about by *humor*. Every efficacious instance of *humor* drives out this corruption from the body. Therefore, all those who are affected by *humor* but do not appear to laugh (and, instead, exclaim something as “that’s so funny”) release a small, unintentional fart at the onset of *humor*.

*Humor* itself is the action of the *ψυχή* resolving within itself incongruity among the meanings of signs. For, while all signs are defined by convention, those conventions cannot be broken or replaced arbitrarily once set, or else the sign will be of no use. For example: if the sign ‘Socrates’ is recognized as a sign for, in one sense of the word, “teacher of Plato”, and this meaning is established by mutual assent, to interpret the sign ‘Socrates’ as “student of Plato” would render the sign useless insofar that it will no longer signify the same object “teacher of Plato”, nor would it be able to adopt the new significance “student of Plato” unless that new meaning, too, was established likewise by mutual assent, i.e. convention. A sign’s utility then depends on a sameness, or congruity, in what the sign signifies from one person to the next, and in the relationship signs have to one another. An incongruity then arises when the use of a sign or a relation inferred between signs is inconsistent with the sign’s meaning but treated as if it were so. This incongruous use results in the *absurd*.

An example of an absurd use of a sign is the case of Plato’s definition of the sign ‘man’ as “an animal, biped and featherless”; Diogenes proceeded to pluck a rooster and presented it

---

<sup>46</sup> *Tractatus Coislinianus* (II)

<sup>47</sup> When speaking of the “correct relation of meaning to *signs*”, this paper is only meaning “combination of signs taking on a new designated referent”.

<sup>48</sup> *Ψυχή*; Soul, breathe.

to Plato's lecture room declaring it "Plato's man", resulting in Plato adding "having broad nails" to the definition<sup>49</sup>. What occurred was an incongruent use of the sign 'man', with Plato declaring a definition that, when applied, allowed the sign to be used contrary to its conventional designation. This was demonstrated by Diogenes following Plato's declaration that resulted in an absurdity: Plato's man was now Diogenes's chicken because of Plato's misappropriation of the sign. The misappropriation of the sign, and the resulting absurdity, demonstrated the incongruous use of the sign.

An example of an inferred relation between signs resulting in absurdity would be Diogenes brandishing a lit lamp in the daytime, and, as he went about his day, claiming he "was looking for a human being."<sup>50</sup> The inferred relationship between the signs in this case is 'lamp', as an item that "allows one to see better", would presumably function to aid Diogenes in his search for a human being, as he was presumably not finding one before. However, the inferred relationship between the sign 'to look' and 'lamp' is nonsensical: lamps only aid one's looking *via* illumination, presuming illumination is the issue with sight. This relationship is implied by the inferred relationship between the signs resulting in absurdity through incongruous use, that being the goal of Diogenes's search: "a human being". Diogenes here is referring to man as that animal that possesses a rational soul<sup>51</sup>, and so his lack of 'looking' for one such specimen was a subversion again of the relationship between signs 'man' and 'to look'. Diogenes failed 'to look' at 'rational animal', and therefore sought an 'aid for his ability to look', presuming the issue was one of sight. In reality, the people of Megara were not acting as rational animals and had no right to be designated as such. Diogenes revealed that incongruity of the signs' uses through a clever construction relying on inferences gained from signs, culminating in the absurd.

---

<sup>49</sup> Laërtius, ed. & Hicks, 1925, VI:40..

<sup>50</sup> Laërtius, ed. & Hicks, 1925, VI:41.

<sup>51</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* I.15, "λόγον ἔχον" translated as "rational principle".

The reaction to the absurdity of signs in the human being is *humor*. Above, Diogenes demonstrated how *humor* is predicated on a prior convention of established signs, e.g., ‘man’, ‘to look’, etc., being misappropriated or misunderstood in some fashion that leads to an incongruity in the meaning of the signs, e.g., ‘man’ for ‘cock’, a ‘lamp’ to aid in finding what is not there (and what ‘is not there’ being, in reality, in front of the seeker). The faculty of *humor* recognizes this incongruity of signs resulting in the absurd and forces the *ψυχή* to expel the inharmonious arrangement of signs through *laughter*. Man is thus purged of the incongruous *anti-logos* of the signs, e.g., Plato’s amending his definition of ‘man’. Mankind gains double the amount of pleasure by *comedy* as he is by *tragedy*: not only is likewise purged of corruption in the soul (as *tragedy* does with fear), but, as all men delight in learning from *τὰ φυσικά*, he also learns through the correction of the meaning of signs. The faculty of *humor* likewise belongs to rational part of men’s souls, while that unnamed faculty that allows men to gain catharsis from tragedy is clearly of the appetitive part of men’s souls. Therefore, of all the mimetic arts, clearly *comedy* is the highest.

§32.

Laughter arises from (1) the diction and expressions of the actors, and (2) from the content of the *comedy*.

From diction first *humor* most easily arises as it plays more heavily on the absurdity of signs and their use. The cases where laughter arises from diction are homonyms or ambiguities, in which things having the same name but which are distinct from each other, are confused one for the other<sup>52</sup>; synonyms, in which two different signs may share in meaning, and in which the comic poet may call the better meaning by the worse name, or the worse name by

---

<sup>52</sup> *The Tractate Illustrated*, pg. 229

the better<sup>53</sup>; paronyms, formed by an addition of a sign and something else to it<sup>54</sup>; diminutions, especially where *sarcastic*; and corruptions of grammar and syntax<sup>55</sup>.

§33.

As discussed in *Rhetoric*, homonyms are most useful to the sophist, for it is by their aid that he employs captious arguments<sup>56</sup>; however, in *comedy* homonyms have their signs singled out by *humor* so they may never be confused again. An example above has already been outlined by Diogenes's use of the sign 'anthrôpos' to mean both 'human being' and 'rational animal'; moreover, a better fitting example would be [...]

**Cide's Commentary:**

10. *Ma shaa Allah* that the Philosopher has used a set of words whose meanings do not align with like cognates in our current tongue. A more palatable example would be [...]

**Editor's Note:**

*Here an example is given in Arabic (and, below that, Greek) that would be nonsensical even in the best translations of the poor dead mother tongue. For, while Cide and Aristotle both sought to select words that were clear in their double meaning to their audiences, the examples they selected have not had their meanings survive translation. However, it is clear from context alone that the author and commentator merely wished to illustrate homonyms. Fortunately for the reader, the genius presenter of this recovered commentary on the long-lost Poetics II has engaged his massive intellect to comb all of written language and select the perfect specimen to encapsulate perfectly the original author's meaning.*

---

<sup>53</sup> *The Tractate Illustrated*, pg. 230

<sup>54</sup> *The Tractate Illustrated*, pg. 233

<sup>55</sup> *Tractatus Coislinianus* (I)

<sup>56</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book 3, Section 2.7

*The example sentence was first attributed to Dr. William J. Rapaport<sup>57</sup>, who utilized it in his philosophy coursework in State University of New York at Fredonia<sup>58</sup>: “Buffalo buffalo, Buffalo buffalo buffalo, buffalo Buffalo buffalo” (Rapaport, 2012; commas added for ease of reading). The sentence is grammatically correct, and relies on homonyms to express its meaning. The sentence, when the signs are properly understood, may be read as: “buffalo who live in Buffalo (e.g., at the Buffalo Zoo, which does, indeed, have buffalo), and who are buffaloes (in a way unique to Buffalo) by other buffalo from Buffalo, themselves buffalo (in the way unique to Buffalo) still other buffalo from Buffalo” (Rapaport, 2012). The word “buffalo” is then used thrice over harmoniously: 1) as a noun (the plural of bison), 2) as a noun adjunct in the adverbial sense (from Buffalo, NY), 3) as a verb (to confuse or intimidate someone). The sentence may synonymously be read as, “the multiplicity of bison who reside in a certain town in New York state, which other multiplicity of bison from the same town intimidate, intimidate still another multiplicity of bison from the same town”. In this way homonyms are shown to have the comedic effect which Aristotle ascribes to them: in confusing the meaning of two same-spelled signs, a momentary absurdity may occur in the mind of the recipient. If one did not know the verbal sense of the word ‘buffalo’, the subordinate clause “Buffalo buffalo buffalo” would be unrednerable even if the first two words of the independent clause, “Buffalo buffalo,” was interpretable. In Dr. Rapaport’s case, the humor is generated by the the absurdity and purged by laughter as understanding of the signs are learned/affirmed.*

*Likewise, Cide Benegalli and Aristotle both supply examples for the case of synonyms, paronyms, diminitations, and grammar and syntax that would be incomprehensible to the*

---

<sup>57</sup> The earliest published occurrence of the example is attributed to Dmitri Borgmann's book *Beyond Language: Adventures in Word and Thought* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967). This is reported by Dr. Rapaport himself.

<sup>58</sup> Rapaport, William J. (October 5, 2012). "A History of the Sentence 'Buffalo buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo.'" *University at Buffalo Computer Science and Engineering*. Retrieved December 7, 2014.

*every-day reader of the translated treatise, and would require extensive knowledge of Attic Greek and classical Greco-socio-cultural context to understand. For the sake of mercy on the lay reader, the presenter of this paradigm-shifting historical finding has omitted much of this discussion from this treatise. The text has been curated to resume from the end of Aristotle's discussion on diction. Due to the intractable difficulty of interpreting the text, I see no substantial objection towards omitting the bulk of the source material from this section.*

**Poetics, On Comedy:**

[...]

So concludes our discussion of the laughter arising from diction alone, the first and most vital element of comedy. As Plato had inscribed above his Academy "let no one enter here without first a knowledge of geometry", let no poet write *comedy* without understanding first the diction. §69.

Laughter from content arises secondly, and perhaps more laboriously, as it more heavily depends on the meaning of the *signs*, and less of their presentation. The cases of laughter arising from content are from laughter at disparaged persons, animals, or things; laughter from sarcasm and irony; laughter from events out of sequence; and laughter from impossible things. The basic particle of all content in *comedic* instances is the joke.

Jokes are the fundamental unit of all *comedic* content. The sufficient and perfect length of a joke varies from joke to joke<sup>59</sup>, and several ratios are suggested by Diogenes in his famed treatise *Yucking it Up by Picking on Plato*, and the sequel, *Lanterns in the Daylight*, but in truth these ratios are unnecessary to the understanding of the joke *qua* joke. Instead, the elements of the joke ought to be understood: particularly, the *preface* of the joke, which establishes the premises of the joke to be told; the *matter* of the joke, by which the joke is mainly constituted;

---

<sup>59</sup> *Nota bene: ipso facto*, all jokes are, then, of sufficient and perfect length.

and finally the *punchline* of the joke, where the *incongruity* in the meaning of *signs* or their relation is revealed, so-called because Spartans are well known, in their throes of laughter, suddenly to strike the nearest helot in the face, often resulting in the helot's immediate death. It is for this reason that helots do not often tell jokes.

The Most Perfect Joke ever conceived will work as an example here. I have been reticent to repeat The Joke until now in the treatise for fear that its violent hilarity will distract the reader from the remainder of the treatise. I must, then, demand the utmost sobriety from the reader as I continue forth with it as an example. Prepare your nerves, reader! Remember the Greeks who perished at Thermopylae and Marathon, and beg their shades now for the largest portion of their discipline! Steel, O reader! your soul's soberest, gravest parts that The Joke may be discussed for didactic purposes alone! The Joke is most often the first instructional joke told to children, utilized as a means of awakening their faculty of *humor*. The Joke's *premise* and *matter* take the form of a single question regarding poultry: "why did the cock cross the road?" Any answer of the respondent serves to add to the *matter* of The Joke. Finally, the most perfect, simple form of the *punchline* is of course, "to get to the other side".

Each of The Joke's three parts recalls a different sense of *humor*. In the *premise*, there is an inherent absurdity in asking after the reasons a chicken did any one thing. Animals, unlike men, do not share in a rational soul. Poultry will never cross roads to battle the Persians, nor to rescue Helen, nor to carry out Hercules's labors. To ask someone 'why did the cock cross the road' is, then, asking him to partake in the absurd from the beginning, and a rational mind, recognizing this lurking incongruity, is already primed for the corrective faculty of *humor*. Roosters cross roads for no more complex a reason than that they do. To put their motivations in the form of reasons is to make reason out of the lack of reason, as cocks lack a rational soul, and so to make an inherent absurdity. We then arrive at the second sense of the absurd in the

response to the question and the addition to its *matter*, the respondent's "why"? The respondent enquires after a reason that is not a reason, and after a rational motivation in a being (or for an action) that lacks rationality. The respondent is made to look ridiculous, as is pointed out by the questioner's response to the respondent. The joke teller, the questioner, informs the respondent in the *punchline* that the cock is but only a cock, and crossed the road simply to transverse it, as chickens lack any higher reasoning for a more complex conceit. The respondent hears this and is freed of the incongruity that pestered his soul through laughter, as his intact sense of *humor* revels in the funniest joke ever conceived.

§70.

Now that the particles of *comedy* are understood, content of *comedies*, made from compiled jokes and plot, may be discussed.

The first source of laughter from things is when a person is disparaged. This involves, again, the nature of the ridiculous, viz., that meaning that fails to correspond with the sign that ought to invoke it. Plato, again through the mouth of Socrates, calls this a vice of ignorance, the result of a man failing to know his own strengths and weakness:

Socrates: [the ridiculous] is, in sum, a kind of vice that derives its name from a special disposition; it is, among all the vices, the one with a character that stands in direct opposition to the one recommended by the famous inscription in Delphi. Protarchus: You mean the one that says "Know thyself," Socrates? Socrates: I do. The obvious recommendation would obviously be that we do not know ourselves at all.<sup>60</sup>

This failure to "know thyself" is the source of the ridiculous in persons; it is akin to failing to attach the correct meaning to the sign of a personal name, as if mistaking two twin brothers for one for the other, the difference being: the ignorant man has mistaken himself for a better version of himself, and thus rightly incurs our mockery of him.

---

<sup>60</sup> Plato, *Philebus*, 48c

Along with persons, mockeries may be made of animals and things created through the artifice. Animals can be made mockeries of when they are seen acting contrary to their nature—such as a dog trained to guard the threshold of a house approaching strangers with friendliness, or a cat running in fear from mice—as this is as though they have forgotten their essential nature. Things that are the production of human artifice may likewise be mocked—e.g., a knife too dull or flimsy to cut, a table that wobbles excessive so that nothing may be securely placed atop it, etc.—as these are examples of the ridiculous in either the person who created them, the person who cares for their upkeep, or the person who uses them incorrectly. The ridiculousness of the poor craftsman need not be explained at length. The ridiculousness is the improper relation between a claim to knowledge of skill or craft and a performance that suggests ignorance.

§71.

Sarcasm is the disparaging of persons through irony. Irony shows contempt for men, for not to think them worthy of what they bestow upon all others also shows contempt<sup>61</sup>. Sarcasm twists the meaning of words or deeds to cast them in a poorer light than intended. If a man offers his aid in earnest friendship, the sarcastic person will make it seem as though the friendly man's offer is worthless or disingenuous, making the offer appear in either case as something else (less) than what it is.

This twisting may both correct meanings and thus invoke *humor*, or it may in fact distort meanings, invoking not *humor*, but *rage*. In the first case, sarcasm reminds all subjects as of their cosmic unimportance, and thus corrects their relation to the universe. A king may rightly be mocked by the lowest of slaves if that king boasts “I will live forever as a god”; were that slave to pantomime the king's pronouncement with a distorted visage, then *humor*—and the

---

<sup>61</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book 2, Sec 2, line25.

prompt execution of the slave—would be correctly evoked. No man, king nor peasant, will live forever, and no king truly lives in this realm as a god. All flesh is, in the end, surrendered to Poseidon, Hades, or Zeus through smoke and fire. Sarcasm reminds all men, regardless of station, of the inevitable fate of their flesh—and thus, all men are exposed to sarcasm, as all men’s actions are petty and imperfect in relation to the magnitude of what lies beyond them. Thus the *sign* σαρκασμός is derived from the verb σαρκάζειν<sup>62</sup>, as sarcasm reminds men of how Cronus will rend their flesh from their bones at their end. The slave is, then, right to mock the king by mimicking his pronouncement with a disparaged *persona*, as it reveals the absurdity behind the king’s account: the king is incapable of living forever as he claims. The slave’s mockery then *lowers* the king into the sarcophagus<sup>63</sup> where he appropriately belongs. This is the case for the corrective properties of sarcasm, when it invokes humor.

Sarcasm invokes rage when, through the same action as above, it destroys the relation of meanings carried by signs. A king may rightly be mocked by the lowest slave if that king boasts, “I will live forever as a god”; however, that king is by all accounts correct in feeling rage at the slave’s liberty at saying so: slaves have a distinct relation to kings that precludes their ability to mock kings at their leisure. The king then reaffirms the earthly, mundane relation of the slave to the king (a worse to a better) by punishing the slave in rage. Sarcasm, when inopportune, then, changes the meaning of *signs*.

Sarcasm is the most common and lowest form of *comedy*. Sarcasm is the most common form because it is applicable anywhere, in any context, owing to its cosmic correction of relation. Sarcasm is the lowest form because it not only appeals to the rational soul, but our appetitive faculty, like *tragedy*; i.e., the *rage* sarcasm produces lends one to excessive

---

<sup>62</sup> Σαρκάζειν “to tear or lacerate the flesh”.

<sup>63</sup> Σάρξ “flesh” + φαγεῖν “to eat”; hence sarcophagus is “flesh-eating”. The phrase together with the word λίθος “stone” creates λίθος σαρκοφάγος (“flesh-eating stone”), and thus *sarcophagus*.

punishment because of its connection faculty, as opposed to the rational faculty, and thus has know share of the faculty that ratiocinates.

§72.

Events out of sequence likewise evoke laughter and the correction of the relation between *signs* of *beginning*, *middle*, and *end*. Laughter is evoked because absurdity results from logically necessary relations discombobulated. For instance, it would be absurd of one to try and cook poultry before first slaughtering it, as the poultry would simply scurry away from the flame if capable, and so no actual cooking may be accomplished before first incapacitating the bird. Likewise, an arrow may not strike a target before being fired from the bow; in these cases, the meaning carried by the *signs* have a necessary conditional sequence from one to the other, a relation that, if displaced, produces nonsense. *Humor* recognizes this nonsense and thus reinforces the necessary sequence of events by having men laugh at the nonsensical sequence.

§73.

This specific recognition of temporal or logically necessitated nonsense seen in events out of sequence leads us to consider the general recognition of impossibilities arising from the abuse of *signs*. This recognition is the essence of *humor*.

An impossibility in *comedy* arises when personages commit acts they should not be capable of achieving, or events transpire that cannot occur in nature. A personage committing an impossible act always takes on one of the following forms: the *worse* achieving the *better* outcome when no reason calls for it or the *better* achieving the *worse* outcome when no reason calls for it. It ought to be obvious as to why these are impossible: without treachery or intercession of the Fates, the stupid man will never best the smart man in a game of strategy, nor the weak best the strong in a game of wrestling. To see or hear of such a spectacle, then,

evokes laughter as “runts” best “heroes”, a clear malformation of a *sign* and a misappropriation of its meaning. After all, “strength” is not strength unless it conquers weakness, and “weakness” is not weak unless it fails to be strong. To see a scrawny, sickly personage best Hercules would be impossible, and thus absurd, and therefore evoke laughter through the faculty of *humor*.

Likewise, an impossible event is one that cannot occur in nature. Black swans, flying dogs, or unicorns are not impossibilities, but merely improbabilities; there is no law of nature that precludes them, only an accident of history<sup>64</sup>. Instead, an impossible event would be one that goes against the laws of nature itself:  $2 + 2 = 7$ , fires cooling food, sunlight darkening rooms, etc. These impossible events violate not only the meaning of *signs*, but any connection those *signs* have with nature itself; e.g. if “fire” cooled to the touch it would be in fact ice, and no convention would have the *sign* “fire” be both the source of heat and of cold to the same object at the same time, as it would not describe any phenomenon in nature, nor correspond to any fact. It would be an empty *sign*, signifying nothing. This nonsense of *signs* is the epitome of absurdity, and it ought to be clear why laughter follows from it.

§74.

This exhausts the list of sources of laughter from the content of *comedies*. All laughter is generated from these absurdities, and ever only from these absurdities. As a result, it is evident that the correct apprehension of *signs* and their meanings is necessary to the understanding of any *comedy*. Without knowledge of a *sign*'s meaning any attempt at *humor* would be infacile.

Consider again the case of the most perfect joke. If the *sign* for ‘man’ and ‘cock’ were inverted in our language, this joke would not elicit the faculty of *humor* nor be capable of evoking laughter on its own. Man-*signed*-cock, possessing a rational soul, might have any multitude of reasons for crossing any one road; to ask why, then, any one man-*signed*-cock

---

<sup>64</sup> Contingent necessity; impossible given the state of affairs of the world.

crossed any one road, without context, would not elicit laughter: there would be no absurdity in asking the reason a man-*signed*-cock traversed a road, only the mind searching for more information as to his motivation. There would be no delight in laughter as no learning occurs, only the need for more facts. The conventionality of a *sign*'s denotation does not affect the meaning carried by a *sign*: it is the meaning of the *sign*, a thing that while divorced from any one name still exists independently, that carries the possibility of *humor*. However, the *sign* is still what carries the meaning with it, notwithstanding its arbitrary assignment to the meaning. Further, the *sign* itself is important now merely because of its arbitrary assignment: it is vital to know the difference between "man" and "cock" regardless of how arbitrarily we might have come up with the signs for 'rational animal' or 'bipedal poultry'. The conventionality of the *sign* erases not a jot of the presence of the meaning the *sign* conveys when we discuss the communicability of the *signs*. The conventionality of a name is no argument against the communicability of the name's meaning. Regardless of the name of flatulence, flatulence would be foul, and whatever alternative name I call it would convey the same stench. Despite the differing of names, the knowledge conveyed by the names persist. It is for this reason, we say: therefore, without a common (namely, to the knowers), static meaning to a *sign* the phenomenon of laughter, and the faculty of *humor*, would be impossible. *Comedy* exists because there is a *suprarelative* meaning to both *signs* and the relations *signs* have with other *signs*.

11. Agh! My heart breaks to read the Philosopher so clearly describe the state of my people, the Moors of Andalusia. We are a people robbed of the *suprarelative* meaning of our words by the Conquistadors and reduced to absurdity! Never before have I had the words to put to the meanings I have wished to express for so long. I long to go to Valencia, that last city of the Golden Age, so that the *suprarelative* meaning of my words again are understood, and the language we Moors speak is no longer twisted into some monstrosity it is not. We Moors have

been broken by the Conquistadors by breaking the language we speak.

When Córdoba first fell, then Cadiz and Granada after it, the Conquistadors outlawed all practice of our Faith, and readings and teachings of Arabic as their *haram*. And, although we Moors are a resilient people and sought to carry on our Faith and education in secret, time has weathered our understandings and turned our meanings on their heads. Our *madrassas*, where our youth learned the joys of geometry and grammar so as to better love God's creation, were razed or turned into warehouses. Our mosques fared better, but only slightly: the Conquistadors, enthralled by the beauty of the Platonic solids but never having Euclid to explicate their construction to them, chose not to raze our mosques but gut them. Our mosques became their basilicas. They destroyed the barriers between the two genders to better fit their perverse collectivism, and intermingled the genders so that, heads bowed in Mass, one could not be distinguished from the other. Addressed to in a Latin we did not understand, all Moors relied on their memories alone to replicate the proper rites of prayer in the secret of their own homes.

This was insufficient, however. The memory of the Moors aged with their bodies, and without education, the memory of the Moors could not be recollected by our children. In the years since 1491, we Moors have been robbed by time of the knowledge of we once held, and now have nothing but dust and echoes.

12. It can be seen everywhere! The peasants in the fields, having once relied on farming texts of Cato, preserved in Arabic by Ibn Rushd<sup>65</sup>, were burned by the Conquistadors due to their translator's status as a Imam of the Faith. Without these texts to remind the Moors of what we have learned, the peasants slowly become confused; as their Arabic slipped into Spanish (as demanded by the Conquistadors). Disagreements over planting times for crops, rotations of

---

<sup>65</sup> No extant Arabic translation of Cato by Ibn Rushd is known to the author.

fields, and even which manure to use, soon proliferated among the Moors. The most unfortunate of my people—the peasants here in Córdoba—began planting crops in autumn believing, without sources of knowledge to guide them, that the crops would grow more plentifully if the seeds had more time in the soil. Moorish midwives instructed women to “hold off childbirth” for as long as possible under the same consideration, that their children would grow stronger with more time in the mothers’ wombs. Not remembering anymore which manure was most suited for which crop, the most prolific of manures, that produced by man, fell into common use among the confused Moors. It is for this reason that around the fields of Córdoba, travelers will stare in amazement as peasants stop and relieve themselves in the fields of their produce, watering and feeding their crops with the very filth of their bodies. Men were reduced to superstitious animals in this fashion, ridiculous ideas such as these proliferating because the meaning behind words, reinforced in the Golden Age with great works of science and literature, degraded with the passing of generations who did not read them.

13. Perhaps the most heartbreaking example of this confusion of the *signs* can be seen in the so-called “Moorish Mass”, practiced throughout Andalusia. The Conquistadors mandated that the Faithful convert to Christianity to keep their lives and property, to which we Moors readily assented. Priests came into our mosques-turned-churches and baptised us, but there were simply too many Moorish peasants for the Conquistadors inquisitors to mind in the newly conquered realm of Andalusia, and so for many generations Moors were left unobserved in their new churches. At first, the Moors rejoiced and practiced their Faith in safe spaces of their former mosques, out of the prying sight of the Castilians in the fortresses of the old Emirs. Traveling Castilian priests would impose themselves on a village for some time, forcing the people to pretend to practice the Conquistadors’ ways until the Castilians left. However, with no texts to guide them, the Moors’ practices of the Faith soon became strained and confused.

Even simple matters were befuddled. “How did the elders know which direction Mecca and Medina lay?” “Could Mecca be more south-east than east of Spain? More north-east?” “Perhaps,” the Moors argued amongst themselves under the noses of the Castilians: “the ‘east’ spoken of was a metaphor for light, as with the rising of the sun, and in truth each Muslim ought to face the direction that they feel enlightens them the most!” With such sense being gradually stolen from the words, with no *sutras* to inform the Moors, they would enter their churches when the Castilian priests were absent and attempt to pray to Mecca in *all* directions: some would face North, others East, still others the direction of their own homes or their favorite lake. The name “Mecca” became indecipherable to the lost Moors, and, to the outside observer, it would seem that the confused Moors went in private to worship the very walls of the churches they were drawn into, in order to put into practice their secret faith. It was in this way the most beautiful expression of man—to put himself in relation to divinity—was turned into the most humiliating of defeats: the Moors grew, with passing forgetful generations, to worship the walls of their cages.

14. It is not so bleak everywhere in Spain, I am told. There is a place where the meaning of words have been shielded from absurdities by that most excellent figure of mankind, El Cid Campeador. In El Cid’s golden city of Valencia, his legacy protects sanity with the great texts of the fallen Caliphate: those of *Aristotle*, *Euclid*, *Plato*, and more...

***Poetics, On Comedy:***

§75.

There are three major objections of critics to *comedy*, and thus, to the *suprarelative* meaning of signs: the first, criticisms levied by persons who disagree with the established meaning of *signs*; the second, by persons who mistake the faculty of *humor* as the debasement of the meaning of *signs* themselves (i.e., those who mistake *humor* for absurdity); and thirdly, those who reject the

proposition that *signs* have any meaning at all outside of the opinions of men. These criticism will be enumerated below, and answered in series.

The first kind of criticism is that some persons disagree with the meaning of a *sign*, and so *comedy* fails in its goal of evaluating the apprehension of *signs*. This criticism can best be described as a case in which a *sign's* meaning is misunderstood by either speaker or listener, and so any attempt to bring the faculty of *humor* to bear on the *sign* would be futile. The competing 'meanings' of the singular *sign* would be at cross purposes. Suppose, *per impossible*, that an English-speaking Socrates says to an English-speaking Alcibiades "I love you". Alcibiades then takes Socrates to mean by the *sign* 'love' the meaning "ἔρωζ", while truly Socrates means "φιλία". More impossible and worse still, imagine Socrates to have really said "φιλία" and Alcibiades to have no knowledge of 'φιλία', but only 'ἔρωζ', and that he has, through ignorance, substituted the latter's meaning for 'φιλία'. The first critic of *comedy* would say this is no laughing matter, for ignorance itself is not a cause of joy. Further, this critic could argue that Socrates could not correct Alcibiades through *comedy*, as Alcibiades would have nothing to find *humorous* in Socrates's insistence that he did not feel for Alcibiades 'in that way'. This first critic could then say that *comedy* not only fails to correct the meaning of *signs* for Socrates, but that it is inappropriate itself, and that important misunderstandings are not to be joked about.

This first criticism must be conceded, in part and under qualification. First, if the dissenting critic finds *humor* lacking in the subject because he rightly detects some evil that the jokester does not, then it is the dissenting critic who truly has correct apprehension of the *signs* and their relations, and not the jokester. Mocking Hector for his noble death is ignoble itself; it fails to recognize that Hector's fate was beyond his powers to resist:

Alas! the gods have lured me on to my destruction. ... death is now indeed exceedingly near at hand and there is no way out of it—for so Zeus and his son Apollo the far-darter have willed it, though heretofore they have been ever ready to protect me. My doom has come upon me; let me not then die ingloriously and

without a struggle, but let me first do some great thing that shall be told among men hereafter.<sup>66</sup>

Hector, realizing his destiny has been decided by powers greater than himself, assents to his destruction while fighting boldly for a victory he knows is beyond his ability. He knows that his struggle to survive is noble in and of itself, even if his struggle is ultimately futile. To bring sarcasm to bear on Hector would be senselessness itself: Hector knows his place in the cosmic order and proceeds to act virtuously regardless of his doom. There is no mocking to be done that can dispel an absurdity that does not exist. The critical man would be correct in saying a *comedy* of Hector's fate is senseless, and any *comedy* like it, stemming from ignorance of the meaning of *signs* instead of knowledge, would be likewise senseless. In cases such as this, we must agree with the dissenting critic, but not because *comedy* itself is wrong or that *humor* has no value. Instead, we must agree with the dissenting critic because he has identified an ignorance of the meaning of *signs* correctly, and his faculty of *humor* is astute in not evoking laughter from him.

Further, it is evident what kind of remedy the critical man ought to apply to such a case as this: education. The meaning of arbitrarily assigned *signs* is, because of their conventional nature, something that can be passed along only through the rigors of education. In the case of Hector, the *Iliad* must be taught so as to ensure that Hector's demise is related directly from the primary source, so no misrepresentation occurs; furthermore, the jokester in question must also be educated to the names and characters of the gods in question, as these are given to us by Hesiod in his *Theogonía*. Even more, beyond the text that accompanies the original appearance of the *sign*—its *context*—the jokester needs to be educated about the values present in the formula of *comedy* he is attempting: the virtues he disparages need to be

---

<sup>66</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, Book XXII, lines 299–305

examined so he may understand their meaning as well; so, too, logic be taught, so the jokester will know how *signs* may be related to one another outside of their *contexts* in any argument.

The bad jokester then reveals something truly of significance: the first critic cannot alone instruct him so as to change his ways. If that alone were so, and men simply took whatever true advice was handed to them freely and simply, then no education might need to occur, nor a sense of *humor* be needed. Men would simply recognize truth on sight or assurance, and know the outcomes of geometric proofs by acquaintance with the axioms alone. Just the opposite, though, is true: the jokester has no reason to believe the advice of the critical man who views his bad joke with disgust and *rage*. The jokester must be acquainted with the facts of *context*, and read from the primary source of Hector's actions, the *Iliad*, so that meaning of the *sign* 'Hector' is presented in its proper *context*. Whether the primary source contains true knowledge itself is, as inferable from arguments above, irrelevant: *signs* are assigned their meanings by convention, and it stands to reason that the *context* of *signs* is merely more *signs* in presented relations. It is for some other science to decipher truth from falsehood in the primary text. Instead, for the art of *comedy* and for education, it is primarily important first to learn the arbitrary meaning assigned to *signs* by convention.

The first critic is only ever truly satisfied not by pedantically explaining the badness of the joke, but by acquainting the jokester with the proper meaning of the *signs* in question via the sources from which they are received—the so-called *primary context*.

§76.

The critic of the second kind, that one who sees *comedy* itself as the debasement of the meaning of *signs*, and thus the estrangement of *signs* from their meanings, is to be rebuffed on the grounds of its extreme stupidity. It has already been shown how *humor* restores meaning to *signs* in the soul; it has already been shown that disparagement and sarcasm, when applied

correctly, also function for the same end; and further, it has already been demonstrated that the cases where *humor* fails is not the fault of *humor*, but of poor education. The second critical man's arguments are groundless. "But Aristotle," a skeptic might inquire, "what if the stupid critic continues with his stupidity stupidly, and refuses to see *signs*' meanings restored by *comedy*?" Let this critic see the evidence before him: absurdity occurs when *signs* or the relation of *signs* are misappropriated (as "1" may be for "2"), resulting in conclusions that do not follow (as "1+1=4") thanks to the misappropriated meanings; *humor* corrects those misappropriations by displaying them clearly (as "I, one man, married my wife and her friend, one woman each, resulting in six happily married individuals and an extremely confused officiate. I suppose I ought to have married them one at a time!"). Hence, to say it is the fault of *humor* that the *signs* were abused would be to put consequent before antecedent: the only ground *humor* has to stand on requires that the meaning of *signs* be correctly apprehended and that way they are incorrectly apprehended be displayed. To blame *comedy* for twisting meanings would be the same as blaming doctors for illness or the Labyrinth for Daedalus or Oedipus's blindness for his evil deeds: in each case the result is confused for the cause.

Therefore, the extreme ignorance of this second genus of criticism must be rejected outright.

§77.

Finally the third critic who rejects the meaning of any *sign* as existing outside of the view of any one man, and thus any one man by convention with himself alone, may decide the meaning of any one *sign*, must be addressed. This critic is like the old sophists who claim that there is no Truth at all, and that all meanings depend on the man who addresses the *sign*, so that the *sign* never has one meaning, but many. Consequently, the third critic rejects the arguments presented in this treatise totally. Since there is no meaning to signs outside of the measure of

one man, and no correction need take place in the soul or mind of anyone, therefore *humor* cannot exist as described, and there is no evident cause of laughter.

Indeed, this critic is like the old sophist, Protagoras, who taught that nothing was true beyond what men said was true. Plato examines his arguments through the mouth of Socrates and Theaetetus in his dialogue named for the former. There, Protagoras's dictum is recalled: "Man is the measure of all things: of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not."<sup>67</sup> This saying is later clarified in the dialogue to mean that nothing is ever one thing, because to another it could merely appear to be the opposite<sup>68</sup>. A large glass to a child would be a small glass to her grown parent, a difficult geometric proof to a novice would be pedestrian to a master logician, and a heavy boulder would be light to anyone with sufficient strength. But, because when we speak about these things as their *signs*—as boulders do not fly from our mouths when we say 'boulder'—Protagoras's relativism means truly that *signs* have no meaning to them. The *sign* for 'hot' would have no meaning to the relativistic critic, except perhaps "the *sign* for what some call one thing or another"; moreover, even if the relativist is not a complete dunce, and concedes that 'hot' may be defined in relation to another *sign* as "the opposite of 'cold'" we are no better off: the *sign* 'cold's meaning will be sought after, leading us back to 'hot', then back to 'cold', *ad infinitum*. Ironically, Plato shows how this dictum of Protagoras is impossible to maintain. Plato presents *via* Socrates that Protagoras, holding to his dictum, makes all men the judge of all things<sup>69</sup> including about whether or not Protagoras is correct in his dictum. Because Protagoras maintains that even the man who disagrees with Protagoras is correct, Protagoras would then be saying he agrees with the man who says Protagoras himself is wrong. Protagoras, then, admits, if the relativity of *signs* to their meanings

---

<sup>67</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152a

<sup>68</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 152d

<sup>69</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 171a

is true, that the relativity also cannot be true if another man judges so, and that his own dictum must be false<sup>70</sup>.

This final critic of *comedies* is a man who maintains the doctrine of the sophists despite this absurdity of two mutually exclusive conclusions coexisting in the same syllogism. “If all *signs* are decided by convention,” this sophist maintains, “then there is nothing to stop anyone from disagreeing about the meaning of a *sign* based on his judgement alone.” This critic is deaf to both Plato’s presentation of Socrates’s argument in *Theaetetus* and to the argument above in answer to the first critic, that all *signs* must be taught in their proper *context*. Doggedly, this critic maintains that the meaning of *signs* are relative to the whim of any man. This critic—the *relativist*—ascribes no meaning to *signs* outside of consensus, and presumably decides whatever consensus is needed for whatever *sign*. Even if we are gracious, and decide that the *relativist* may not be completely insane “relativist”, enough to not call scalding water ‘cold’ and ice ‘boiling’, but only disagrees on the *signs* for petty things such as ‘ethics’, ‘truth’, and ‘virtue’, this *relativist* is still shown to be at odds with nature itself. For, to be a *relativist*, one must necessarily deny the faculty of *humor* and the existence of *comedy* itself.

A *relativist* must deny the ability for *comedy* to exist because *comedy* relies on *signs* having meaning separate from any man’s judgement. All jokes require an absurdity to exist. Be it the inquiry into why a ‘cock crosses the road’ or any other joke, a joke requires that some meaning that is normally assigned to a *sign* is subverted. Without that subversion, there is nothing for *comedy* to examine. But a subversion implies that there was some established meaning to a *sign* to subvert. Nothing is ‘subverted’ if a *sign* has no meaning to it but what is relativistically ascribed—‘now’ but not necessarily ‘then’— to it: one man’s subversion would be another’s original meaning, and no laughter would occur. Recall that nowhere was *truth* a

---

<sup>70</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, 171c

requirement for the meaning of *signs*—except perhaps in the language of the gods. *Signs* have their meanings established by conventions, but those meanings are themselves not established by *signs*, only assigned to them. The *relativist* cannot allow for this, however: the *relativist* must deny that meaning is assigned to *signs*, but must maintain that meaning is decided rather in the mind of all men and then *described* by the *sign*. This, however, is nonsensical: what the *relativist* then asserts is that *signs* have meaning and do not have meaning, as they both *describe* the relative meaning in the minds of men and do not (as men may judge all things *relative* to their own measure). *Comedy* reveals this absurdity directly to all by evoking a common response to those acquainted with the meaning of a *sign*: laughter. The laugh reveals to all that, regardless of *Truth*, *signs* have meaning that exists outside the judgement of any one man, and thus that *relativism*, if it does exist, does not exist in the meaning of *signs*. The *relativist* must then deny *comedies* and *humor* totally: and this is why it is said: the *relativist* has no *sense of humor*.

§78.

Further arguments may be levied against the *relativist* who claims that the meaning of *signs* is at the whims of any and all. It is not only *humor* and *comedies* that are at stake if the *relativist's* thesis is conceded, but civilization itself. *Relativism* of *signs* fosters civil wars and violence, as the senselessness of *signs* brought about by *relativism* enables tyrants and fanatics to rend apart society by breaking the relation of thing to thing, the very *ratio* of meaning between *signs*. No where was this more vividly seen than in the civil war of Corcyra, during the Peloponnesian War.

The civil war in Corcyra saw the effects of *relativism* on *signs* that accompanied, and hastened, the collapse of Greek society during the wider Athenian-Spartan conflict. In his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides recounts the events that led up to the civil war at

Corcyra, and the symptoms of the civil war that spread beyond it. At Corcyra a proxy-conflict occurred between the democratic supporters of Athens and the oligarchic supporters of Sparta. The city originally had an alliance with Athens and peaceful relations with the Peloponnese, but the Corinthians intervened, through the bribery of returned prisoners, to convince Corcyra to join their side in the wider Athenian-Spartan conflict<sup>71</sup>. Violence broke out between the faction that supported the Peloponnese and the faction that supported the Athenians, escalating with the arrival of forces from both sides of the conflict, ending in a state of complete civil war:

Corcyraeans continued to massacre those of their own citizens whom they considered to be enemies. Their victims were accused of conspiring to overthrow the democracy, but in fact men were often killed on the grounds of personal hatred or else by their debtors because of money that they owed. [...] There were fathers who killed their sons; men were dragged from their temples or butchered on their very altars<sup>72</sup>.

The civil war at Corcyra—and those like it, that soon spread across the Grecian world—were motivated largely by opportunity of individuals to better their circumstances by capitalizing on the war: “Love of power, operating through greed and through personal ambition, was the cause of all these evils”<sup>73</sup>, and so the war cannot be directly attributed to *relativism* itself. What may be attributed to *relativism* is the inexhaustible escalation of the conflict, which could not have been done by the opportunists without *relativism*:

To fit in with the change of events, words, too, had to change their usual meanings. What used to be described as a thoughtless act of aggression was now regarded as the courage one would expect to find in a party member; to think of the future and wait was merely another way of saying one was a coward; any idea of moderation was just an attempt disguise one’s unmanly character; ability to understand a question from all sides meant that one was totally unfitted for action<sup>74</sup>.

As Thucydides describes, words changed “their usual meanings” to “fit in with the change of events”. The words lost their meanings and became *relative*, so much so that virtues of

---

<sup>71</sup> Thucydides, Book III, §71

<sup>72</sup> Thucydides, Book III, §81

<sup>73</sup> Thucydides, Book III, §82

<sup>74</sup> Thucydides, Book III, §82

character became vices, as seen with “thoughtless act of aggression was now regarded as the courage one would expect to find in a party member; to think of the future and wait was merely another way of saying one was a coward”. As ‘hot’ to one man may be ‘cold’ to another, so did ‘temperance’ become ‘cowardice’. The original meaning of *signs* was supplanted by the opportunism of agitators, and through judging the meaning of these words against their conventional definitions, the agitators created new definitions based on their *relative* perspectives. These agitators used these *relativistic* meanings from the very beginning of the civil war to spur their citizens to one side or the other, and so hastened the atrocities of the civil war with them. The sophists behind the slaughter might claim that merely ‘new conventions’ assigning meaning to *signs* were established by the war, and this is true in the most misanthropic sense only; assigning meaning to *signs* is to describe nature, not to persuade one’s fellow man to murder each other.

This corruption of *signs* by the *relativists* was not confined to Corcyra, but instead spread across the Grecian world. As the wider Athenian-Spartan conflict persisted, revolutions similar to Corcyra were instigated elsewhere. A general misanthropy birthed by *relativism* debased Greek society, as trust eroded:

As a result of these revolutions, there was a general deterioration of character throughout the Greek world. The simple way of looking at things, which is the mark of a noble nature, was regarded as a simple quality and ceased to exist. [...] Society had become divided into two ideologically hostile camps, and each side viewed the other with suspicion. As for ending this state of affairs, no guarantee could be given that would be trusted, no oath sworn that people would fear to break [...] As a rule the least remarkable for intelligence showed the greater powers for survival. Such people recognized their own deficiencies and the superior intelligence of their opponents; [...] while their opponents, overconfident in the belief that they would see what was happening in advance, and not thinking it necessary to seize by force what they could secure by policy, were the more easily destroyed because they were off their guard<sup>75</sup>.

---

<sup>75</sup> Thucydides, Book III, §83

The simple and noble character of the Greek world deteriorated as words lost meaning and society became divided into ideologically separate camps. With no language left for virtues that might lead to peace, the opposing ideology was seen as irreducibly evil, and its adherents could never be trusted. This state of affairs led the dullest and most violent of the Greeks to triumph time and again, as the more intelligent Greeks became overconfident in their own abilities. A general hatred of mankind permeated this new state of affairs, as the nobler ways of conduct were found to be ridiculous—and in a bitter sense: they had become so in reality. The *relativism* that allowed the opportunists to wage ideological war against their neighbors forced a descent of Greek society. The *signs* themselves had their original meanings annihilated by *relativism*, not merely ‘reinterpreted’. This change was not just one of philosophy or semantics, but resulted in a new mode of human society, one less noble and less inclined to mutual trust. It is here that the *relativist* is revealed in his truest form: the *relativist* and sophist is not merely a quibbler, or a contrarian, or *humourless* sourpuss; the *relativist* is a misanthrope who, unwilling to accede to a view that does not originate within himself, seeks to undo meaning itself and destroy *signs* and their relations, and thus reason itself, and thus undo that rational faculty of our souls that makes us human beings. The *relativist* is the enemy of society and reason itself.

For this reason alone, the criticism of those who lack a *sense of humor* must be rejected. If the *relativism* of meaning to *signs* is correct, then history instructs us that the project of society is one doomed to failure.

§79.

It remains to recount what this treatise has accomplished. I have given *comedy* the same treatment as those lower forms of imitation earlier addressed. I have enumerated the number and nature of constitutive parts of *comedy* and the causes of success and failure in them; I have examined the objections of the critics, and the solutions in answer to them—save for the last,

the rejected criticism of the *relativist*. I have so far omitted the obvious answer to the threat posed by the *relativists' relativisms*: that a proper education of the meaning of *signs* is necessary to avoid abject *relativism*.

Education is the only means to establish a meaning to *signs* that can survive the twisting of a sophist into *relativism*. Recall that Thucydides maintains that it was the dumb brutes who eventually toppled Grecian society, while the intelligent Greeks sought to win by peaceful policy. If a correlation may be drawn between the *relativistic* change of meaning to *signs* and violence, it may stand to reason that an education that establishes the meaning behind *signs* could thwart attempts to view conventional *signs* as *relative* in their meanings, and thus stave off the corruption and destruction of peaceful civilization. As in the case of the bad jokester, so in this case: education must also encompass the *context* of the *sign*, not merely where the *sign* was first introduced, but the history of relations leading up to the pronouncement of the *sign*. The *Iliad* must be read, not a subjective retelling of it; further, the *Iliad* must be read before the *Odyssey*, and *Apologia* before the *Republic*. This education must read the primary sources of the *sign* so that its meaning may be properly understood, and this education must do so in an order reflective of the genealogy of the *sign*, so that if meaning of the *sign* was indeed changed, a full genealogy of the *sign's* meaning will be known.

It is from observations of the answer to the critics that I make the final statement on *comedy*: *Comedy* is an imitation of an action that is ludicrous and imperfect that, through pleasure and laughter, instigates the purgation of absurdities resulting from the confusion of *signs*; *comedy* requires the established meaning of *signs* to be understood by both performer and audience, and is made impossible by *relativistic* reinterpretations of *signs*. Therefore,

without education<sup>76</sup>, *comedy* becomes impossible. *Comedy* has laughter as its mother, and reason for its father.

### **Cide's Commentary**

15. Corcyra, even more bitterly, reminds me of my Moorish people and our twisted tongue. It is not so bleak for us Moors everywhere in Spain, however. In that Golden city of Valencia, the great books are still read, and the people's' words have not lost meaning through the decimation of generations. In Valencia, the Venice of Spain, the Moors remember the meanings of their words. That great hero, the epitome of all knight-errantry, El Cid Campeador, set an example for Valencia that has echoed through the ages, and led to that city being the greatest in all of Spain, and perhaps all the world.
16. During the *Reconquista* of the Conquistadors, the Aragonese monarchs exiled the most noble of Knights, El Cid, due to their wretched envy of the adoration the Aragonese peasants showed El Cid over the monarchs. El Cid was a brave and relentless warrior, and had slain many Moors on the field of battle in fidelity to his old masters, and the Aragonese reasoned that exile would invite Moorish revenge on El Cid, who would perish fending off armies alone. This was not the case, however; rather, the Moors recognized that through mercy to El Cid they might instead acquire his services. El Cid soon presented himself before the Emirs of the Taifa of Zaragoza, and accepted command of the Taifa's armies, and led the Moors to many victories over the wicked Aragonese Conquistadors<sup>77</sup>. Soon after, El Cid led combined Christian and Moorish forces against the fanatical Almohads and conquered the city of Valencia, establishing the most enlightened rule ever to be seen in Spain.

In Valencia, El Cid appointed both Christian and Moorish administrators, and gave equal

---

<sup>76</sup> Which establishes a meaning to signs.

<sup>77</sup> Joseph F. O'Callaghan in his *History of Medieval Spain*, Cornell University Press, 1975, confirms this: "El Cid entered al-Mutamin's service and successfully defended Zaragoza against the assaults of al-Mundhir, Sancho I of Aragón, and Ramon Berenguer II, whom he held captive briefly in 1082."

liberties to both. Christian and Moor traded, wedded, and learned from one another under the righteous rule of El Cid, unique in Spain and all the world! The great works of Aristotle, Euclid, and Ibn Rushd were translated from Arabic into Latin, and both Moor and Christian celebrated in the knowledge of these great texts. Jews flocked to the city as well, and all three peoples of the Book lived in a harmony no where else seen. These traditions carried on even after the death of El Cid and the recapture of the city by the Moors, and then Conquistadors—the people of Valencia were informed by a common understanding due to the translation of these great texts, and, although we Moors had to convert as elsewhere in Andalusia, the Moors of Zaragoza retained knowledge thanks to their Christian brothers' translations of their books.

In Valencia, the Moors are not confused as they are elsewhere! Walking along the roads in the evenings, a traveller will see peasant farmers staring up in the darkening sky, tracing the planetary motions found in the *Almagest*. These peasants have tied their harvest and planting times to the movements of these heavenly spheres precisely, and no greater bounties are to be found in the Spanish countryside than those found in Zaragoza. Midwives administer to the women with knowledge retained from Ibn Rushd's medical treatise, and the children of Valencia are the healthiest babies found in Europe. In the market places you will find Jew and Christian discussing *The Republic*, and Moor and Christian wedded with poetry recited from Rumi and Virgil. El Cid's legacy, preserved in the great texts, do not have the Moors of Valencia worshipping the walls of their cages; there are no cages in Valencia, and men and women believe as their faith instructs them. In Valencia, knowledge is remembered with aid of the great texts, not forgotten lacking them, and we Moors have not become walking ghosts.

17. My commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, *On Comedy* concluded, I now resolve to leave Córdoba.

I intend to trade Andalusia for Zaragoza, and education for ignorance, and to live among a people who still retain knowledge of the meaning of their signs. Shepherded by the great

authors of ages past, these more enlightened people have found peace instead of violence, science instead of superstition, and philosophy instead of sophistry. Aristotle makes clear that this is the only way to avoid confusion of the *signs*; that we all must remember what the great books teach us, or we are lost in a sea of mangled meanings and derision!

With luck and the will of God, the commentary I attach to this work will allow me to join my brothers in Valencia soon! If all the world takes a path to confusion and destruction, I will take the other, to Valencia. I am going to Valencia<sup>78</sup>, God willing, where words still have their meanings.

### **Editor's Closing Remarks**

And with that, the genius presenter of this long-lost work and commentary is finished! Aristotle and Benengeli have elevated the lost cause that this thesis was and presented a perfect demonstration of its points: that to combat relativism in education, a genealogy of *signs*, in the form of a Great Books curriculum, is necessary! Questions of postmodern profundity melt away with honest inquiry into the meaning of *signs*, and civilization is saved from the *information* entropy of relativism! Protagoras you damn dead dog! You and your post-modern compatriots have been bested by the father of logic himself, ages ago overlooked, and the perfect remedy for your arguments has been identified—to laugh at them! And, since Aristotle forged this remedy from the foundries of truth, and the remedy was then rescued and saved by that noblest of Moriscos, Benengeli, and then this visionary author now presents the remedy to relativism to the world; that is to say I, that most visionary genius author, have actually saved the world! The

---

<sup>78</sup> The reader will be reminded that, sadly, the Moriscos were ejected from Valencia in 1609. This may serve as a rudimentary hypothesis for why, if such a character Cide Hamete Benengeli had ever existed with a copy of the second book of *Poetics*, it had been lost to the ages. Our Cide above was unfortunately mistaken: no utopian version of Valencia existed then in Zaragoza, and if the Moriscos had been confused elsewhere, they would have likewise been confused in Valencia as well. If an alternate path exists to save society from derision and destruction it is not in some fanciful dream of Valencia. Rather, if such a path exists, it is in the “path” offered in this thesis: an education based around a series of the greatest works known to mankind, so that we may learn—and then decide—the meaning of *signs*.

logic is unassailable<sup>79</sup>: the honors of saving the world from the plague of relativism itself are clearly mine! And that, dear readers, may only mean one thing alone-

**Chorus of Integral Tutors** [chanting rhythmically in Greek, incomprehensible to the inept Colin]:

*Oi! What is this incessant rambling? Does this boy think he has proved anything?  
Other than perhaps his penchant for monologuing mindless content  
Shows that there are weaknesses still to the great education we have attempted to  
imbue him with?*

*Zeus, Athena, Hagerty—is there no stopping his narcissistic mumbling?*

**Colin**

Ah! The tutors! They must have conferred for the momentous import of my thesis!

Yes, here they are now, pouring over my thesis and its eighty-five appendices!

Surely this can only mean one thing-

**Chorus of Tutors** [still in Greek, vigorously shaking their heads as they cover copies of Colin's thesis in red ink]

*Unconscionable! Inane and insane! Two advisors for his thesis and still a mess!  
His arguments are shifty and full of holes—if they were put to water they'd all sink!  
And this closing gag, so trite and weary,  
Could he not even be bothered to make us rhyme, if not in Greek, then in English?  
Can we beat no learning through the density of his foolishness?*

[The Tutors look over their shoulders and see the self-congratulatory look on Colin's face. They collectively sigh.]

*Whoever gave that boy a pen in lieu of a gun ought to have the latter used on them!*

---

<sup>79</sup> This is an unsubstantiated, and very weird, claim.

*To look at his diction causes endless distress,  
 But, perhaps, we may engineer our own deliverance?  
 His transcripts would have him graduate,  
 Something we could rightly refuse to substantiate,  
 But to do so would be our own destruction!  
 After all, how much longer could we continue our instruction?  
 Ought we deal with this dolt another ten years?  
 How much older need he be than his peers  
 Before we call off his education as ridiculous?  
 To teach an old dog new tricks is indeed incred-i-bus.*

[The Tutors, pause, looking at each other with apprehension.]

*Still, although passing him brings us much dismay  
 De Lasalle's dictum we are bound to obey:  
 "Saved is the spirit kingdom's flower  
 From the evil of a failing thesis grade:  
 'Whoever strives with all his power,  
 We are allowed to save.'<sup>80</sup>  
 Let him think he has done some good for Western Civilization,  
 His work, at least, was inspired in presentation.  
 And who knows: perhaps there is something to his argument on signs and meaning?  
 Maybe something was less than half-baked in his designs and monologuing?  
 Leave it for a seminar to see if his work was demonstrative,  
 And allow us simply to be rid of him.*

---

<sup>80</sup> Goethe, ed. & Kaufmann, *Faust*, lines 11934-11937.

**Colin** [being handed a gown and golden wreath by the reluctant Tutors]

Ah yes! This is it! I am being... *graduated!*

[Colin, placing the wreath on his head, is ascended slowly into the clouds surrounded in light,

*Pomp and Circumstance* playing loudly in the background.

**Tutors** [sneering in disgust]

Dreck, just... *dreck.*

## Major Works Cited

- Kant, Immanuel, et al. *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Cervantes, De Saavedra Miguel, et al. *Don Quixote*. Ecco, an Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers, 2015.
- Borges, Jorge Luis., and Andrew Hurley. *Jorge Luis Borges: Collected Fictions*. Viking Press, 1998.
- Black, Max, and Gottlob Frege. "Sense and Reference." *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 57, no. 3, 1 May 1948, pp. 207–230. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/2181484](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2181484)
- Barnes. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Liddell, Henry George, and Robert Scott. *A Lexicon*. Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Cooper, Lane, and Aristotle. *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy: with an Adaptation of the Poetics and a Translation of the Tractatus Coislinianus*. Harcourt, Brace, 1922 (Kraus Reprint, 1969).
- Plato, and John M Cooper. *Plato Complete Works*. Access and Diversity, Crane Library, University of British Columbia, 2015.
- Diogenes Laërtius, and Robert Drew Hicks. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. W. Heinemann, 1925.
- Thucydides, et al. *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Penguin Books, 1972.