

*Can irony act as an antidote for reality?*

First I consider it necessary to narrow down what I am referring to by reality. In the mathematical field, there are a series of figures that appear while dealing with the notion of eternity and the process of limitation, both of them being thinking tools used to find out what the term reality actually stands for.

In order to determine what reality is, we need to know where it starts and where it ends. I can say bluntly that reality is the conglomerate of existing facts. Now, the friction between the terms limitation and eternity arises, giving place to paradoxes, fallacies, and sophisms. All three have in common the fact that they are an unexpected result of a calculation. What differences they have from one another is the degree of accuracy in defining phenomena. This brings us to the problem concerning the knowledge about the medium chosen for explaining facts.

Paradoxes relate to mystery. They are correct, for they escape the expectations prior to the analysis, but the calculation does not contradict any structuring principle of the chosen medium. Fallacies relate to ignorance. The observer is unaware that he or she is not obeying the laws governing the medium; after the surprise, the status of the discovery is verified, the observer goes through the entire calculation without being able to notice where or what the mistake is. Sophisms relate to trickery. As fallacies, they are also incorrect formulations, but they are used deliberately to fool others, coming across as true to those who don't have the knowledge or the patience to evaluate the statement critically.

The text that follows is a logical inquiry to find out if irony has the potential of acting like an antidote to reality, or if it just behaves like anesthesia. My lack of in-depth knowledge about the laws governing logical reasoning might cause the predictable or celebrated discoveries to follow, to be rendered false. In fact, these potential errors during the argument can be convenient if we bear in mind that what is at stake here is not the pursuit of truth per se, but the sabotage of a spectrum of reality dominated by a cloud of constraintment and alienation. Instead of using logic as it is normally prescribed to us: as the means to find reasonable conclusions or efficient

solutions to problems; let me consider logic here and now as a mechanism in itself, against its own -programmed- nature. Seeking what the limits of logic were theorist Immanuel Kant postulated in Critique of Pure Reason that logic is not reliable when it comes to examining ontological truths, since it is possible to prove by the means of reasoning in two opposite statements -in Kant's case- that God does and does not exist. Following this argument, Hans Vaihinger stated that since these metaphysical truths cannot be discovered, one should ask whether it is useful or even necessary to act "as if" they were true. Perhaps using logic "as if" it will lead us towards a better place, or simply towards a safer place when the need of food and shelter becomes urgent, can contribute in the long term to finding yourself in the following situation: where you need to work in order to survive but you dislike the labor you are doing, and how this labor contributes to the current state of affairs, but you have no time and energy to get out of the spiral. The dependence on patterns of habit, collectively sculpts the alienated realm I was referring to before to which, I propose, an aesthetic use of logic may become disruptive.

Oscar Wilde camouflages absurdity in his essay, *The Decay of Lying* through the use of apparently logical arguments (sophisms). Certain formats like official discourse, opinion articles in newspapers or philosophical essays, unintentionally evoke a relationship of mutual trust between the writer and reader. A reader can have a critical attitude towards a text, but it is not frequent that a reader thinks that the writer does not stand behind his or her own words. Am I wrong? Included below is an excerpt from Wilde's text:

CYRIL (coming in through the open window from the terrace). My dear Vivian, don't coop yourself up all day in the library. It is a perfectly lovely afternoon. The air is exquisite. There is a mist upon the woods like the purple bloom upon a plum. Let us go and lie on the grass, and smoke cigarettes, and enjoy Nature.

VIVIAN Enjoy Nature! I am glad to say that I have entirely lost that faculty. People tell us that Art makes us love Nature more than we loved her before; that it reveals her secrets to us; and that after a careful study of Corot and Constable we see things in her that had escaped our observation. My own experience is that the more we study Art, the less we care for Nature. What Art really reveals to us is Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. Nature has good intentions, of course, but, as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out. When I look at a landscape I cannot help seeing all its defects. It is fortunate for us, however, that Nature is so imperfect, as otherwise we should have had no art at all. Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place. As for the infinite variety of Nature, that is a pure myth. It is not to be found in Nature herself. It

resides in the imagination, or fancy, or cultivated blindness of the man who looks at her.

CYRIL: well, you need not look at the landscape. You can lie on the grass and smoke and talk.

VIVIAN: but nature is so uncomfortable. Grass is hard and dumpy and damp, and full of dreadful black insects. Why, even Morris' poorest workman could make you a more comfortable seat than the whole of Nature can.

Besides humoristic, Wilde's operation is a subversive one — he infiltrates the forms of official discourse with illusive constructs that mimic the mechanisms of logic. Well-articulated reasoning catches the reader's attention, with the intention of conducting the stream of thought away from any of the expected trajectories paved by habit. These deviated destinations act like *trompe l'oeil* thoughts where an illusory space is suggested beyond a flat surface. The success or failure of this subversive strategy is ambiguous but it opens up a debate. On the one hand, the ineffectiveness of the text is obvious, when it comes to measure its capacity to transform the alienating status quo. But on the other hand, the strength of this text is that the sabotage is not noticeable; it is a weak one yes, but perhaps it is part of a silent or invisible revolution. To me, what matters is that in this spectrum of reality dominated by constraintment, the inhabitants are exposed to a repetitive sequence of experiences and within this pattern, a camouflaged -polluting-antidote has been introduced. What is at stake is not the transformation of external phenomena, but the corruption of the organ itself where experience is finally distilled— the awakening of the reader's ironical faculties. When you're being ironic, you don't say directly what you think, you leave space for the listener: like a puzzle, you purvey a -seemingly- incongruent group of pieces. It is possible that the mosaic-kind-of-image that the pieces form altogether in a unique combination remains unnoticed. "When you are an artist, it is important that people talk about you, even if they do so in a good way". Irony functions like a code, where the real message is hidden and needs to be deciphered. In this way it can be used as a means of resistance creating a "we" that corresponds with patterns of behaviour, like for instance only if you engage with "this apparent nonsense", you might understand it. The opacity of its meaning can certainly provoke irritation, and worst of all there is a big risk of troubling communication by generating misunderstandings: where someone thinks that someone else is being ironic and is not the case, or when someone incurs into the rewardless exercise of looking for sense where there is none. To be honest there is nothing as shameful as badly formulated irony. But let us come back to the very reason why irony was introduced in this query: to find out if it did act as anesthesia or as an antidote for the feeling of alienation. This kind of

humor does have an anesthetic effect that manifests through the eruption of laughter that later on fades away. Unlike entertainment, where the pain produced by the routine is put aside -so as to make it possible to keep on going- or either a reconciliation with the forms of alienation is proposed, irony is rooted in pessimistic thinking. The core of pessimism lies in acknowledging that existence is marked by the urge to satisfy a constant and expanding deficiency of every kind, thus life is characterized by suffering; namely, when one of the needs or desires is satisfied, immediately another goal emerges. We can observe how both irony and pessimism are about giving up and being resigned to the fact that death will come and after that nothing else, as opposed to letting oneself be dragged in life into an endless stream of illusions such as religion, life plans, and holidays. These obligations help to build expectations of some kind, and expectations sooner or later lead towards disappointment. There are monsters that survive pessimism though, they are the target of the ironic comment, which is in itself a serious joke. Embracing that death is inescapable does not exclude the fear that comes with this realization. Thus, in my opinion, when Wilde is rendering nature as ridiculous, "Nature is so imperfect, as otherwise we should have had no art at all. Art is our spirited protest", he is looking for a fictional blindspot to mortality. Judging nature -mountains or mere trees that live for a longer period than human beings with the criteria used and made by humans is his ironic strategy (a fallacy) to prove for a moment the mirage of our victory. Sometimes stating the obvious helps. I do not think Wilde is standing behind his words here, but rather claiming the agency of these mental images disproving any truth applied to reality. To me, they are hinting at a paradigm shift where the experience of the human being is stressed above the so-called external phenomena, as the nucleus of a contingent revolution. An example of what the ironic behavior entails -culturally speaking- could be represented by what Duchamp said about people deliberately attending Happenings; namely not to be amused but rather to incur in a certain play of boredom.