

Irony and existence.

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On negative, self-destructive irony.

From my "Ironi och existens." (1983.)

(Translated from original by the author.)

This translation is an attempt to put together parts of the original book – Ironi och existens -, without altering the original text, but through rearranging the order of the paragraphs maybe enlighten the meaning of the book. The true meaning of the book is – naturally – each and everyone's experience by reading the original book. The book contains a lot, and is arranged with numbered sentences. It could not be said to be "aphorisms". The book were categorized in (100 !) Swedish libraries as sheer ...prose. All the same it is recommended by independent authorities (?) for philosophy students in Sweden. (Probably as an horror example in practical philosophy. I cannot say that I regret the book. It is an honest book, however bad it might be. (Not all books are honestly written.) The meaning of the book could also be said to be : to describe negative irony, and to describe an irony directed towards oneself in a destructive manner, and by describing this kind of irony to enable some

people to get rid of this kind, this type of devastating irony. Thus – such is the hope of the author – this “interpretation” could be helpful to some therapists around the world. It was originally written quite simple and without any connection to contemporary psychology. It was not influenced by any special psychologist but rather held in a philosophical tradition. The sole clearly perceivable psychological influence is the one from S. Kierkegaard. By it's use a philosophical and not a psychological terminology this text has at least the possibility to be of direct importance even a long time after it's original moment of conception. The following is neither easy reading nor for amusement at all. It is a description of a seriously distorted mental state. It is even – I believe – a rather tiresome task to read it through. You could not possibly find it interesting unless 1.) you are yourself in the same deplorable situation yourself, and want to get out of it, or 2.) you are trying to – professionally – recognize a mental state of this kind and to help a person with a syndrome like the one described here out of it. The state is not very common, but it is not very unusual either, I believe According to passages in – for instance – the writings of Anna Freud and Karen Horney persons like the here described are not likely to

*be found on the surface of the earth. I am no therapist, and am I certainly not giving advise. What I once wrote was from personal experience, and when I am reading it again when 30 years has passed, I find it not convincing as a whole, but much of it enough thought worthy. I have not (in the interest of historical truth) altered anything in the original text. Hoping that this could serve somebody. (The numbers within brackets are referring to the paragraphs – not site – from the original book **Ironi och existens**, 1983, Bokförlaget Korpen, Sweden.) With this new order it will certainly be a new book, and I am omitting paragraphs I now dislike. It is certainly not the original book. Here it is, the newly ordained, rearranged one (reminding me of Juan de la Cruz, (John of the Cross), – one of L. Wittgenstein's favourite authors – who was very foresighted in that he himself commented his own poems right in their first editions)..... (Since I in the later book , **Splittringar**, (1985), did not completely leave the subject, I find it appropriate to put passages from this book into this text. The quotations from *Splittringar* is marked with an S before the number, thus “ (S.373.) Reflection can only be put to an end by a decision, not by new reflection, according to Kierkegaard.*

2017.KG.

(The books starts –
surprisingly – with a definition of irony.
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(1.) Irony is:

1. When something is covering something else, and this “something else” is meant, asserted, is object of purpose.
2. When the cover and the covered at least in one way is treating the same subject.
3. When the cover by means of a means is referring away from itself, e.g. by an exaggeration. This, then, is the ironic means.
4. When one beforehand not have agreed about some code by which one is meaning the opposite to what one really is saying.
5. When the situation has a certain complexity, that is creating a sort of tense opposition.

(25.) Self irony is not irony itself. When irony is, it is there because of someone’s ironizing something, and it is sometimes even simple and free. It is directed and it has its goal. It

enlightens something which the one who has self-irony knows he has got and which he dislikes. It is his attention to show this.

The one, however, who is ironic through and through uses irony to cover himself, to hide himself in behind: he or she has irony all day and all night long; he or she who has irony all day long – as well as night – keeps creating an irony which stands free and which hereby is irony per se, an irony itself and which has the Self of an irony.

(26.) The ironic hereby creates the negate to a relation between himself and others.

(27.) The ironic is invisible, but: here is the ambiguity: one has to see and hear the ironic in order not to see or hear him/her.

(34) The ironic is busy being an ironic.

(56.) Hell on earth would be to be meeting an ironic crowd.

(96.) It is apparent that a person is an ironic, if he is. The ironic himself is not at all apparent. You might say, that he is apparent as a “that”(“the fact that grass is green”)(germ.”dass”, French “que” “le ciel est tel noir, que ...”), a small word of mystic in our language.

(93.) Irony is probably universal, polyglot, meaning that you do not, when learning a new language, have to learn extra how to be ironic.

Some philosophers – like Kierkegaard and Höffding – claim, with support from the ancient comedian Aristophanes and his comedy *The Clouds*, that irony came with Socrates. Irony was to have been born together with democracy. This, naturally, is nonsense.

(94.) As Wagener points out, the irony of Socrates was a pedagogical one. Socrates acted as if he did not know. It was a method, where he led the others in various debates on philosophical issues. Plato puts – in the late dialogue *Meno* – Socrates in a curious position, since S. here claims that all knowledge is remembering. Probably this was the opinion of Plato, not of Socrates, who had a more down to earth mind than his pupil Plato. (Like everybody knows Socrates never wrote anything, since he claimed , that writing harmed the memory capacity.)

(28.) The ironic is mirroring the world as it is: invisible.

(35.) The “Weltironie” respectively “Verdensironie” that Hegel and Kierkegaard is writing about is a variation on the dialectics of history, and this is not the irony here at issue.

(59.) The ironic: "Of course I am unimportant, but I do not think that I am that unimportant. I have reached the pint where I doubt my own existence. – To God everything is possible, and he did not suffice himself by creating me, no: he thought it over very carefully, so very carefully that he withdrew me from the primary creation and decided himself to act as if I did exist. That is what I am, God's careful withdrawal."

(It could easily be said, that the ironic is not a very sympathetic person, at first sight)

The author makes one important distinction. There are two kinds of irony: overt and covert. (Cf. Wayne Booth. In his book on irony.) *Id est: Transparent and non-transparent.*

(62.) The transparent ironic. (With the transparent ironic irony is visible, with the non-transparent it is not.)

The shape of irony is close and it is extremely dependent on all it's parts which does not allow anything foreign to enter. The concept of "self"(reflexivity) is necessary and central when it comes to describe irony and the ironic. The Ironic is in himself – however small this Self is – and he is himself by himself.

He does not leave himself: a short visit outside himself (personified reflexivity or the “I”) is immediately followed by a swift retreat.

He is never leaving himself totally, for sure, and he is bitter about this and is answering the imaginary question by saying:” If I cannot come out, nobody is going to enter either!”

The communication of the ironic (or non-communication (pseudo-communication)) is his very *way of existence* and constitutes his *identity*.

(It is not easy to like the person(s) described here, but that was not the prime issue.)

There is a reason why the ironic does come out, ever is leaving himself. The reason – or ground – is the hate of self, which is letting it’s counterpart, the love of or deification of self, create a balance. This duality is binding him up. This duality forces him to this communication, by means of speech and mimics, where he primarily, primarily and all the time, keeps asserting, that he does not want to be what he is.

The ironic brings forth that which he experiences, that which he innermost is, and presents it in such a way that the surrounding world (people) do understand, that he does not want to, that he is not able to be what he

innermost is, that which has been withdrawn by himself, hidden into the forbidden.

But a certain picture of his inner self has the ironic got, and he is choosing to accentuate certain traits with this (former) "Self", and is building upon it, exaggerates into a grotesque for everybody to relinquish, to accuse, keep aloof, and at the same time this is the only, the sole thing he is doing : his life is – in other words – just presenting this picture and this keeping it at a distance.

The ironic thus gradually becomes a picture of himself or a mirror for himself and his situation. He becomes a picture of the cleft between himself and the world, since he even has moved out a part of himself to the world, extinguished himself as acting subject, transformed it into an object (a thing, a Hegelian *an sich*, a sartreian *en soi*). The ironic has abstained from, most often once and for all, from trying to tune in with the rest of the world outside himself, this world, that he finds so wholly "unjust" and "insulting". So deadly unjust.

But in this very relation which lies in this up keeping of distance, the very art into which he develops this, there comes up a – seen from the outside – treacherous paradox... The ironic is incredibly satisfied with himself when

succeeding in expressing, that he does not like himself at all.

The most important, when we are talking about the ironic as a paradoxical being, is to observe the change in meaning of the word, the concept of “self”. For the ironic life is indeed this: not wanting to be oneself, – it is this: despairingly not wanting to be oneself, but at the same time despairingly to want to be oneself in another way, and in a very special way, namely, to want to be oneself as an ironic, which he truly is as soon as he has succeeded in explaining what he does not want to be in that indirect manner he is using.

Such is irony. Such a captivative art can be shaped in and together with irony, so that it can in its close form, like a black hole, can be said to realise its strength immanently, even if it does not can be said to be inprovocable; if irony is affected from the outside, one of its three parts reacts and the other two are affected as well (maybe is the strain on the irony heightened a bit), but soon irony is in perfect balance again, keeps itself in its closed shape – it has a relatively simple structure, you know – and can soon again constitute the solid “soul” of the ironic in question.

Irony is as much a form of communication as a total defence can be.

This, I assert, can be seen together with the uniqueness which can be found with the irony, in the fact that it is expressing a negation of itself, but this negation expressed keeps strengthening irony itself all the time. (It must be looked upon each feature: irony can express that a person does not want to be himself and irony can at the same time be irony upon itself, self-irony of the irony.)

Irony is educating the ironic into a brilliant speaker (in his small environment), and this Art becomes gradually the great ART, which if even not statistically, becomes something of a monologue, or anyway a parody on communication and conversation.- There lies too in the nature of irony to demand a rather intense activity from the person who is the beholder of the irony, which has to do with the natural decline of the ironic Self: the negative irony becomes by necessity poorer and poorer and more and more mannered. (He, the ironic, is a little like an old Don Juan.) Behind his irony the ironic is aware of this. Deep inside him he starts to feel that something is “too late...”. Thus, behind all the smiles and tricks and manners, he

knows that this cannot go on for ever. But despair has only one message to give: Forwards!

(63.) The identity of the ironic as ironic, which is the only identity he has (also according to the above), is immobile to everybody, except for one kind of people :the non-transparent ironics, who take with them their covert meanings and opinions home and never is letting anybody even suspect that they are ironics.

These non-transparent ironics only make themselves visible by their interest in taking the irony off the transparent ironic. In an immediate way they could appear to get along with the irony of the transparent ironic, but only for a while, and then by their ability to uncover by using their skill to cover they will attack the other.

The non-transparent ironic is unlike the transparent one in the following ways: A. He (or she) never uses ironic means (and he therefore completely disregards the ironic means of the transparent ironic, – the smiles, the little winks and so on ...) B. He keeps the irony within himself. C. He is visible.

The non-transparent does not accept the ironic means of the transparent, however strong these means can be, and he thus is denying constantly the whole body language of the transparent one.

He is hereby crushing a third of the irony of the transparent one, and thus the irony as a whole, and thus the transparent ironic. Each ironic utterance by the transparent is received by the non-transparent by eloquent naivety as a determined utterance.(Which it is not.) Against this assault the transparent ironic has no defence at all. The lovely naïveté could not by him be judged to be neither true or false and in this state of unknowingness (all) irony is dying. The non-transparent is untouchable because he does not reveal anything (about himself) or admits anything, and as an attacker he is merciless. The transparent one becomes through the non-transparent visible in his nothingness. This is enough to make him absolutely

Nought.

To the non-transparent is assault the best defence: because, if the non-transparent would accept the irony of the transparent ironic, then the non-transparent would necessarily become determined, serious, or lose a narcissistic moment, and this is equally not in the interest of the non-transparent as it is not of the transparent.

(67.) The ironic mirroring himself in his irony and falls in love with himself, like Narcissus. Worse than Narcissus. Because the ironic is

mirroring his invisibility in his irony. Irony is the most beautiful of all things, but irony does not return his feelings, because irony is shut within itself.

(70.) The irony of the ironic is a theft of presence.

(72.) The ironic is needed by the others, so that they can define themselves

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