

**Universitatea „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași
Facultatea de Filosofie și Științe Social-Politice**

TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT

- ABSTRACT -

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Doctorand:

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HOMO IRONICUS
**AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH OF
PHILOSOPHICAL IRONY**
- ABSTRACT -

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Since its first manifestations on the stage of the Western culture, irony has captured the rhetoricians and literary scholars' attention, being one of the main ways of expressing human intelligence and creativity. Most authors have tried to capture its essence in simplistic, unequivocally definitions, but few have really realized its complexity avoiding, thus, any definitive classification. In this paper, we do not intend to give a new definition of irony, but to capture its largeness within the development of universal culture and civilization, as an essentially human phenomenon.

, this does not mean that the work is a history of irony, identifying its historical paradigms taking into account the depth, and at the same time, the difficulty with which it can change worldviews or a certain state of affairs.

Thus, by virtue of its ambiguity, irony has been studied from various angles: rhetorical, philosophical, religious, psychoanalytical, pedagogical, ethological, or linguistic. Nowadays, due to these interpretations, irony is given particular importance (even though only in small circles), its effectiveness at a social, or personal development level still being regarded with suspicion.

Many philosophers and literates wrote about irony, but

few dared to put it into practice, especially because of its controversial nature, difficult to keep under control. Except the old cynics and, of course, Socrates, Schlegel, Kierkegaard, or Nietzsche, we do not have many examples of authors for whom irony reflects a lifestyle or a worldview, most of them being simple “servants” of the subversive thought.

However, throughout the paper, we proved that all authors regarded as being representative of what we call *philosophical irony* had a major contribution in the field of philosophical anthropology, not only in changing the conception about man, but also in improving human condition and its position in relation to the rest of the creatures and to the whole world.

Since modern times, classing figures of speech has been excessively nuanced, almost every instance of discursive virtuosity receiving a name. Thus, irony has been “isolated” to the simple definition of the rhetoric, although it does not necessarily consist in the contrary or the double meaning of a statement, but in its *hidden* message, in what it does not say specifically, but in what it wants to be noted and understood in a certain way. For this reason, we have considered it necessary to establish a typology of irony, to which we have devoted an

entire chapter. Thus, we have identified four main types of irony: non-verbal, para-verbal, verbal, and philosophical. All these types have been analyzed from the point of view of philosophical anthropology, of psychoanalysis and of human ethology.

In the idea of bringing together under the irony “dome” most tropes and other related phrases, in the subchapter dedicated to defining and highlighting the conceptual connections (rhetorical, aesthetic, ethical, psychological), the necessary arguments are also exposed. We have suggested that all types of irony (non-verbal, para-verbal and verbal) converge or, we might say, find their fulfillment in philosophical irony, the perfect expression of human thought.

In this respect, the anthropological approach of irony is not limited only to the analysis of the figure of speech or of the Socratic method; it also involves exploring its fecundity both as attitude towards life (*existential irony*) and as operating strategy at a non-verbal, para-verbal, and verbal level, in order to reach to an optimal agreement between interlocutors or, where appropriate, to convey something difficult to expose bluntly.

Steven Pinker, a prominent researcher in areas such

philosophy of language and cognitive sciences, is one of the authors who support the idea that nowadays humanity lives in the most peaceful known period. Moreover, in *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, he argues that the brute violence manifestation level has diminished over the millennia, although not constantly. In fact, according to the author, only in the last two centuries, and especially after World War II, one can speak of a sharp drop in committing atrocities, mainly due to the large-scale literacy of the population. Somewhat similarly, in his turn, Richard Rorty argues that the moralistic effects of literary and journalistic writings had a major impact in the melioration process of the worldwide conflictuality.

Furthermore, closely linked to Pinker and Rorty's ideas about the ethic advance of humanity, Norbert Elias – taking into account a certain dialectic of irony as an adjustment or violent attacks transformation factor – noticed in modern times, compared to the medieval period, an appeasing trend of expressing cruelty towards other people, the pleasure of torturing gaining more subtle forms of satisfaction. This mechanism, which is a specific variation of human behavior, is called by the author *civilizing*.

Although western countries have fought expansion wars

in the name of this ideal, Elias argues that through a short writing of Erasmus of Rotterdam, *De civilitate morum puerilium*, the term *civilitas* gains very similar meanings to the contemporary ones. As we shall see, Erasmus is an important historical paradigm for philosophical irony. And, in this respect, the writing was expected to be exposed with that playful seriousness, specific to great ironists.

Sharing the mentioned authors' optimistic outlooks, it can be said that the source of moral progress, although fragile, is due to the growing forces of man's spirit or to the man's ability to critically assimilate information.

Thus, along with the Renaissance, more and more educated people began to be less receptive regarding superstitions, religious, political, or moral prejudices, naïve conceptions about the world, ridiculing them more frequently. We do not think we need to resort to examples in order to understand that they have been, in fact, the reason why many people terribly suffered. Eventually, all pseudo-knowledge had to be, in some way, exposed. And, since a principled change cannot suddenly occur, an indirect way of changing the state of things was needed. Jean-Claude Margolin calls this critical way, specific to humanists, "ironic self-consciousness". In this

paper, we will look at the manner in which *ironic self-consciousness* has developed, namely the impact it had on downsizing the apparent distance between people, between people and other creatures, but also between people and things. Having a key role in governing ancestral human aggression, we have insisted on the cathartic and on the social cohesion function of irony.

Like the civilizing process discussed by Norbert Elias, the *humanization* process certainly does not have a linear and irreversible journey. Mitigating mainly aggressive characters through the charm of irony cannot be efficient in all circumstances. If the interlocutor has reached the point in which he can no longer master his emotion, determined to act brutally, no rhetorical and no philosophical subtlety can be useful.

We mention the fact that we use the term *humanization* in an ethical acceptance, not in the sense of biological evolution. The idea of *humanity*, in the moral sense, is similar to the Kantian ethics according to which man is an end in itself, and not a means that we can have anytime and anyhow. As used herein, *humanity* does not only imply responsibility towards other people or the self, but also towards other living creatures

and the environment that they live in. Without cancelling *difference*, *humanity* is an ironic way of living together with what does not currently characterize us or that we cannot understand just by using the thinking “tools” with which we have been educated.

The theme of irony tunes perfectly with the philosophy of the continuous becoming. For the German Romantics, at least, irony is a true concept, more than a state of mind, it is the headquarters of the supreme world order.

In the present paper, emphasizing the impermanence of our historical, social, anthropological, psychological path etc., we certainly have no intention to shut the world into a system, into a single point of view. Although, cultivating irony, we could say that we are always *at home* (meaning where our humanity is); however, we are never *in the house* (namely at the core of the truth). In our view the ironist is, therefore, a person who tends to debunk any theory that is based on the idea of congruence between language and things, phenomena or attitudes.

Among other things, it has been said that what distinguishes man from animals is his “unusual” language, from which the classical dichotomy man-unreasoning arises.

Articulate language could be considered the distinctive element that would clearly emphasize the dissociation, words giving us the opportunity to know (us) and to reflect. While animals do not have the ability to reflect on what they do, including the (dis)simulations they make, which come under the non-reflective language, only man can consciously play with ideas and concepts, giving them a connotative meaning.

But is it sufficient to say that, by virtue of his outstanding features, man might be superior to other creatures? And, if so, more precisely, in what sense can he be considered superior?

Anticipating, to a great extent, both Freudian psychoanalysis principles and the ideas of the Schelerian philosophical anthropology, Friedrich Nietzsche considered that the ascetic or the Christian prostrated before the cross are just examples through which man redirects his cruelty against his own self. Therefore, he wrote, “almost everything we call «higher culture» is based on the spiritualization and on deepening of *cruelty* [...] the knower, by forcing his spirit to know *against* its own inclination and, often enough, against the wishes of his heart – in other words, to say «no» when he would like to affirm, love, worship – this knower will prevail as an artist of cruelty and the agent of its transfiguration. Even

treating something in a profound or thorough manner is a violation, a wanting-to-hurt the fundamental will of the spirit, which constantly tends towards semblances and surfaces, – there is a drop of cruelty even in every wanting to know”¹. Therefore, the *humanity* we are proud of is not as innocent as it seems at first glance, but it is the result of deviation, transformation or, in psychoanalytical terms, of sublimating death instincts.

Our work may also be considered a theorization of the becoming of “holy cruelty” described by the German philosopher, a knowing of our species’ past, present and, why not, future, because irony is a phenomenon of transition from one era to another, or from one mentality to another, that always occurs when old beliefs and convictions are no longer accepted.

In this context, while Konrad Lorenz and Karl Popper argue that “thinking begins by lying”², we might as well say that *humanization develops by mocking*. Or, as Søren Kierkegaard states in one of the preliminary theses of his work

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil. Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1991, pp. 156-157.

² Karl R. Popper & Konrad Lorenz, *The Future is Open. A Discussion while Nursing the Fire*, Trei Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997, p. 30.

dedicated to Socratic and romantic irony, “*Ut to dubitatione philosophia sic ab ironia vita digna, quae humana vocetur, incipit*”³, suggesting that authentic human existence is recognized by the way in which practical wisdom of irony is acquired.

Thanks to Socrates, to the German romantics and to the mentioned Danish philosopher, irony acquires philosophical and religious importance, since they mock only in order to reveal the inconceivable, namely what is found beyond the ordinary meanings of the words. For this reason, maybe “we need at least consider the possibility that we are no less funny and comical beings as we are rational”⁴. In this sense, in the chapter entitled “Historical Paradigms of Philosophical Irony”, we will analyze the religious-philosophical expression of irony, as noted in the case of some of the most important philosophers and theologians of the universal culture, revealing its divine nature. Beginning with “the Spirit of Greek Antiquity” – when irony in the philosophical sense makes its presence felt among

³ Søren Kierkegaard, *On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, in *Works*, vol. I, Humanitas Publishing House, 2006, p. 14 (“As well as philosophy begins with doubt, a life worthy of being called human begins with irony.” trad. n.).

⁴ Mordechai Gordon, *Humor, Laughter and Human Flourishing. A Philosophical Exploration of the Laughing Animal*, Springer International Publishing, 2014, p. 17

the ancient Greeks, not only thanks to Socrates, but to Thales, Heraclitus or even to the sophists – the ethic and pedagogical importance of irony emerges.

Then, going through the cynics' experience, we will analyze the phenomenon of the so-called "fools for Christ", insisting on the religious aspect of the medieval irony. Thus, apophatism is interpreted as an ironic way of relating to God, especially because it is based on knowledge through negation. Furthermore, even God's reporting to the world is often considered ironic, the most obvious examples being the ones from the Bible.

Going beyond the axiomatic frameworks of the Middle Ages, we could not omit the humanistic perspectives of the ironic thinking of the Renaissance and Baroque, when Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarca opened the fighting possibilities against ignorant scholars and rigid theologians, and Erasmus of Rotterdam refined its subversive style being, at the same time, tolerant towards the plurality of faiths and beliefs. Moreover, we could not miss Giordano Bruno's "world reformation" attempt, so passionately accomplished, and helped by Momus, the taunting god banished from Olympus because of his uncomfortable criticism. As for Michel de

Montaigne and Blaise Pascal, whose *Essays* and *Pensées* have troubled their contemporaries' "dormant" minds, we had no choice but to bring them to the forefront of ironology. All these thinkers, together with those of the French Enlightenment (Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu) and, especially with Søren Kierkegaard, are the most important historical figures of philosophical irony.

Finally, the analysis will focus on the forms of postmodern irony, which are generally "cynicism" inspired, among which we mention nihilism, anarchism (political, cultural and epistemological), environmentalism and the rortian pragmatism. Overall, the entire philosophical discourse revolves around the idea of moral, *humanized* progress, perpetrated by the various ways of ironic expression.

In post-modernity, the search for truth in the broad sense of the term is not important, it being analyzed only in plural forms. Postmodernism, which claims itself from the Nietzschean philosophy, aims to deconstruct any metaphysical edifice, without putting anything in place, as even Nietzsche would have probably desired. Postmodern criticism does not identify with any particular paradigm, so that it seems it lacks clarity or sense when it defends its views. From what we can

tell, the refusal to accept new theoretical systems is, actually, the fear of creating an ideology that could end up in “interrogation”, even in getting down to the “torture chamber”. Since modern theories have created big disappointments, affecting to some extent the sad events of the last century, which resulted in the loss of hundreds of millions of lives, nowadays no one dares to seriously argue an idea to the end of its possibilities.

Nihilism, the lack of faith in transcendence, and the loss of any authority center are the main elements that have marked the current culture and civilization. Because of them, today we have visual arts without beauty, literature without narrative, poetry with absolutely no rhyme, rhythm and punctuation, movies without storyline, architecture without any ornaments, purely decorative library (without solid shelves for books), music without melody (*rap*) and, of course, criticism without clarity or even common sense.

Very important for this part of the thesis is Peter Sloterdijk’s book, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, an ironic allusion to the three Kantian “critiques” – *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, *Critique of Judgment*. Actually, it is a critique of “impure” reason, namely an attempt

to counter contemporary cynicism, from the positions of the old philosophical cynicism. Its role within our work is significant for identifying the philosophical forms of contemporary irony. As the author writes, “if one is talking about «cynical reason», then initially this formula completely takes over behind irony”⁵. According to him, the phenomenon of current cynicism begins with Friedrich Nietzsche, a philosopher in which we meet both remnants of old and recent cynicism.

Sloterdijk believes that even the logical positivists’ opposition to the fundamental problems of philosophy might be “cynically inspired. Is not Wittgenstein really the Diogenes of modern logic and Carnap the desert hermit of empiricism?”⁶ However, we believe that is an exaggeration, a philosopher such as Paul Feyerabend being much more “cynical” than the logical positivists, especially because he liked to shock with acid replicas towards the academic philosophy and scientists’ knowledge. For instance, Feyerabend asked “citizens to decide themselves on the content of research and teaching. All cultural traditions had, according to him, the right to equal access to

⁵ Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, vol. I, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2000, p. 12.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

power centers. With the slogan «Civic initiatives instead of cognitive theories», he succeeded another challenge. Free citizens had to replace the «philosophers’ unnecessary, expensive and illiterate talk through their concrete decisions»⁷. Then, his autobiography, mockingly entitled *Killing Time*, fully resonates with the philosophy of the “barrel”. Wanting to justify his scandalous findings, in “Introduction to the Chinese edition” of the ironical work *Against Method*, Feyerabend wrote: “The main reason I wrote the book is humanitarian, not intellectual. I wanted to help people, not to «advance knowledge». [...] «The advancement of knowledge» has meant, in many places, killing minds. [...] I am against ideologies that use the name of science for cultural homicide”⁸. Therefore, since “irony, like art, are a kind of «miracle» that denies the evidence of linear commonsense, favoring what was thought to be impossible, inconceivable”⁹, we will consider the impact of some subversive phenomena, like the political, cultural and epistemological Anarchism on

⁷ Robert Zimmer, *Philosophy since Illuminism until Today*, ALL Educational Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 118.

⁸ Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method. Outline of an Anarchistic Theory Knowledge*, Verso: London and New York, 1993, pp. 3-4.

⁹ Luca Casadio, *L'umorismo. Il lato comico della conoscenza*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2006, p. 134.

humanization.

An important topic of this chapter is the ironic way of expression through music. If ordinary language is relatively limited regarding the communicability force, “musical discourse” tends to silence the artist’s compelling reason. Moreover, the significance of the words in music does not lie in themselves, but in what they hint at.

We are dealing, therefore, with a specific kind of irony, that can only make itself heard in melodic sequences. A good way of expressing grievances is achieved through music, *according to* the traditions and cultures of which we belong. Considerable is the fact that protest aired on certain sequences and musical rhythms, such as those belonging to the rock, has a similar cathartic stress relief force brought off by irony. When the latter is translated into melodic line, it seems to unite and bring closer those who sing together. For them, physical aggression tends to be replaced by the symbolic one. And the most obvious expression of the therapeutic power of contemporary music we found in the *make love not war* message of the hippy movement. As we will see, “as ancestor of the hippy movement and as proto-bohemian, Diogenes left

his imprint on the tradition of intelligent life in Europe”¹⁰, nowadays the *hipster* being one of the most striking neo-cynical types. Moreover, in the 60s of the last century, at the same time when the hippies’ sexual revolution took place, respectively student movements, environmentalism begins to be heard pleading with the specific radicalism of anarchism, so that, today, “postmodern citizenship is less political and more ecological, we do not anymore believe in a moral and civic education oriented towards shaping selfless and patriotic feelings, we only aspire to a green citizenship”¹¹. In other words, we are witnessing a “cynical” inspired cosmopolitanism, visible in the nature preservation militants’ defiant attitudes.

A critique, to a large extent, well-founded of the environmentalism followers’ growing political strength comes from Pascal Bruckner, which makes a distinction between the two main types of ecology, one more reserved, more cerebral, and another rather irrational, resembling totalitarian ideologies. He condemns the latter, which he describes in terms of negativity typical to irony: “Ecology excels by what it wants to prevent, not by what it proposes: it closes factories, it blocks

¹⁰ Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, vol. I, qtd. ed., p. 190.

¹¹ Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Dawn of Duty. The Painless Ethics of the New Democratic Times*, Babel Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, p. 242.

projects, it prohibits the construction of highways, airports, railways. It is the power that always says no. [...] In this area, as in others, the most vehement always succeed, because they change doctrine in the sense of exaggeration. The environment is the new secular religion that rises, in Europe at least, on the remains of a faithless world. But it also must be subject to criticism; we have to expose its infant disease that grinds it and makes it unreliable: catastrophism”¹². The French author suspects that contemporary man’s fear of his own end might hide behind the radicalism of the environmental global ideology. Although he enjoys the privileges of civilization, man feels, however, the deaths of his species and of collateral ones as anguish. The extent to which environmentalism is a new form of anti-humanism – if it is not merely apparent, actually hiding a higher form of humanism – is presented in the subchapter entitled “The Challenge of Environmentalism”.

The thesis will conclude with the study of the American philosopher Richard Rorty’s “radical pragmatism”, for whom irony, although an element of private sphere, can be applied to public issue questions. Therefore, we believe that

¹² Pascal Bruckner, *The Fanaticism of the Apocalypse. Save the Earth, Punish Human Beings!*, Trei Publishing House, Bucharest, 2012, pp. 13-14.

contemporary, blasé and without any perspective cynicism, so blamed by Peter Sloterdijk, can be countered with the help of Rorty's preached *universal ironism*.

In sustaining his philosophical “mindset”, Rorty uses the term “utopia” somewhat ironically, first to mock his own temptation of offering a universal formulation. Therefore, it is not a utopia in the usual sense, namely one that means an absolute impossibility. Eventually, as it was possible to live in a world where we are no longer governed by religious authorities, so we might hope of living in a world where we will no longer be led by the new “priests” (the scientists), but by the sense of irony, carefully cultivated in the art of conversation.

In this “new philosophical order”, “the intellectual” or “the cultural critic” appear as philosophical paradigms of the current era. Their common figure is “the ironist”, a more suitable character for today's times than the “professional” philosopher.

Through the so-called “liberal utopia”, Rorty tries to convince us that people with different mentalities belonging to different cultures can actually live peacefully, if all go over about irony. Therefore, the author believes that classical

writers, who have described more eloquently than philosophical treatises what it meant to be human, good, or right, better achieved what we call “moral progress”. The novelist, the poet or the journalist are more skilled than the theorist when it comes to expressing compassion that we must show towards people or entities foreign to the culture we are living in.

Therefore, the thought that, in Rorty’s “world”, the ironist is the positive character because he is the one who does not step aside from anything but suffering, should not scare us. He can be of help in fulfilling not only certain private tasks, but rather, in developing the sense of responsibility towards problems of the community in which he lives.

Even if we have not stopped to a single definition regarding human uniqueness, we have shown that any attempt to emphasize the human essence cannot ignore the ironic dimension of human existence.

Due to both conservation instinct of the species, and the need of saving mental energy, people often avoid to making efforts to understand *what is different*, what is not common to their culture, tending to become dogmatic. And dogmatism is nothing else but one potentially aggressive factor, against

which irony might act, this “«oblique» means of communication used when maybe opposing violence is not useful, or when accepting confrontation and open dialectic open is not fruitful. [...] Thus, due to irony, we can find similarities between various objects and differences between similar aspects”¹³. Therefore, irony is a way of preventing rigid thought, of liberating man from the tyranny of ignorance, namely from the narrow circle of poorly researched or no longer significant for the present life beliefs and practices. “The only real knowledge is, therefore, criticism understood as a continuous skepticism exercise, designed to correct the previous mistake and to continuously create, thus, new situations for discussion”¹⁴. In this sense, the analysis of the socio-cultural impact of irony has not represented only an opportunity to reflect on the world, but also on the way in which people and different historical contexts give rise to opinions, beliefs and certainties, namely on the manner in which all these become obsolete or, where appropriate, revive.

Indicating the becoming path of the *ironic self-consciousness*, from its most rudimentary forms until

¹³ Luca Casadio, *op. cit.*, pp. 200-201.

¹⁴ Giovanna Pinna, *L'ironia metafisica. Filosofia e teoria estetica in K.W.F. Solger*, Pantograf, Genova, 1994, p. 175

nowadays, we have recorded its decisive role in reducing the instinct of aggression, namely in strengthening the idea of *humanity*. Thus, we have pointed out that, while the *civilizing process* inhibits the individual's libidinal progression, subjecting him to a moral of fault and chastity, the *humanization process*, boosted by philosophical irony gives man the possibility of mediation between private needs and public obligations. "Where the animal side is neither suppressed nor excessively elevated, a «discontent in the culture» becomes impossible. Life energy must rise from below and flow unobstructedly, even in the wise"¹⁵, writes Peter Sloterdijk, taking into account the health or, we might say, the philosophical fecundity of the "well-tempered" cynicism, which aims both at improving man's bio-spiritual self and the world in which he subsists. In other words, irony is preferable to the advancement of our culture and civilization because it brings both public and personal benefits. Through it, the social is not valued to the detriment of the individual.

Therefore, we should not be afraid that undermining power of irony could crush our beliefs and ideas, because only through its targeted coup, all human things come to show their

¹⁵ Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, vol. I, qtd. ed., p. 200.

real value. Eventually, the specific forms of the analyzed philosophical irony are just critical means of reporting to the profane existence (and animals), in the sense of alleviating human condition (and even animal), namely ways of understanding the sacred and, therefore, the supreme deity.

The fact that man has evolved somewhat surprisingly compared to other known species, producing culture, this “epiphenomenon” of the living world is, on the one hand, a good thing, but on the other, a saddening one. Although we are somehow privileged, given the fact that we are the only species that has developed a unique *modus vivendi*, in which each creature or corner of nature can be valued, we must not forget that the time and place in which we find ourselves, in this case the *civilizing* level, might be anytime forgotten.

Since everything that makes us *human* is more related to culture than nature, we are always exposed to the danger of returning to the pre-human or even inhuman conditions. Even if the process of improving human condition passes relatively well, we have no guarantee that it will maintain itself or that it will continue, as it happens with the evolutionary process of species. Any planetary catastrophe could annihilate everything we have built over so many generations, because everything

we know, everything that differentiates us from other creatures is barely transmitted through genetics, but using one Richard Dawkins's terms, through *mimicry*. Therefore, at all times, we could become a submerged "Atlantis" in the abysses of history, prompting those who survive to wonder if a civilization as advanced and prosperous as ours has ever existed.

On the other hand, all scholars and generations' intellectual effort, that have created a better life for us, might fall apart anytime if we ignore or destroy the art of (self) education. Therefore, only *in* and *through* the latter we may hope that we will succeed in becoming *better*.

Taking into account the fact that present-day society tends to leave the "Gutenberg galaxy" (according to some, we have already done it) – as in Socrates' time orality was undermined in favor of writing – heading towards one of the images and sound, we have noticed that the forms of irony diversify, covering more and more areas of the real. And, if irony will be more leniently interpreted and internalized than in the past, then it means that our future, terrestrial or extraterrestrial, remains an open one. If we manage to remain within the "limits" of "stable" life – cultivating (besides our daily food) through *ironic self-awareness* the ideas and

practices that make us human – it means that we will have succeeded not only in *finding* ourselves, but also that we have self-improved, namely that we have reinvented ourselves. *Because we exist, only insofar as we know not to be what we have been.*