The Architecture of the Imagination: New Essays on Pretence, Possibility, and Fiction

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CHAPTER

7 Why Irony is Pretence

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Abstract

This chapter defends the thesis that irony is a form of pretence. It traces the development of this view, and presents a stronger version of it than has previously been available. It contrasts the pretence theory with its strongest rival: the echoic theory. The similarities and differences between the theories are described, and the conclusion reached is that the pretence theory is better. Empirical evidence used to support the echoic theory is examined; this evidence supports the pretence theory at least as well. While the pretence theory does not apply directly to what are called dramatic and situational irony, it can be seen that these are closely related to irony proper as the pretence theory characterizes it.

Keywords: irony, pretence, echoic theory, autism, dramatic irony, situational irony

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Children thrive on pretence. So, in less obvious ways, do grown-ups. Take irony: our speech and other actions pass in and out of ironic mode, as we pretend to congratulate, approve, admire, and, occasionally, criticize and deplore.[1] Some deny that irony is a form of pretence, and I aim to show that they are wrong. In the process I separate the pretence theory from so me restrictive assumptions: that irony is essentially communicative, that it is essentially linguistic, that it is essentially critical. I show how the pretence theory is extendable in natural ways to cover dramatic, situational, and what I will call 'suppressed' irony—a category so far lacking the publicity it deserves. I conclude with some thoughts on what a sensibly modest theory of irony, like mine, should try to be.

1. Three Theories

Irony is traditionally thought to involve saying one thing and meaning its opposite. Cicero says that, with irony, 'what you say is quite other than what you understand', and Quintilian calls it that 'in which something contrary to what is said is to be understood'—a view preserved in the dictionaries of Johnson and Webster and present even in recent commentary.[2] The idea has, says Gregory Vlastos, 'stood the test of time' (1991: 21).

p. 112 For a theory that has lasted so long, this one explains astonishingly little (Sperber and Wilson 1981). Questions can be ironic, as with 'Have you won the Nobel Prize yet?' This irony is not accounted for by specifying some word that is contrary to the intended sense of the question, since no question is seriously intended. Or take 'You sure know a lot', said to someone who does indeed know a lot but who is too keen to impart what he knows; it would be a very feeble comment on his practices to be asserting that, really, he does not know much. And Vlastos's own example of Socratic irony:

> (1) teach me more gently admirable man, so that I won't run away from your school (Gorgias 489d),

makes no sense if we understand Socrates really to be exhorting Callicles *not* to teach him more gently.[3]

People aware of these problems and sensitive to developments in linguistic theory have tended to adopt one of two approaches. The first is Sperber and Wilson's 'echoic' account according to which irony is a kind of free indirect quotation involving the expression of a negative attitude towards a thought attributed to some other person or type of person.[4] The second, long campaigned against by Sperber and Wilson themselves, is the pretence theory. According to this view, Socrates is pretending, in (1), to plead with Callicles not to be so harsh with him: pretending to say something which is a—no doubt exaggerated version of—something Callicles would like Socrates really to say, or so Socrates' performance suggests. Here, as elsewhere, the irony is not a matter of replacing words by their contraries, but of pretending to do something rather than really doing it. These two approaches have much in common: rejection of the contrary-saying view of Cicero; insistence that the ironic utterance serves to express a negative attitude rather than constituting a non-literal statement of such an attitude. Sometimes it is suggested that these two views are the same, or that they do not differ in essential ways. I believe that the views are different, and that the echoic theory fails to account for something that distinguishes irony from other forms of so-called echoic utterance. Yet there is merit in the echoic theory, and the pretence theory has not always been presented in the strongest way. Some rethinking is required.

Someone might worry that we are leaving the traditional view behind too quickly. Can this ancient, resilient view be wholly wrong? We need not say it is wholly wrong: it can be read as a version of the pretence theory,
p. 113 according to which the ironist pretends to say one thing but really says the opposite.[5] ↳ The mistake is in the latter part. While ironists pretend to say things, the idea of really saying the opposite of what one pretends to say plays no role in explaining the effects or attractions of irony. The ironist pretends to assert, or to question, or to endorse, and in doing so expresses an attitude towards those who do or would say or question or endorse in this way, or towards people and actions and attitudes which the pretence otherwise brings to mind. This expressing need not be a case of saying.[6] Indeed, irony does not need language; I may stagger back in a parody of horrified distaste when confronted by an austerely elegant Sung vase, ironically expressing my rejection of your ludicrously demanding aesthetic standards.[7]

But if the traditional view is not wholly wrong, it is badly wrong, so its longevity remains a puzzle. I am grateful to Genoveva Marti for suggesting a solution: advocates of the traditional view locate irony in a contrast between (as we would now put it) semantic meaning and speaker's meaning. This is wrong, but there certainly is a contrast between the kinds of *effects* one intends by one's ironic utterance and the effects one would probably intend if one were speaking seriously. With (1), someone speaking in a serious, non-pretending way would be taken as intending to avoid humiliation at the other's hands by flattering him. In fact, we take

Socrates to be intending something like the opposite effect: humiliating Callicles by giving voice, in pretend mode, to a perspective on Callicles′ intellectual and rhetorical powers which is absurdly inflated.

That said, I think we may move directly to the pretence theory.

2. Irony as Pretence

I start with a formulation due to Herb Clark and Richard Gerrig, partly because it is a detailed and systematic attempt to flesh out the intuition behind the pretence theory, and partly because it was the focus of Sperber′s attack on pretence theories in general. According to Clark and Gerrig (1984: 122), a speaker, S, speaks ironically
p. 114 when: ↳

(i) S speaks to an audience A;

(ii) in so doing S pretends to be S′, saying something patently uninformed or injudicious to an audience A′ which is taken in by the utterance; they should, as part of the pretence, be seen as assenting to what is said, or at least as giving it a degree of consideration it does not deserve;

(iii) where A is intended to understand the pretence in (ii).[8]

On this view, irony involves a pretence that one seriously gives voice to an absurd or at least defective thought, and, in doing so, is taken seriously by an audience. This audience—the A′ of (ii)—may be, but need not be, real. We have irony when the speaker addresses two audiences, one comprehending and the other not. But we also have irony, according to Clark and Gerrig, when it is merely understood as part of the pretence that there is this uncomprehending audience (A′) present.

In so far as it goes beyond the basic idea that irony is a form of pretence, this proposal has many defects. Seeing them will get us to a better formulation.

3. Audience, Communication, Expression

Why should an ironic utterance involve the pretence that the speaker speaks seriously to the gullible audience of Clark and Gerrig′s definition? Sometimes the pretence in irony involves the idea that the speaker assumes there is an audience that will take her seriously; on other occasions, the effect of ironic utterance is heightened by the pretence that, while the speaker utters what is in fact an absurdity confident in the belief it will be taken seriously, no one will take it seriously. If A is an inveterate exaggerator whom no one believes, and you say, in the style of A, ‘I was there to save the situation’, I understand that I am to imagine A saying this to his usual, sceptical audience—at least, I don′t see why I should be forbidden, by the very nature of irony itself, from imagining this. The gullible audience might be there at one further intentional remove: We are to pretend that {A believes that [the audience takes him seriously]}. But even that need not be so; A may be the sort of person who doubts whether he has a sympathetic audience, but who feels strangely compelled to boast anyway.

So much for the insistence on the pretence of a credulous audience. But Clark and Gerrig also say that there must really *be* an audience, or at least that the speaker must believe that there is one; the ironist′s intention
p. 115 must include the intention to communicate with an audience, and to make it clear to that audience ↳ that the utterance is a case of pretence.[9] That irony is an essentially communicative activity, and one that requires transparency from the speaker, is a view widely shared. Vlastos, advocating the contrary-saying view, tells us that irony must be ‘altogether innocent of intentional deceit’ (1991: 27). This accounts very badly for much ironic utterance.[10] Irony often involves a detour down the garden path.[11] It can be a short one; we may not get the irony in ‘I′m mad about good books—can′t get my fill’ right away, but the next line helps: ‘And James

Durante's looks give me a thrill'.[12] Sometimes people get through the whole performance and don't catch on. Tories were very irritated by the irony of Defoe's 'Shortest Way with Dissenters' and its argument for the extermination of Methodists. For 'it would not, on first reading, seem impossible that an extreme Tory could argue in this manner' (Booth 1983: 319). The communicative view might be reformulated so as to insist merely that the audience have to be given a fighting chance of getting it. This would not help. We can have irony which the audience is intended not to get; a defeated prisoner may have to keep the irony in his confession to himself. And there can be irony without any audience in fact or in the speaker's mind. When I go out without my umbrella only to encounter heavy rain, my utterance of 'Great' is an ironic comment on failure meant for me alone.

So irony is a form of expression. In speaking ironically, one expresses an attitude. This may be intended as a form of communication as well, as when a disgusted facial expression is intended to communicate one's disgust to others. But what is essential is the expression, not the communication. This is not a point of dispute with Sperber and Wilson, who say that 'the attitude expressed by an ironical utterance is invariably of the rejecting or disapproving kind' (1995: 239). As we shall see, I disagree with Sperber and Wilson about what sorts of attitudes need to be expressed in irony.

4. Targets

Even with these requirements concerning the audience removed, Clark and Gerrig's proposal will not do. As
p. 116 Dan Sperber points out, merely pretending to assert ↳ that 2+2=5, that the moon is made of cheese, or a host of other 'patently uninformed or injudicious' things, would not count as saying anything ironical. We need in addition the idea that the pretence draws attention to something we might call a *target* (see Sperber 1984: 131). Suppose A is known for his relentless uttering of wildly false assertions; seeing A coming towards us, I say, '2+2=5, the moon is made of cheese . . .', carrying on in this manner for some while. This is irony, because its target is A's profligate unreliability.

Clark and Gerrig recognize, in some measure, this requirement, since they say that the content of the pretence should be worthy of hostility, indignation, or contempt (1984: 122) Presumably, they mean that thinking or asserting that content would be worthy of such a reaction; I for one have no hostility to the *proposition* that 2+2=5. But then it is true that anyone who pretend-asserts '2+2=5' is drawing attention to something which, were it asserted, would provoke a negative reaction, so the clause concerning hostility does not help to distinguish irony from the wider class of pretend assertions. The idea of a target seems to add what is missing here: it is not irony merely to pretend to say something that would be ridiculous if seriously asserted, but it is irony to pretend to say something, intending thereby to draw attention to something ridiculous.

Should we say, then, that the target of the pretence—in this case A's relentless spreading of falsehood—should be worthy of a hostile, or at least in some way negatively evaluative, reaction, and that the pretence should be intended to provoke this reaction? Sperber and Wilson, who disagree with Clark and Gerrig about much, agree with them that irony is essentially disapproving; they require an 'associated attitude of mockery or disapproval' (Wilson and Sperber 1992). This is too strong; when I say, of my daughter, 'She is very excited. Father Christmas is coming tonight', I am pretending, in the service of irony, to assert that Father Christmas is coming tonight. But I am not expressing hostility to, indignation at, contempt, mockery, or disapproval of my daughter for believing this. What makes the remark ironic (and perhaps a little questionable) is the invitation in my pretended assertion to attend to her epistemically limited perspective.[13]

This suggests a general point about the nature of ironic pretence. The pretence one engages in with irony is partly one of behaviour; one pretends to be doing something which one is not doing: speaking seriously and assertively, seriously asking a question, seriously expressing distaste. But the pretence that is fundamental to irony is not a pretence of doing; it's a pretence of being. In pretending to assert or whatever, one pretends to be a

certain kind of person—a person with a restricted or otherwise defective view of the world or some part of it. Socrates pretends to be a person who is overawed by the (actually very modest) intellect and rhetorical power of Callicles; I pretend to be someone with a small child's view of the world; and Emma Woodhouse pretends to
p. 117 be someone with ↳ Mr Knightly's unreasonably critical view of Emma herself, when she says, 'Especially when one of those two is such a fanciful, troublesome creature!' adding for Mr Knightly's benefit, 'That is what you have in your head I know.'

What is the connection between the idea of a target of irony and the defective outlook that the ironist pretends to have? Often they are the same thing; they are the same in the three examples I gave just now. In each of those cases, the speaker pretends to adopt a limited perspective, and in so doing expresses something about some person's occupancy of that perspective: Socrates expresses a relatively strong form of rejection of the perspective he imputes to Calicles; Emma, a somewhat more affectionate condemnation of Mr Knightly's view of her (a view which, in some moods, she is inclined to share); myself, a wholly affectionate depiction of my daughter's naive belief in Father Christmas. This last case is somewhat of an exception, but that is easily explained: those who pretend to adopt a perspective which seems to them limited or defective in some way are more likely than not to be intending some criticism of it.

In other cases, the relationship between the perspective adopted in pretence and the target is more complicated. We may have something to learn from Sperber and Wilson here, and this is a convenient moment to introduce their theory.

Sperber and Wilson (1981) originally formulated a theory of what they called 'echoic mention', according to which irony is indirect quotation which can, in turn, be accounted for as a case of mentioning the proposition expressed by the utterance. Later, they generalized the theory somewhat: an utterance may count as an ironic comment on the assertion of a proposition *P* without counting as mentioning *P*, as in the case of irony which exaggerates or, as with the following, understates:

> (2) *Mother*: Anyone would think I was an ogress, and the companion a martyr.
>
> *Son*: I think that might be a possible view of the position, Mother.[14]

Here the son draws attention to the deficiencies of the mother's perspective by pretending to adopt a perspective which is slightly less unreasonable than hers, a perspective which at least acknowledges as a possibility that which from her own perspective is utterly absurd. According to Sperber and Wilson, all that is required for the ironic targeting of the tendency to believe *P* is that the ironic utterance have a content which resembles the content of *P* and which, because of that resemblance, serves, in the context of utterance, to draw attention to *P* (see Wilson and Sperber 1992; Sperber and Wilson 1994: 229). Resemblance is a matter of 'a sharing of logical and contextual implications' (Wilson and Sperber 1992: 65).

Appeal to resemblance is central to Sperber and Wilson's account of the function of echoic utterances, and is a recurrent feature of expositions of relevance theory, of which they are the founders. The appeal is sometimes
p. 118 objected to on ↳ the grounds that everything resembles everything (see e.g. Stanley 2005). But there is surely something in the idea that in a given context certain pairs of things strike us as resembling each other while other pairs do not, and this may allow one of the pair to put us in mind of the other. If the idea of resemblance as Sperber and Wilson use it turns out to be seriously and irremediably flawed, we shall need to think again about this aspect of their programme. But I am willing to accept it for the moment. My aim is to show that they need pretence as well. However, while resemblance is a useful notion here, I don't wish to be confined to resemblance with respect to implications. When, in Compton-Burnett's exchange (2), the son pretends to have a certain perspective on his mother's behaviour—seeing it as possibly open to certain criticism—he pretends to a way of looking at the world which dimly recognizes certain obligations to others that most of us see very clearly and the mother, apparently, not at all. His pretended perspective resembles hers much as the optical

perspective of a very poorly sighted person resembles that of one who is wholly blind, and I doubt whether this is entirely accounted for in terms of implication.[15] So I prefer to speak of perspectives, or points of view, one of which puts us in mind of the other by virtue of having certain limitations that resemble the limitations of the other, and I treat identity between points of view as a limiting case of this. I leave it for another occasion to say more about the kinds of resemblance we may encounter in irony: in particular cases, such a resemblance is not difficult to recognize.

So what matters is that the ironist's utterance be an indication that he or she is pretending to have a limited or otherwise defective perspective, point of view, or stance, F, and in doing so puts us in mind of some perspective, point of view, or stance, G (which may be identical to F or merely resemble it) which is the target of the ironic comment.[16] Perspectives can be of many kinds, and on just about anything. But irony is, I think, limited by the requirement that it target perspectives only of a certain kind: those to which we can apply a standard of reasonableness. It would not be irony to pretend to the most literal of limitations of point of view, blindness, even if in doing so I seek to draw attention to the blindness of another. Tendencies to believe or desire in certain ways, or to have certain emotional reactions, are fair game, even in cases where no personal blame attaches to the person whose perspective is being singled out. If Martians are less subject to emotional outbursts than we are, they may comment ironically on our failings by pretending to be as emotionally irrational as we are. Perhaps they are wrong, and our style of emotional responding is the more sensible, or is as
p. 119 sensible as theirs, given our differing circumstances. In that case their ironic commentary would ↳ lack justification; the important point is that irony represents—and hence may misrepresent—its target as unreasonable in some way, or at least as falling short of some salient standard of reasonableness.

We can now answer another criticism of the pretence theory offered by Sperber. Imagine that Bill is prone to say of himself:

> (3) I am a very patient person.

In response to a display of temper from Bill, Judy says, ironically:

> (4) Bill is such a patient person.

Here, Bill, or rather Bill's tendency to say or think things like (3), is the target of the irony. As Sperber points out, Judy cannot be pretending to *be* Bill, since Bill would not say (4). This is no criticism of the view that Judy pretends to be adopting a perspective in the service of expressing something about a suitably related perspective actually occupied by Bill. In pretending to assert (4), Judy makes it plain that she is pretending to occupy a perspective according to which Bill is a patient person, and thereby draws attention to Bill's tendency to think exactly this about himself, though he would express it in other words. Perhaps Bill never actually says things like (3), though we all suspect that he thinks them. No matter—it is the perspective that is the target of Judy's ironic comment, not any particular utterance or formulation. Judy engages in a performance which makes it pretence that she does something—asserting that Bill is a patient person—and which we are thereby encouraged to imagine her doing. But the target of her performance is not any doing of that exact thing by Bill.

5. Pretence of Manner

The idea that irony involves some sort of match by resemblance between points of view explains why ironic utterances can take such a variety of forms: there are ironic assertions, questions, orders, and insults, as well as ironic gestures and facial expressions. Anything that serves to indicate that one is pretending to a point of view will do. There are even ironic pretendings. Suppose Albert is an enthusiastic player of war games. Welcoming guests for lunch, I say:

(5) You must excuse Albert for the moment. He is outside fighting for his life.

I am not expressing reservations of any kind towards Albert's or anyone's belief that Albert is fighting for his life; no one, including Albert, believes that he is. Rather, my pretend assertion of (5) picks out for consideration Albert's whole-heartedly engrossed—and hence rather ridiculous—pretending that he is fighting for his life. With (5), I really am pretending to assert that Albert is fighting for his life. But I am also pretending to pretend to assert this *in a very engaged way*; I am pretending that my pretence is an enthusiastic, wholehearted joining in with Albert's own pretence.

p. 120 Authors of fiction, whose utterances are pretended assertions made in the service of getting us to imagine various things, sometimes involve a similarly complex pretence. In *Persuasion*, Jane Austen introduces Anne Elliot to us by saying:

(6) [Sir Walter Elliot's] two other children were of very inferior value.

It is immediately apparent that this description does not correspond at all to how Austen expects us to imagine Anne, but rather to how, in the story, she and her sister are thought of by Sir Walter Elliot. Austen is pretending to assert things about someone called 'Anne Elliot', but her pretence is not straightforward; we are not to take the words she uses to correspond to how we should imagine Anne. Rather, Austen pretends to be pretending in a straightforward way, when in fact her pretence is ironical, targeted at Sir Walter's certainly defective perspective. So Austen's pretence is complex. She is pretending, as fiction writers do, to tell us something. But in addition, she is pretending that her pretence is straightforward, when in fact it is not.

In these two cases ((5) and (6)) we have a *pretence of manner*. The speaker pretends to be pretending in a certain way, when in fact he or she is not pretending in that way, though he or she certainly is pretending. That pretence of manner can make for irony opens up the possibility that one can utter an assertoric sentence ironically, and at the same time really be asserting it.[17] Take this example, put to me by Stephen Barker: You and I have just landed on a flight that touches down both in Melbourne and in Anchorage. Stepping off the plane there are evident signs that we are in Melbourne. Failing to notice them, you ask where we are. I say, in an ironic tone:

(7) Well, we are either in Melbourne or in Anchorage.

Does the pretence theory have to deny that I am asserting (7)? If it did, it might be in trouble. After all, (7) is true, I believe it, and I want to get you to believe it, because your believing it will help you to see that, given the temperature, we have to be in Melbourne. But a pretence-based account of the irony in (7) can live with the assumption that I really am asserting (7). All that needs to be observed is that I am doing something *more* than asserting (7). My pretence in uttering (7) need not be the pretence that I am asserting it. I might be genuinely asserting it, yet pretending to have the kind of interest in it we normally have in disjunctions: namely, its providing us with the basis for an inference, should further information come in, of the form A or B, not A, so B,
p. 121 and so getting us to a definite conclusion about where we are. I am pretending, in Frank Jackson's terms, that
↳ the disjunction is robust with respect to the falsity of each of its disjuncts.[18] My target is your being uncertain about the truth of the first disjunct, when a glance around would tell you that it is true.[19]

These two examples help to resolve a general problem. Let's understand the phrase 'pretends to ϕ-in-manner-Σ' to refer to acts of pretending in which one really does ϕ, but in which one pretends to do it in manner Σ. Thus pretending to ϕ-in-manner-Σ is quite distinct from pretending-to-ϕ. We might initially think of the class of pretendings with the capacity to generate irony as the class of pretendings-to-ϕ, and therefore be skeptical of the idea that pretending is itself a potential value of the variable ϕ. For what would it be to pretend to pretend? Is that logically possible? If so, is it something that we are psychologically capable of? Answering 'No' to either of these last two questions suggests that pretence cannot be the target of irony. But we should not conclude this,

whatever difficulty we may see in the notion of pretending to pretend. For irony can also be generated by the class of pretendings to ϕ-in-manner-Σ, which does allow pretending to be a potential value of ϕ without our having to countenance pretending to pretend.

6. Positive Irony

I said that irony need not always be critical, as with my ironic remark about Julia's belief in Father Christmas. But why should it be that irony is always the pretended adoption of a *defective* outlook? One answer is that this is simply analytic of the concept *irony*, and you might as well ask why bachelors are unmarried. But we can put the question another way: If, necessarily, irony is a practice of pretending to adopt a defective outlook, why isn't there a symmetrical practice, whatever we might choose to call it, of pretending to adopt a superior outlook? Pretty obviously, the answer is this: people are good at identifying ways of seeing, or thinking about, or reacting to the world which they consider inferior to their own; they are not very good at identifying ways of seeing, or thinking about, or reacting to the world which they would consider superior to their own, and when they do, they usually go on to adopt them. In fact, there seems to be something close to a pragmatic paradox involved in the idea of pretending to see things more clearly, more rationally, more dispassionately, than you actually do see them.[20]

p. 122 In another sense, irony is sometimes positive, as with Grice's (1989: 54) 'What an egotist you are, always giving yourself the satisfaction of doing things for other people.'[21] Here the speaker pretends to adopt the (certainly defective) standpoint of one who, come what may, insists on explaining actions as the result of selfishness. But this is done so as to compliment the speaker's conversation partner on his generous motivation. Why is positive irony, in this sense, rare? For this reason: to achieve this positive effect, the ironist has to go one step further than is required for irony itself: he or she has to perform an action in which the pretend adoption of a defective standpoint serves to highlight the defects of that standpoint, or of one suitably related to it; he or she has also to find a way to use the pretence so as to highlight some positive trait or action. So positive irony is *not* like positive commentary; commenting positively on something is not doing more than commenting, it is just making a certain kind of comment, and we would expect to see plenty of positive and negative commentary. Positive irony, on the other hand, is irony plus something else, and the something else is not easy to bring off.

7. The Scope of Pretending

I have one final point to make about how the pretence theory is to be understood. Someone whose utterance is ironic engages in pretence, and engaging in pretence means performing an act of some kind. But we need to distinguish between what the utterer does and what we might call the *pretence content* of the doing—the part of the act which lies within the scope of the pretence. The pretence content often corresponds closely to the performance itself. When I say, ironically, 'It's a lovely day', as we are lashed by rain, you are likely to imagine me seriously (and ludicrously) asserting exactly that, though you know that in fact I am not doing any such thing. But sometimes, the pretence content is related in more complex and subtle ways to the nature of the performance itself. A ballet dancer pretends to be a swan. Does she pretend to be a dancing swan? A swan in a tutu? No. We are to imagine that she is a swan, but not that she is a dancing swan in a tutu, even though her dancing in a tutu is integral to the actions which constitute pretending to be a swan. Aspects of stageing and make-up in theatre are often highly stylized, and we are not always intended to imagine that the character has a facial expression or is clothed in the garments corresponding to the facial expression or the clothing of the actor on stage.[22] Acts of pretence sometimes require from us a sophisticated imaginative response: one which
p. 123 picks and chooses between ↳ elements of the performance, and which sometimes adds further elements which are merely implied by the performance, rather than being explicit in it.

This point has important consequences for another criticism of the pretence theory. Sperber claims that the pretence theory is inconsistent with there being an ironic tone, because an utterance made using an ironic tone is an utterance which 'makes any pretence impossible. There is no audience, real or imaginary, that would fail to perceive the derogatory attitude and hence the ironic intent it conveys' (1984: 135). Sperber might as well say that plays can never effectively take place on sets that are manifestly artificial: after all, no audience would fail to realize the artifice of the situation. But the case of staged performance makes it plain that we easily bracket out elements of what we are given in a pretence. Just as a dancer in a tutu can pretend to be a swan without pretending to be a swan in a tutu, so an ironic utterance of *P*, using an ironic tone of voice, need not constitute a pretence of [seriously asserting *P* in an ironic tone of voice]. Instead, the ironist pretends, using an ironic tone of voice, [seriously to assert *P*].[23]

This is relevant to yet another criticism of the pretence theory offered by Sperber. Consider the ironic:

> (8) Jones, this murderer, this thief, this crook, is indeed an honourable fellow.

Sperber says that there is no speaker who could seriously utter such a blatant contradiction, nor an audience which could assent to it (1984: 133). One point to make is that Sperber is encouraging us to consider the wrong question. It is not relevant to ask whether there is such a speaker and such an audience. The relevant question is whether we can *pretend* that there is such a speaker and such an audience. We are able to pretend all sorts of absurd things, and often take delight in doing so; why can't we pretend this? Note also that imagining someone saying or thinking an absurdity is not always as difficult as imagining the absurdity being the case.

However, another way to deal with this and like cases would be to argue that the pretence content has to be carved out from the whole utterance. We might hear irony in (8) by splitting it into an ironic part:

> (8a) Jones is indeed an honourable fellow

and a part which provides information in the light of which the serious assertion of (8) would be ludicrous, namely:

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> (8b) ↳ Jones is a murderer, a thief, and a crook.[24]

Which account of (8) is right? Do we imagine the serious utterance of an absurdity, namely (8) itself, or do we imagine the utterance of the not intrinsically absurd (8a), made incongruous by the assumption of (8b) as background knowledge? I don't need to answer this question. The answer may depend on precise details of the context or the tone of the utterance, or it might be up to auditors to respond in their own different ways. All we need say is that any theory of irony based on pretence should acknowledge the possibility of very complex and hard-to-regiment relations between the totality of the performance and what constitutes the content of the pretence.

I have arrived at the view that irony is a matter of pretending to a limited perspective in a way which is expressive of a view you have about the limitations of some suitably related perspective, where those limitations compromise, to some degree, the reasonableness of the perspective. All this ignores a certain fragility in irony itself; there are conditions that can make it difficult or even impossible to achieve an ironic effect, even assuming one fulfills the conditions stated. A full analysis of these conditions would be a distraction from those aspects of irony where we find the pretence and echoic theories in competition, but I will note one example: the pretence nature of the performance ought not to be strongly signalled by the context of the performance. Theatrical performances, particularly comic ones, are sometimes undertaken by people who wish, through their pretence of being a certain sort of person, to express their thoughts or feelings about some point of view which they take to be limited in some way. While such performances may contain moments of irony embedded within the fictional contexts they create, it does not seem right to describe the whole

performance as ironic simply because of the nature of the project.[25] The kind of pretence we naturally label ironic generally requires a context that contains no explicit or conventional signals that what is said or done is pretence, and should rely instead on aspects of the ironist's own performance to hint at the ironic intent.

8. The Elaboration of Pretence

My approach so far has been defensive. I've been concerned to provide a formulation of the pretence theory,
p. 125 plausible on independent grounds, which avoids ↳ criticisms that have been, or might be, levelled against it. I now turn to what seems to me the distinctive advantage of the pretence theory over its echoic rival. The point is best brought out by considering a pair of cases given by Sperber and Wilson which illustrate, they say, the fact that irony is but one echoic form. They make the point that one can echo a remark in the process of endorsing it, as with:

> (I) *Peter*: It's a lovely day for a picnic.
>
> [They go on a picnic and the sun shines.]
>
> *Mary*: It's a lovely day for a picnic, indeed.

just as one can echo in a dissociative, ironic way:

> (II) *Peter*: It's a lovely day for a picnic.
>
> [They go on a picnic, and it rains.]
>
> *Mary*: It's a lovely day for a picnic, indeed.

Sperber and Wilson say that 'these utterances are interpreted on exactly similar patterns; the only difference is in the attitudes they express' (1995: 239). But there is in fact another great difference between these two cases. In the second case, if Peter responds with 'Yes, I'm so glad we decided to come', this would naturally be seen as an imaginative elaboration of Mary's pretence. If Peter said exactly that in the case where everything went well (as with (I)), there would be no tendency to see his effort as an imaginative elaboration of a game.[26] It could be understood only as serious agreement with Mary's remark. In (II), but not in (I), Mary effectively opens the door to pretending, whether or not Peter decides to go through.[27]

Friends of Sperber and Wilson might say that this argument assumes what it seeks to establish. When rain spoils the picnic and Mary says, 'It's a lovely day for a picnic, indeed', she is not, on Sperber and Wilson's account, engaging in any pretence; why should they grant that any further extension of the commentary—perhaps Peter joins in by saying, 'Yes, I'm so glad we chose today of all days for it'—is pretence either? The answer is that, intuitively, such an exchange seems awfully like pretence; Peter and Mary seem to be making up
p. 126 a playful ↳ dialogue full of sayings to which they are manifestly not committed. Calling this pretence is very natural, and would hardly be objected to by anyone untouched by this debate. At the very least, we are owed an account of why this is not, contrary to appearances, pretence. It might be argued that Peter's additional remark takes the conversation into pretend mode, but that Mary's ironic 'It's a lovely day for a picnic, indeed' is not, or need not be, pretence without that continuation. If the basis of this claim is that pretence is essentially shared, I reject it; there is plenty of reason to think that children and adults engage in solitary pretence. Or the argument might be that Mary's remark is distinctive in that it makes way for pretence, but that remarks which do this need not be pretence themselves. It is certainly possible to do things which provoke or set the stage for pretence but which are not themselves part of the pretence. But Mary's remark does not seem to be of this kind. If I say to you, 'Let's play a game of cops and robbers', there is no inclination, as the game proceeds, for us to look back and see this remark as part of the game itself; that is why it is a good example of something which

provokes pretence without being pretence. But if Peter and Mary continue their ironic exchange about how sensible it was to go for a picnic, there is every reason to look back on Mary's 'It's a lovely day for a picnic, indeed' as being the first step in the pretence itself. Could it be said that Mary's 'It's a lovely day for a picnic, indeed' is ironic, but not pretence, unless her remark is taken up and elaborated on by Peter, in which case it becomes pretence retrospectively? Claiming that much would allow Sperber and Wilson to say that irony sometimes is, but does not have to be, pretence. I see no advantage in this implausible position apart from the defence it offers to the non-pretence view of irony. And to admit even this much would be a significant concession; it would be to say that an ironic statement, like Mary's in (II), is essentially a conduit to pretence, while the same type of utterance in (I) isn't. That would mean that pretence plays a part in a specification of the essential properties of irony, which is more than Sperber and Wilson seem willing to grant.[28]

9. Empirical Evidence

Accounts of irony such as the echoic theory say something about the cognitive resources we bring to bear in
p. 127 understanding ironic utterances, and some of these ↳ claims are open to test. Francesca Happé (1993) claimed support for the echoic theory from a study that examined comprehension of metaphor and irony by people with autism. She distinguished three groups of subjects: those who failed first-order false belief tests (non-ToM), those who passed first-order but failed second-order false belief tests (first-ToM), and those who passed both (second-ToM). The non-ToM group were able to comprehend similes ('He was like a tree'), but were generally incompetent with metaphor ('He was a tree'). The first-ToM group were competent with metaphor, but had difficulty with irony, while the second-ToM group were competent with both. Also, normally developing children of about five years old were distinguished according to whether they passed or failed second-order false belief tests. Those who passed were competent with irony, while those who failed were not; both were competent with metaphor.

Any account which makes irony simply another form of verbal trope, on all fours with metaphor, will not be able to explain this. Sperber and Wilson can explain it: irony, but not metaphor, requires the hearer to understand that the speaker speaks with the intention of directing our attention to another's thought, the one he or she is echoing. So with irony, but not with metaphor, one has to be able to think about thoughts about thoughts; one must be capable of what is called second-order metarepresentation.

Doubt has been expressed about the validity of Happé's results.[29] But there are other sources of evidence for the general claim that comprehension of irony requires understanding of thoughts about thoughts. Winner et al. (1998) found that poor performance on second-order theory of mind tests was highly predictive, for both right-hemisphere brain-damaged patients and normal controls, of poor discrimination between ironic joke-telling and lying. Shamay-Tsoory et al. (2005) found that comprehension of sarcasm correlated 'moderately but significantly' with performance on a rather sophisticated test of second-order theory of mind. Accepting Happé's results at face value, how does the pretence theory fare in explaining them? It is important to see exactly what capacity was probed in Happé's tests. Here is one of her scenarios:

> *Cake story*
>
> David is helping his mother make a cake. She leaves him to add the eggs to the flour and sugar. But silly David doesn't break the eggs first—he just puts them in the bowl, shells and all! What a silly thing to do! When mother comes back and sees what David has done, she says:
>
> 'Your head is made out of wood!'
>
> p. 128 ↳ *Q: What does David's mother mean ? Does she mean David is clever or silly?*

> Just then father comes in. He sees what David has done and he says: 'What a clever boy you are, David!'
>
> *Q*: *What does David's father mean? Does he mean David is clever or silly?*

The pretence theorist ought to say that, in being ironic, David's father is pretending to assert that David is a clever boy. What is required in order to understand this? You might say that understanding pretence does not generally require second-order mind-reading skills, since pretending that *P* is logically on a par with believing that *P*, and understanding that someone believes that *P* requires only first-order theory of mind. This is a controversial issue, but we need not settle it here. For the question ought really to be this: what is required in order to understand that someone is pretending, in the specific case where the pretence is one of making an assertion? It would not be easy to provide an uncontroversial account of assertions and what is involved in their production, but fortunately we do not need one. The question asked is 'What does David's father mean?' And the children can be expected to get the right answer if they understand that, while David's father may have seemed to think that David is clever, he is really only pretending to think this. They are required to grasp the thought that:

> (9) David's father pretends that [he thinks that {David is clever}].

This would require second-order mind-reading skills. If Happé's results support the echoic theory, they support the pretence theory also.

10. Other Kinds of Irony

We call many things ironic, and not all of them are covered by the account of irony I have given so far. This need not worry us; these other things are not, intuitively, of exactly the same nature as the cases of irony I have focused on so far: cases of irony proper, as I shall say. But an account like my own will gain in strength if it can be shown that it sheds some light on these other kinds. Here I focus on three phenomena, two of which are well known, while the third has not, I think, been clearly delineated. The first two, closely related, are *dramatic* and *situational* irony.[30] Electra mourns over the ashes she thinks are those of Orestes; Malvolio's hope is based on a letter we know is a fake. Through credulousness, wishful thinking, or merely because they don't know the facts, characters in fiction often have a limited perspective, highlighted by the more inclusive view granted to the audience. So 'dramatic irony' turns out to be simply the fictional representation of the kind of contrast between perspectives that one pretends to be the victim of when one speaks ironically. 'Situational irony' is a
p. 129 bloated ↳ category that threatens to engulf anything we find surprising, incongruous, or unfair.[31] Sensibly restricted, it covers real circumstances that mirror those of dramatic irony, except that there need be no onlooker aware of the disparity at the time. It was ironic that they fled to the Falkland Islands just before the invasion, that she resigned the day before her promotion was to be announced, that we robbed the bank the day after its vaults had been emptied. If we had known differently we would have acted differently, and the representation of any of this in performance or literature would count as dramatic irony.

I call my third category '*suppressed* irony'. Suppressed irony, as I define it, isn't really irony in my sense, though it is an exploitation, usually for comic purposes, of the mechanisms by which irony operates. It will help explain the concept if I start with the idea of things being this way or that way in or according to a fiction. In a fiction, a character may speak in a genuinely ironical way, as with Emma's reply to Mr Knightly: 'To be sure—our discordancies must always arise from my being in the wrong.'[32] In *Emma*, it is fiction that Emma speaks ironically when she says this. But speaking ironically is speaking in pretend mode, and pretence creates fiction, so irony itself induces a further fiction. If Emma and Knightly had been real people, Emma's utterance would make it fictional that [she asserts that her disputes with Mr Knightly always arise from her being in the

wrong]. Since Emma and Knightly are creatures of Austen's fiction-making, we have the embedding of a fiction within a fiction:

> It is fictional (in *Emma*) that {Emma's utterance makes it fictional (in her game of pretence) that [she, Emma, seriously asserts that her disputes with Mr Knightly always arise from her being in the wrong]}.

This gives us nested fiction. We sometimes get what I am calling suppressed irony when we remove the second, small-scope *fiction* operator. In the passage from *Emma* which I've used to illustrate this process, the result would be odd, rather than humorous; the novel would be telling us that Emma seriously thinks that she is always in the wrong when she disputes with Mr Knightly, and this would be a very puzzling thing for us to be told. There are therefore no attractions in the idea of removing the small-scope operator in this case, and Austen wisely did not do it. But a certain kind of staged or filmed humour does this very often. Here are Nydia Westman and Bob Hope in *The Cat and the Canary* (1940):

> 'Don't these big empty houses scare you?'
>
> 'Not me, I was in vaudeville.'

p. 130 And here are Diane Keaton and Woody Allen in the Hope-inspired *Love and Death* (1975):

> 'And before Seretski, Aleksei, and before Aleksei, Alegorian, and before Alegorian, Asimov, and . . . '
>
> 'How many lovers do you have?'
>
> 'In the mid-town area?'

In these cases a character speaks seriously, so far as what is true in the fiction is concerned, seriously asserting that their vaudeville experience has prepared them for grim and ghostly buildings, seriously inquiring as to whether our interest in their lovers is confined to those in midtown. In doing so, they are represented as occupying absurdly defective perspectives, and that is part of what makes their remarks funny. To that extent the remarks are funny because they are *not* ironic. But they are funny also because the words are uttered by real actors (the technique does not work with literary fictions) with whom we share an awareness of the ironic possibilities in the remark.[33] The performance makes it common knowledge between actor and audience that the actor just said something which, if uttered in real life, could only be uttered ironically—that is, with the narrow-scope fiction operator restored.

11. Limited Ambition

The cases just dealt with belong to kinds qualitatively different from the kind I have labelled irony proper, or so I say. On the other hand, there are cases which don't fall under my characterization of irony proper, but which it does not seem satisfactory to place in a distinct, though related, kind. For example, what I have said here would not serve to distinguish in a fully satisfactory way between irony and similar devices such as sarcasm. Perhaps there are attitudes expressed in sarcasm which are distinct from those expressed in irony; perhaps our practice of categorizing performances as ironic or as sarcastic are ad hoc, or unsystematizably complex, or responsive to contextual features that have nothing to do with speakers' intentions, or exceed in some other way the resources of the theory outlined here. This is not terribly worrying: Sperber and Wilson (1995) say that irony is 'not a natural kind', that we should not expect 'irony' to map neatly on to some independently identifiable subset of echoic utterances, that fine distinctions within the class of echoic utterances pale into insignificance beside the big distinction—that between echoic and non-echoic utterances. I agree, except to say that the real big distinction is between pretend and non-pretend utterances. All that any of us are doing is seeking a centre of gravity for irony: a place from ↳ which a range of irony-related cases spread out, with no clear point at
p. 131 which the label ceases to be applicable. The proper way to deal with cases within the region of this point is not to ask whether they really are or are not cases of irony, but rather to ask in what ways they are like or not like cases at the centre. As a case of particularized conversational implicatures Grice gave:

> (10) In a letter of recommendation for one of his students B writes: 'Mr Smith is always neatly dressed and has beautiful handwriting.'

B can be thought of as pretending to occupy an absurdly limited perspective, pretending to think that something is a relevant contribution to the topic of Smith's suitability for a career when in fact it is obviously not a relevant contribution. But I cannot see any target here; B's pretending to occupy this perspective does not serve to draw attention to someone who does occupy this perspective or some relevantly similar one. The point of the remark is to draw attention to *Smith's* deficiencies, but this does not make Smith a target in the relevant sense. This is not centrally a case of irony, but it has clear affinities with irony as I have characterized it and might be cited as evidence of B's tendency to adopt an ironic tone.[34] If we can give an account of the relations between cases like these and more central cases, we need have no special interest in which ones we label 'ironic'. What a theory of irony must do is show that it has the resources to characterize, in intuitively acceptable ways, the place where irony's centre of gravity is, and to measure, again in intuitively acceptable ways, the distances from there to other places on the map, such as the location of (10). It is against this standard that the pretence theory should be judged.

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Notes

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1 For versions of the pretence theory of irony see e.g. Clark and Gerrig 1984; Walton 1990: 222–3; Kumon-Nakamura et al. 1995 (for whom pretence is 'pragmatic insincerity'; this would make the echoic theory of Sperber and Wilson a pretence theory); Clark 1996: 369–74. Kendall Walton has suggested that pretence plays an important role in many aspects of linguistic and other behaviour. Steve Barker (2004) may be the most extreme advocate of pretence theory for linguistic phenomena; he holds that sentence meanings are not propositions but speech-act types, and that compositionality requires us to invoke pretence in order to explain how we get complex speech-act types from simple ones.

2 Quintilian, *Institutio Oratorica*, quoted in Vlastos 1991: 21. Cicero, *De Oratore*, quoted in Vlastos 1991: 28 n. 24.

3 For criticism of Vlastos's treatment of Socratic irony, see Nehamas 1998.

4 See Sperber and Wilson 1981; Sperber 1984; Wilson and Sperber 1992; Sperber and Wilson 1995, 1998; Wilson 2000.

5 It is notable how quickly advocates of the traditional theory appeal to pretence, games, and role-play in describing particular instances of irony. Cicero remarks that Socrates was always 'pretending to need information and professing admiration for the wisdom of his companion' (Cicero 1913: Book I. xxx). Quintilian says that Socrates 'assumed the role of an ignorant man lost in wonder at the wisdom of others' (1920: ix. 2. 44–53). And Vlastos describes Socrates as 'casting himself as a pupil' of Callicles (see Vlastos 1991: 26). There are hints of the pretence theory in other ancient formulations, such as this from the *Rhetoric to Alexander*, once attributed to Aristotle: '*Eironeia* is [a] saying something while pretending not to say it or [b] calling things by contrary names' (quoted in Vlastos 1991: 26). [a] seems promising: better, anyway, than [b]. But it is not quite right: the ironist pretends to say something while *not* saying it. Grice, who abandoned the traditional view in favour of the pretence theory, does not seem to have understood the former as a version of the pretence theory (see Grice 1989: 54).

6 Since ironic utterances embed—'If Albert is going to give us one of his delightful sermons I am leaving'—this raises problems familiar from the debate over expressivism. I cannot deal with these problems here; a good place to start is Blackburn 1984: ch. 6, sect. 2, and moving on to Gibbard 1990: ch. 5.

7 But cases of verbal irony are the commonest and easiest to characterize, so I stick with them for the purposes of this chapter.

8 Clark says that irony is pretence in his 1996: 369–74, without offering any explicit definition. My (ii) alters Clark and Gerrig's

formulation; they say that A′ is supposed to be an audience which 'misses' the pretence. Clark and Gerrig's overall exposition makes it clear that the real point is that this audience should not merely take the utterance for a seriously meant assertion, for that would leave open the possibility that they regard it as serious but absurd. The idea is, rather, that this audience should assign the utterance a greater degree of credence than it warrants.

9 As their clauses (i) and (iii) make plain.

10 And contributes to some misidentifications of Socratic irony on Vlastos's part. Vlastos contrasts the genuinely ironic passage from *Gorgias* quoted above with what he takes to be a different sense of *eironeia* in *Republic* 337a, where Thrasymachus, exasperated, complains about Socrates' 'habitual shamming (*eironeia*)', saying that Socrates would 'sham and would do anything but answer if the question were put to you'. According to Vlastos, this passage involves an imputation of lying and cannot, therefore, represent a case of irony proper (1991: 25). But Vlastos is not entitled to this final conclusion.

11 Sperber and Wilson say that many of the best examples of irony are garden-path utterances (1995: 242). The fact that irony often leads to 'garden-path' effects is a further reason for classing it apart from metaphor; metaphors can be difficult to understand, but they do not typically function to persuade us, temporarily, that the speaker really means what he literally says.

12 This is Frank Sinatra's version. The original lyric by Ralph Freed has the puzzling 'And Franklin Roosevelt's looks give me a thrill'.

13 Muecke says that '[s]imple ignorance is safe from irony' (1969: 30). I think the example shows that this is not quite true.

14 Ivy Compton-Burnett, *Mother and Son* (New York: Messner, 1955).

15 As this example shows, such resemblance is highly context-dependent; in the country of the blind a very poorly sighted person might put us in mind of someone with very good eyesight.

16 Perhaps it would be more strictly true to say that the target is some person's really having that perspective, or some tendency on the part of a group of persons, or persons in general, to have or be attracted to having that perspective. These are refinements that do not, in themselves, divide me from the echoic theorists, so I do not emphasize them.

17 That is, asserting *P* for the same audience as that for which the utterance is intended to count as ironic. Irony and lies may, unproblematically, coexist in the same performance, where one audience is supposed to see the point and another to be deceived. That is how it is with Frank Churchill, whose remark about the dangers of opening windows are meant to be taken seriously by Mr Woodhouse and ironically by Emma.

18 See Jackson 1987: 22–3. I prefer Jackson's account to the Gricean explanation in terms of violation of conversational rules.

19 Many thanks to Stephen Barker, who persuaded me that an example I started with would not do.

20 As long as the pretence involves some pretended adoption of a specific standpoint; there is nothing approaching paradox in my merely pretending *that* I am more rational or dispassionate than I actually am.

21 Sperber and Wilson discuss the asymmetry between positive and negative irony in various places (e.g. 1998), and I am indebted to them for having identified a problem. Our treatments are somewhat different.

22 Artists have sometimes advocated a minimalist approach to stageing precisely because this encourages the use of imagination in creative ways; see e.g. comments on Jarry in Carroll 1993.

23 We may signal our irony with a tone of voice, but that tone is not always needed, even when we want our irony understood. Why is there such an irregular relationship between irony and ironic tone? The ironist pretends to a limited perspective: pretends to be saying or doing something that only someone who failed to see certain facts or values in a lively and sympathetic way would say or do. However, we cannot count on universal agreement about what is a limited perspective, and quite often we do come across people whose perspective really does seem to us to be limited in this way. So the mere fact that your utterance derives from (what seems to me to be) such a perspective is no guarantee that you are speaking ironically. That's why we dispense with ironic tone most often when in the company of people who share, in some detail, our own perspectives and whom we think of as sensitive to even subtle shifts of perspective. See Pexman and Zvaigzne 2004.

24 This account of the distinction between what is within the scope of the pretence and what is outside corresponds to the distinction made by Clark and Gerrig between depictive and other aspects of what they call 'demonstration'; they further separate these other aspects into Supportive, Annotative, and Incidental Aspects (1990: 768). Precedent for this approach can be found in treatments of other linguistic phenomena. One plausible theory of epithets has it that they serve to create a duality of propositions associated with the utterance. Thus, one who says 'The Dean said he would come to the meeting, but the idiot forgot' can be said to have communicated both that (i) the Dean said he would come to the meeting but he forgot, and (ii) the Dean is an idiot. See Corazza 2005.

25 I am grateful to Manuel Garcia-Carpintero here.

26 It is not important for this point that Peter and Mary be together, or that the elaboration be conversational. A piece of literary irony invites elaboration from the reader, who may imagine certain propositions which extend the ironic line of thought, without her saying anything at all. A striking example of elaboration of another kind of literary pretence occurred

in response to Wofgang Hildesheimer's (very unobviously) fictional biography, *Marbot*. Hildesheimer took J. P. Stern's straight-faced review as evidence that Stern had misunderstood, when in fact he was simply continuing the pretence (see Cohn 1999: ch. 5).

27 In this respect, irony is like parody, which Sperber and Wilson regard as a close relative of irony. When in conversation I parody someone's poetic style, I make way for others to join in, elaborating in further imaginative ways. What distinguishes parody and irony? Sperber and Wilson say that parody has form as its target, while irony aims at content. But they acknowledge that there is no sharp distinction between these kinds; the important point is that they are both echoic tropes used to express critical attitudes. I agree that irony and parody are alike, and that little is to be gained by seeking a sharp distinction between them, but I say that their likeness consists in their being species of pretence.

28 I've argued that Mary's 'It's a lovely day for a picnic, indeed' is pretence in (II) but not in (I). As Wilson notes, some writers seek a very wide domain for the pretence theory, a domain that would include free indirect as well as direct quotation, and in some versions contexts such as (I) (see Wilson 2000: 425; the view goes back to Quine's remarks on indirect discourse as an 'essentially dramatic mode' (1960: 219)). We need to distinguish kinds of pretence. If there is a sense in which (I) and (II) both involve pretence, it is a thin, atrophied sense, distinct from the thicker, active sense that distinguishes (I) and (II). Mary's 'It's a lovely day for a picnic, indeed' is pretence in (II) in an active sense that naturally invites imaginative elaboration by Mary's conversation partners or by Mary herself (she could have said it quietly to herself while struggling home through the rain). If there is any pretence in (I) it is not of that substantial kind.

29 Courtney Norbury (2005) examined Happé's results concerning metaphor, drawing attention to small sample size and large within-group variation in language ability; these problems carry over to the study of irony. Using a larger sample, Norbury found that the first-ToM group was not significantly better at metaphor than the non-ToM group. Norbury was not able to obtain reliable results concerning irony (personal communication). See also Martin and McDonald 2005, which claims that impairments in general inferential reasoning, rather than in ToM, are associated with poor understanding of irony.

30 Meanings assigned to these terms vary, but the meanings I assign to them here are common ones.

31 Thus Barbe (1993), in a study of situational irony, includes this as an example: 'Bill Davis, a member of the Vietnam Veterans Against War, stated: "War-profiteering is a sick business." Davis also referred to an advertisement for T-shirts, which promoted the war. Ironically, this ad was very prominently displayed in the exact same issue of the *Star* in which Mr. Davis is quoted.' This is ironic only in the bloated sense, since there does not seem to be any limited perspective implicated in this incongruity. See also her example (11).

32 Quoted in Wilson and Sperber 1992: 64.

33 This sense is reinforced by continual references within Hope's films to their fictional status and even to Hope's own real-life career as a comic, as when he (in *My Favourite Blond*) hears himself on the radio and says 'I hate this guy.'

34 One might hear (10) as fully ironic: commenting on the tendency to avoid saying anything negative in a reference. But that would not be obligatory for all possible instances of (10).