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The *Tractatus* as “an Exercise in Kierkegaardian Irony”

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RESUMEN

Según Hacker, la lectura que Conant hace del *Tractatus* “representa el libro como un ejercicio de ironía kierkegaardiana”. Ninguno de los dos explica, sin embargo, qué quiere decir ‘ironía’. En este artículo, comenzaré por presentar una concepción de la ironía, basada en los trabajos de Muecke y Booth, que permitirá evaluar si el libro es o no irónico. Posteriormente argumentaré que, tanto la lectura de Diamond-Conant, como la (denominada) ‘lectura tradicional’ del *Tractatus* implican que, en efecto, el libro es irónico, aunque de diferentes formas. Finalmente, presentaré a grandes rasgos una tercera forma de considerar la ironía en el libro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; *ironía kierkegaardiana*; *ironía*; *Wittgenstein*.

ABSTRACT

According to Hacker, Conant’s reading of the *Tractatus* “represents the book as an exercise in Kierkegaardian irony.” Neither Conant nor Hacker provide, however, a definition of ‘irony.’ In this paper, I will start by providing a framework, based on the works of Muecke and Booth, to evaluate whether a book is ironical or otherwise. I will then argue that both the Diamond-Conant and the (so-called) Traditional Readings of the *Tractatus* entail that it is indeed ironical, albeit in different ways. Finally, I will propose, in broad strokes, a third way to consider the irony in the book.

KEYWORDS: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; *Kierkegaardian Irony*; *Irony*; *Wittgenstein*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Commenting on Conant’s “Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and Nonsense” (1992), Hacker described his adversary’s reading of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (henceforth “TLP”) thusly:

James Conant has developed her [i.e., Cora Diamond’s] interpretation in ‘Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense’ and attempted to draw parallels between Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard. In particular, he compares the author

of the *Tractatus* to the pseudonymous Kierkegaardian ‘humourist’ Johannes Climacus, who wrote his book in order to revoke it. Conant represents the book as an exercise in Kierkegaardian irony. [...] This ‘deconstructive’ interpretation seems to me to be a most curious way of reading a great book and of dismissing the philosophical insights that it contains, even though many of them are, as Wittgenstein himself later realized, ‘seen through a glass darkly’, and many of the claims are, as he later laboured to make clear, erroneous. [Hacker (2000), p. 359]

Despite their being central in his criticism, Hacker never states clearly what he means by “ironic,” “dialectic” or “Kierkegaardian irony” [Hacker (2000), pp. 360-61, 370]. It seems reasonable to look for enlightenment in Conant’s paper, but that proves disappointing. ‘Irony’ and ‘ironical’ are used there in several, imprecise, ways [see e.g. Conant (1992), pp. 211-13, 206, 215]. Conant cannot be blamed for this. It was never his goal to provide an account of irony (Kierkegaardian or otherwise), nor did he need to. His paper aims, rather, at bringing to the fore the similarities between the *procedures* of Climacus and Wittgenstein, regardless of whether any of them is ironical. Claiming that Conant “represents” the TLP as “an exercise in Kierkegaardian irony” can, therefore, be misleading. In fact, according to Conant, Climacus and Wittgenstein share a general method, but the “device of irony” is used only by the former:

At the level of generality at which Kierkegaard speaks [in *The Point of View of My Work as an Author*], it is proper to speak therefore (despite the qualification offered in the preceding footnote) of an overarching analogy between the *procedure* of the *Tractatus* as a whole and that of the [*Concluding Unscientific*] *Postscript* [to *Philosophical Fragments*] as a whole; both works employ an “indirect method” in which the author “arranges everything dialectically for the prospective captive, and then shyly withdraws.” But whereas the author of the *Tractatus* wishes to exhibit the *nonsensicality* of the philosophical claims with which his book begins, the author of the *Postscript* wishes to exhibit the *ludicrousness* of the philosophical claims with which his book begins. The author of the *Tractatus* attempts to lead his reader from the latently nonsensical to the patently nonsensical. The author of the *Postscript* attempts to lead his reader from the latently ludicrous to the patently ludicrous (and hence barely sensible), and then on to the patently nonsensical. Where the *Tractatus* begins directly with nonsense, the *Postscript* begins first with “ludicrousness” which it then elaborates into nonsense in the guise of an attempt to make it philosophically respectable. The disanalogy is therefore that the latter work employs a strategy of *parody* (with its concomitant devices of irony and humour) and the former does not. The analogy is that both works culminate in patent nonsense

and hence both are – as each declares at its conclusion – written in order to be revoked [Conant (1992), pp. 223-24, n. 86, emphasis in original].

On behalf of Hacker, one could rebut that his words should not be taken literally; that ‘Kierkegaardian irony’ was but a turn of phrase. I find this hard to maintain. On the one hand, Hacker uses ‘ironical’ to refer to Conant’s reading and ‘transitional’ to refer to Diamond’s (using ‘dialectical’ in a more general way), which suggests that he uses these terms in a precise manner [Hacker (2000), p. 370]. On the other, since the debate is focused on the importance of taking expressions literally, and since Hacker claims that his adversaries do not do so with regard to Wittgenstein’s own word (see esp. [Hacker (2000), pp. 371-82]), this rebuttal seems *ad hoc*. It is nonetheless true that the expression occurs *en passant* and might have been but a turn of phrase.

Be it as it may, such expression opens up an interesting possibility, namely that of seeing the *Tractatus* as an ironical text and that the parties in this debate might disagree with regard to such qualification. These parties are, evidently, the proponents of the so-called “resolute reading,” on the one hand; and of the so-called “standard reading” on the other. I will call them, respectively, ‘Diamond-Conant Reading’ and ‘Traditional Reading.’ They disagree, to put it as simply as possible, on how the self-ascription of nonsense in TLP 6.54 should be read. For an overview of this debate and its origins see e.g. [Diamond (1995), Conant (2000), Hacker (2000), Goldfarb (2011), Bronzo (2012), McGuinness (2012) and Conant and Bronzo (2017)].

I will argue that both readings entail that the *Tractatus* is ironical and that the irony attributed to the book by the Traditional Reading is closer to the qualification ‘Kierkegaardian’ than that attributed by its adversary. Thus, although Hacker’s global characterization is correct, it is misleading. In order to do this, I will start by presenting a well-established framework of irony developed in the field of literary theory (independently) by Muecke and Booth. I will then argue that the *Tractatus* exhibits the basic clues for irony and that both readings entail that it is indeed ironical, albeit in different ways. By way of conclusion, I will propose, in very broad strokes, another way of reading the *Tractatus* as an ironical work.

II. IRONY: A FRAMEWORK

Usually, irony is understood as a phenomenon where one is “asked to understand the opposite of what is said” [Quintilian (1921), p. 59

(9.2.44)]. This phenomenon is linguistic and can be called ‘*verbal irony*’ [Muecke (1969), pp. 42-43]. Instances of verbal irony are those in which we consider it appropriate to describe the speaker as someone who *is being ironical* [*Idem*]. Verbal irony depends upon the existence of an agent with a specific intention of being understood in a particular, non-literal, way [see Booth (1974), p. 5].

There is another kind of irony which is not tied to a particular speaker or utterance but is a feature of the situation.¹ We appeal to this kind of irony when we say that *it is ironic that* something is the case. This we can call ‘*situational irony*’ [Muecke (1969), pp. 42-43]. Contrary to verbal irony, situational irony need not be intended by an agent. In order to take place it needs only to be recognized as an instance of this kind of irony.

Although this distinction is often taken to be exhaustive, Muecke points out that it fails to capture an important middle term, which takes place when an agent invents or presents ironical situations [see also [Booth (1974), p. 235]:

As I have said, one way of being ironical is to invent and present ironic situations, but an ironist who presents ironic situations will have much the same sense of irony, attitudes, and responses as the ironic observer [Muecke (1969), p. 43].

This, as Muecke notes [(1969), p. 44], is often seen as a form of verbal irony, but it should be distinguished from most instances of that kind. In order to identify it as the middle term it is, I will call it ‘*presentational irony*.’

Verbal, situational and presentational irony are species of the same genus. They are all *ironical phenomena*. Although it is hard to find a precise definition of such phenomena, Muecke puts forward three “formal requirements” which “may be regarded as a definition of irony” [Muecke (1969), pp. 19-21]:

- (i) irony is a double-layered phenomenon; in which
- (ii) there is some kind of opposition (“contradiction, incongruity, or incompatibility”) between the two layers; and
- (iii) there is an “element of ‘innocence’” (i.e., a “victim”, which can be the target, the reader or an observer).

Although it might be criticized for being too permissive with regard to some parasitical cases [see Muecke (1969), p. 29], this can be taken as a

definition of ironical phenomena. Some remarks concerning these conditions are, nevertheless, in order.

There might be legitimate concerns about the notion of layer in condition (i). This notion is purposely vague so as to accommodate all kinds of irony. In cases of verbal irony, one layer might be the literal meaning of the utterance and the other the speaker’s meaning. But in the ironic situation of a bear hunter falling into his own bear-trap because it was too well-hidden [Muecke (1969), p. 49], the layers are events, namely the successful hiding of the bear-trap and the hunter’s falling into it. (Cases such as this can also be called ‘irony of events.’) In condition (ii), the notion of opposition should be read in its most general sense – as the parenthesis suggests – so as to accommodate many kinds of relations between layers. Finally, in condition (iii), the element of innocence might raise some questions, which will not be addressed here [see Muecke (1969), pp. 29-39]. For the present purposes, we can restrict this element to the readers, to whom the conflict between layers is disclosed *via* the reading process.

Another important distinction, orthogonal to the one between verbal, situational and presentational irony, is that between *simple* and *double* irony, which concerns the relation holding between conflicting layers. In simple irony, “an apparently or ostensibly true statement, serious question, valid assumption, or legitimate expectation is corrected, invalidated, or frustrated by the ironist’s real meaning, by the true state of affairs, or by what actually happens” [Muecke (1969), p. 23]. The latter “function quite openly as correctives,” for “[o]ne term of the ironic duality is seen, more or less immediately, as effectively contradicting, invalidating, exposing, or at the very least, modifying the other” [*Idem*].

Double irony, on the other hand, includes “an opposition at the lower level,” a form of irony “in which two equally invalid points of view cancel each other out” [Muecke (1969), p. 24] (see also [Booth (1974), p. 62]). There are three variants of double irony.² In one, “the contradiction and mutual destruction directs us to the ironist’s real meaning” [*Idem*]. This we can call ‘*corrective* double irony.’ In another, the corrective aspect of the ironic situation lies on its “point” being “simply that the victim was unaware of being in a dilemma or if he only thought he was in a dilemma when in fact he was not” [Muecke (1969), p. 25]. This we can call ‘*quasi-corrective* double irony.’ In the last variant, the dilemma is perceived as genuine and unavoidable, which leads to some change in the victim’s (or ironist’s) conception of it [*Idem*]. This I will call ‘*non-corrective* double

irony.’ Although strictly speaking there is no correction in this case, there is nevertheless some corrective element:

Ironies which do not function simply as correctives are nevertheless not without an element of ‘correction’. Their dominant feature may be the opposition, at the lower level, of equally valid [or invalid] terms but this only obscures the existence of an upper level, it does not imply its absence [Muecke (1969), p. 28].

In such cases, the “upper level” might be the victim’s coming to see a situation “with irony and not simply with bewilderment or compassion” [*Idem*].

Evidently, this framework is not bulletproof. This should not, in fact, surprise us, given the amount of phenomena being described. It is, nevertheless, a functional framework with which we can address the question of whether the *Tractatus* can or should be considered ironical.

III. IRONY IN THE *TRACTATUS*

Booth proposes a list of clues to which one should remain sensitive in order to identify irony in a text [Booth (1974), pp. 49-76]. One of them applies particularly well to the *Tractatus*: the existence of “conflicts of fact within the work” [Booth (1974), pp. 61-66]. This clue, which is present in a “very great portion of ironic essays,” displays the following structure: “(a) a plausible but false voice is presented; (b) contradictions of this voice are introduced; (c) a correct voice is finally heard, repudiating all or most or some of what the ostensible speaker has said” [Booth (1974), p. 62].

This schema applies to the *Tractatus*, which can be illustrated by the following rough and simplified description of the book. It opens with a series of metaphysical claims about the world, facts, states of affairs and objects [TLP 1-2.063]. It then moves on to a series of considerations on how we can represent the world and on how we do so through language and thought [TLP 2.1-4.53]. In the meantime, we are told that our current way of speaking is prone to many confusions, which justifies the use and development of a more precise sign-language [TLP 3.323-3.324]. As the development of this account of language in its relationship with the world takes place, we are presented with more and more counter-intuitive aspects of it, ranging from the nonsensicality of sentences

like ‘There are 100 objects’ [TLP 4.1272] to the truth of solipsism [TLP 5.6-5.641] and the impossibility of ethics and aesthetics (which are said to be the same) [TLP 6.4-6.422]. While intriguing, none of these amount to contradictions in the work itself. Those, as well as the “correct voice,” seem to be presented in the final remarks of the book:

6.53 The correct method in philosophy would really be the following: to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. propositions of natural science—i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy—and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions. Although it would not be satisfying to the other person—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—*this* method would be the only strictly correct one.

6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

7 What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.

The fundamental contradiction of the *Tractatus* rests (apparently at least) in its being an attempt to say what cannot be said. The correct voice, in turn, seems to be the recognition of the nonsensicality of most sentences in the book, throwing them away as such.

The *Tractatus* hence exhibits the clues identified by Booth. These are, however, mere clues and not jointly sufficient conditions for the book to be ironical. In order to ascertain whether it is ironical, we must ask (at least) whether it meets the formal requirements of irony (which are jointly sufficient, if only from a formal point of view) identified by Muecke. This, in turn, depends upon our way of reading the book. In what follows, I will use Muecke’s conditions to characterize the *Tractatus* according to the two readings identified in the introduction.

IV. THE DIAMOND-CONANT READING AND SIMPLE IRONY

The gist of the Diamond-Conant Reading of the *Tractatus* is that TLP 6.54 should be taken literally. If so, then what comes before should be thrown away for good. According to this reading, there are no meta-

physical insights in the book because the sentences that allegedly conveyed them are purely nonsensical. As Diamond famously put it, the attempt is that of “not chickening out:”

What counts as not chickening out is then this, roughly: to throw the ladder away is, among other things, to throw away in the end the attempt to take seriously the language of ‘features of reality’. To read Wittgenstein himself as not chickening out is to say that it is not, not really, his view that there are features of reality that cannot be put into words but show themselves. What is his view is that that way of talking may be useful or even for a time essential, but it is in the end to be let go of and honestly taken to be real nonsense, plain nonsense, which we are not in the end to think of as corresponding to an ineffable truth [Diamond (1995), p. 181].

In order to identify most sentences of the book as “plain nonsense,” we need to take some other sentences, not only as meaningful, but as truthful. These provide the “instructions” on how to read the whole work, including the need to “throw away” part of it. These instructions, which include TLP 6.54 and the Preface, were often characterized as the *frame* of the work and contrasted with its *body*, composed of the metaphysical pseudo-propositions to be thrown away [see Diamond (2000), pp. 149-151].

The distinction between frame and body of the *Tractatus* was, however, far from unproblematic. Adding to 6.54 and the Preface, it became clear that 3.32–3.326, 4–4.003, 4.111–4.112 and perhaps even 4.126–4.1272, 5.473 and 5.4733 had to belong to the frame [Conant (2000), p. 216, n. 102; Hacker (2000), p. 360]. It became clear, that is, that whether a particular remark was part of the frame or not was not “simply a function of where in the work it occur[red],” but “a function of *how* it occur[red]” [Conant (2000), p. 216, n. 102, emphasis in original]. But the problems continued, as some sentences belonging to the frame seemed to depend upon sentences considered to be nonsensical [White (2011), pp. 48-50]. It hence became progressively clearer that the “Frame-Body Dualism” would have to be overcome [Read and Deans (2011), pp. 153-154; see also Kuusela (2011)].

Although “the image of the ‘frame’ of *Tractatus* [...] turned out to be unhelpful” [Diamond (2019), p. 5], it sheds light on an aspect of the Diamond-Conant Reading important for the present purposes, namely, the fact that the reading presupposes the existence of two layers in the book. The lower layer is that of the metaphysical theory apparently put forward in the book and the upper layer is that where that “theory” is denounced as nonsensical. The two first formal requirements for irony

are, therefore, met: the book presents two layers, which are in opposition, for one deems the other nonsensical. It is important to note that, since the whole idea of such reading is to take 6.54 *au pied de la lettre*, the nonsensicality of the lower layer cannot be taken to result from the alleged theory of meaning put forward on that same layer. If that were the case, then we would be, to use Diamond’s phrase, “chickening out.” The upper layer must be independent from the lower one. What allows us to say that the lower layer is nonsensical is, not what that layer seems to say, but our recognition of some failure of communication [see Conant (2000), pp. 189-193]. The upper layer is one where we arrive when we start seeing as patently nonsensical what we did not see as such before [Conant (1992), p. 224, n. 86], not one where we apply a theory to itself. This takes us to the third formal requirement.

The reader is, of course, the “element of innocence.” According to the Diamond-Conant Reading, the book is crafted as a tool to engage the reader in the “imaginative taking of nonsense for sense” [Diamond (2000), p. 158], to show her that her tendency to philosophy is the result of a mistake:

The attractiveness of the forms of words expressive of philosophical confusion arises out of the imagining of a point of view for philosophical investigation. And it is precisely that illusory point of view that the *Tractatus* self-consciously imagines itself into in an attempt to lead one to see that there was only false imagination in the attractiveness of the words one had been inclined to come out with [Diamond (2000), p. 159].

Once the “victim” of the book has gone through it, she should be able to no longer fall prey to the attractiveness of some empty forms of speech. She should be able to avoid using *unframed* nonsense; that is, to avoid using nonsensical sentences as if they had sense [Diamond (2000), p. 160].

Thus, the *Tractatus* meets, according to this reading, the definition put forward by Muecke and is hence ironical. It is, in particular, an instance of simple verbal irony.³ Therefore, Hacker’s characterization of Conant’s reading is correct overall, but there is a caveat: the kind of irony at stake here can hardly be called ‘Kierkegaardian.’ As argued by Muecke, Kierkegaard focused on what romantic authors, such as Schlegel, called ‘irony,’ which was mainly *double*, rather than simple [Muecke (1969), pp. 10-11]. This kind of irony is, as I will argue next, implicitly attributed to the book, not by Conant, but by those who reject his view.

V. THE TRADITIONAL READING AND DOUBLE IRONY

It is always difficult to understand what is meant by ‘standard’ or ‘Traditional Reading’ of the *Tractatus*. As a matter of fact, Hacker (and others) have argued that their views have been systematically misrepresented [see Hacker (2003)]. Here, I will try to remain as parsimonious as possible. Taking Anscombe as the main proponent of such reading, I will focus on what seems to be the crucial difference between her views and the Diamond-Conant Reading.

As seen above, the Diamond-Conant Reading rests upon the idea that the two (as I have called them) layers of the book are independent. That is, that what justifies the claim that the sentences in the book are nonsensical is not a theory present in the book itself, but something else (to be determined). This, I believe, is the crucial difference between that reading and the Traditional one. Anscombe, for instance, seems to consider that the self-attribution of nonsense in the book is, not only not independent, but rather a result of the metaphysical theory put forward there:

[...] Wittgenstein regards the sentences of the *Tractatus* as helpful, in spite of their being strictly speaking nonsensical according to the very doctrine that they propound; someone who had used them like steps ‘to climb out beyond them’ would be helped by them to ‘see the world rightly’. That is to say, he would see what ‘is shewn’, instead of being down in a bog confusedly trying to propound and assert sometimes cases of what is ‘shown’, sometimes would-be contradictions of these [Anscombe (1959), p. 162].

According to this view, TLP 6.54 should be seen as the conclusion of a *modus tollens* having as premisses the claim that if a sentence is meaningful, it must satisfy certain conditions and the claim that those conditions are not met by the sentences in the book. This, however, seems to generate a paradox. If the sentences in the book are meaningful, then the *modus tollens* runs and 6.54 is true, which entails that the sentences in the book are nonsensical. If, on the other hand, we take the sentences in the book to be nonsensical and take that to have a theoretical justification, we seem to owe that justification to the sentences in the book, which entails that they are meaningful.

Oversimplified as such a description might be, it shows that the Traditional Reading tends to identify (and that is implicit in Anscombe’s words) a paradox in the book. This paradox is itself composed of two conflicting layers: (i) the sentences of the book are meaningful; and (ii)

the sentences of the book are nonsensical. Hence, the first two formal requirements of Muecke’s account of irony are met. The “element of innocence” is, once more, the reader, who starts the book believing that she can come to grasp the meaning of its sentences and is progressively pushed to the paradox described above. Thus, according to this description, the book meets our working definition of ‘irony’ and is hence ironical.

Now, none of these layers can be considered the correct perspective of the author. Rather, both are “equally invalid points of view” which “cancel each other out” [Muecke (1969), p. 24]. According to this description, the book instantiates double, rather than simple, irony. As was seen above, this means that the “real meaning” of the author must lie in yet another layer. In other words, the lower layer here is itself composed of two conflicting layers, there being an upper layer which corrects one’s perspective with regard to the conflict at the lower level. In Anscombe’s reading, that layer consists in the recognition that one should not try to say what cannot be said. Hence, the conflict in the lower layer leads to the upper one, where the “ironist’s real meaning” is identified [Muecke (1969), p. 24] and the reader’s perspective corrected. Thus, *prima facie*, the book instantiates corrective double verbal irony.

As already noted, Kierkegaard’s main interest was in the double irony of romantic authors. Since the Traditional Reading attributes double irony to the *Tractatus*, it is closer to Kierkegaard’s interests than is the Diamond-Conant reading, which, as seen above, attributes it only a form of simple irony [see also Muecke (1969), pp. 44-49, 119-121]. Thus, Hacker’s description of Conant’s reading of the *Tractatus* is misleading. It is, nevertheless, overall correct and it opens interesting possibilities on how to read this puzzling book. By way of conclusion, I will, in the following section, put forward in broad strokes another way of considering the irony in the *Tractatus*.

VI. QUASI-CORRECTIVE PRESENTATIONAL IRONY

According to the Traditional Reading, the silence recommended in TLP 7 is “saturated with understanding” [Bronzo (2012), p. 51]. The idea seems to be that, once the paradox is recognized, it can be avoided by remaining silent. I want to challenge this claim and use the apparatus of irony presented before to hint at another way of reading the last remarks of the book, combining aspects of the two readings addressed above.

In a meeting with the Vienna Circle in 1929, Wittgenstein stated the following:

But the inclination, the running up against something, *indicates something*. St. Augustine knew that already when he said: What, you swine, you want not to talk nonsense! Go ahead and talk nonsense, it does not matter! [Wittgenstein and Waismann (1979), p. 69, emphasis in original]

Let us assume, for the sake of the argument, that in what concerns this particular remark Wittgenstein is here expounding the views he held in the *Tractatus*. In that case, then, the silence recommended in TLP 7 is not as corrective as it seemed. Remaining silent is just another way to concede to the paradox, solving nothing. If one remains silent, not being “cured” from one’s desire to say what one recognizes as ineffable, then the only difference made by the book is that one no longer says certain things out loud. If that is the upshot of reading the *Tractatus*, however, not much has changed. In that case, “it does not matter” whether one remains silent or otherwise. If so, in turn, remaining silent cannot be seen as a corrective layer, for it leads back to the paradox.

According to the description just proposed, the book instantiates a form of second-order double irony. Being exposed to the paradox (layer 1) leads us to remain silent (layer 2) and that is just another way of facing the paradox (layer 1). Hence, we have two layers which are, once again, “equally invalid points of view” and “cancel each other out” [Muecke (1969), p. 24]. Accordingly, we must have yet another upper layer, which relates to the double irony holding between remaining silent and engaging in the paradox. This raises two questions.

The first is whether such upper layer needs to be seen as “Wittgenstein’s voice.” The answer is ‘no.’ That must only be the case if the irony in the *Tractatus* is verbal. Yet, we might be faced with (what I have called) an instance of presentational irony. Wittgenstein might be showing us that we are all in a particular ironical situation, rather than saying something different from what he seems to be saying. The second question concerns the corrective aspect of this double layer. As seen before, this corrective aspect might be merely the recognition that one is indeed in a dilemma [Muecke (1969), p. 25]. It can also be the fact that the “victim” comes to see her situation “with irony and not simply with bewilderment or compassion” [*Idem*]. I have called these, respectively, quasi-corrective and non-corrective forms of double irony. Now, perhaps Wittgenstein wants his reader to understand that she is in an ironical, dilemmatic, situation of engaging in a paradox even if she tries to

avoid it. Since this paradox is seen as the result of doing philosophy in the most advanced way possible, it can be generalized. Wittgenstein’s reader, being prone to philosophize, will thereby be shown, not only that she will never attain the goals she aimed at, but also that she cannot avoid trying to achieve them.

The account of the irony in the *Tractatus* I am proposing, therefore, takes the book to instantiate a form of quasi-corrective double presentational irony. There is, yet, an aspect of non-corrective double irony. Realizing she lives an ironical situation which she cannot change, the reader might come to see her own situation in a new light. She might come to terms with her own impotence, with the irrelevance of her will, as addressed by Wittgenstein in TLP 6.373-4.

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NOTES

¹ Quintilian himself seems to recognize this other kind of irony: “Indeed a whole life may be held to illustrate Irony, as was thought of Socrates, who was called *eirōn* because he played the part of an ignoramus who marvelled at the supposed wisdom of others.” [Quintilian (1921), p. 61 (9.2.46)]

² According to Muecke, there are only two kinds of double irony, one of which subdivides into two [Muecke (1969), pp. 24-25].

³ I have omitted the distinction between *overt* and *covert* irony, which depends upon the irony’s “[d]egree of openness or disguise” [Booth (1974), p. 234], that is, upon the extent to which “the victim or the reader or both are

meant to see the ironist's real meaning at once" [Muecke (1969), p. 54]. The irony in the *Tractatus* is, according to the Diamond-Conant Reading, overt.

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