PROBLEMOS

Problemos
ISSN: 1392-1126
ISSN: 2424-6158
redakcija.problemos@fsf.vu.lt
Vilniaus Universitetas
Lituania

Mimetic Evil: A Conceptual and Ethical Study

Airaksinen, Timo
Mimetic Evil: A Conceptual and Ethical Study
Problemos, vol. 98, 2020
Vilniaus Universitetas, Lituania
Disponible en: https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=694574419005
DOI: https://doi.org/10.15388/Problemos.98.5

Articles

Mimetic Evil: A Conceptual and Ethical Study

Mimetinis blogis: konceptuali ir etinė studija

Timo Airaksinen timo.airaksinen@helsinki.fi
University of Helsinki, Finlandia
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8850-418X

Problemos, vol. 98, 2020

Vilniaus Universitetas, Lituania

Recepción: 27 Abril 2020
Aprobación: 25 Junio 2020

DOI: https://doi.org/10.15388/Problemos.98.5

Redalyc: https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=694574419005

Abstract: Irony and sarcasm are common linguistic tropes. They are both based on falsehoods that the speaker pretends to be true. I briefly characterize their differences. A third trope exists that works when the relevant propositions are true – yet its rhetorical effect resembles irony and sarcasm, I call it mocking. It is mimetic evil: an agent copies another so that the result ridicules him. The image is, in a limited way, true of him and it hurts; we all are vulnerable. I provide a systematic framework for understanding this phenomenon, mocking, in terms of emulation and simulation. Finally, I introduce an idea of universal mimesis and discuss René Girard's theory of desire. He argues that desires are copies of a model. This may not be possible, and I suggest a modification to his theory. I pay attention to his idea of mimetic desire as a source of hatred, which is obviously related to what I call here mimetic mocking.

Keywords: Irony, Mocking, Emulation, Simulation, Girard.

Summary: Ironija ir sarkazmas yra įprasti lingvistiniai tropai. Abu jie remiasi netikromis prielaidomis, kurias kalbėtojas naudoja kaip tiesą. Straipsnyje glaustai apibrėžiami jų skirtumai. Egzistuoja ir trečiasis tropas, kuris veikia prielaidoms esant teisingoms – vis dėlto jo retorinis efektas taip pat primena ironiją ir sarkazmą. Straipsnyje šis tropas vadinamas pašaipa. Pašaipa yra mimetinis blogis: agentas imituoja kitą agentą taip, kad pastarasis liktų išjuoktas. Sudarytas vaizdas iš dalies primena jį ir dėl to yra skaudus; tokiu būdu pažeidžiami esame visi. Pateikiamas sisteminis būdas pažinti šį fenomeną (pašaipą) per emuliaciją ir simuliaciją. Taip pat siūloma universalios mimezės idėja ir diskutuojama su René Girard'o troškimo teorija. Girard'as teigia, kad troškimai yra modelio kopijos. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad tai nėra įmanoma, ir siūloma modifikuoti Girard'o teoriją. Straipsnyje atkreipiamas dėmesys ir į Girard'o idėją apie mimetinį troškimą kaip neapykantos šaltinį. Ši neapykanta yra aiškiai susijusi su tuo, ką aš vadinu mimetine pašaipa.

Keywords: ironija, pašaipa, mėgdžiojimas (emuliacija), simuliacija, Girard'as.

Falsehood as a Rhetorical Tool

Irony and sarcasm are two linguistic tropes whose rhetorical force depends on falsehoods in the conventional sense, understood in terms of the correspondence or coherence theory of truth. [1] This is to say, truth is a property of a declarative sentence or a proposition. A proposition is true when it fits the world: "Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white. Think of the following ironic and sarcastic propositions:

> *Irony:* "Morally it is wicked." [But] "for those who did not get killed or hurt, [it was] very jolly." (Mount 2019: 22) [2]
>
> *Sarcasm:* Conscience is your first executioner. (La Mettrie; M. de Sade) [3]

The first proposition states something that looks false, namely, killing local peasants in the colonies is "jolly." The sentence is somehow less than self-consistent or coherent; hence, when a speaker takes it as if seriously its irony is unintentional; the fact that he does not see the point indicates second level situational or embedded irony. The speech act in toto creates a sinister but comic, or jolly, effect. In an intentional case, the intended audience knows the speaker's predispositions and this makes the ironic effect of the speech act possible. This is free or verbal irony. [4] I state something everybody knows is false, and I know that the intended audience knows the relevant truth, therefore the stated falsehood does not count as a lie. What happens is, *I call what is bad good*. This is a simple but drastic transformation, but this it is what irony, or at least one type of irony, achieves (Garmendia 2010: 397). Of course, the use of tropes like irony is infinitely varied among different speech situations. We tend to understand the idea of irony in so many ways, yet this simple true/false transformation looks like a key to the understanding of it. Consider the following:

> *Irony:* Murder and death are the greatest of erotic pleasures. (Bataille; Sade) [5]

Murder is bad but now we characterize it as a pleasure, and pleasure is good: What is bad is now said to be good. You may think the proposition is nonsense, but for an ironist it is false and yet worth saying – in this case the speaker ridicules hedonism. Again, this irony may not be intentional, which makes a verbal report a case of situational, not verbal, irony.

What about sarcasm? I suggest sarcasm is based on making *what is good look bad*; in this way sarcasm is the structural opposite of irony. However, sarcasm is also based on an obvious falsehood, in the following way: conscience is a good thing, we all agree on this, but then it is called an executioner, which is a monstrous role. Here the speaker, Sade, refers to conscience as if it were a good thing, and yet he calls it bad, or an executioner. He rejects the value of conscience in a cynical manner, or he rejects an obvious value and pretends it not being a value. Therefore, he dismisses the value knowing perfectly well what he is doing. He says what is valuable is not valuable, which is of course a contradiction and paradox. His intended audience knows this is the case but understands and accepts the speech act as a sarcasm.

Mimetic Evil

Let us see how mockery works via mimesis. [6] It exists, it is frequent, and it is evil:

> President-elect Donald Trump fired back at Meryl Streep Monday morning after the actress denounced his campaign rhetoric during a speech at the Golden Globe Awards Sunday night. Streep ripped Trump for his obvious mockery of a journalist's physical disability in late 2015, and Trump responded by once again denying that he meant to make fun of the reporter's condition (*Washington Post* 9.1.2017). [7]

Here we find a nasty trope that does not depend on falsehoods. Mr. Trump was mimicking the handicapped journalist, this is true. And he did it from above, that is, his power advantage was undeniable. However, what he did and said was to the point, and that is why it was so bad, just as Ms. Streep said. [8] Mr. Trump successfully imitated the handicapped journalist – it is all true.

The relevant trope here has remained, perhaps, hidden and is certainly much less discussed than irony and sarcasm (Dynel 2008). This is unjustifiable. Let us call this trope *mocking*. Synonyms are derision, disdain, scorn etc., but mocking is especially suitable because it hints at copying, imitation, and mimicking, that is, to the wide world of mimesis, including simulation and emulation (Keestra 2008). Mocking is a type of mimetic evil: one imitates a target in a way that, say, humiliates her. This can be done by means of a speech act but also bodily action. Mocking is not only based on spoken language but also on style, and style characterizes the whole range of human existence and agency. However, if mocking occurs in the field of speech and language, it is based on truth; if it does not, it is accurate or truthful in an extended sense of the term. A non-verbal, actionist mocking plays with the notions like accuracy and faithfulness. Such actions create a suitable simulation.

Here are some simple examples of mocking acts:

> *Non-linguistic Case:* My spoken English has a foreign accent. A native speaker starts imitating me without a good reason, as if for fun.
>
> *Linguistic Meaning:* "No huge crowd here today," when in fact the place is half empty.

In the second example, what is said is true, but we often call this kind of speech act ironic. Of course, what is said is a hyperbola, but regardless of that, the proposition is true. [9] It is not a huge crowd – of course a meiotic strategy may work, too. An ironic version would be: "What an enormous crowd you have here," which is a falsehood (Walton 2015). The first example above can be read as follows: Because we cannot require linguistic truth, we focus on the accuracy of the mimetic action, which makes the mocking act successful; we may call it truthful, that is, to use a suitable analogy for linguistic truth. Suppose mimicking is truthful. What properties make it bad, say, shameful? The full answer may only come from psychology and hence it does not belong here. Yet, it is obvious that some features of persons and situations should not be truthfully underlined in public. To mention them may be impolite, but willfully to reproduce them, and thus explicate and emphasize them by means of mimicking, is evil.

Obviously, to mimic is potentially dangerous, although it is difficult to specify why and when. To start answering such questions, let us discuss simulation and emulation. First, let us draw a distinction between them at the same time keeping in mind its stipulative nature:

> *Emulation:* when something more complex mimics less complex. The result is emulacrum as replacement. [10]

Simulation: when something less complex mimics more complex. The result is simulacrum as model.

Notice that in the examples above, the first one (my broken English) exemplifies emulation. Also, the case of Mr. Trump is emulation, as Ms. Streep's comments make clear: "he outranked [him] in privilege, power, and the capacity to fight back" (*Washington Post* 9.1.2017). Trump is a more complex entity in several dimensions, of which only some are relevant here. The third example is more difficult to classify, but perhaps we can call it emulation as well: the more complex "not a big crowd" emulates the simplistic "small crowd." Of course, the distinction between emulation and simulation is not primarily a linguistic one but concerns agents and the outcomes of their actions. We need to pay special attention to action because we are here discussing evil mimesis, and evil resides in actions, including linguistic behavior, or pragmatics.

The reference to complex and less complex agents must be specified. Complexity functions as a variable: it takes as its value all kinds of positive attributes, or values, like more able, more efficient, of higher functional status, more competent, more complex, and richer in detail. We also can speak of higher and lower status, although is it far from clear how we form such judgements. Despite this, our intuitions seem reasonably clear and stable when we speak about simulation and emulation. I will use the pair more/less complex below, but we must keep on mind that complexity is an umbrella notion. I also speak of value differences between a subject and her target.

Think of a supercomputer emulating a cheap calculator, or artificial intelligence simulating human intelligence, or a president emulating a journalist, or an actor simulating a president. A student simulates the teacher and the teacher may find it useful occasionally to emulate the student. The key point is the variance between a subject and a target in terms of some relevant value. In the first example above, as a non-native speaker, I am a simple target and the mocking agent is a complex subject: this aims at an emulacrum. The result of a mocking act. The subject represents the target via mimicking him. We can call the results jointly as "lacra": mimetic acts result in lacra, which the target can see in the mirror held by the subject. If the lacra mock the target, if she does not like what she sees, her experience is bound to be painful. The subject is prima facie evil and cruel.

The Power of Simulacra: Girard on Mimesis

René Girard argues that mimesis is a source of serious conflict in social life; that is, all mimesis is problematic in social context regardless of its mocking effects. He does not distinguish between simulation and emulation. He says the subject suffers when I say the target suffers. Girard may be right, but in the case of mocking, the suffering has obvious moral significance, unlike in mimetic behavior simpliciter: the subject suffers independently of the target's intentions. Girard writes – I utilize his first

theory – describing the subject's attitude towards the target, who is the source of her ideas of desirability and actual desires:

> The subject is torn between two opposite feelings toward his model – the most submissive reverence and the most intense malice. This is the passion we call hatred. Only someone who prevents us from satisfying a desire which he himself has inspired in us is truly an object of hatred. The person who hates first hates himself for the secret admiration concealed by his hatred. In an effort to hide this desperate admiration from others, and from himself, he no longer wants to see in his mediator anything but an obstacle [...] Now the mediator is a shrewd and diabolical enemy (Girard 1961: 11). [11]

Girard is hard to interpret, but he deserves to be read sympathetically. For instance, his "hatred" is a wide umbrella notion, or it names a cluster concept. Alternatively, hatred is used metonymically, or self-hatred is a metaphor. [12] The case of a person (target) who somehow prevents another person (subject) from satisfying her desire that is sourced from him, is a special one. Some copied desires are onerous, dangerous, disgusting, perverted, prone to obsession, tasteless, criminal etc. I may accuse the mediator of them, and hate him for that.

Girard's idea is that the subject must understand his mediocre status in relation to the target. This sounds strange in the case of emulation, as I use the term, when the subject is, explicitly, better than the target. Perhaps one can suggest the following: The target is worthy of copying, which entails he is stronger, more complex, and more valuable than the subject who must now feel he is somehow reduced in the mimetic process. He becomes a mere simulacrum. Hence, their relationship is not only simulation, but it is also meiotic. The subject now is a mere representation of the target-mediator. The subject's identity is no longer fully his own because a part of it is now borrowed from the other in a diminished form. He is no longer fully himself, or an autonomous person and agent. The subject cannot appreciate the foreign part, or the simulacrum, in himself; he finds it alien to him. Anyway, the simulacrum is a problem for the subject and he may be willing to act violently to the various kinds of threats it represents. If this is so, we may not need an overblown concept of hatred; we can talk about discomfort and anxiety.

Girard has a point, but his approach may still be incomplete. He only deals with simulation and simulacra, or the situation where the target is more complex than the subject, and thus he fails to see that also the target may feel bad about the mimetic process, or the simulation he stimulates without being able to control it. He may offer himself as a model to be simulated, that is true, but in the role of the target he can never fully control the outcome, or the simulacrum. Anyone who makes himself available for mimicking must recognize her own vulnerability and its associated risks, especially mockery: if the subject hates the target, mockery is an attractive strategy. The target may not like the look of the simulacrum now visible in the subject, and he may even think that his existence is somehow reduced due to the simulacrum; that is, he no longer is a unique individual. He sees his own copies floating around in various

positions. Perhaps he is proud of this, this is possible, but he may as well feel reduced and hurt – both cases need their own explanation.

We can combine my theory, which focuses on the suffering of the target, with Girard's theory, which focuses on the subject and her misery. As we may say, mockery is the subject's revenge when he faces the humiliating simulacra resulting from his mimicking the target. Girard claims this is painful and makes the subject hate the target. He cannot truly identify with the simulacrum: he hates himself as a divided personality who now is less than an autonomous agent. Meiosis is painful. His desires are not his own desires; they are representations of the alien other in him – and he knows he cannot correct the situation. What can one do? He can retaliate by mocking the target. The relevant strategy looks obvious: I notice that my person and life contain an alien element and therefore I hate the source of it, that is, the target. I want compensation and therefore I mock him by simulating him in a hyperbolic manner. I believe that this makes him look ridiculous in the eyes of the intended audience, which I hope we share. To achieve this, I mockingly reproduce the alien element in me at the same time making it clear that this displays an image of the target. I make the simulacrum as grotesque as possible, or I use some subtler methods, always depending on what I can afford and what brings about the maximal evil effect. Perhaps a silly representation works well etc. In this way we can, I hope, understand Girard better. If I hate the target, as he says, I must do something about it. Violence is mostly out of the question in modern societies, but many other methods exist, for example mockery, but also irony and sarcasm. Girard, as a Roman Catholic religious thinker and amateur cultural anthropologist, loves the idea of violence. [13]

The Effects of Mirroring

Girard concentrates on simulation, but we need to study emulation as well. The asymmetric status of the relevant players of the mimetic game influences their reactions to simulacra and emulacra. We can then ask how large this influence is. Let us call the mimetic process of mirroring. [14] We should not focus only on intentional and explicit mimesis, which is to say that both the subject and target know what is going on and what they are doing. Tacit mimesis exists as well: I copy a target but she will never know it, or I copy someone as if subconsciously, that is, without recognizing what I am doing. This is what normally happens. Anyway, in the explicit case both parties see themselves and the other as participating in the game of mimesis, perhaps they are unwilling partners but partners they are. The target may offer herself to be copied. Typically, the subject starts the game by initiating mimetic action. If he is not stopped – he can be stopped in various ways – the target is reduced to passivity, indeed, he is the target of the subject's action, say, his gaze. He can then observe his own image in the mirror of the other, an image that is in various ways

incomplete and distorted, or perhaps exalted and worthy of glorification. [15]

Let us investigate simulation first. Here mirroring takes two different forms: the more complex target sees himself in the mirror of the less complex subject who is for her either the other or the Other. To explain: the other is a potentially familiar player and an identifiable agent. He is a person to whom one can relate as a friend, an enemy, or perhaps nobody, yet someone whose description the target knows. The Other is an alien type of entity, a nebulous object of imagination whose nature and existence one cannot pin down. My fear and subsequent rejection produce the Other whereas attraction diminishes otherness: I focus on her, aim at understanding, and I approach her, which reduces the sense of Otherness until I, if all goes well, meet the Other as another person. Sometimes the Other is a threat, or nightmare, a rejected entity who should not exist, yet the lure of the Other may still be felt (Riera 2006).

An example: if men and women are mutual Others, Drag Culture celebrates this via hyperbolic mimesis in such a way that the differences can be displayed, understood, and manipulated. Say, male Drag Queens mock womanhood by overdressing and exaggerating the female habitus, as if being female were something bizarre to celebrate. Women can see themselves in mocking light in the mirror Drag Queens hold, yet they may accept all this. It is a show that mimics women. I do not attempt to analyze this complex interaction between what is bizarre and grotesque in mockery here (Czachesz 2014).

Suppose a subject who simulates the target in a situation where the target recognizes the subject as the Other and watches his mimetic behavior as if in a mirror. What he sees may be malevolent; but whether it is amusing, flattering, or neutral, that is another question. Malevolent simulation qualifies as mockery and is humiliating and irritating, which may lead to conflicts. The subject imitates the target's language and ideas in a mocking way suitable for a less complex party. In fact, it is this very fact that the subject is less complex that makes the case humiliating, think of the Saturday Night Live TV show endlessly mocking Mr. Trump: the very fact that the subject is now in no way more complex than the President, makes the mockery even more biting. In general, the less complex subject is tempted to mock the target and his or her idiosyncratic aspects as if they were weaknesses. The target then sees them in the mirror, which reduces his complexity and minimizes self-worth making the process painful to experience. Notice that mocking behavior is occasional and passing, never permanent and foundational. They mock her and then stop. They intentionally and deliberatively create a simulacrum that hurts and then retreat from the scene – it is hit-and-run. The point is to offer a glance, in the mirror, of the target reduced to the minimum; this emphasize his tacit weaknesses. This case is easy to understand. Yet, the game of hurts works in the opposite direction as well. I mock you and want to show your ugly face in my mirror, but by doing so I come to emphasize my own weaknesses, that is, my own reduced complexity. I come to admit my weaknesses, which is painful. Mocking simulation hurts and pains both

parties, and as such it is a bitter game whose results are ever so ambiguous and inconclusive. It is impossible to nominate the winner.

Next, let us look at emulation where the more complex subject mimics the less complex target. Suppose the mimicking turns out to be mockery. We now return to the case where a native speaker mockingly mimics, or emulates, my clumsy foreign English accent and perhaps even offers his advice after my sorry performance. As I said above, simulation is a bitter game, that is, it hurts both sides. Nevertheless, mocking emulation may allow the subject to celebrate his own complexity and forces the target to recognize himself in a reduced form. The emulacrum in the mirror shows him reduced even more, when compared to the originally weak entity. Strong and successful emulation may make the target vanish: the shame and humiliation are overpowering. The trip from weakness to nothingness is sometimes surprisingly short, as stigmatized targets know (Goffman 1986). The subject enjoys his own performance, which he may claim is justified: I gave a lesson to the target; he should be grateful – note the ambiguity between "lesson" as a metaphor and literal term. But perhaps this is only ironic? The point is, the subject can now play around with his mocking act because he is, after all, the more complex agent. His are the key resources, he is better than the target, and thus he can mock in various ways staying in complete control of the game. The context is hyperbolic. The target has no chance of protesting or countering the emulacrum whose victim he now is. His position is hopeless and as such painful: he is forced to see his already reduced self-reduced even more until all he can see are his faults presented in unfavorable light. The target will hate the subject.

Universal Mimesis and the Problem of Adoption

The Universal Mimesis Game has no single subject because all the players are now subjects and targets at the same time. Social life depends on universal mimesis, as it seems. Yet, as individuals, we do not want to be too dependent on simulacra: we abhor the idea of simulation because we feel it will turn us into clones. As Girard writes, "Imitative desire is always a desire to be Another" (Girard 1965). Of course, we are no clones because no original master target exists in this nebulous social universe of ours. In this sense, we do not copy any given target but we all copy each other: we all are targets. Does this lead to social uniformity? Why are we afraid of it? We are no copies, because we also are copied, but we are all similar. Girard, when he says we copy our desires, claims that a subject mimics the target as if we could draw a line between these two roles. However, he also seems to recognize the implausibility of this idea. he writes: "Every desire that is revealed can arouse or increase a rival's desire; thus, it is necessary to conceal desire in order to gain possession of the object" (Girard 1965: 153). We can see universal mimesis in action here.

The problem is, if agents copy each other, the lacra start looking more and more uniform. Suppose A has properties x, y, z, and B a, b, c. Copying them tit-for-tat does not make much sense, because in that case A and B

only combine their characteristic sets of properties: A and B now share all their desires, which is the end of individuality. Suppose B copies A, further suppose it is simulation, then B ends up having the whole set of properties, which makes him like A. But this is impossible: A was supposed to be more complex than B. Therefore, B cannot copy all of A's properties – because of his relative weakness: B is unable fully to benefit from A's complexity. What if A emulates B: in this case A does not change in any essential way; B's properties may not add anything to A, A does not need B. It is safe to say that simulation leads towards uniformity but not as much as one might initially expect.

If B is too weak to benefit from A's properties; B only can mock them, but this does not benefit B in the sense of making her more valuable in relation to A. Emulation is even more conservative: the complex subject cannot benefit from the simple target in the sense of becoming even more complex. Only if A and B are equals do their property sets converge towards uniformity. The rule is: equals tend to be similar. However, we may safely say such equality is rare, or perhaps impossible, in social life. The idea of A and B being stable equals is fiction.

Girard's approach may be problematic because it operates with a simplified and perhaps invalid idea of mimesis. He seems to say that when A emulates or simulates B, A becomes like B, which dismisses the idea of occasional mirroring. When A simulates B, B sees his own image in the mirror held by A, but this may not change A or B. The point is: two types of mimesis exist, namely occasional and adoptive. In the occasional mirroring case, B only realizes what it is like to appear in the mirror held by A, and then B drops the project. This is an epistemic case: B learns something about herself by peeping at her own image in the mirror held by A. This is like occasional pretending, which applies equally well to simulation and emulation; mocking belongs to this occasional category. The adoptive case is different: one adopts certain properties of the other, or tries to do that. This may change the agent permanently, but as we already saw, restrictions apply. Prima facie, mimesis creates a lacrum that, from now on, characterizes the subject.

To mimic, whether it is simulation or emulation, does not entail adoption. A subject may witness the target's attractive features and behavior that he wants to simulate, or he simulates it without paying attention to what he does. The subject produces a simulacrum, which is his new style of acting on the social stage; however, he must accept and adopt it before it becomes a part of him. If he does not, the subject only is a platform for the simulacrum that appears in the real world. In the case of mocking action this is clear: the subject plays games with simulacra and hopes, say, to hurt the target. But the subject does not become like the target, on the contrary, he makes it clear that this is not the case. To mimic in order to adopt may not be that common, except, as we might think, in the context of learning something. A pupil simulates her teacher's Japanese pronunciation and this generates a simulacrum. But she must not adopt it as such: it is always defective. He must try again and

again. One does not learn by adopting a simulacrum. We need to work on it.

Self-Mockery

The subject, when he mimics, normally assumes that the simulacrum is somehow below the par, and hence she should not accept and adopt it. The common method is to pretend adoption, which is a kind of thought experiment. In other words, the subject tries out in her imagination how it feels to possess the simulacrum and then how it influences her. If she does not want the simulacrum, she still may reject it, deny it, or invent an alternative counter-image. In this way, one fights the threatening uniformities when one adopts too many simulacra from too many targets. We may also rebel against some simulacra and that is bound to produces something new. What about emulacra? When a complex subject makes a good copy of a simple thing, he never has a reason to adopt it. Think about a mathematician explaining a simple geometrical problem to pupils; he has no possible reason to even consider adopting his emulacrum. He does not need it.

Finally, let us consider desires, of which Girard says, we copy them from others. As I said, the problem is, mimesis does not entail acceptance and adoption. What we see are, in others, the simulacra of our own adopted desires, according to the principle of universal mimesis. In the same way, we know that such simulacra loom large in the mirror I hold ready to be considered, accepted, and adopted by others. All this presents a grave danger because uncritical, blind acceptance leads to a reduced set of desires and impoverished culture where the action alternatives get scarcer. Another danger is that we adopt simulacra that are mocking us. A schematic illustration: The target considers a mocking simulacrum that represents him, as produced by a subject, and for some obscure reason accepts and adopts it, and in this way becomes a mocking parody of himself. The principle of universal mimesis tells us that this must happen, when I mimic what I see in the other, even if it is mocking me. [16] Every target is at the same time a subject and some subjects mimic the strangest things. Unintentional self-mocking is not rare. Some people are living parodies of themselves – some hate it, some play with it.

A real-world example illustrates this. [17] Think of the fashion world and the people who follow suit dressing how they are expected to dress, or how they think they are expected to appear. This world is all about desire and its realization in action that follows the norms everyone knows exist but no one can explicate or enforce. This is the world of universal mimesis where subjects copy each other, where everyone simultaneously is a target and subject. But this world is at the same time stratified: some targets are more important than others and they aim at the attention and acceptance of the best subjects, yet everyone is a target, however minor. What is nebulous can at the same time be stratified, the idea is that all borders are fuzzy and all control is tentative and camouflaged behind something they call good taste and class, or if this does not sound attractive, at least one

wants to be trendy and cool. Many people refuse to be part of it but only the select few can avoid it altogether.

Now, a subject mimics something like a target he does not quite identify or comprehend, this is a fuzzy target, sometimes a person but mostly an image – created in one's imagination – of what is fashionable, or good taste and classy just now. She works hard to create the right image and realize it in action, others adopt it just like that, and some do it unconsciously relying on subliminal cues. Of course, professional pushers recommend particular fictional targets as if they were authoritative and even mandatory, but their influence blends in with the cacophony of voices heard from all kinds of sources. What should an individual subject do when he wants to look classy and trendy? Certainly, he simulates his ideal targets, but he also may emulate in the sense of dressing down.

All of this is risky business to an individual subject. She is supposed to mimic something that she cannot know in any definite sense. She is supposed to understand the meaning of small differences between targets in contexts where big differences do not exist. Whatever she does, she mimics targets as models that she can handle in various creative ways – normally this is simulation: the subject is less complex than the models, which look infinitely varied, unstable, and complex. The subject is a person when the target is a set of artificial images in constant flux. What is the simulacrum here? It is the subject's appearance as fashionable and trendy, in which role she becomes an aspect of another target. Certainly, such a simulacrum can mock the subject, although one cannot find any agent who would be responsible for this. The subject does it to himself; this is a kind of self-immolation whose effects sting especially hard when the subject does not realize what is going on – perhaps there is a touch of dramatic irony here. His appearance is all wrong, as the audience knows, but he does not realize it. We all know what this is: the subject mimics something that is not at all suitable for him and thus makes himself look like a mongrel in disguise.

In the world of universal mimesis, we are unable to identify a subject who mocks the target by means of an insulting simulacrum. In this brave new world, one considers a set of imaginary targets that one simulates, thus creating a simulacrum for other subjects to imagine. They may consider and even adopt it, which entails the original subject's success. The effects may be neutral, but the subject also may create a self-mocking lacrum that puts him into a shameful social position. [18]

References

AAiraksinen, T., 2020. Irony and Sarcasm in Ethical Perspective. *Open Philosophy* 3 (1): 358-368, https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2020-0132.

Airaksinen, T., 1995. *The Philosophy of the Marquis de Sade*. London: Routledge.

Bataille, G., 2001. *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. Tr. Mary Dalwood. San Francisco: City Lights.

Bataille, G., 1986. *Visions of Excess*. Tr. A Stoekl. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Biris, I., 2012. Religious Violence and the Logic of Weak Thinking: Between R. Girard and G. Vattimo. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 11: 171-189.

Booth, W. C., 2004. *A Rhetoric of Irony*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bryant, G., 2011. *Verbal Irony in the Wild*. Pragmatics and Cognition 19: 291-309.

Clifton, W. S., 2016. A Notorious Example of Failed Mindreading: Dramatic Irony and the Moral and Epistemic Value of Art. *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 50: 73-90, https://doi.org/10.5406/jaesteduc.50.3.0073.

Czachesz, I., 2014. *The Grotesque Body in Early Christian Discourse*. London: Routledge.

Dillon, R. S., 2011. Self-forgiveness and Self-respect. *Ethics* 112: 53-83, https://doi.org/10.1086/339140.

Donskis, L., 2003. *Forms of Hatred*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Dynel, M., 2008. No Aggression, Only Teasing: The Pragmatics of Teasing and Banter. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics* 4/2: 241-261, https://doi.org/10.2478/v10016-008-0001-7.

Galeotti, A. E., 2008. *Tolerations as Recognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gandesha, S., 1998. Nietzsche and the Self-mockery of Reason. *European Legacy* 3: 96-108, https://doi.org/10.1080/10848779808579902.

Garmendia, J., 2010. Irony is Critical. *Pragmatics and Cognition* 18: 397-421.

Girard, R., 1999. Violence in Biblical Narrative. *Philosophy and Literature* 23: 387-392, https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.1999.0038.

Girard, R., 1961. *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. Tr. Y. Freccero. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Goffman, E., 1986. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Goldie, P., 2007. Dramatic Irony, Narrative, and the External Perspective." *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 60: 69-84, https://doi.org/10.1017/s1358246100009619.

Hurley, S. L., 2008. The Shared Circuits Model. How Control, Mirroring, and Simulation Can Enable Imitation and Mind Reading. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 31: 1-22, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0140525x07003123.

Keestra, M., 2008. Diverging Force of Imitation. Integrating Cognitive Science and Hermeneutics. *Review of General Psychology* 12: 127-136, https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.12.2.127.

Kirwan, M., 2005. *Discovering Girard*. Lanham: Cowley.

Kotsko, B., 1994. *Fuzzy Thinking*. London: Flamingo.

La Mettrie, Julien Offray de*, 1747. L'homme machine*.

Livingston, P., 1992. *Models of Desire: Rene Girard and the Psychology of Mimesis.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

McKenna, A. J., 1992. *Violence and Difference: Girard, Derrida, and Deconstruction*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

McNeill, D., Freiberger, P., 1994. *Fuzzy Logic*. New York: Touchstone.

Melberg, A., 1995. *Theories of Mimesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mount, F., 2019. Nasty, Brutish, and Great. *New York Review of Books*. LXVI: 10.

Popa-Wyatt, M., 2019. Embedding Irony and the Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction. *Inquiry* 62: 674-699, https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174x.2018.1446048.

Popa-Wyatt, M., 2014. Pretense and Echo: Towards an Integrated Account of Verbal Irony. *International Review of Pragmatics* 6: 127–168, https://doi.org/10.1163/18773109-00601007.

Riera, G., 2006. *Intrigues: From Being to the Other*. Fordham University Press.

Schwartz, H., 2000. *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likeness, Unreasonable Facsimiles*. New York: Zone Books.

Tabacaru, S., 2017. When Language Bites. *Pragmatics and Cognition* 24: 186-211.

Valentini, A., 2018. Ambivalence of the Notion of Mimesis: Between the Opening Towards the Other and the Repetition of the Same. *Aisthesis. Pratiche, Linguaggi E Saperi Dell'Estetico* 11: 93-205.

Walton, K., 2015. Meiosis, Hyperbole, Irony. *Philosophical Studies* 174: 105-120, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-015-0546-6..

Notes

1 Wayne Booth (2004: ix) writes: "There is no agreement among critics what irony is, and many would hold to the romantic claim [...] that its very spirit and value are violated by the effort to be clear about it." Cf. Walton 2017. I argue that sarcasm is different from irony, the terms are not synonyms, or it is not true that sarcasm is biting irony; see Tabacaru (2017: 186): "the definitions have often been loose and confusing, integrating it [sarcasm] into the concept of irony." Also, mockery may, falsely, count as a type of irony.

2 This is W. Churchill in India 1897 killing rebellious peasants on horseback.

3 Originally without irony, Julien Offray de La Mettrie in his *L'homme machine* (1747), and ironically by M. de Sade; see Airaksinen, 1995: 33.

4 See Bryant 2011; Popa-Wyatt 2014; Popa-Wyatt 2019. Airaksinen (2020). 5 "I am joy before death." Bataille 1986: 238. Also, Bataille 2001. 6 *Webster Dictionary*: The act of mocking, deriding, and exposing to contempt, by mimicry, by insincere imitation, or by a false show of earnestness; a counterfeit appearance. Mockery is simply imitation gone awry.

5 "I am joy before death." Bataille 1986: 238. Also, Bataille 2001.

6 Webster Dictionary: The act of mocking, deriding, and exposing to contempt, by mimicry, by insincere imitation, or by a false show of earnestness; a counterfeit appearance. Mockery is simply imitation gone awry.

7 Concerning psychologically damaging effects of mocking, Dillon 2001 This is also dramatic irony, Clifton 2016; Peter Goldie 2007.

8 Power relations are essential, see Galeotti 2008.

9 The truth here depends on fuzzy thinking: "X is small" and "X is not that big" are both true at the same time because they define partially overlapping fuzzy sets. See Kotsko 1994; McNeill, Freiberger 1994.

10 The dictionary meaning of emulation refers to desire and endeavor to equal or excel others. This is a process notion. In systems theory we encounter a result or success notion: the creation of an existing, complete copy of its target, or a replacement. Hence, the stipulation that, to achieve the goal, the emulating agent must be more complex and capable than the target. However, as the result is a copy, some of its features must identify it as such, this logically entails a difference (Melberg 1995: 1). I utilize a special notion of

emulation that is derived from systems theory and computational science. An emulator performs the same functions as its target; in other worlds it creates an emulacrum that can replace the object. I apply this idea to the special case where the emulator is more complex than its object. This makes sense especially when we discuss the success notion, less so in the case of process notion. A simple actor may try to emulate the more complex one but with lesser success than a complex one. The latter may expect full success. The simpler actor only creates a simulacrum, or a model.

11 Desire for Girard is a three place relation: Subject – Mediator/Target – Object; see Kirwan 2005: 21, 26. I (subject) want pink suit (object) because John has one (target). I imitate John. Also Livingston 1992; McKenna 1992.

12 See Donskis (2003: 21, 24, 240 ff.) on self-contempt, self-hatred, and self-victimization. He does not recognize metaphors; cf. *odium peccati .op. cit.:* 3).

13 For example, Girard 1999. See Biris 2012.

14 Mind reading is the key term (Hurley 2008).

15 Cf. Valentini 2018. Mimesis as a connecting point between opposites (Melberg 1995: 1) is a crypto-ironic notion.

16 Systematic differences of emulation and simulation play a role here – an untraceable problem.

17 Everything is a copy without an original. Every target I copy already is a copy (Schwartz 2000).

18 Cf. Gandesha 1998.