The varieties of verbal irony: a new neo-Gricean taxonomy

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Abstract

This paper has two interconnected goals – one defensive and fairly conservative, the other more novel and enterprising. The first goal is to defend a broadly Gricean approach to verbal irony from the post-Gricean criticisms which have emerged in the intervening literature – i.e., all things considered, verbal irony is best viewed as one among many species of particularized conversational implicature. The subsequent goal is to work toward developing a significantly original theory of verbal irony, within this Gricean orientation, which aims to take into account and rectify some omissions in and shortcomings of Grice's very brief published remarks on the topic.

In section one I take up the two related tasks of giving an overview of some pertinent background history, and honing a working target when it comes to the question: What exactly is verbal irony? Section two then engages with what I take to be the most significant criticisms of Grice's approach, from the post-Gricean literature. Finally, section three develops the contours of a positive account, charting an original neo-Gricean taxonomy of the varieties of verbal irony.
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Verbal irony has long been distinguished and discussed, alongside other sub-varieties of non-literal communication (such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, hyperbole, meiosis, idioms, etc.) – for example, Cicero and Quintillian both discuss the notion.[1] However, serious theoretical engagement with the mechanics and psycho-linguistics of verbal irony – what exactly it is, and how exactly it works – is a much more recent phenomenon, which only became possible at a certain stage in the sophistication of the pertinent overlapping sub-fields within linguistics, psychology, and philosophy. Specifically, Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature is epochal, on this matter as on related others pertaining to the semantics/pragmatics interface – so much so that the subsequent contenders are explicitly self-styled as "post-Gricean" theories of irony. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that every treatment of irony written since its publication cites Grice (1975) in its opening paragraph, and contains a section detailing its relation to Grice's work.[2]

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[1] Cicero, 55 BCE "De Oratore" (Bk. II: *passim*); Quintillian, 95 CE "Institutio Oratoria" (Bk. IX: Chpt.1,3). Although Aristotle wades into irony at times, his discussions are focused on non-verbal varieties of irony. (For example, Gooch (1987) argues that the notion of 'Socratic irony' is first distinguished at section 4.7 of the "Nicomachean Ethics".) Verbal irony is a kind of trope or figure of speech, a distinctive sort of deliberate misdirection for communicative effect. Someone engaged in Socratic irony, or dramatic irony, or etc., need not be employing verbal irony (though they could be).

[2] From the 22 papers collected in Gibbs and Colston, ed. (2006) <u>Irony in Language and Thought: A Cognitive Science Reader</u>, the index cites 37 references to Grice, many of which are multiple pages in length.

This paper has two interconnected goals – one defensive, the other more enterprising. (Although neither of these goals is completely original, there is plenty of significant pioneering work done along the way.) The first goal is to defend a broadly Gricean approach to verbal irony from the post-Gricean criticisms which have emerged in the intervening literature – i.e., all things considered, verbal irony is best viewed as one among many species of particularized conversational implicature. The subsequent goal is to work toward developing a comprehensive theory of verbal irony, within this Gricean orientation, which aims to take into account and rectify some omissions in and shortcomings of Grice's very brief published remarks on the topic. (Despite its massive influence, the Grice-irony-corpus is pretty much exhausted by one paragraph at (1975: 34) plus three paragraphs at (1978: 53–4).[3]) Rather than abandoning Grice's framework and going post-Gricean, I work to support the case that a neo-Gricean approach, which tweaks certain features of the framework to accommodate some significant challenges, affords the most satisfactory and comprehensive theory of verbal irony.

In section one, I take up the two related tasks of giving an overview of some pertinent background history, and honing a working target when it comes to: What exactly is verbal irony? Section two then engages with what I take to be the most significant criticisms of Grice's approach, from the post-Gricean literature. Finally, section three continues the development of a positive account, charting a neo-Gricean taxonomy of the varieties of verbal irony.

Among the many works on which I build, the two predecessors who are closest in spirit are Dynel (2013) and Garmendia (2015), and the two other chief, primary influences are Camp (2012) and Kapogianni (2016a). In general, I put innovations from the latter two to the service of the kind of project spearheaded by the former two. Many of the points which make up section two occur, scattered and piecemeal, in the extant literature; and so, to some extent, the originality of my contribution consists in the unique way in which I integrate them. When it comes to section three, though, no one has yet viewed the terrain through this particular kind of comprehensive neo-Gricean lens.

Before turning to that business, I should enter a framing, orienting note on methodology: This work falls within 'the cognitive science of language', by which I mean to designate the loosely overlapping sub-fields within linguistics, psychology, and philosophy (first and foremost, among other disciplines) which I draw on and engage with here. From experimental results in the laboratory, to refined conceptual distinctions drawn by armchair philosophers, this interdisciplinary endeavor spans a lot of different styles of inquiry and argumentation. Conceptual and empirical strains of inquiry into the nature and workings of language are mutualistic, and the best of work in each of the sub-fields is influenced by and has influence on work in the others. (After all, that is the *raison d'être* for cognitive science in the first place.) But this multi-modal conversation does bring with it some significant challenges. For example, good research in philosophy could be impartially judged to be bad research in linguistics, and vice versa, depending on the operative tools and schemas of assessment.

Like Grice, I come at this subject matter from the philosophy of language. It is the conceptual questions which most interest me, and which determine my methods and arguments. What follows is relatively programmatic, high-level theory; it is conceptual analysis of the place of 'verbal irony' within a compelling comprehensive account of our communicative exchanges. It aims to engage with, and aspires to influence, empirical work on verbal irony; but in its conception, methodology, and execution, it comes from the philosophy of language arm of the cognitive science of language.

So consider, for instance, the controversy within the linguistics literature over the "simple" and "limited data" on which work on irony tends to focus (cf. Dynel (2017: 6–8) for discussion; the quoted material above and below comes from there). As a philosopher, it is the conceptual issues which chosen examples isolate and illustrate that matter, not whether they reach any quantitative benchmark for significance or representativeness. So, not only is "... recycling examples from paper to paper" completely fine, it is also permissible to just make up your own.[4] Accordingly, like Dynel and most of the others whose work I discuss, I rely on "manual selection of examples premised on proposed definitional components of irony". (Dynel (2017: 7–8) discusses drawbacks to the alternative methodologies for "compiling ironic data".) However, when it comes to the many "recycled" cases discussed below, I do not give a thorough literature review, encompassing what all others have said, and supporting with detailed, case-specific argument anywhere my stance differs from predecessors. (That would turn the following into a dissertation, as lots of these examples have been previously discussed in several published papers.) In what follows, a comprehensive overview of the theory takes precedence over detailed engagement with all of the preceding literature on commonly discussed examples.

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[3] Grice also uses the term 'irony' at (1968: 120) to describe a use of 'Palmer gave Nicklaus quite a beating' to mean "that Palmer vanquished Nicklaus with some ease". As I will use the term, this is not verbal irony but rather an idiomatic variety of non-literality. Note though that the idiom could be used ironically, in the more precise sense developed below – say, in a context in which it was Nicklaus who vanquished Palmer, to deride someone who had expressed the opinion that Palmer would be the victor.

[4] Even further, the unique genius of some of the most important philosophers of language consists in part in their skilfulness in crafting an enthralling example – I'm thinking here of Wittgenstein and Kripke.

1. What is verbal irony?

1.1. Toward a working target

Verbal irony is a linguistically embodied phenomenon marked by deliberate misdirection for communicative effect. It is a certain kind of non-literal communication, a familiar sort of way in which the speaker's intention is to communicate something distinct from the literal meaning of the expression uttered. The most commonly-cited example may be the case of saying, in the midst of an unexpected, unwanted downpour:

[1] What lovely weather.

Grice's (1975: 34) example has a speaker uttering, in a context in which it is mutually known that X has betrayed the speaker:

[2] X is a fine friend.

Following a usage with some currency in the literature (e.g., Partington, 2007), I will use the term *dictum* to designate what ironic speakers are "making as if to say" or "purporting to put forward", and *implicatum* to designate what they are really "trying to get across". (The quoted material is borrowed from Grice (1975: 34), though he does not exactly so-apply the terms 'dictum'/ 'implicatum'.[5])

The dictum/implicatum relation is quite straightforward in the above-cited classic cases (e.g., *dictum*: what lovely weather; *implicatum*: this weather is awful), but it gets much more complex after certain post-Gricean developments. For example, consider an ironically-used idiom (cf. note 3) or metaphor (e.g., Stern's (2000: 236) example of saying 'What delicate lacework' of remarkably messy handwriting), in which case there is an intermediate step between literal meaning and ironic implicatum – i.e., it is a non-literal interpretation which gets 'ironized'. By section three, I will be in a position to distinguish several different sub-varieties of verbal irony, each with its own (more or less specific) kind of dictum/ implicatum relation.

At this point, still much remains open, when it comes to an exact definition of verbal irony. There just simply is not any one precise standard definition commonly employed across the literature; in fact, Knox (1961: Chpt. 2) distinguishes ten different senses of "this protean word" (though several of them overlap). Not surprisingly, then, one finds significant diversity when it comes to, say: How exactly does irony relate to sarcasm, satire, or sardonicism? 'Irony' vs. 'sarcasm' is perhaps the chief case in point here – Giora (1998: 1), Attardo (2001: 795), Camp (2012: note 1) all discuss diversity of usage as to the relations between these terms. Some use them as synonyms, others take sarcasm to be the more general phenomenon, and still others take irony to be the more general phenomenon.[6]

And so Gibbs and Colston (2006: 3) muse about the "very wide range of loosely related phenomena" to which the term 'irony' has been applied; in context, Walton (2017: 116) may well be wise to explicitly reject the desideratum of trying to "line up with anyone's pre-theoretic, intuitive conception of irony". Not so for present purposes, though. I need a working target, as precise as is practically possible, and which captures at least a critical, significant range of the phenomena to which the term has been traditionally applied.

1.2. Classic verbal irony

There is one relatively specific conception of verbal irony which can be found in works from Cicero to Grice, and which I will call 'classic verbal irony' (CVI). While CVI does have the virtue of precision, its chief problem is that ever since Sperber and Wilson (1981) first press what I will call the 'problem of range' (to be discussed in depth below), it is virtually unanimously held that CVI is too narrow a conception – i.e., there are things which should be classified as verbal irony but

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[5] Typically, verbal irony is marked in tone or stress – one pronounces the expressions differently than if one was speaking literally. (For recent discussion and analysis of the 'ironic tone of voice', cf. e.g., Mauchand et al., 2018). This is by no means essential, though – witness the wry 'deadpan' acquaintance, whose utterances necessitate a double-take. ('Wait a second … was that *serious*?') Nor is any such specific tone sufficient evidence of irony – cf., e.g., Camp (2012: note 4) on the "… evidence that this tone is simply an instantiation of a more general expression of negative emotion". Ironic tones are common, conventional clues which speakers use to signal verbal irony, but they are neither necessary nor sufficient for speaking ironically.

[6] Cf. Dynel (2016a) for a very thorough account of the state of the literature on 'irony' vs. 'sarcasm'. Among other things, she discusses dialectical variation and change over time, with respect to both terms.

which are definitely not CVI. The enduring taxonomic challenge, then, is to come up with a robust, broad yet precise, conception of verbal irony.

CVI takes *meaning-inversion* to be the distinctive mark of verbal irony, the *sine qua non* which distinguishes irony from the other non-literal varietals. When speaking ironically, the speaker's intention is to communicate (more or less exactly) the opposite of what the words uttered literally mean. (Grice (1975: 34) uses the term "contradictory"; cf. Sperber and Wilson (1992: 56), Giora (1998: 1–2) for citation of various adherents to this traditional definition of verbal irony as the trope in which the figurative meaning is the opposite of the literal meaning.) Grice (1978: 54) also discusses a second necessary condition of *derogation*, without which a case of meaning-inversion "will be playful, not ironical". (His putative example of non-ironic meaning-inversion involves saying "*What a scoundrel you are!*" when I am in fact "well disposed toward you".) This is not a major break from tradition on Grice's part, but rather an articulation of the observation that negative evaluation seems to be a constant component of the CVI cases. CVI, then, is the variety of non-literal communication marked by (i) meaning-inversion plus (ii) derogation. [1] and [2] above are paradigm cases.

The approach to be developed herein retains related but broader versions of both these classic components (i) and (ii). Some of the ground to be charted before I can describe that in much detail includes the 'problem of range' in Section 1.4 (i.e., the kinds of case, widely discussed in the post-Gricean literature, which are arguably verbal irony though definitely not CVI), as well as further discussion of the relations between irony, sarcasm, and literal meaning, in Section 1.5. Next up though is more background context on what Grice adds to the debates about verbal irony.

1.3. What is a neo-Gricean approach to verbal irony?

The monumental development which Grice (1975) adds to this traditional conception of verbal irony is its integration into his more general theory of conversational implicature, for that theory, I take it, is one of the most important developments ever made in the philosophy of language, with marked impact across the cognitive sciences. Herein lies why Grice's remarks on irony, while so brief, are yet so massively influential. (I labor this a little bit – running a risk of fawning – because it is a major component of the overall argument in favor of a neo-Gricean approach to irony.) Within the philosophy of language, it changes the rules for what theses about meaning entail, or what they are entailed by.[7] It affords a wide-ranging explanation of a broad range of disparate phenomena, thereby undermining considerably the motivation to posit a whole gamut of varieties of figurative meanings, referential meanings, metaphorical meanings, and pragmatic meanings in general. As for impact of work done within the philosophy of language across the sprawling cross-disciplinary study of language, Grice's theory of conversational implicature is peerless.

Grice's (1975) treats irony (e.g., [2]) as an instance of a more general sub-category of particularized conversational implicature, which also includes metaphor [3], hyperbole [4], and meiosis [5]:

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[2] X is a fine friend.
[3] Juliet is the sun.
[4] I've already been to London a thousand times this year.
[5] He was a little intoxicated. (said of someone known to have exercised massively
　　flawed judgement while completely drunk)

All these cases, according to Grice, involve flouting the first maxim of Quality ("Do not say what you believe to be false"). In conjunction with the (always defeasible) over-riding presumption that the speaker is being co-operative, that triggers a Gricean derivation of an implicature. (*What is the proposition Q, distinct from but related to the one P which the speaker "purports to put forward", that the speaker is really "trying to get across"?*) Again, for Grice, irony is distinguished from these other Quality-implicatures by the two features of (i) meaning-inversion (which none of metaphor, hyperbole, or meiosis exactly instance) plus (ii) derogation (which any of the others could but need not instance).

By 'neo-Gricean' I mean to designate a range of views which hold that there is something deeply right about Grice's conceptual geography of implicatures, and so afford a central theoretical place to its attendant factorization of what is communicated with an utterance (in context) into the two channels of compositionally determined semantic competence (*What does the expression uttered mean*?) and general purpose, sense-making, pragmatic reasoning (*Why did the*

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speaker utter that expression in that context?). Illustrative examples of neo-Griceans, in this sense, include Horn (2004); Kaplan (2004); Bach (2006); Camp (2012). There is plenty of room for disputes over details, within the neo-Gricean tent.[8]

A main goal of this paper is to contribute toward the case that, all things considered, verbal irony is best viewed as one among many species of particularized conversational implicature. (Much of the post-Gricean work will turn out to be (more or less insightful, accurate) accounts of smaller parts within this bigger picture.) What we have here, in my view, is the familiar theoretical virtue of reflective equilibrium: a large measure of the beauty and power of Grice's factorization is its general applicability to a vast, broad range of cases, which fosters a presumption in favour of such an account of verbal irony; in turn, the compelling account of the target phenomenon which results reinforces the grounds in favour of that general neo-Gricean presumption.

Hence the target: a conception of irony which is broader than CVI though still theoretically significant that has a natural place within Grice's theory of implicature.

1.4. The problem of range (i.e., putative varieties of non-CVI verbal irony)

The problem of range is the first, and in many ways most basic and seminal, of the post-Gricean criticisms. In general, those are the focus of section two; but for the present purpose of honing a working definition of 'verbal irony', it is necessary to wade some distance into the issue at this stage. There are at least three (not exclusive but overlapping) alleged varieties of non-CVI verbal irony (and hence *prima facie* problems for a Gricean approach): (a) irony without meaning-inversion, (b) irony without flouting Quality, and (c) irony without derogation. All three allegations appear in Sperber and Wilson (1981), the first post-Gricean work on irony; as we will see, all have been further probed in subsequent literature.

(a) irony without meaning-inversion: Sperber and Wilson (1981: 300) invite us to compare an utterance of [1] with utterances like [6]-[8] in the same context (in which the interlocutors are surprised by a drastic downpour):

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[1] What lovely weather.
[6] It seems to be raining.
[7] So glad we didn't bring an umbrella.
[8] Oh no! We forgot to water the lawn!

The idea is that these cases instance verbal irony (i.e., the relevant kind of linguistically embodied deliberate misdirection for communicative effect) but yet there is nothing quite like meaning-inversion at work. Other putative examples of non-meaning-inversion irony include:

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[9] I love children who keep their rooms clean.
   (said by a parent upon entering a teenager's disastrous room)
[10] You sure know a lot. (said to a boorish show-off)
[11] I think a good solution to the problem of child poverty is for rich folks to purchase,
   kill, and eat poor children. This would have several benefits . . .

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[9] is first discussed by Gibbs and O'Brien (1991), and [10] by Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995). [11] is derived from Swift's (1729) "Modest Proposal", the most famous example of satire in English literature – Wilson (2006: section 5) calls this variety of verbal irony "impersonation irony".

There is a definite and familiar kind of non-literality at work in cases [6]–[11], which arguably should be classified as verbal irony; but none of them exactly instance meaning-inversion. Relatedly, note well that, with a look ahead to section three, all of [6]–[11] involve much more complex, nuanced dictum/implicatum relations than the relatively simple, straightforward cases like [1] or [2].

(b) irony without flouting Quality: There are, arguably, cases of verbal irony in which the speakers are not "saying what [they] believe to be false". (Dynel (2017) and others aptly call this sort of case "verisimilar irony".) Again, these categories (a), (b), and (c) overlap; and so, for example, [9] and [10] just discussed are also putative instances of this present category

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[8] So, for example, commitment to a neo-Gricean orientation does not preclude disagreements over the exact treatment of conventional implicature, domain restriction, deferred interpretations, etc. However, the neo-Gricean tent is not so large that it covers everyone. In particular, the centrality of Grice's factorization has been challenged by relevance theorists, semantic contextualists, semantic relativists, and others. Non-neo-Griceans deny that semantics and pragmatics are discretely separable, and so allege that Grice's factorization is an untenable relic from a bygone era.

(b) – i.e., in addition to being an (a)-case, in that the ironic speaker of [9] or [10] does not intend meaning-inversion, ironic speakers of [9] or [10] also need not be disavowing a dictum which they purport to espouse, in which case we would also and thereby have a (b)-case of irony without flouting Quality.

As Sperber and Wilson (1981: 302, 309, 313) press the point, this (b)-category is starkly, distinctively instanced by any case in which an ironic speaker purports to do anything other than make an assertion (i.e., what Garmendia (2018: 28) calls ''non-declarative irony''); for, strictly speaking, only in making an assertion could speakers ''say what [they] believe to be false''. So, consider then the following 'ironic questions':

[12] Why don't you take your time washing the dishes?
  (asked of someone who is taking an unreasonably long time with the task)
[13] Could I possibly entice you to eat just one more small piece of pizza?
  (asked of someone who has rudely devoured almost the whole pie)

[12] is first discussed by Gibbs and O'Brien (1991), and [13] by Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995). If these should be counted as verbal irony, and if flouting the first maxim of Quality is both essential to Gricean-irony and possible only when purporting to make an assertion, then QED – this is a glaring problem of range.

(c) irony without derogation: if [6]–[8] count as ironic, then we already have an instance of this third category of non-CVI irony under consideration, given that they could be purely playful, non-derogatory jokes. In work spanning over decades, Sperber and Wilson insist that examples abound of what they call ''positive irony'' (i.e., verbal irony that does not derogate), and that this too poses a big problem for Grice. A relatively pristine candidate is [15] below, from Sperber and Wilson (1981: 312; 2012: 127). The setup goes: just as [14] could be said ironically of a ballerina who trips and falls on her face, [15] could be said ironically of a ballerina who delivers a flawless, other-worldly performance:

[14] How graceful.
[15] How clumsy.

On their view, the cases are parallel when it comes to the question whether this is verbal irony; the speaker of [15] is obviously not derogating anyone; ergo, again, QED – another stark counterexample to Grice's approach to irony. (I note again that these categories overlap – more or less any case of (a)- or (b)-type irony could also be (c)-type, positive, playful irony.)

Now, on the one hand, a lot of subsequent literature follows Sperber and Wilson on this question, and countenances non-derogatory irony.[9] On the other hand, though, Sperber and Wilson's enduring insistence that positive irony constitutes a counterexample to Grice is an outrage. *Faux*-insults to graceful ballerinas could no more provide a counterexample to Grice than does his own (above-cited (1978: 54)) case of purporting to call someone you like a 'scoundrel'. This would amount to a different terminological choice, not the discovery of data which disproves his theory.[10]

Which all goes to show how important this preliminary work is, toward nailing down a working target – i.e., What exactly is verbal irony?

1.5. Irony, sarcasm, meaning

I will next distinguish how I will use the terms 'irony' and 'sarcasm'. (While this is partly stipulative, some such stipulations are theoretically essential, and I aim to build the case that these ones will more than earn their keep.) There is massive overlap between these two terms, on my usage – most typical instances of either will be an instance of both (as are, say, [1]–[2] above). Nonetheless, they are not concepts of the same rank, and there is on my view both non-ironic sarcasm and non-sarcastic irony.

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[9] Cf., e.g., Dews et al. (1995); Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995); Gibbs (2000); Camp (2012); Green (2017). The point is not unanimous, though – cf. Garmendia (2015: section 2.3; 2018: Chpt.5), Dynel (2018) for arguments against the notion of positive irony.

[10] For the record, my orientation on this question lines up with the authors cited in the first sentence of note 9 – i.e., I hold that most though not all verbal irony is negative (derogatory, critical, complaining). And so, unlike Grice, I count his (1978: 54) 'scoundrel' case as ironic (even if it is purely playful). As I understand it, this divergence from the Garmendia/Dynel position cited in note 9 is more terminological than substantive. My stipulative terminological choices will be more deeply grounded immediately below in section 1.4, when I distinguish how I will use the term 'irony' (an operation on meaning) from 'sarcasm' (a sub-type of speech act). This also relates to understanding the 'normative bias' of verbal irony – i.e., Why is it that there more negative than positive verbal irony? On my view, the explanation lies not in the nature of irony itself (considered as an operation on meaning) but rather in psychological and socio-linguistic questions, along the lines of: Why speak ironically? (cf. note 13)

Following Kapogianni (2016a), I take verbal irony to be a kind (or kinds) of operation on meaning. First and foremost, to speak ironically is to instance a familiar sort of deliberate non-literality.[11] I take all putative exemplars discussed so far ([1]–[2] and [6]–[15]) to be instances of verbal irony, in this sense. Hence, while meaning-inversion is one paradigm example of an ironic operation, it marks off a proper sub-set within the broader kind – i.e., there are non-meaning-inversion instances of the ironic operation. One hard theoretical challenge is to give a cohesive definition of this broader ironic operation. (If irony turns out to be a disunified motley, or to apply to any non-literal usage, then its theoretical integrity could be questioned.)

Sarcasm, in contrast, applies to a sub-category of speech acts which are marked by a certain con-attitude. A sarcastic speaker is engaged in a scornful (rude, bitter) jibe or complaint. There are different accounts of the nature of sarcasm (cf. Camp (2012); Taylor (2015) for examples, and Dynel (2016a: Section 3) for an overview of recent sarcasm literature), but they all agree that negative evaluation, of some degree or form, is an essential feature.

Given that, I countenance non-ironic sarcasm (as do Attardo (2001: 795), Kapogianni (2016a: 16), and others). Attardo's example has a professor writing 'Nice cover! F' on a really awful essay which does in fact have a nice cover. My favored example of non-ironic sarcasm is when skater-teens use 'Fail!' as a comment when a rival messes up on an attempted trick. Such cases are not ironic in that 'Nice cover!' and 'Fail!' are meant quite literally. However, they are sarcastic.[12]

In addition to non-ironic sarcasm, there is also plenty of non-sarcastic irony – such as the following already discussed:

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[8] Oh no! We forgot to water the lawn!
[15] How clumsy.

These cases may be seen to instance (different sub-varieties of) the relevant operation on literal meaning, but need not be even remotely sarcastic. Even further, I count the following as cases that could be ironic but not sarcastic – that depends on whether the speaker intends a harmless, playful joke or a negative complaint or insult:

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[7] So glad we didn't bring an umbrella.
[12] Why don't you take your time washing the dishes?

So: similar to the way in which meaning-inversion is on my view one paradigm case of verbal irony, which does not exhaust the species, sarcasm is in my view one paradigmatic answer to the question: Why would one speak ironically?, which does not exhaust the range of answers. Some other illustrative (neither exclusive nor exhaustive) answers to that question include: for humorous effect, for otherwise artful poetic effect, or just for sheer idle amusement. (One could speak ironically to oneself, alone.)[13]

So, once we distinguish irony from sarcasm, along the above lines, irony can be positive or negative in valence, but sarcasm is essentially derogatory. The extent to which this is a departure from Grice will be limited below when I detail how, nonetheless, an evaluative component is essential to verbal irony. On my view, though verbal irony need not derogate, it does always involve a move in the expressive dimension.

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[11] Although she does not employ the notion of 'operation on meaning', the core idea comes across loud and clear in the following passage from Garmendia (2018: 120): ''When a speaker is ironic, the literal meaning of her utterance is discordant with the belief she intends to communicate . . . . We will always find that clash in an ironic utterance. We will find it in the examples introduced by [Griceans, echoic mention theorists, or pretense theorists] because every time we say that a speaker makes as if to say something she believes to be false, or echoes something that she attributes to someone else . . ., or pretends to say something without saying it, we are already accepting that a clash between contents underlies the utterance. There are indeed no cases in which the speaker flouts the maxim of Quality, echoes an attributed thought, or pretends to say something in which we will not find a clash between what the speaker intends to communicate and what she appears to be putting forward.'' (Linking back to note 10, note that all of that is compatible with irony that is positive or playful – it applies in equal measure to [14] and [15].)

[12] 'Like'-prefixed sarcasm (e.g., *Like* she'd ever go out with you') is another variety of non-ironic sarcasm (given that in this case meaning-inversion is lexically encoded, a part of the meaning of 'like') – cf. Camp (2012: section 4.4) for extensive discussion. I also count 'manner sarcasm' as a variety of non-ironic sarcasm (e.g., Camp's (2012: 596) 'Would you mind very much if I were to ask you to please consider cleaning up your room?', or Grice's (1975: 37) 'Ms. X produced a series of sounds that corresponded closely with the score of ''Home Sweet Home''.') Given that pure manner sarcasm involves nothing non-literal, it is on my view non-ironic. (In lots of cases, though, manner sarcasm can be impure (i.e., mixed with a variety of verbal irony), as in: 'Would you mind very much if I asked you to consider cleaning up your room *sometime this decade*?')

[13] In a classic study, Dews et al. (1995) distinguish, and provide quantitative data pertaining to, four different rationales for speaking ironically: humour, status elevation, aggression, and emotional control. Sarcasm could (but need not) be co-instanced with any of those four. Garmendia (2018) contains some more up to date, insightful discussions of some of the conventional ''clues of irony'' (Chpt. 6), as well as irony's common co-occurrents (negative evaluation, Chpt. 5; sarcasm and humor, Chpt. 7).

1.6. Summary

   To take verbal irony to be an operation on meaning, then, has many theoretical virtues. It accords remarkably well with the various loosely overlapping usages of the term 'irony' on the market; so much so that it is plausible to hold that it is a central component shared by all of them. It broadens the range of the conception of 'irony' beyond CVI, to also encompass at least some of the post-Gricean range-challenges. It affords a crisp response to the criticism of Grice concerning the notion of 'positive irony'. And it helps to explain the conceptual overlap of verbal irony with sarcasm (again, on my usage these concepts overlap considerably), as well as some other related terms. (Consider 'satire', for example – verbal irony in this sense is a key instrument in the satirists' toolkit; further, to the extent that some degree of pretense is necessary for both irony and satire, this would also help to explain their overlap.)

   Henceforth, then: Verbal irony, in general, involves a kind of operation on meaning (meaning-inversion being but one paradigm case thereof). *What is irony?* is not the same question as *Why would one speak ironically?* (though the two are obviously related). 'To be sarcastic' is but one paradigmatic answer, among several, to that latter question.

   What, then, are the post-Gricean criticisms of Grice's incorporation of verbal irony into the theory of conversational implicature? Can a Gricean orientation be adjusted and refined to accommodate them?

2. Post-gricean criticisms and neo-gricean refinements

   I begin Section 2.1 with a discussion of what I take to be the main criticisms of Grice on irony, from the post-Gricean literature. Next, in Section 2.2, I turn to tweaks to certain features of Grice's framework which are in order, to accommodate some of the substance of these criticisms, within what is still a neo-Gricean orientation. That will put us on good footing for charting a neo-Gricean taxonomy of verbal irony in section three.

2.1. The post-Gricean criticisms

   In one form or other, all the major post-Gricean criticisms date back to Sperber and Wilson (1981), and have been developed in their subsequent work on the 'echoic mention' theory of irony – Sperber and Wilson (1992; 1998; 2012). Alongside echoic mention, the 'pretense' theories constitute the other most influential post-Gricean account of verbal irony – Clark and Gerig (1984) is an early classic; other significant variations on the 'irony is pretense' theme include Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995); Recanati (2004: Chpt. 5), Currie (2006). Other important conceptions of the essence of verbal irony include 'indirect negation' (Giora, 1995), 'relevant inappropriateness' (Attardo, 2001), and 'evaluation reversal' (Partington, 2007). More recently, Green (2017) argues that an 'expressivist' theory is a better alternative than any of those others; and Garmendia (2018) defends a 'minimalist' theory which, though grounded in Korta and Perry's (2011) 'critical pragmatics', still ''could be considered neo-Gricean'' (2018: 33).

   These are what I take to be the main criticisms of Grice on irony:

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post-Gricean criticisms:
(PC1) problems of range: Grice only captures a small subset of verbal irony
(PC2) failure of sufficiency: even if everything Grice says about irony is necessary, it falls far short of sufficient to identify let alone explain irony
(PC3) refutation by empirical studies: Grice's account has empirical entailments which have been shown to be false by subsequent experimental work
(PC4) mechanical problems: irony does not fit well within Grice's general theory of conversational implicature
(PC5) motivational failure: Grice offers no explanation as to why anyone would choose to speak ironically

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Given what has already been said above in Section 1.4, **(PC1) problems of range** need no further introduction here. In general, I concede this challenge, and am in search of a theory incorporating shades of irony beyond meaning-inversion or Quality-flouting, as well as irony which is non-derogatory or positive in valence.

   As for **(PC2) failures of sufficiency**, an upfront statement of the challenge is: Why isn't every case of flouting the first maxim of Quality (i.e., any case of saying something believed to be false) ironic? (This line of objection is even more sweepingly put in Sperber and Wilson (1981: 309), where they press that Grice's account is neither necessary nor sufficient for irony. It is not necessary because irony can occur in questions (in which, they say, it is not possible to flout the first maxim of Quality); it is not sufficient because of liars, story-tellers, etc.) And the suspicion is that, to the extent to which

one articulates further conditions – to distinguish the ironic speakers from liars, story-tellers, etc. – the Gricean derivation of a conversational implicature is going to fade into the background as a small and incomplete piece of the puzzle.

In general, I also concede (PC2); the remainder of the paper is largely dedicated to detailing further conditions to distinguish verbal irony from various nearby, related phenomena. Hence, I take both (PC1–2) to point to important refinements of Grice's approach to irony. Not so, though, for (PC3-5), which I will argue stem from uncharitable misreadings of Grice, or failures to appreciate the nuanced conceptual geography underlying Grice's theory of implicature.

To **(PC3) refutation by empirical studies**, then: the late 1980s and 1990s saw a spate of studies dedicated to establishing whether there is a significant difference between the time it takes to interpret literal communication and the time it takes to interpret verbal irony. Some early cases seemed to find that irony does not in fact take longer to process (cf., e.g., Gibbs (1986); Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989), Gibbs and O'Brien (1991)). In turn, some took this to constitute evidence against Grice's account of irony, and in favour of a more streamlined account of irony interpretation (such as the echoic mention account), which avoids appeal to anything like a Gricean derivation from a dictum to an implicatum. (Cf., e.g., Gibbs and O'Brien (1991) for a clear case in point, and Sperber and Wilson (2012) for its enduring prevalence.)

As for **(PC4) mechanical problems**: here the issue is how well or ill Grice's account of irony fits within his over-arching theory of conversational implicature. (Sperber and Wilson (1981) press this issue, and it remains a major part of Wilson's (2006) statement of the case against Grice.) The allegation goes that Grice's general picture is that "a speaker's meaning typically consists of what is said, together with any implicatures" (2006: 1725). However, for this general picture to apply to irony, "Grice [would have] to both extend his notion of implicature and his account of how implicatures are derived" (2006: 1725). For an ironic speaker (in CVI cases like [1], [2]) does not *say* anything (in the relevant sense), but only implicates something. Further, implicatures generally are derived either to restore the presumption that the speaker is being co-operative, or else to explain why a maxim was violated (in the case of a clash). But this cannot save or apply to CVI cases, because the implicature contradicts what is said. How could attributing a contradiction to the speaker save the presumption of co-operativeness?

Finally then to **(PC5) motivational failure**: it is commonly alleged by developers of the echoic mention and pretense theories that a key benefit of their theory is that they do something which Grice fails to do, which is provide a rationale for speaking ironically. (Wilson (2006: Section 1) also gives a fairly recent example of this charge.) The allegation is that Grice is no better than the traditional 'trope' view in offering no explanation whatsoever for why a co-operative speaker would decide to utter a falsehood to communicate something else, which could just as well have been literally expressed. In contrast, both echoic mention and pretense theories, for example, are premised on clearly identifiable rationales for speaking ironically.

The job of developing refinements to Grice's approach, in response to problems (PC1–2), is already underway, and will be continued throughout. The next order of business is to argue that problems (PC3-4) should be dismissed.[14] As for (PC5), I concede a version of it, but one which turns out to be decidedly *anti*-post-Gricean. That is, Grice was quite right not to offer a specific rationale for speaking ironically – contra post-Gricean accounts which are premised on one – because there is, in general, no one specific rationale for speaking ironically. The reasons, inclinations, proclivities, etc., which one might have for speaking ironically are numerous and varied.

Back to the (**PC3**) **refutation by empirical studies** challenge, then: one problem with this line of thought is that the key premise that irony does not take longer to process has not been consistently supported. For example, Shwoebel et al. (2000) found that, to the contrary, irony does take longer to process; Balconi (2010: 103) gives a summary of inconsistent, conflicting results on the question. Another problem is that, even if we were to concede that key premise, still the inference from a lack of temporal differences between irony and the literal to a problem for Grice is not at all straightforward. For example, both Giora (1995: 249-56) and Reimer (2013: 9–19) independently give Gricean-friendly interpretation of this body of data anyway. (They both point to some serious problems with the experimental designs.)

In any case, in my view the bigger problem is with the underlying assumption that Grice's (1975) account is committed to irony taking longer to process than literal communication. To the contrary, Grice's project is conceptual, not empirical. He is not offering a psychological account of the processes which occur when an implicature is processed, but rather an account of the logical organization of the different channels of information-flow involved in linguistic communication (cf. Bach (2006): points 2, 5)). Within Grice's project, the semantic content of the dictum is essential to any implicature – i.e., the implicatum cannot be characterized without taking the dictum into account. (This holds true across the broad spectrum of conversational implicatures, from manner implicatures, to implicating a desire for one's guests to leave soon by uttering "It's getting late", right on through to the varieties of irony.) However, that conceptual dependence between the dictum and

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[14] In addition to work by Dynel and Garmendia, other work on which I will build in countering these charges includes Giora (1995); Bach (2006); and Reimer (2013).

implicatum does not entail any specific psycho-linguistic or temporal claims. As such, it is simply not subject to refutation by real-time processing results.

In short: this line of objection depends on holding Grice to the view that in ironic cases what hearers actually always do is: **[step 1, at t_1]** first interpret the utterance literally, then **[step 2, at t_2]** decide whether or not that works out, and if it doesn't then **[step 3, at t_3]** try to identify a plausible non-literal interpretation. However, Grice absolutely and unequivocally never makes any such claim. Furthermore, everything Grice does claim is compatible with the hearer recognizing that the speaker is being ironical (or metaphorical, or otherwise non-literal) well prior to the completion of the utterance. (In some contexts, you might even have a good hunch as to forthcoming misdirection before the speaker utters a sound!)

Hence, first, Grice's approach is compatible with all manner of different hypotheses as to temporal processing. Second, going forward, I hold that implicature accounts of irony have not been refuted by empirical data.

What about (**PC4**) **mechanical problems**? In my view, this line of objection is premised on an inflexible misreading of Grice. Note, first of all, that right from the start Grice (1975: 34) explicitly talks of "making as if to say", as opposed to "say", in cases of irony. That is a distinctive feature of verbal irony, the factor which motivates the compelling idea that pretense is essence of irony. This objection seems to miss that, or deny it, and insist that an ironic speaker – like any garden variety conversational implicator – is saying one thing P and implicating some other thing Q. But this is not so, and it is not Grice's view. That verbal irony is a kind of conversational implicature is compatible with it being a distinctive specimen of the genre, unusual in this critical respect.

The mechanical objection takes what is true of certain paradigm cases of conversational implicature to be exceptionless law, whereas Grice's approach to the semantics-pragmatics interface has much more leniency and fluidity built into it. Conversational implicatures comprise a diverse variety of sorts, which exhibit a high degree of openness-of-texture and indeterminacy (1975: 39–40). Among this spectrum, the precise balance between speaker-meaning, what is said, and what is implicated will vary (1978: 41). I take this fluidity to be a large part of the beauty of Grice's factorization – herein, precisely, lies its generality, its broad applicability to such diverse phenomena – as opposed to an easy source of counter-examples to it.

Relatedly, while Grice is consistent in his usage of this locution 'what is said', the diverse range of ways in which others use the expression can render it sub-optimal. One issue is that the common locution 'said that' is notoriously ambiguous. And so, for example, concerning one who is speaking ironically in uttering 'X is a fine friend', there are senses of 'said' in which the speaker did say that X is a fine friend, and senses of 'said' in which the speaker did not. I am not alleging that Sperber &/or Wilson, or anyone else, merely falls prey to such an equivocation.[15] Rather, one pertinent benefit of the 'dictum'/'implicatum' terminology is that it can be more easily applied across a range of cases. While it may seem to be a problem for Grice that an ironic speaker does not say anything (in a pertinent sense of 'say'), they clearly express a dictum, toward the end of getting across a related but distinct implicatum.

So, the alleged mechanical problem is substantially mitigated by Grice's own explicit statements that, first, ironic speakers "*make as if* to say", or "*purport to* put forward", a dictum (1975: 34), and second, that the precise balance between speaker-meaning, what is said, and what is implicated will vary, across the broad spectrum of conversational implicatures (1978: 41). If the dictum contradicts the implicatum, that makes it an instance of the meaning-inversion variety of irony, which the CVI cases [1]-[2] typify. In such cases, one of the factors (i.e., the semantic content of the dictum) has a null effect on the overall product which is communicated (though it clearly plays an indispensable conceptual role in the characterization of the implicatum). This is no more troubling than that a literal speaker might not implicate anything, consistently with Grice's factorization. Hence, this sort of mechanical consideration does not refute a suitably nuanced and flexible Gricean approach to irony.

Lastly, then to (**PC5**) **motivational failure**: What, then, of the rationale for irony? Well, given the weight of these ongoing considerations, this too counts for a Gricean view, and against the more specific post-Gricean views which are premised on one univocal rationale for speaking ironically. Given the diversity of the species, irony has no one homogenous rationale. (And so the cases which the 'echoic' and 'pretense' theories take as paradigmatic will be retained in my view as proper sub-species of irony.[16]) Again, Dews et al. (1995) tailor their classic experimental design with a view to four different rationales for speaking ironically – humour, status elevation, aggression, and emotional control – and they make no claim whatsoever that these four exhaust the options. Sometimes irony is pure poetic play, for no end other than itself.

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[15] Cf. Wilson's (2006: 1725-6) subsequent discussion of whether Grice's 'say' amounts to merely expressing, or, more demandingly, to "asserting a proposition, with its commitment to truth".

[16] Garmendia (2015: section 4.1) gives a convincing case that echo, far from being the essence of irony, is rather "a consequence of irony's basic features". The status of echoic mention is very much akin to the status of the ironic tone of voice (cf. note 5 above) – i.e., echo is commonly employed to signal ironic intention.

So, I concede that Grice (1975) does not identify or explain the rationale for irony. However, I hold that, on this front too, a refined development of Grice's orientation is on the whole preferable to any of these more specific and limited post-Gricean views.

2.2. The neo-Gricean refinements

Next, to detail some of the key ways in which this present account will tweak, expand on, or depart from Grice's very brief remarks on the irony-as-implicature approach:

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neo-Gricean refinements:
(NR1) from 'meaning-inversion' to the more general **meaning-replacement**
(NR2) from 'making as if to say' to the **full range of speech acts**
(NR3) from 'Quality' to also include **Quantity** and **Relation**
(NR4) irony may be exhibited in significantly **different ways,** or at **distinct levels**
(NR5) from 'derogation' to the expressive dimension

I will discuss each of these in turn; each will be further fleshed in via the neo-Gricean taxonomy of verbal irony sketched in section three.

First to **(NR1)**, then, "**meaning-replacement**" is Kapogianni's (2016a: 17; 2018: 8) more general term to cover a broader range of ironic operations on literal meaning, including but not limited to meaning-inversion.[17] Meaning-replacement is explicitly tailored to subsume several of the distinct varieties of incongruity, misdirection, etc., already illustrated above (e.g. verisimilar irony ([9]-[10]), impersonation irony ([11]), non-declarative irony ([12]-13]), etc.). One of the main goals of section three is to distinguish some sub-varieties of ironic meaning-replacement. (All these other neo-Gricean refinements are also crucial toward that end.)

As for **(NR2)**, the move to the **full range of speech acts**, this step was first explored by Haverkate (1990) and subsequently developed by Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995). It is another, more fecund, direction in which to turn from the Sperber and Wilson (1981: 309) charge that verbal irony cannot be instanced in non-declarative speech acts (in which there can be no straightforward Quality flouting – i.e., no saying of something believed to be false). The move is to say that, analogous to the way in which ironic-asserters riff on the first maxim of Quality, there are various other non-declarative ironic speech acts which riff on the applicable sincerity or felicity conditions. And thus we have a natural place in our view for ironic questions, commands, offers, compliments, etc. In general, the ironic operation may be manifest in any speech act that is (more or less loosely) governed by (irony-amenable) norms.

(NR3), the move from **Quality-irony** to holding that irony may result from violations of **other kinds of maxims**, has been considered before by several others (including at least Haverkate (1990); Colston (2000); Attardo (2001); Livnat (2011)). While I hold that most verbal irony is of the **Quality-irony** variety, I also countenance sub-species of **Quantity-irony** and **Relation-irony**. (There is no Manner-irony in my view for reasons discussed in Section 1.4 above (cf. especially note 12) – i.e., there is no non-literality at work in a pure Manner case, and hence they do not instance the ironic operation.[18]) Accordingly, the taxonomy developed in section three will incorporate the move from viewing irony as exclusively Quality-implicature (i.e., purporting to express something false/ insincere/ infelicitous when one is really trying to get something distinct across) to also admitting Quantity-implicature and Relation-implicature varieties of irony (i.e., purporting, or making as if, to express something not conversationally appropriate or pertinent, to get across something else which is related to the dictum in a way that is available to the hearer).

I take meiosis-type, wry understatement cases to provide illustrative examples of **Quantity-irony**:

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[5] He was a little intoxicated.
[6] It seems to be raining.
[16] Theresa May is not exactly the most charismatic person in the world.

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[17] At places (e.g., (2018: 9)), Kapogianni distinguishes meaning-replacement cases from meaning-reversal cases, but for present purposes I will stick to one general notion of 'replacement'. Kapogianni's (2016a: 17) explicit, proximate motivation for moving from meaning-inversion to some such more general notion is to incorporate Partington's (2007) work on evaluation reversal (i.e., cases of verbal irony in which it is not so much the operative meaning, but rather an agent's evaluation of the situation at issue, which gets operated on). The need for this move is also starkly illustrated by cases from Camp (2012: section 2) and others wherein irony targets not just semantic content *per se* but also implicatures. (More on this in section three.)

[18] Hence I disagree with Attardo's (2001: 799) classifying the above-discussed Grice (1975: 37) case of the catty review of Ms. X' rendition of "Home Sweet Home" as Manner-irony. While I agree that this is a Manner implicature, on my view it counts as non-ironic sarcasm.

(Haverkate (1990) and Colston (2000) both explore a similar move.) **Relation-irony** is the most open-textured sort, and so the most open to artful, poetic effect. In such cases, irrelevant dicta are put forward, for diverse, amorphous communicative effect. An example from Attardo (2001: 808) has one farmer say to another, during an anxious conversation about the ongoing perilously drought-stricken August:

[17] Don't you just love a nice spring rain?

Another candidate for Relation-irony (also discussed by Attardo (2001) and others) comes from Katz and Fodor (1963: 181):

[18] This is the happiest night of my life! (said during an unpleasant afternoon)

More detail to follow in section three, about Quantity- and Relation-irony.

The key progenitor for **(NR4)**, that irony may be exhibited in significantly **different ways**, or at **distinct levels**, is Camp's (2012) work on sub-varieties of sarcasm. (Given the huge overlap between irony and sarcasm, a lot of her work on sarcasm will carry straight over to this work on irony; even further, on Camp's (2012) usage, sarcasm is an especially sharp and biting sub-category of verbal irony.) Below, I follow Camp in distinguishing four different levels or foci of verbal irony (each of which might occur in Quality, Quantity, or Relation-irony): **[a] sub-propositional, [b] propositional, [c] illocutionary,** and **[d] implicature-targeting**.

To whet the appetite just a bit, for now: while typical CVI cases (such as [1] and [2]) are **[b] propositional**, the following is an example of **[a] sub-propositional** verbal irony:

[19] We managed to get there just before closing time, but the *helpful* staff had
   already locked the doors.

Here the irony is limited to the italicized bit; the rest of the expressions are used quite literally. Standard 'pretense' cases instance **[c] illocutionary** irony, such as:

[13] Could I possibly entice you to just eat one more small piece of pizza?

The ironic misdirection in such cases applies at the level of the speech act, not at the level of word- or sentence-meaning. Finally, an ironically-used metaphor (e.g., Stern's (2000: 236) 'What delicate lacework', discussed in Section 1.1 above) might provide an illustrative example of **[d] implicature-targeting** irony. Here, as distinct from [a], [b], and [c], we have a distinctive step of identifying a non-literal interpretation, then subjecting it to an ironic operation.

Lastly, then, **(NR5)** from 'just derogation' to **the expressive dimension**. Following Kaplan (2004) and Potts (2005, 2007), I distinguish descriptive from expressive dimensions of meaning along the following lines:

[20] I have to look after Sheila's damn dog while she is away.
   (descriptive) I am obligated to care for Sheila's dog
   (expressive) I am negatively inclined to this situation
[21] That bastard Kaplan got promoted.
   (descriptive) Kaplan got promoted
   (expressive) I hate that guy

To be sure, these are uncommonly easy examples for proponents of a descriptive/expressive factorization – in general, it is often not so clear how to separate out these components of content, and there are lots of messy borderline cases. (The burgeoning literature on pejoratives provides ample evidence – cf. Sullivan (2017: section 2) for discussion and references.)

Still though: first, there are fairly clear paradigm cases in which we can isolate these distinct components, and second, irony generally involves a move in the expressive dimension, not just the descriptive. The kinds of things that irony is amenable to communicate are akin to Potts' and Kaplan's (expressives), not descriptive matters of fact. (Note that while I rely on Potts' work to explain this point, his 'expressive meaning' is a bandwidth within the *semantic* channel, whereas what I am talking about, in the case of ironic implicatures, is the *pragmatic* implication of content that is (at least partly) expressive (as opposed to purely descriptive).) It is attitudes about presumed facts, not depictions of presumed facts, which get communicated by ironic operations on meaning. Hence my qualified agreement with Grice's (1978: 54)

'derogation' restriction – i.e., it is not that irony is necessarily hostile or negative, but rather that it always involves a move in the expressive dimension.[19]

To sum up: I began this section with the five main post-Gricean criticisms of Grice's approach to verbal irony:

(PC1) problems of range
(PC2) failure of sufficiency
(PC3) refutation by empirical studies
(PC4) mechanical problems
(PC5) motivational failure

I argue that **PC3-5** pose no serious problems for a suitably nuanced neo-Gricean view; but I concede **PC1-2**, and take them to point to important refinements. Next came the following five neo-Gricean refinements:

(NR1) from 'meaning-inversion' to the more general **meaning-replacement**
(NR2) from 'making as if to say' to the **full range of speech acts**
(NR3) from 'Quality' to also include **Quantity** and **Relation**
(NR4) irony may be exhibited in significantly **different ways,** or at **distinct levels**
(NR5) from 'derogation' to **the expressive dimension**

These are one and all directions of range-extension, beyond the CVI cases, which will help toward filling in gaps of sufficiency. On the whole, they may be seen as a clear step beyond Grice, while nonetheless still amounting to a recognizably Gricean account of the varieties of verbal irony.

3. A taxonomy of the varieties of verbal irony

In the course of elaborating the refinements to Grice's brief remarks on irony (in Section 2.2), I have already (implicitly) drawn the following twelve-cell taxonomic grid, by committing to three sorts of ironic implicature, each of which might be manifest at four different levels:

	[I] Quality-irony	**[II] Quantity-irony**	**[III] Relation-irony**
[a] sub-propositional			
[b] propositional			
[c] illocutionary			
[d] implicature-targeting			

Tasks which are prerequisite to jumping into a tour of the flora and fauna which populate these cells include specifying a general definition of verbal irony, which takes on board the lessons learned so far and aims to attain an optimal balance between precision and generality. Another is to consider some qualifications to the very idea of trying to apply that kind of taxonomentric grid to something as protean as verbal irony.

3.1. A definition and some qualifications

Once we broaden our target beyond CVI, multiple dimensions will emerge along which cases of verbal irony differ; and so a comprehensive account of irony will have to be general, fluid, dynamic. I will start from a definition which owes much to Kapogianni (2016a: 17; 2018: 7), among other sources. Verbal irony is a species within the genus of particularized conversational implicature, marked by the following individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions:

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[19] Cf. Garmendia's (2018: 89) case in favour of the claim that ''all theories of irony agree that an attitude is expressed when being ironic''. Green's (2017) expressivist theory is also (not surprisingly) in strong agreement with this expressivist point.

1) **incongruity** between the dictum (what the ironic speaker purports to put forward) and the implicatum (what they are really trying to get across)
2) **pretense**: the speaker purports, or makes as-if, to express the dictum[20]
3) the relation between dictum and implicatum involves **replacement** along a normative or evaluative scale
4) the implicatum includes a move in the **expressive** dimension, not (just) the descriptive

All putative cases so far discussed ([1]-[2] and [6]-[19]) instance these four features – though, they may be instanced in different ways. In particular, and as will be illustrated in detail below, **(3) replacement** differs fairly markedly in its concrete integuments, across the species, from subtle and nuanced to blatant and over-the-top. (The operative normative or evaluative scale is discussed by Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995); Partington (2007); Camp (2012); Kapogianni (2016b); Dynel (2017), and will be illustrated in the discussion of individual cases below.) And there is surely a wide range of scale – from the mild to the extreme – when it comes to what gets communicated along **(4)** the **expressive** dimension.

As to ways in which I depart from Kapogianni's (2016a: 17; 2018: 7) similar lists of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for verbal irony: for starters, neither (2) pretense nor (4) expressivity is explicitly an element of her account. Another difference is that she includes the condition of 'background contrast'. Now, there is surely something to this – cf., e.g., Sperber and Wilson (1998); Attardo (2001); Dynel (2016b) for some good discussions of the ways in which ironic speakers rely on and exploit a clash between dictum and context – but at the same time I find it somewhat vacuous. For: what could possibly be a contrast-free context of utterance? Any context includes a multiplicity of potential background contrasts, lurking in wait for the ironic speaker.

Moving on to the requisite qualifications pertaining to the taxonometric table: there is bound to be a lot of fluidity and openness of texture, when it comes to taxonomizing verbal irony. On this front, some pertinent points from Grice's corpus have already come up above – such as the (1975: 39–40) point that one of the common features of conversational implicatures in general is a "kind of indeterminacy", and the (1978: 41) point that, even further, among the broad range of implicatures, the precise balance between speaker-meaning, what is said, and what is implicated may vary considerably. If irony is a kind of implicature, then we should expect there to be considerable indeterminacy, and the sub-varieties of irony might differ significantly along multiple dimensions. (Some might involve an easily identifiable and relatively determinate implicatum (e.g., the CVI cases [1]-[2]), others decidedly less so (e.g., verisimilar irony cases ([9]-[10]) or Relation-irony cases ([17]-[18].)[21]

This point about indeterminacy and amorphousness is crucial, when it comes to requisite qualifications pertaining to the taxonometric table. Consider, for example, Camp's (2012: section 4) discussions of the difficulty of dividing the [a] sub-propositional from the [b] propositional cases, when it comes to dividing up the distinct levels at which sarcasm may be manifest. The [b] propositional/ [c] illocutionary boundary is sure to be even more complex. Shades of grey ubiquitously pervade the seas of language, at the semantics/pragmatics interface as thoroughly and deeply as anywhere; and so any discrete table like the one I develop below must be taken with a pinch of salt. (That is of course not to deny that such taxonomic apparatuses may well still have some considerable theoretical usefulness.)

Relatedly, there are plenty of platypuses (i.e., cases which could arguably be put into multiple distinct categories), even once we settle the speaker's communicative intentions in context as precisely as is practically possible (e.g., was that an insult? or just a joke?). To be sure, this also applies to non-ironic implicatures: for example, Grice's (1975: 33) infamous letter of reference could be read as either a Quantity-implicature (as Grice presents it) or as a Relation-implicature (presenting true but irrelevant material). Similarly, below we will see certain cases (such as 'I love children who keep their rooms so clean!', or a use of 'How old are you?' to admonish childish behaviour) plausibly characterized as either a case of illocutionary Quality-irony or as a variety of Relation-irony.

The sub-category of illocutionary Quality-irony is the hardest to put up a good solid fence around: given that pretense is a necessary feature of irony, plus the move to encompass multiple sorts of ironic speech act, it is arguable that more or less any case of irony could be shoe-horned into this sub-category. While not without motivation, though, that would obscure some of the significant distinctions to be charted below.

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[20] It may be thought redundant to distinguish (1) from (2); for when pressed to define 'incongruity' and 'pretense' I am drawn to saying very similar things in both cases (cf. note 11). That worry noted, I leave the two as is. If nothing else, incongruity and pretense apply at different levels (i.e., semantic content vs. illocutionary act), and so are answers to different (though related) questions.

[21] At a bit more length: With the most determinate varieties of irony, it is fairly straightforward to characterize a specific implicatum whose recognition by the hearer is necessary for successful communication (e.g., *dictum*: what lovely weather / *implicatum*: this weather is awful). However, in my view, in lots of cases of irony, there is simply no specific content whose recognition by the hearer is required (e.g., *dictum*: I love children who keep their rooms clean / *implicatum*:?) It seems to me that the latter just implicates definite but vague negative evaluation – likely annoyance, frustration, perhaps anger. (Again, in this respect, irony is no different from lots of other relatively indeterminate implicatures. Something similar might be said of Grice's (1975: 37) Manner-implicature, for example – the catty reviewer merely implicates a vague negative evaluation of Ms. X's performance.)

3.2. The taxonomy

Let us get on with the taxonomy. Not only is the majority of verbal irony Quality-irony, but relatedly, the four distinct levels [a]-[d] are most starkly illustrated in that kind of irony too. So that is where we begin, and where we will do the most thorough job.

[I] Quality-irony: the dictum is not true or not sincere; the implicatum is a replacement of it, along an evident scale. To some extent, vindicating theorists from Cicero to Grice, Quality-irony subsumes the majority of the instances of irony. That extent is limited though, by the rather recently recognized [c] 'illocutionary' and [d] 'implicature' sub-cases – i.e., an important recent development is the recognition of distinct varieties of Quality-irony, distinct levels at which irony operates, distinct things which get replaced to yield the implicatum.

[Ia] Sub-propositional Quality-irony (i.e., lexically focused, or limited to a sub-clause):

[19] We managed to get there just before closing time, but the *helpful* staff had
  already locked the doors.
[22] If Jim is such a *genius*, there is no way he'll pass calculus.
[23] *Poor you*, lounging on the beach sipping daiquiris!

Here the irony is strictly limited to the *italicized* material; the rest of the expressions uttered are used literally. That said, though, (1)-(3) above (incongruity, pretense, replacement along a scale) apply in full force to these sub-propositional elements, and there is a definite overall (4) expressive effect. Further, the particular variety of irony instanced here is along the Quality (truth/sincerity) spectrum. As we will see below, Quantity- and Relation-cases are less amenable to lexical isolation in this sort of way. (Cf. Camp (2012: Section 4.3), Kapogianni (2016a: section 4) for discussions of the challenge these sub-propositional cases may pose for common presumptions about compositionality and meaning.)

[Ib] Propositional Quality-irony: This corner of the map includes the CVI cases. It also includes hyperbole, exaggeration cases (e.g., [4]), all the way up to what Dynel (2013: Section 3.4) and others call "surrealistic irony" (e.g., [24]):

[1] What lovely weather.
[4] I've already been to London a thousand times this year.
[24] Yeah, sure. And I'm the Queen of England.

It is propositional content which is the input to the ironic operation in these cases. In CVI cases, it is straightforwardly reversed; the hyperbole cases involve a slightly more nuanced replacement along a scale; the surrealistic cases involve an indirect operation which targets the content to which it is a response.

[Ic] Illocutionary Quality-irony: These are the cases upon which the pretense theory is built. There need not be a strict flouting of Quality (in the sense of saying something believed to be false), but there is a violation of felicity or sincerity conditions, and the irony depends upon its recognition:

[13] Could I possibly entice you to eat just one more small piece of pizza?

Another common example has a speaker sarcastically calling "Thank you!" at someone who let the door slam shut in their face, rather than holding it open for them. So far these are all non-declarative, but that is not essential. For example, satirical 'impersonation irony' is also of this sub-type, and it can involve 'purporting to say' something:

[11] I think a good solution to the problem of child poverty is for rich folks to purchase,
kill, and eat poor children. This would have several benefits . . .

Further, this type of case is not essentially sarcastic or negative – imagine the boss joking to an employee who everyone knows to be doing a magnificent job:

[25] You really have to start pulling your weight around here.

Again, all of defining features (1)-(4) (incongruity, pretense, replacement, expressiveness), are definite hits for these cases; a harder theoretical problem here is the boundary – i.e., lots of cases which are plausibly put into the various other sub-varieties defined above and below can also be plausibly viewed as illocutionary-Quality irony. (Perhaps this is inevitable, to the extent that some degree of pretense is essential to irony.)

[Id] Implicature-targeting Quality-irony: This is the most recently discovered sub-species in our zoo (cf. Camp (2012: Section 2), Kapogianni (2016a: Section 3.1), Dynel (2016b: Section 3). An ironic speaker may be *making as if to implicate*, as opposed to making as if to say. Let us start from the 'verisimilar' cases, and build from there:

[9] I love children who keep their rooms clean!
[10] You sure know a lot!

Obviously, no meaning inversion needs be involved here, nor need there be any Quality issues pertaining to the dictum. Further, though, it is arguable that these cases can (in context) differ from the illocutionary cases in that the irony is not merely in the pretense of a compliment, but rather the irony operates at the level of what the utterance would typically implicate. So, Camp (2012: 597) says of an utterance of [10] that: ''. . . the speaker's scorn may be directed exclusively at the pretended implicature that this [demonstration of knowledge] is admirable''. Something similar could be said of [9], and Camp, Kapogianni, and Dynel (ibid) all discuss other such cases.

Hence the critical difference between these implicature-targeting cases and cases of non-ironic sarcasm. There is no replacement along a normative scale with 'Fail!', or the catty reviewer of Ms X's performance. (Or even with 'Nice cover. F'' – although there is a whiff of misdirection here, it is rather a matter of straightforward ambivalence at the dictum level, akin to ''I like your kitchen but I hate your house''). There is a scale-replacement with [9] or [10], though it is of a more nuanced sort than, say, hyperbole or CVI cases. Here, distinctively, we have cases of speakers making as if to implicate something, which implicata get subject to an ironic operation.

This sub-species is starkly illustrated by the case of an ironically used metaphor (as discussed above in Section 1.1) – provided that we treat metaphor as involving a kind of implicature. Consider an ironic use of [26], with reference to remarkably messy handwriting:

[26] What delicate lacework.

Here the target of the ironic operation is the metaphorical interpretation; and hence we have another case of implicature-targeting Quality-irony, further down the river from [9] or [10]. Moving further along: an implicature-targeting case from Camp (2012: 597) has the speaker answer, when asked whether visiting in-laws are a bother:

[27] Oh, they only take over the main floor of the house, and never stay for more
   than a year.

The literal meaning could be genuinely asserted, while the irony targets ''only the implicature that such visits are no imposition''. From here, for more or less any case of implicature, it would seem possible to cook up a scenario in which the implicature is subject to an ironic operation. Again, in these cases, we clearly have the features of (1)-(4) (incongruity, pretense, replacement, expressiveness). And, again, the dimension along which the irony operates is more clearly the Quality (truth/sincerity) dimension, as distinct from the following Quantity and Relation cases.

[II] Quantity-irony: the dictum is not exactly false, so far as it goes, and not exactly insincere; hence the misdirection instanced here is not of the Quality variety. Rather, here the distinctive feature concerns the amount of information semantically expressed, relative to salient contextual demands:

[5] He was a little intoxicated.
[6] It seems to be raining.
[16] Theresa May is not exactly the most charismatic person in the world.
[28] I see you might have done this once or twice before.
   (prompted by a flawless display of rare expertise)

Pretense is clearly instanced here, as is a sort of incongruity. Replacement along a normative scale is instanced here in a relatively straightforward way (i.e., the implicatum is a strengthening of the dictum). Finally, there is a decidedly expressive dimension to the overall communicative effect – though (here as elsewhere) there is considerable variance in degree across cases.

So, in Quantity irony, the dictum involves a contextually inappropriate amount of information; the implicatum is an evident alternative quantity, along an identifiable scale.[22] Quantity-irony cases are well-illustrated by wry, sardonic understatement. While it is harder to see that a Quantity case could be purely **[IIa]** sub-propositional as opposed to **[IIb]** propositional – again, cf. Camp (2012: Section 4) on how hard it can be to firmly draw that distinction in any case – still, it is plausible to take the Quantity-irony to specifically operate on just 'a little' in [5] or 'seems to be' in [6]. As for **[IIc]** illocutionary-Quantity cases, consider:

[29] Well, sort of, thank you, I guess, a little bit.
(to someone who just saved your life through superhuman effort)

Assuming that thanks (like apologies, and similar commodities) comes in relative amounts (e.g., I owe you a million thanks / I am really so very very sorry), the above might constitute a situation in which the speaker is deliberately riffing on contextual Quantity expectations to pull off verbal irony. Or, perhaps:

[30] OK, maybe just a wee slice. (to someone giving you the whole pudding)

As for a case of **[IId]** implicature-targeting Quantity irony, it seems clear enough what to look for (i.e., an implicature of an inappropriate amount of information), but, given the indeterminacy of implicatures, difficult to tell whether you have found it.

[III] Relation-irony: This is the most diverse and indeterminate of all of our sub-kinds. Remarks 'apropos of nothing' can carry implicatures which satisfy (1)-(4) above (incongruity, pretense, replacement, expressiveness), though it can be difficult to individuate any specific implicatum. In Relation-irony, the dictum is not necessarily held to be untrue, or infelicitous, and there is not exactly a Quantity issue, but what is expressed is not contextually relevant, and the overall communicative effect depends on recognizing this discrepancy. Candidates already cited include:

[8] Oh no! We forgot to water the lawn!
[9] I love children who keep their rooms clean.
[17] Don't you just love a nice spring rain?
[18] This is the happiest night of my life.

While there is some temptation to say that all Relation-irony cases are **[IIIc]** illocutionary – in that it is more at the level of speech act, as opposed to compositional semantic machinery, that this sort of irony operates – we might distinguish [18] as an instance of **[IIIb]** propositional from [17] as an instance of **[IIIc]** illocutionary Relation-irony (for [18] pretends to assert an irrelevant proposition). Of the defining features, (3) meaning-replacement along an evident normative scale, is at its loosest here, in this amorphous corner of the map. (Consider [17], for example – it may be hard to identify any specific implicatum which the speaker is trying to get across (cf. note 21).) (1) Incongruity, (2) pretense, and (4) expressiveness are all strongly present.

I do not see how **[IIIa]** sub-propositional Relation irony could be identified – for to lexically isolate the relevant kind of misdirection would shade into metaphor or idiom. As for **[IIId]** implicature-targeting Relation-irony: first, akin to the Quantity case, it is easy enough to define what would have to be the case in order to be classified as such (i.e., an implicature of irrelevant information); but, second, unlike the other cases, this would fly in the face of the entire co-operative Gricean endeavor. Given how the pragmatic channel operates, how implicata depend conceptually on dicta, how implicatures have to be available and calculable (in context), etc., irrelevant information is un-implicatable. Thus, there is something oxymoronic about **[IIId]** implicature-targeting Relation-irony.

As for the especially amorphous nature of Relation-irony cases, I have mentioned already that [9] is also cited above as a potential example of implicature-targeting Quality irony. Another Janus-faced case is provided by a sarcastic, admonishing use of the following:

[31] How old are you?

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[22] For discussion of the mechanics of (what I am calling) Quantity-irony, cf. Haverkate (1990); Colston (2000); Partington (2007); Livnat (2011); Neuhaus (2016); Dynel (2016b). Note too that I am following Walton (2017) in positing a significant asymmetry between meiosis (a kind of Quantity-irony) and hyperbole (a kind of propositional Quality-irony), which are usually taken to be parallel cases. Walton explores some surprising differences between saying non-literally, of a situation involving (say) ten police officers, the understatement 'There are a couple of cops out there' and the overstatement 'There are a hundred cops out there'.

It is easy to see this as [Ic] illocutionary Quality-irony, but, equally, it could also be seen as a variety of Relation-irony (i.e., literally interpreted, the question is completely incongruous to the context at hand; the implicatum is received only if the audience recognizes the discrepancy).

Again, Relation-irony is the most open-textured sort, and so the most open to artful, poetic effect. In general, the degree of determinacy exhibited by the ironic implicature, while strongest in the classic CVI cases, is weakest in the cases of [III] Relation-irony. Intermediate shades of grey range from the fairly discrete and tractable [Ia] sub-propositional Quality-irony and relatively determinate [II] Quantity-irony cases, on the one hand, on over to the relatively indeterminate [Id] implicature-targeting and [Ic] illocutionary Quality cases, near the other pole. So, in general, the determinacy-scale looks something like this:

Determinacy → [Ia-b]. . .[IIa-b]. . .[Id]. . .[I-IIc] . . .[III] ← **Indeterminacy**

3.3. Back to the table

So, the twelve-cell matrix drawn above has shrunk to nine cells, as one of those twelve has the property of being virtually unidentifiable, and two others do not seem to be robust possibilities:

	[I] Quality-irony	[II] Quantity-irony	[III] Relation-irony
[a] sub-propositional			**Not possible**: *lexically isolated Relation-irony would shade into metaphor, or idiom*
[b] propositional			
[c] illocutionary			
[d] implicature-targeting		**Unidentifiable**: *implicating an inappropriate amount of information* would be hard to conclusively detect, given the indeterminacy of implicatures	**Not possible**: *implicating irrelevant information* would fly in the face of the whole cooperative Gricean endeavor

Here then are candidate examples of the rest of the sub-types:

	[I] Quality-irony	[II] Quantity-irony	[III] Relation-irony
[a] sub-propositional	[19] We managed to get there just before closing time, but the *helpful* staff had already locked the doors.	[5] He was *a little* intoxicated.	
[b] propositional	[1] What lovely weather.	[28] I see you might have done this before.	[18] This is the happiest night of my life!
[c] illocutionary	[13] Could I possibly entice you to eat just one more small piece of pizza?	[29] Well, sort of, thank you, I guess, a little bit.	[17] Don't you just love a nice spring rain?
[d] implicature-targeting	[27] They only take over the main floor of the house, and never stay for more than a year.		

4. Conclusion

One goal of this paper was to help defend a broadly Gricean, implicature-based approach to verbal irony from the post-Gricean criticisms. A second goal is to refine and further develop the contours of this kind of approach, by charting a compelling, comprehensive neo-Gricean taxonomy of the varieties of verbal irony. I have aimed to bolster the case that, all

things considered, such an approach affords the most satisfactory and comprehensive account of the target phenomenon. Many of the post-Gricean theories of irony (e.g., echoic mention, pretense, evaluation reversal, expressivism), as well as previously-posited sub-categories (e.g., verisimilar irony, impersonation irony, non-declarative irony, surrealistic irony), can be helpfully situated among the sub-species of neo-Gricean verbal irony, which is itself integrated into the wide-ranging theory of conversational implicature.

When Sperber and Wilson (1992: 55) made this observation a quarter of a century ago, it was apt:

> It is curious . . . how little attention has been paid, by linguists, philosophers, and literary theorists, to the nature of verbal irony. . . . [W]hile there are many illuminating discussions of particular literary examples, the nature of verbal irony is generally taken for granted.

To show that the diverse varieties of verbal irony can be successfully integrated into a new-Gricean framework, among the diverse varieties of conversational implicature, is a considerable and significant theoretical achievement, which goes a long way toward rectifying that situation.

Conflict of interest

None.

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