

## George Couvalis

Flinders University

# Telling the truth through lying about lying in Lucian's true stories

### Abstract

Lucian of Samosata's *True Stories* (alethondiegematon) is, in part, a parody of Greek allegorical writing and of Greek allegorical interpretation. The parody works through a bizarre narrative that has been said to be the world's first science fiction story. Before the narrative begins, Lucian announces that he is lying, but is more honest than other liars because he tells you that he is lying. Lucian then plays on various paradoxes without committing himself to a paradoxical content. Using a Gricean account of meaning, which distinguishes between semantic and pragmatic meanings, I explain how Lucian evades paradox while satirising pseudo-profound paradox mongers.

### Introduction

Lucian of Samosata was a Syrian satirist who wrote in Greek in the late second century CE and who satirised many philosophers and historians. The target of his satires was often religion or superstitious belief, including the Christian religion. A number of his satires are directed at philosophical or religious claims to profound knowledge that are wrapped up in incredible stories or obscure texts.

*True Stories* (alethondiegematon) is his most famous work. It was very widely imitated. It inspired *Gulliver's Travels*.<sup>1</sup> Its central portion narrates a voyage in which Lucian does various preposterous things that are described

in very realistic detail. In the narrative, Lucian goes to great lengths to show his credibility. However, it includes depictions of outlandish sex with mysterious vine women, being taken by a typhoon to the moon, a battle between the kings of the moon and the sun, visits to the dead in the isles of the blessed and the wicked, living for months inside a whale, and so on.

Before the narrative, Lucian begins *True Stories* by saying that just as athletes need relaxation, so too those who study texts need relaxation to put them in better trim for future labour. It would be appropriate for them to take up reading that is not just pure amusement, but provides a little food for thought. The present work is something of that sort. They will find it enticing not only because of its novelty and humour and because he tells all sorts of plausible sounding lies, but also because everything in the story parodies (eniktai) old poets, writers and philosophers who wrote much that is monstrous (terastia) and mythological.<sup>2</sup> He would cite them by name, but you will recognise them. Soon after he says:

1) *“On encountering these I did not blame them for their lying, as already it was habitual even for those professing philosophy. What I was stunned by was they could get away with writing nothing true (oukalithes). So, due to my vainglory (kenodoxia), I wanted to leave something behind, lest I alone be left without a portion of the freedom to invent myths (muthologeineleutherias). As I had nothing to tell that was true (I had nothing happen to me worth telling), I turned to lying more honestly (eugnomonesteron) than others. And if (k’an – kai an) I tell the truth, I tell the truth in this one respect: I say that I am lying. If I believe I escape censure, it is by confessing (omologon) that I say nothing (ouden) true. I write of events that I have neither seen, nor had happen to me, nor have learned of from others; they are neither in any way real (mite olosonton) nor are capable of coming to be. You should in no way (mudamos) believe what you encounter.”*

Lucian’s voyage then begins. Commentators agree that various philosophers, historians and travellers are being parodied in the story. Here are some crucial passages that I will discuss later:

2) At one point in his voyage through the clouds, Lucian and his crew sight Cloudcuckooland in the distance. He says that this “made me think of Aristophanes the poet, a wise and truthful man whose writings are

distrusted without reason” (1, 29). (Cloudcuckooland is the city the birds build in the sky in Aristophanes’s *The Birds*).

3) In the course of his voyage, Lucian visits the Isle of the Wicked, on which the wicked are punished for their deeds in life. We are told that the greatest punishments are undergone by those who lied in life, and those who wrote untruths, such as Herodotus. Lucian says “Seeing them, I had good hopes for the future. For I was aware of (sunepistamin) never having told a lie” (2, 31).

4) At the end of the text, Lucian sails to another land. The standard text ends with “What happened in the other land, I shall tell you in succeeding books” (2, 47). This is, of course, a lie. There are no other books.

### Lucian’s Underlying Message

What exactly is Lucian trying to say through *True Stories* - in particular, passage 1?

Georgiadou and Larmour, who wrote the standard commentary in English on *True Stories*, think one of its central aims is to parody the then fashionable allegorical interpretation of texts, particularly by neo-Platonist philosophers.<sup>3</sup> In particular, he is parodying allegorical interpretations of voyage narratives as voyages of the soul.<sup>4</sup> In addition, they think various allegorical myths in Plato are parodied. They distinguish Lucian from other allegorists by saying that:

*“The vital difference is, of course, that allegorists like Porphyry are seeking the “truth” which can be discovered behind or beyond the text’s surface, while, for Lucian, the secondary meanings undermine the validity of allegorical interpretation, through their relentless parody of specific poets, historians and philosophers. The truth to be discovered behind or beyond Lucian’s text is that these authors – far from conveying the truth, allegorically or otherwise – lie”.*

(Georgiadou and Larmour, 1998: 12)

I think they are on the right track. We can all learn a great deal from their very detailed analysis of what is being parodied in various episodes of *True Stories*. However, their remarks about secondary meanings are vague as to how Lucian achieves his aims. They do not tell us what primary meanings

and secondary meanings are. I will try to be more precise. Further, although they point out that Lucian alludes to various paradoxes, they do not explain how exactly he exploits them to make his parody effective. I will try to explain in some detail how he exploits paradoxes.

### Lucian's play on paradoxes

Commentators agree that Lucian plays on paradoxes in passage 1. Which paradoxes is Lucian playing on?

Initially, Lucian is playing on the liar paradox, which was well known in antiquity. Epimenides the Cretan is supposed to have said that Cretans always lie intending what he said to mean that all Cretans always speak falsehoods.<sup>5</sup> This amounts to him having said that everything he says is false. To understand why this is a paradox, consider that a fundamental law of logic in standard logic is that it is impossible for any well-defined indicative sentence to be false and true at the same time. However, "I always lie", meaning "I always speak falsely", must be capable of being both false and true at the same time; for, if it is true, it is false.

Lucian's statement appears to be more straightforwardly paradoxical, for by saying that he is lying he seems to be saying "this sentence is false", which implies that the sentence must be both true and false; for, if the sentence is true it is false, and if it is false, it is true.

At first sight it looks like he is playing only on the liar paradox in passage 1. However, as Georgiadou and Larmour say, Lucian's play also alludes to Socrates's speech in Plato's *Apology* (Georgiadou and Larmour, 1998: 1, 57-58). Socrates there appears to say that unlike others who speak as if they know something, he knows nothing. He also seems to describe himself as superior to them because he knows that he knows nothing (21D).<sup>6</sup> Lucian is describing himself as superior to the other liars because if he escapes censure, it is by confessing that he says nothing true. The scholiast on passage 1 also thinks that Plato is the target of the remark that lying has become habitual even to those who profess philosophy (Georgiadou and Larmour, 1998: 13). The remark seems to refer to the passage in the *Republic* (*Politeia*) in which Socrates recommends that rulers produce a noble (*gennaion*) lie for the benefit of the polis (414b-c) So we can take Lucian to be playing on an apparent paradox in Socrates's speech in *Apology*. If Socrates is saying

"I know that I know nothing" this is paradoxical, because, if I know that I know nothing, then I know something; so the sentence is necessarily false. I may know nothing, but I cannot know that I know nothing. However, Socrates's paradoxically false sentence is a noble falsehood, like Lucian's lies, so it is more honest than other lies.

The remark about honesty leads us to a similar paradox. When Lucian declares himself to be more honest than the other liars because he is telling the reader that he is lying, he apparently cannot be honest because he must be lying when he says it.

Lucian invents what seems to be yet another paradox when he says "you should in no way believe what you encounter". If we follow his advice because we believe him, then we believe something we encounter, namely, his advice. This means that if we follow his advice, we cannot be following his advice.

All of these apparent paradoxes result from self-reference. Not all self-referential statements are paradoxical but it is easy to produce paradoxes through self-reference.

### Strategies for interpreting Lucian

In analysing the text, one strategy seems to be to argue that Lucian is not really prey to any paradox, because, in ordinary language, "I am lying" is scope ambiguous, and Lucian only means it to apply to the voyage narrative. To explain the point: unlike in formal logic, in ordinary language we would not indicate explicitly whether "I am lying" is only intended apply to the narrative or also to itself; that would have to be decided by context, and we can see from the context of the sentence that it is not intended to apply to itself.<sup>7</sup> On this interpretation, Lucian exploits the scope ambiguity to jokingly suggest that he is writing something paradoxical when in fact he is not. This seems to get some purchase if we compare 1 with 3. In 3, Lucian has lied about having visited the isle of the wicked (which he knows does not exist) while saying that he is aware that he has never told a lie. It is his behaviour in narrating what he has done which is inconsistent with his claim. It is what philosophers call a pragmatic self-contradiction, a contradiction between what someone says and what she does. But that is not a paradox. Lucian is just lying in saying he has never told a lie.

Nevertheless, the view that “I am lying” applies only to the narrative is far too simple as an interpretation of Lucian’s intentions. For instance, passage 2 is revealing. Lucian describes Aristophanes as truthful in a passage that talks about Cloudcuckooland as if it is real. But if all the narrative is simply false, then the claim that Aristophanes is truthful must also be simply false. A more plausible way to interpret the passage is that Aristophanes is truthful in the same sense as Lucian; that is, as a satirist. Aristophanes lies in depicting Cloudcuckooland, so that he is not wise and truthful in that way, but he does not lie as a satirist. To produce a more subtle interpretation of the text, we must give up the view that Lucian only intends statements like “I am lying” to apply only to the narrative. As we will see, Lucian can be plausibly interpreted to be applying such statements to themselves, but not in an obviously incoherent way. A fairly precise way to understand how Lucian does this is to use the distinction between the semantic and pragmatic content of people’s utterances. This distinction has been spelt out in some detail by Paul Grice and his followers, the so-called neo-Griceans, in their analysis of conversations (Grice, 1989: 22-116; Huang, 2014: 27-83).<sup>8</sup>

### The Gricean account

According to Griceans, the semantic content of a sentence is constructed out of the conventional semantic meaning of the component words organised according to conventional grammatical rules. The pragmatic meaning of a sentence uttered in context is the meaning the speaker intends to convey, which cannot necessarily be read off from the semantic meanings of her sentences. Grice calls such meanings “conversational implicatures” to distinguish them from the implications that follow strictly from the semantic meaning of a sentence. On the Gricean account, understanding the pragmatic meanings of a speaker, particularly an original speaker who is speaking by using metaphor or analogy, involves theorising about the speaker’s intentions. Grice in particular holds that this is tricky business; though he thinks even highly original speakers implicitly follow some maxims that we use in understanding them. We assume they are implicitly following the maxims even when they appear to violate them when the violation is obvious. Such apparent violations are called “floutings” by Grice (Grice, 1989: 30).<sup>9</sup> I do not want to list the maxims, as most of them are not important here. Instead, I want to provide a sketch of what a full Gricean

analysis might offer. Let me start by explaining the Gricean view through an example:

Suppose you ask me how I am, and I say “up shit creek in a barbed wire canoe without a paddle”. That sentence semantically says that I am up shit creek etc. However, it is clearly false that I am literally in that situation. So, if you are to understand me to be rationally answering the question, you must understand me to be saying something different. Grice puts the maxims into categories such as quality and quantity. A key Gricean maxim I am flouting is the maxim of quality. Grice explains the maxim of quality in the following way: “Under the category of quality falls a supermaxim – “try to make your contribution one that is true” – and two more specific maxims:

- 1) Do not say what you believe to be false
- 2) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence” (Grice, 1989: 27).

As you are to understand me to be flouting, but not rejecting, the maxim of quality, you will infer that I am talking by using a kind of analogy.<sup>10</sup> If I actually were up shit creek etc., I would be in a very bad situation and unable to get out of it. You could then infer that the pragmatic implicature of my utterance is that I am in a very bad situation and I cannot get out of it. That is what I implicate, although the semantic meaning of my utterance by no means implies it.

Of course the above example is a little weak because in the Australian vernacular the sentence now conventionally means being in a very bad situation that you can’t get out of. So perhaps that meaning has now become part of the conventional meaning of the sentence. To fully understand the import of a Gricean analysis, put yourselves in the shoes of someone hearing the first person to produce the sentence. She would have to theorise about what was meant by this bizarre utterance. The original pragmatic implicatures of sentences tend to become conventional though not semantic, meanings, as what was original becomes a cliché.<sup>11</sup>

### How Lucian evades paradoxes

Grice produced his account to explain features of conversations. However, the account is easily adapted to deal with written texts. We can assume that the author of a written text is in a kind of conversation with an audience in which she is following the maxims. Let’s turn to Lucian.

When Lucian says “I am lying” and apparently intends this to refer to itself, what can he mean? Interpreted purely semantically, it seems that his statement must be both true and false, which is incoherent. He is apparently not trying to speak the truth and so apparently violating the maxim of quality. He is also apparently violating the maxim of manner, which tells us to be perspicuous (Grice, 1989: 27). Nevertheless, these apparent violations are so obvious that we can take Lucian to be flouting these maxims. For Grice, this means that we can take him to be implicitly following the maxims. As what Lucian is saying, interpreted only semantically, is false and makes no sense, we need to understand him pragmatically.

It can be true that Lucian is lying in his narrative as well as in saying that he is lying. He is telling deliberate falsehoods. None of the things in the narrative happened to him. He is honest in telling you the truth about this. Of course, if he is lying even in saying that he is lying, then he is also telling the truth in that very statement. He is lying about lying because pragmatically in the narrative he is telling what he thinks is the truth about the obscurantist allegories of philosophers etc. He is telling us that he thinks they lie or fudge the truth. So, bizarrely, it is consistent for Lucian to declare that he is lying through much of *True Stories*. It is only true semantically.<sup>12</sup> It is false pragmatically because he is trying to tell the truth in what he implicates. (Note as well that Lucian doesn’t actually tell you semantically that he is telling the truth in saying that he is lying. He says “And if I tell the truth...” He *may* be telling the truth pragmatically. Then again, this conditional itself might be negated because it is a lie, which would leave room for him to be telling the truth pragmatically about far more than the fact that he is lying).<sup>13</sup>

So Lucian is evading the liar paradox by saying something semantically true but pragmatically false. It is an evasion rather than an outright contradiction since he has not produced something both semantically true and false, which is the point of the paradox. He is, in a way, lying by producing an apparent paradox that pretends to be a real one. The underlying point in producing an apparent paradox may be this: various philosophers talk paradoxically as if they are producing something profound, when it is contradictory nonsense. (Rather like the modern pseudo-profound Derrida). Lucian is, however, producing an apparent paradox that masquerades as a real one to parody these lying philosophers.

Similarly, when Lucian says “You should in no way believe what you encounter”, he means that you should not believe the lying semantic narrative, but the statement also applies to encountering the statement itself, so you should not believe it when it is applied to Lucian’s pragmatic meanings. You can believe his pragmatic meaning that philosophical allegorists talk obscurantist nonsense.

To see the force of Lucian’s critique, we can turn briefly to the neo-Platonist philosophy of Plotinus. On Porphyry’s account, Plotinus’s views are riddled with various paradoxes about the one (to en). For instance, we are told that the one is more fundamental than what exists and explains it. It is beyond being. This means that something that does not exist still somehow explains. We are also told that the one can’t even be said to be “the one” as it is utterly simple, even though Plotinus seems to say an awful lot about it. On Plotinus’s account, the one can only be properly grasped in an indescribable mystical experience (which means that, conveniently, Plotinus doesn’t have to properly explain it or properly answer unsympathetic critics). Of course, Porphyry was writing about Plotinus some time after Lucian, but it is reasonable to think that the obscurantist groundwork had been prepared for Plotinus by his neo-Platonist predecessors.<sup>14</sup>

Let me say a little more about passage 1. In his introduction to *True Stories* Lucian is lying in other ways than the ways I have described. He describes himself as having written the text due his empty/worthless (keno) desire for reputation (doxia), and as telling the truth in only one respect, in saying that he is lying.<sup>15</sup> It is semantically a lie that he is only motivated by vainglory, for pragmatically he shows himself to be motivated by the desire to expose fraudulence of the kind Socrates exposes in some of Plato’s dialogues. He is exposing various liars who produce supposedly profound allegories, or supposedly profound allegoric interpretations of tales that are nothing but tales. He is showing their pretence to expertise to be based on nothing (it is a form of kenodoxia) by telling a tale whose pragmatic meaning is that they are lying in various ways, a tale that is apparently more “authentic”, and more imaginatively constructed, than their favourite tales. So he is indeed lying. That is semantically true. He is also misleading us by suggesting at the outset that we are going to avoid hard tasks and engage in relaxation in order to prepare us for something more serious. He is more serious than many of those who pretend to be serious. So he is also

misleading us about the task he is setting us. Nevertheless, he is an honest liar, or at least a more honest liar than the other liars.<sup>16</sup> As David Hume observed in the eighteenth century, Lucian “though licentious in regard to pleasure, is yet, in other respects, a very moral writer” who “cannot, sometimes, talk of virtue, so much boasted, without betraying symptoms of spleen and irony” (Hume, 1998: 53).

In concluding my comments about passage 1, let me warn the reader that I am not saying that Lucian intends “I am lying” to apply to *all* of *True Stories*. When, before passage 1, he tells us that he is parodying various lying historians, poets and philosophers, that is what he is doing. When he tells us that he is producing something novel and humorous, that is also what he is doing. Part of the point of sketching a Gricean analysis of *True Stories* is to emphasise that we must attribute intentions to Lucian that make best sense of all parts of the text in context. This means that we cannot simply assume that there is a kind of bracket around all of the text to which “I am lying” applies. The point of Gricean pragmatics is to capture what a straightforward logical analysis fails to capture, not to think that pragmatics works in exactly the same way as semantics.

### Interpreting some other passages

What about some of the other passages I cite? There is no contradiction in them, though many of them are obviously lies. In passage 2, Lucian says that he is sailing through the air close to Cloudcuckooland. Now of course, this is a lie, as he is not sailing through the air and there is no such place as Cloudcuckooland. He also describes Aristophanes, the inventor of Cloudcuckooland as wise and truthful. Aristophanes too is semantically a liar and untruthful. He describes preposterous situations. Lucian is lying (semantically) when he says that Aristophanes is wise and truthful. However, I take it that Lucian is pragmatically telling us that Aristophanes is pragmatically wise and truthful. What Aristophanes is getting at through lies about Cloudcuckooland and the like are important truths.<sup>17</sup> (Of course, the force of the “if” in passage 1 seems to mean Lucian might be getting it wrong in passage 2; but then again it may be negated by Lucian indicating that it is a lie).

In passage 3, Lucian is in part sending up Plato’s *Republic* (*Politeia*), for the reference to the Isle of the Wicked is a reference to the myth of Er at the

end of *Republic*. Lucian is, of course, lying in saying that he is aware of never having told a lie; for the whole story of the visit to the Isle of the Wicked is semantically a lie. Is Lucian pragmatically trying to say that he is saying the truth here? Perhaps not. This passage just fits his claim at the beginning that he is more honest than others because he tells you that he is lying. There may be a more subtle point here. Sunepistamin sounds like what Socrates says in the *Apology* about his wisdom in knowing that he knows nothing. He there uses *sunoieda* for his peculiar knowledge. Lucian has recently left Socrates and others behind on the Isle of the Blessed when he arrives at the Isle of the Wicked. Perhaps the pragmatic point is that, like Socrates, he is more honest than Plato because he admits that he is lying, whereas Plato pretends to profound knowledge through the myth of Er.

Passage 4 gives the game away about Plato more clearly. The scholiast on the passage calls it “the biggest lie of all” in the margin (Georgiadou and Larmour, 1998: 232). I take it to be not only a semantic lie, but for it to involve a pragmatic lie as well - which is intended to tell a “deeper” pragmatic truth. Plato ends *Republic* with the myth of Er, which is a trip by Er to the land of the dead, and which is supposed to be revealing of the afterlife of the divine and immortal soul. Lucian, by contrast, ends with a lie in which he implicates that he will tell you something even more profound than Plato (he has already been to the Isle of the Blessed and the Isle of the Wicked and so has outdone Er), but tells you nothing. Nevertheless, he is more truthful than others because he doesn’t tell you a supposedly profound lie. He ends with a lie that implicates at a “deeper” level that perhaps there are no profound religious meanings by showing that he doesn’t know any better than others what the truth is on these matters.

### Conclusion

We have seen that if we understand Lucian in a Gricean manner, he evades some paradoxes. Does he evade paradoxes altogether? Can he still be justly accused of himself using obscurantist allegories to criticise all obscurantist allegories? Is he at least committing a suspect pragmatic self-contradiction? After all, it is often unclear what he is getting at, and, if Georgiadou and Larmour are right, he is often so subtle or obscure that even many readers in his time would have had trouble understanding him.

Further, if Georgiadou and Larmour are right, he sometimes produces deadpan allegorical interpretations of works of art as prefaces to works like *True Stories*; and he does it for the sheer fun of showing he can do better than serious allegorical interpreters (Georgiadou and Larmour, 1995). Is he both offending logic and committing the moral offence of hypocrisy? To deal with this issue, we can ourselves dig up Lucian to accuse him of hypocrisy and crimes against logic, just as Lucian accuses himself elsewhere of having dug up an old dog (palaionkynon), the Cynic philosopher/satirist Menippos “who bites unexpectedly because he grins when he bites” (Lucian, 1921: 147).<sup>18</sup> Logic and Frankness (parrhesiades) will be the prosecution, and Truth will be the judge.<sup>19</sup> Lucian will, as usual, represent himself; illustrating the old adage that a man who represents himself in court has a fool for a counsel. It will start something like this:

Logic appears before the court; Truth presiding. Logic wears no make up, but has a striking natural beauty respectably clothed in axioms and theorems.

Logic: Lucian of Samosata, you are accused of undermining logic by producing a lying allegory attacking all lying allegories. Do you plead guilty?

Lucian: Dear Logic, I have always admired your simple elegance ...

Logic: Stop! No verbiage. We know you consorted with that slut Rhetoric in a sham marriage (Lucian, 1921). You haven't given up her tricks. This is a trial before Truth, with Logic and Frankness prosecuting. Guilty or not guilty?

Lucian: But I was trying to save Philosophy from seductive paradox mongers! A parody is a kind of reductio of their allegorising to absurdity. Very respectable; and not rhetoric!

Logic: “A *kind* of reductio”! Did you, or did you not, commit a paradox? A real paradox, not a pretend one like one of those absurdly elaborate murders we see on crime shows.

Lucian pauses.

Lucian: Guilty and innocent too. A parody takes up what it criticises, but it is implicating that ...

Frankness: A weasel as well as a paradox-monger! You pretend to be producing an unadorned reduction to absurdity, but you wallow in allegory for the sheer fun of it!

The reader can continue the dialogue.

## Notes

- Swanson points out that the title seems to be an oxymoron (Swanson, 1976: 4). Georgiadou and Larmour say that Polybius defines diegema as “history without truth” (Georgiadou and Larmour, 1998: 1). “True fables” might be a more direct translation of the title Lucian intended, though it is too obvious to capture Lucian’s subtlety. (Both Swanson and Georgiadou and Larmour mistakenly quote the title as alethiediegemata, but translate it correctly. This seems to be a typographical error, as the most reliable manuscripts quote the title as alethondiegematōn (Lucian, 1972: 82)).
- Georgiadou and Larmour point out that eniktai is from romainissomai, speak darkly, but that the evidence is that it was often used in the ancient world to mean “parody” (Georgiadou and Larmour, 1998: 5-6, 23, 53).
- It was once common to argue that Lucian was merely producing arcane comic texts that imitated the style and interests of the Greeks of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. However, scholarship has since made it clear that many of Lucian’s targets are fashions and figures of his own time. See particularly Jones, 1986.
- For a brief history of neo-Platonist allegorical readings of Homer, which go back to at least the fourth century BCE, see Lambertson, 1986.
- The most famous reference to Epimenides’s remark is in Paul’s *Pros Titon 1*/Epistle to Titus 1 in the *New Testament* (Paul, 1983: 740). Paul there does not mention Epimenides by name. Epimenides may well have not intended to say anything paradoxical.
- Careful readers of *Apology* will notice that Socrates does not quite say that he knows nothing. Lucian shows that he is aware of two interpretations of Socrates’s speech in *Hermotimus*, 48 (Lucian, 1959). Nevertheless, in *True Stories* he seems to allude only to the inconsistent interpretation, which was often attributed to Socrates from at least the time of Cicero (Fine, 2008).
- This seems to be the strategy in Swanson, 1976.
- I cannot here discuss the debate between neo-Griceans and some of their critics. However, I think the neo-Griceans have adequately replied to their critics; for some details see Chapman, 2009 and Huang, 2014. I do not here want to commit myself to a particular neo-Gricean account.
- For an interesting account of the subtle uses of flouting, see Henry, 1996.
- It is important to understand that Grice does not mean that the inference involved is like an inference in formal logic. The inference Grice thinks we make is like what philosophers of science call an “inference to the best explanation”, which is an informal inductive inference. Someone making such an inference about a flouting is trying to understand an intention by making best sense of what a rational agent might mean pragmatically. Chapman, 2009 makes clear how important intentions are in Grice.
- In Grice’s terms, “I am up shit creek etc.” now conventionally implicates I am in a bad situation that I can’t get out of. That I am in a bad situation etc. is not part of the semantic meaning of the sentence because it is not the meaning that the parts of the sentence have when put together in a conventional grammatical form.
- Of course, if it were *wholly* true semantically true, it must also be false, and then Lucian would in fact be saying something paradoxical. We must take the pragmatic implicatures of the text to

limit the semantic meaning. So even the semantic meaning is being restricted pragmatically. To properly explain what is going on in Lucian, the Gricean account would need to be expanded.

- 13 Lucian is playing on an additional complexity, which is that he cannot really said to be lying because he does not intend to deceive. If he did intend to deceive he would not say “I am lying”. Speaking falsely is not lying. This, of course, is another way in which he is more honest than the other tellers of falsehoods. Then again, he is perhaps being deceptive in calling it lying when it is not. Some recent accounts of fiction stress that many of them involve pretence. On this view, Lucian may be pretending to lie, which is different from lying. Pretence theorists have usually sought to incorporate Gricean elements into their accounts. For such an account, see Henry, 1996. In my view, we get a more elegant and satisfactory account of what Lucian is doing by using a straightforward Gricean view. This is because *True Stories* is not just a fiction, but a fiction with an apparently non-fictional introduction. However, I have no space to pursue the issue here.
- 14 For a much more sympathetic account of Plotinus and neo-Platonism, see Gerson: 1994.
- 15 The origin of the word kenodoxia itself needs to be understood in a Gricean manner. Constructed from keno and doxa, it is clear that it initially semantically meant empty glory, but pragmatically means a desire for glory based on worthless achievements. However, what would have initially been its pragmatic meaning became conventional. Then, perhaps, it became its semantic meaning.
- 16 A recent film about “The Amazing” Randi, a stage magician who has spent much of his career exposing psychic frauds, has the wonderful title “An Honest Liar” (Measom, 2014).
- 17 Rosen, 2016 points out that Lucian’s shrewd and complex understanding of Aristophanes’s techniques was very unusual in the Roman imperial period.
- 18 Lucian puts himself on trial in *The Double Indictment* for offences against both Rhetoric and Dialogue (Lucian, 1921).
- 19 Parrhesiades (Frankness/Lucian) is under attack by famous past philosophers in “The Dead Come to Life or the Fisherman” (Lucian, 1921b). Naked Alethia (Truth), who is always modest and slipping away, ends up being his advocate. Syllogismos (syllogism) has trouble summoning the philosophers to a proper trial.

## References

- Beall, J. and Glanzberg, M. (2011), “The Liar Paradox”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online).
- Chapman, S. (2009), *Paul Grice, Philosopher and Linguist*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fine, G. (2008), “Does Socrates Claim to Know that He Knows Nothing?”, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, XXV: 49-88.
- “Lucian’s True History as SF”, *Science Fiction Studies*, 3, part 1, accessed at: <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/8/fredericks8art.htm>
- Georgiadou, A. and Larmour, D. (1995), “The Prolaliae to Lucian’s Vera Historiae”, *Eranos*: 100-112.
- Georgiadou, A. and Larmour, D., *Lucian’s Science Fiction Novel True Histories*, Leiden: Brill.
- Grice, P. (1989), *Studies in the Way of Words*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.

Henry (1996), *Pretending and Meaning, Towards a Pragmatic Theory of Fictional Discourse*. London: Greenwood Press.

Huang, Y. (2014), *Pragmatics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Huang, Y. (2015), “Pragmatics, Language use in context”, in *The Routledge Handbook of Linguistics*, K. Allan (ed.), pp. 205-220. London: Taylor and Francis.

Hume, D. (1998), *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jones, C. (1986), *Culture and Society in Lucian*, Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.

Lamberton, R. (1986), *Homer the Theologian*. Berkeley, University of California Press

Levinson, S. (1983), *Pragmatics*, chapter 3, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Lucian (1913), “A True Story”, in *Lucian, Volume 1*, with an English translation by A. Harmon. London: Harvard University Press, pp. 247-357.

Lucian (1921), “The Double Indictment”, in *Lucian, Volume 3*, with an English translation by A. Harmon. London: Harvard University Press, pp. 84-151.

Lucian (1921b), “The Dead Come to Life or the Fisherman”, in *Lucian, Volume 3*, with an English translation by A. Harmon. London: Harvard University Press, pp. 1-82

Lucian (1959), “Hermetimus”, in *Lucian, Volume 6*, with an English translation by K. Kilburn, London: Harvard University Press, pp. 259-416.

Lucian (1972), “AlethonDiegematon”, in M. MacLeod, *Luciani Opera i*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 82-125.

Gerson, L. (1994), *Plotinus*, London: Routledge.

Measom, T. (director) (2014), *An Honest Liar, Truth and Deception in the Life of James, “The Amazing” Randi*, Flim Flam Films.

Paul of Tarsus (1983), “Pros Titon 1”, in K. Aland et al, *The Greek New Testament* (third edition), Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, pp. 739-740.

Rosen, R. (2016), “Lucian’s Aristophanes: On Understanding Old Comedy in the Roman Imperial Period”, in C. Marshall and T. Hawkins (eds), *Athenian Comedy in the Roman Empire*, Sydney: Bloomsbury.

Swanson, R. (1976), “The True, the False, and the Truly False: Lucian’s Philosophical Science Fiction”, *Science Fiction Studies*, 3, part 3. Accessed at: <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/10/swanson10art.htm>

*I would like to thank Chris Mortensen and the members of the Adelaide logic group for helpful suggestions.*