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Liar Paradox and the Rhetoric of Group Self-Deprecation

Abstract. What does a Cretan mean when he says that all Cretans are liars? What is his intention? While formal logic only relates to the truth values of the Liar paradox, we relate to its normative and social aspects. We argue that such utterances are used to imply that certain behaviors, even if despicable, constitute local norms. One may posit such claims either to point out that he has transcended the local culture, to socialize others into local customs, or to deflect from being caught lying. This paradox exemplifies group self-deprecation, a communicative practice intended to get us to disagree, rather than agree, with the disparaging claim and blunt the negative consequences of poor behavior. Its rhetoric relies upon *tu quoque*, *secundum quid* and naturalistic fallacies.

Keywords: Epimenides; Eubulides; no-true Scotsman fallacy; *secundum quid*; fallacy

1. Introduction

When a Cretan says "All Cretans are liars", is he lying or is he telling the truth? This perplexing question may be answered by means of formal logic, if taken literally. On the other hand, taking the formal approach strips the Liar paradox of its context and content, and steers us away from other important questions such as "Does he mean *literally*?" and "Why would he say that?".

During the twentieth century, the Liar Paradox was normally treated as a problem to be tackled by means of formal logic in order to resolve certain formal contradictions, usually by restricting the use of self-reference, and distinguishing between language that is used to describe phenomena,

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and meta-language referring to language (see, e.g., Dowden, 2024; Beall et al., 2025; Schurz, 2012; Tarski, 1956; Russell, 1908). Yet the formal approach ignores the basic distinction between lying and making false statements, and if making a false statement is insufficient to qualify as lying — the formal approach is insufficient to tackle the Liar Paradox.

The Liar paradox is loaded with *informal* aspects that require investigation. While some contemporary textbooks and dictionaries make little or no distinction within the family of paradoxes, including the Liar paradox, Epimenides paradox, and Eubulides paradox (see, e.g., Cook, 2009; Clark, 2002), like the scholars of the previous generations (see, e.g., Cohen, 1961, 1957; Prior, 1958) we see significant differences between them. Indeed, boiled down to its pure logical form, the Epimenides paradox, or a Cretan claiming 'All Cretans are liars' resembles the Eubulides paradox: *A man says that he is lying. Is he lying or telling the truth?* The Cretans and their claims are left behind. On one hand, the problem is significantly simplified. On the other hand, such reduction leaves out a number of substantial issues which we will tackle in this paper.

The paradoxical claim itself "All Cretans are liars" is not merely a statement of fact. It is intended to change our attitude towards Cretans: we are asked to disbelieve them. But when you are calling people or groups of people liars, you are not just making us reassess our attitudes towards them, but you are also inviting us to reevaluate our attitudes towards you. What if you are the liar and a slanderer?

There are always reasons to suspect someone who denigrates groups of people or is being prejudiced against them. On the other hand, why would a Cretan be prejudiced against Cretans? And even if this was the case, why would he choose to make such an attitude public?

In its original form, the phrase was uttered by a Cretan wiseman Epimenides who charged the Cretans with collectively being in disposition to tell lies on account of them pronouncing the god Zeus dead by erecting his tomb. Has Epimenides failed to notice the irony of his words or was it a rhetorical stunt? On the face of it, this claim should cause us to distrust its locutor, but did Epimenides really want us to distrust him? On the other hand, are we really supposed to distrust all other Cretans? Are we expected to embrace negative social stereotypes, or rather to reject them?

We believe that these lines of investigation are worth exploring because they relate to important social issues such as the rhetoric of col-

lective stereotypes. Collective stereotypes are no trivial matter, they pose a threat on one's self-perception and have the power to affect one's attitudes and behaviors (see, e.g., Cohen and Garcia, 2005). Otsri's (2020) analysis of group self-deprecation as a method of dealing with such stereotypes is illustrative. A Cretan's statement that "All Cretans are liars", may also be interpreted as group self-deprecation. Thus, we will investigate the pragmatic uses of such declarations as self-deprecating rhetorical tactics, without reducing all the possible meanings of the Liar sentences to group self-deprecation.

Methodologically, this paper is a forerunner in connecting the rhetoric of paradoxes with that of group stereotypes. To tackle these issues, we will start with distinguishing between lying and making false claims. We will deal with the rhetoric of cultural (group-shared) myths; critique of the possibility of knowledge and its political repercussions; refutation of sophisms and fallacies, and particularly the *secundum quid* fallacy. We will investigate the use of *tu quoque* fallacy and the naturalistic fallacy to deflect from being caught telling a lie. We will compare the Liar paradox with the No True Scotsman Move; delve into the meaning of self-deprecation and group self-deprecation communication strategies; investigate the tactics for diminishing one's responsibility; discuss the connection between norms and identity, the dynamics of marginalization, and outsider/insider flip.

2. Lying or making false statements?

Formal logic, strangely enough, relies on implicit equation between lying and making false statements, which, upon reflection, are not quite the same. The typical dictionary definitions of 'lying', besides the condition of telling falsehoods, adds a condition that the falsehoods are told with an intention to deceive (Carson, 2006). Carson (2006, p. 301) argues that "There are no compelling reasons to revise or reject the ordinary language concept of lying", thus he merely qualifies the regular definition by providing three conditions for lying that relate to borderline cases. One is lying if one is making a false statement while believing the statement to be likely false and *warranting* this statement. Lackey (2013, p. 236) defines lying in an analogous manner: "A lies to B if and only if (1) A states that p to B, (2) A believes that p is false and (3) A intends to deceive B by stating that p".

Sneddon (2021, p. 46) categorizes the cases where one may be lying without intending to deceive, following Lackey's distinction between deception and deceiving:

> Crucially, the 'intention to be deceptive' can be satisfied by both deceit and deception [...]. Deceit involves an intention to spread a false belief to one's audience. Deception involves an intention to hide information from one's audience, without necessarily aiming to give rise to false beliefs. Both suffice for the intention to be deceptive, and neither is necessary.

It is not immediately clear that a Cretan's claim involves either deception or deceit, but is it still a lie, if it does not?

Fallis (2009, p. 33) believes "that you lie when you assert something that you believe to be false." Without going into the differences between warranting and asserting, they both imply that the locutor means what he says. But it is not clear whether this is the case with Liar sentences. In fact, if I say that I am lying, I am not asserting that I am telling the truth!

Some assertions may be considered cynical (Kenyon, 2003, pp. 241–242). Cynical utterances occur when (i) the locutor is insincere, and the interlocutor correctly believes that (i). What makes cynical utterances assertions is the warranting by the locutor. Thus, when I say that I am great at chess after getting handily beaten by a ten-year old, I am merely making a cynical utterance, while when politicians tell the voters that the taxes will not be raised, they may be making cynical assertions. A similar term is telling *bald-faced lies* (Sorensen, 2007). When we tell bald-faced lies, we merely pretend to assert something. Thus, according to Sorensen (2007, p. 256), the remark (falsely attributed to Epimenides) "I am lying" is not a bald-faced lie, as the locutor does not even pretend to assert that he is telling the truth. Nevertheless, Rutschmann and Wiegmann (2017) demonstrate that people perceive bald-faced lies as lies, not just making false statements. Keiser (2016) argues that unless we are interested in philosophical language games, the dictionary definition is sufficient. Anyhow, in our case we are dealing with a unique way of making a false statement: it involves neither direct deception nor deceit, and not even an assertion that it is true. The motivation behind our claim does not fall under any of the categories listed by Sneddon. So, what is the motivation behind claiming that all your compatriots are liars? Without answering the question of motivation, we cannot even be sure that the Liar Paradox involves lying.

3. The rhetoric of national and religious myths

The condensed version of the story is that by erecting a tomb of Zeus, Cretans have made a rhetorical statement putting Nietzsche to shame. Actions speak louder than words: building a temple to Zeus makes a stronger statement than publicly proclaiming his glory. Building a tomb makes a stronger statement than simply stating that Zeus is dead. The pious Epimenides had to discredit the source of such a libelous statement, so he could not discredit just one locutor. He labeled all Cretans as liars, an accusation that stuck long enough for the Apostle Paul to invoke centuries later. The story, of course, is a lot more complex (Strataridaki, 1991), but we will leave it at that.

It may seem that making this statement comes at a personal reputational cost to Epimenides, whether the interlocutors believe him or not: if they do believe him — he is a liar like all the Cretans, while if they do not — he is a liar, unlike the Cretans that he slandered. It appears like a lose-lose situation for Epimenides to get himself into. Thus, Epimenides must either be presumed to be an unwitting self-deprecator or to make a brilliant rhetorical move. We are interested in exploring the latter possibility.

Being Cretan made Epimenides' claim so particularly strong. An Athenian making a xenophobic generalization about Cretans may have been dismissed, but not a Cretan. Epimenides would not be suspected of being biased against Cretans and he would be credited with having an insight into the Cretans' psyche, being a Cretan himself. It is safe to assume that a person of repute, having terrible things to say about his fellow islanders, will be trusted more than an outsider. His motivation would be presumed pure: by denigrating Cretans he is denigrating himself. If he is willing to say dreadful things about his own ethnic group and suffer reputational damage — he must be saying something of foremost importance, something that he believes wholeheartedly.

4. A democratic critique of knowledge

The Eubulides Paradox may be simply put as "A man says that he is lying. Is what he says true or false?" Seuren (2005) views it as an expression of democratic rhetoric of Demosthenes' tutor Eubulides, obliquely directed against Alexander the Great, whose tutor was Aristotle. While

Plato's and Aristotle's correspondence theories of truth may be viewed as politically aligned with enlightened dictatorship, the paradoxes of Eubulides subvert these theories. In other words, if there is a way of knowing the truth, the enlightened should rule over the rest of the populace, while if the truth cannot be fully known and our knowledge stumbles upon paradoxes, no one has monopoly over truth and the opinions of the learned classes are just as faulty as those of the common folk.

Medieval texts, following Aristotle, mention three main lines of dealing with the Eubulides paradox. Following Kneale and Kneale (1962), Seuren (2005, p. 85)) writes that restrictio "consists in a simple prohibition of token reflexivity (self-reference) in the use of language". Cassatio "implies that sentences or texts that suffer from the Liar paradox are uninterpretable due to the impossibility of identifying an entity (suppositum) for the subject term in a Liar sentence like *This very sentence is false*". The third option, "Secundum quid et simpliciter", "does not appear to deserve further scrutiny".

While the modern form of restrictio, proposed by Russell (1908) and Tarski (1956) is nowadays considered the standard solution to the Liar paradox, Seuren prefers the cassatio strategy. Our intention is to give the third option its due attention.

5. *Secundum quid*

Unlike Seuren, Walton (1990) does not see Aristotle not mentioning Eubulides directly in his *On Sophistical Refutations* as an admission of defeat. He rightfully points out that Aristotle does relate to a self-referring liar in chapter 25 of *On Sophistical Refutations*, and notes that this paradox may be viewed as based upon the *secundum quid* fallacy. He specifically refers to the following passage:

> [...] there is no reason why the same man should not be absolutely a liar yet tell the truth in some respects, or that some of a man's words should be true but he himself not be truthful. (180b7-180b8)

According to Walton (1990, p. 123):

> The fallacy of *secundum quid* is associated with an attitude of rigidity or dogmatism that confuses two different types of generalizations in a given case, resulting in the drawing of an incorrect inference. The one kind of generalization could be called the universal (absolute) generalization, a

> type of generalization that does not admit of exceptions. One counter-instance falsifies (refutes) it [...]. The other type of generalization is the defeasible (presumptive) generalization, a type of generalization that admits of exceptions, and is compatible with some new arguments that turn up counter-instances. This type of generalization is not strict, but is openended and tentative in nature.

Eubulides purges all Cretans from the Epimenides paradox. All context and all the content are gone and only the form is left. To solve the paradox, Aristotle reclaims its content. In other words, Aristotle sees the Epimenides Paradox (EP) as a type of sophism, based on taking an overgeneralization literally. Aristotle suggests that if EP is simply taken to mean that Cretans tend to lie more than other Greeks, the paradox is resolved.

The Apostle Paul seems to have treated Epimenides' statement as a generalization, excluding Epimenides from the referents of his claim: "One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons".[1] This saying is true" (NIV, 1967, Titus 1:12–13). One of the ways to understand Paul is through distinguishing between the default and the exceptional meaning of terms (Reiter 1980). While Epimenides is a Cretan, he is not a default Cretan, but an exceptional one. Thus, what he said about Cretans is true, but it does not apply to him. Thus, when prophets castigate their people, they do not refer to themselves. One may also look at them as mere messengers of God or gods who speak through them. Thus, while prophets are scribes, they are not authors. Hence, Epimenides does not claim that Cretans are liars — Zeus does. Thus, there is no paradox to speak of.

It seems that while Epimenides did not intend for his message to be taken literally, Eubulides absolutely did. While Seuren and others speculate regarding Eubulides' intentions, we are allowed to speculate about the intentions of the 20th century formal logicians. While falling for a sophism, taking the Liar paradox literally allowed Russell and others to clarify critical issues and, as some may argue, advance formal logic to higher levels of scientific rigor. If formal logic is justifiably based on misinterpretation, perhaps we may attempt to advance informal logic by interpreting EP without falling for sophisms.

At the beginning of *On Sophistical Refutations*, Aristotle writes:

> That some reasonings are genuine, while others seem to be so but

[1] We would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for bringing up this issue.

> are not, is evident. This happens with arguments, as also elsewhere, through a certain likeness between the genuine and the sham.

Aristotle points out that sophisms are eristic or contentious arguments, aimed at winning at any cost. He distinguishes between five methods of winning in "competitive arguing", with exposing the fallacious thinking of the opponent being second best (behind directly refuting them), while leading the opponent into a paradox being third best. Thus, if the opponents' tactic is to trap you with a paradox, your best tactic is to expose the fallacy behind the paradox if you cannot directly refute them.

Dufour (2016) relates to the distinction between sophisms and fallacies, which is often presented as consisting in the former being intentional and the second being unintentional. He argues that this distinction is too fine to notice, as human intentions, especially unconscious ones, are hard to read. We will posit that sophisms are used by the locutors, and they depend on the interlocutors' susceptibility to fallacies.

Paradoxes are historically associated with sophists, using them as rhetorical devices (Schiappa, 1991). Thus, we may see paradoxes as formulaic schemes aimed (consciously or unconsciously) at deceiving interlocutors through exploiting the fallacies to which they are susceptible. In our case, EP falls into an Aristotelian category of sophisms, aimed at convincing the interlocutors that what is commonly considered as unacceptable behavior (lying), is, in fact, acceptable. We will argue that EP involves deceit as Lackey defines it: it is aimed at indirectly inducing a false belief. The point of EP is not to convince the interlocutor about facts (that the locutor is a member of an ethnic group which consists of nothing but liars), but rather about norms (lying is acceptable).

We suggest that the phrase "All Cretans are liars", uttered by a Cretan, means the following. "I, as a core group representative, am an expert on the characteristics of my group. I may pass judgment upon them and by this speech act bestow upon the core group this characteristic". We should not understand "all" to mean absolutely everybody. We should not understand "liar" to mean one who never tells a word of truth. Rather, "liar" simply means someone who tends to lie on core subjects of social consequence. "All" simply means core representatives of the group. In other words, we are being told that one should expect a Cretan to lie when it matters. Some Cretans will not lie when it matters, yet these are marginal Cretans. Core Cretans, of course, may tell the truth when they do not see the downside of doing so.

6. The no-true Cretan move

It seems to us that EP is a rhetorical device, similar to the No True Scotsman Move, coined by Antony Flew (1971, p. 388) in the following manner:

> Someone says: 'No Scotsman would beat his wife to a shapeless pulp with a blunt instrument'. He is confronted with a falsifying instance: 'Mister Angus McSporran did just that'. Instead of withdrawing, or at least qualifying, the too rash original claim our patriot insists: 'Well, no true Scotsman would do such a thing!' By this evasive essay in persuasive definition, what started as a contention about a supposed matter of fact is shiftily transmogrified into the expression of a factitious necessary truth.

The No True Scotsman Move may be classified as persuasive definition, while a wider concept of concept-swapping or subreption may apply to both (Aberdein, 2017). According to Stevenson (1938, p. 331):

> A Persuasive definition is one which gives a new conceptual meaning to a familiar word without substantially changing its emotive meaning, and which is used with the conscious or un-conscious purpose of changing, by this means, the direction of people's interests.

Later Stevenson (1944, p. 210) would clarify that in a persuasive definition a term defined is both descriptive and strongly emotive. Its purpose is to alter the descriptive meaning of a term by making it more precise within the confines of its customary vagueness, in order to influence people's attitudes. Govier (2010, p. 76) defines persuasive definition as a "stipulative definition disguised as a claim or as a reportive definition". According to her:

> A stipulative definition is one in which someone specifies what the usage of a word is to be. In stipulating a definition, the person who puts it forward seeks to set out a specific usage for some purpose. He or she does not seek to describe ordinary usage, as in a reportive or lexical definition. Rather, the person sets out a meaning for a term.

In other words, a locutor wishes to persuade us that being a Scotsman (or a Cretan) is not a matter of a place of birth or ethnicity, as one would normally understand the term "Scotsman", but rather a matter of acting out certain norms, stipulated by the locutor. Of course, we would have to be naïve to accept a normative statement for a factual statement, but this is exactly what the No True Scotsman Move is intended to make

us do. According to Flew, the No True Scotsman Move is based on an expectation that its interlocutor will fail to separate the is-statements from ought-statements.

Talanker (2023, p. 120) argues that No-true Scotsman Moves and persuasive definitions in general "are usually intended to either marginalize or de-marginalize an individual, a social group or a sub-group, or even object or a set of objects imbued with social significance." Thus, a Scotsman would like to persuade us that Angus McSporran is a marginal Scotsman, whose actions should not be taken to denigrate the core Scottish identity. Talanker argues that this Scotsman does not deny the obvious truth of Angus McSporran being Scottish but rather tries to persuade us to treat him as an exceptional case, not the rule. Being a representative of the core group Scotsmen, he presumes himself to be an authority on what characterizes the group and what does not.

In EP we see the opposite: a Cretan intentionally denigrates his fellow Cretans. A typical Cretan is established as a liar, while the honest one is being marginalized through EP. While we understand the Scotsman's motivation to disassociate the group to which he belongs from a certain particularly nasty representative, what could be the motivation behind denigrating the group of people to which you belong?

7. "We're all mad here"

"We're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad", the line from Lewis Carroll's (1865) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*[2] appearing also in popular songs such as "Mama weer all crazee now" (Slade, 1972) and "We are all mad here" from the album "Alice" (Waits, 2002), hints at the rhetorical sense of core group denigration: the locutor's behavior is presented as no longer marginal, but rather as normal within a group, local or contemporary. Trying to marginalize the locutor's behavior marginalizes the whole group, and the interlocutor is warned against doing so.

In a series of putdowns, the Cheshire Cat subtly proves to Alice that she is less than perfectly rational (p. 60):

> "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"
> "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.
> "I don't much care where–" said Alice.

[2] We would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for bringing up this issue.

> "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.
> "– so long as I get somewhere," Alice added as an explanation.
> "Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough".

The Cat's rhetoric is not really pointed at himself: while he insists that he is mad, the example he gives is poor: dogs growl when they are angry, and wag their tails when pleased, while he does the opposite. The point is to subtly advise Alice not to conceive of the March Hare and the Mad Hatter as somehow less rational than herself. While Alice thinks that there are degrees of madness and rationality, the Cat proves to Alice that he is at least not less rational than her, yet he thinks that everyone is equally non-rational. Therefore, she should adopt his point of view, even if it is non-rational.

In the earthier settings of the song by Slade, "Mama" is told that by labeling certain behaviors "crazy" or "mad", she creates a rift between herself and the generation of the locutor, thus, paradoxically, marginalizing herself. By disapproving of the norms of the "now" generation she expresses her belonging to the older generation, whose time has passed. Thus, the line "Mama weer all crazee now" reverses her marginalization rhetoric. Instead of her marginalizing "son's" behavior from the standpoint of society as a whole, her stance becomes marginalized from the perspective of the younger generation.

A similar social dynamic is described in a classical work on social margins. Becker (1963) wrote about the sub-culture of jazz musicians in the 1950s. He noted that the norms and the values of the sub-culture were diametrically opposed to those of the "squares". Thus, the more adapted one was to mainstream culture, the less adapted he was to the sub-culture of the jazz club. In a sense, to be accepted as "cool" in the jazz club, one had to engage in the same behaviors that would marginalize one in the "square", polite society. Employing "square" rhetoric in a jazz club gets you locally marginalized.

Another rhetorical aspect of the "Mama weer all crazee now" is the insanity plea. The locutor refuses to take responsibility for his behavior by reasons of mass insanity. A generational epidemic of insanity causes him to act against his better judgment. The locutor also accuses "Mama" of causing such akrasia: "I don't want to drink my whisky like you do, I don't need to spend my money, but still do". The locutor points out that he and "Mama" are not that different, and that craziness is also a

matter of perspective. Thus, she is accused of lacking perspective and engaging in hypocrisy.

From the analysis of the song, the phrase "Mama, we are all crazy now" simultaneously means all the following: 1) you are judging me as an outsider, 2) I am not responsible for my behavior, 3) you/your group/normative society may be responsible for our behavior, 4) you are no different from us, yet you judge us, 5) your own behavior may seem "crazee" from another perspective, 6) I deserve pity.

Let us see how this analysis helps us with EP.

8. The rhetoric of self-deprecation

Rudnicki and Łukowski (2021) empirically demonstrate that Liar sentences (This sentence is false) are interpreted by our brains as false. While it must be stipulated that processing a Cretan pronouncing "All Cretans are liars" is more cumbersome than processing the Liar sentence in its simplest form, it is likely to be interpreted similarly. In other words, the result of uttering "All Cretans are liars" by a Cretan is likely to result in the interlocutor believing that it is not the case that all Cretans are liars. This would make perfect sense if we consider that the point of self-deprecation in general is to get the interlocutors to reject it rather than accept it. If indeed the point of self-deprecation is to get the interlocutor to disagree, the self-deprecating aspect of EP would make sense.

When a Cretan says, "All Cretans are liars", he wants us to answer "Oh, nonsense", or perhaps "I am sure that this is not entirely correct. You, at least, are a very genuine person. You are being too hard on yourself. Your standards are very rigorous".

Speer's (2019) research suggests that self-deprecation may be beneficial, at least under certain circumstances. Hayashi et al. (2024) indicate that the success of self-enhancement and self-deprecation communication strategies depends on interlocutor's age and perception of the locutor baseline performance. Adults judged self-deprecation of typically good performers negatively, while self-enhancement of typically poor performers only impressed second-graders. Good performers do not influence character perception by all age groups with self-representation style, yet usually poor performers can improve their character perception by self-deprecating, while they would only negatively affect their character perception through self-aggrandizement. To summarize, self-deprecating

would be a good strategy for poor performers to get others to expect less of them and not to judge their character too harshly.

Speer views self-deprecation as communication practice, which is another term for rhetoric. Following Pomerantz (1984, p. 81), Speer (2019, p. 807)) posits that "the preferred response to a self-deprecation is disagreement: (e.g., A: 'I'm so dumb I don't even know it', B: 'No, you're not dumb')". They argue that by agreeing with the speaker one actually disaligns with him. People are most likely to use self-deprecation to avoid responsibility for their behavior in situations where the danger of losing rapport between parties is present. Self-deprecation does identity work by "managing, pre-empting and deflecting this trouble". It is successful to the degree that the interlocutor disagrees with it. In other words, by self-deprecating one acknowledges wrongdoing to prevent the interlocutor from doing so.

If I call myself a liar, you must disagree with me, lest you lose rapport with me. If I call all the members of my ethnic group liars, you must vehemently disagree with my assessment, lest you lose your good faith relationship with the entire group. Thus, group self-deprecation, which occurs when a group member deprecates the entire group, is even more devious than personal self-deprecation. In our case it is tantamount to saying: "Aren't all Cretans liars? Would you publicly agree with this assessment? I dare you!".

Otsri (2020) points out that since moral condemnation of entire groups cannot be morally valid, group self-deprecation must radically change the message of group condemnation. She mentions a couple of mechanisms through which the message of group condemnation either gets reversed or at least blunted when uttered by a group member: *black humor* and *phrase reclaiming*.

Otsri emphasized and re-emphasized that:

> [...] when group self-deprecation humor fulfills the function of black humor, it does not constitute an agreement with the offensive propositions arising from the humorous performance. Rather, it serves as a way of coping with the existence of these offensive propositions in the world.

Thus, following Brommage (2015) she argues that an offensive joke may be perceived as appropriate and funny if the person making a joke is a subject of a joke. Thus, when a person tells a joke about their own ethnic group, it is clear that its contents are meant in jest. If an outsider were to repeat such a joke, it would be likely perceived as inappropriate.

Otsri relies on the following understanding of phrase reclaiming from (Herbert, 2015, p. 131):

> Reclamation aims to detach the derogation from the term so that the word may be used as either a direct description of the targeted group or as a term of approbation.

Thus, the terms 'queer' and 'slut' may lose their derogatory sting when used by people who identify as "queers" and "sluts".

Thus, when an Athenian claims that all Cretans are liars, he sounds prejudiced, while when a Cretan says the same thing, it sounds like a joke at the expense of a stereotype. Alternatively, a Cretan takes control of the meaning of the term: lying is cool, and Cretans are cool, unlike those uptight Persians who claim to be truthful all the time.

Otsri (2020, p. 305) falls back on Cohen (2006, p. 119), who enumerates three ways of "blunting the edge", deflecting, or silencing condemnation for doing X. Besides denying doing X and arguing that X is permissible, one may "discredit the critic's assertion of standing as a good faith condemner of the relevant action" (Cohen, 2006, p. 119). In other words, if *tu quoque* is a strategy for deflecting blame, group self-deprecation is one of its tactics. It may work through the following rhetorical techniques: the critic may be accused of hypocrisy and/or paternalism, accused of being responsible for the locutor's wrongdoing, told to mind his own business and respect the group's autonomy. In other words, when caught lying, one might deflect by hinting that everybody lies, including the interlocutor. By daring to call attention to the locutor's lying, the interlocutor is paternalizing not just the locutor, but the whole group that he represents. Thus, EP may be interpreted as "Who are you to call me out upon lying? All Cretans are liars, why don't you call all of us out? Are you better than us? Why do you interfere with our local affairs? We know how to conduct ourselves."

9. The rhetorical analysis of EP

The phrase "All Cretans are liars" may be uttered by a Cretan to normalize lying. The phrase implies that lying is a local norm. In the case of Epimenides it was meant to suggest that while lying is a norm on Crete, Epimenides himself is above it. In other contexts, it may serve other purposes. For instance, the phrase may be addressed at a fellow

Cretan to suggest that by trying to be honest in certain matters, he is acting unlike a typical Cretan. Thus, he should stop doing so because either 1) he is making other Cretans look bad and they do not like that 2) he should not be worried that other Cretans will condemn him if he lies 3) he should conform to the norms of his social group.

The phrase may be addressed at a foreigner, trying to reprimand the locutor or one of his friends for lying. If you catch a local telling a lie, you are being threatened and warned that he will not be marginalized as a rule-breaker, but you will be, if you make too much noise about it. You will be exposed as not only an outsider, but an outsider who is unaware of the local norms yet wishes to impose outside norms on Crete. You antagonize the Cretans by thinking that you are above telling lies. The phrase implies that you are not aware of the local culture (whether you are Cretan or foreigner), your social status (an outsider, thinking that he can impose his norms on the locals; or a local, refusing to conform), and your faulty human nature (we all lie from time to time).

Thus, the foreigner is told by the locutor, presuming to represent the local core group, the following complex message: 1) being dishonest is a local norm 2) imposing "universal" values will not be welcome 3) the locutor is a product of his environment 4) ironic undergeneralization: all people are liars, nobody is telling the truth all the time, including Cretans, and the foreigner is about to make a conclusion based on a cultural stereotype, while he himself and others like him are no different.

While the property of being a liar is understood as not telling a single word of truth (in formal logic), it may also be interpreted to mean the opposite extreme: as having said at least one word of untruth. If we look around us, in any given society, there are no liars in the first sense, and we are all liars in the second one. The rhetorical power of EP hides in the second interpretation: *You are accusing me of lying, but have you met anyone in our society (or yours, or any other, for that matter) that had never told a lie?*

This rhetoric is founded upon the naturalistic fallacy, which consists of drawing conclusions regarding moral duties from matters of fact (Moore, 1903), in our case — negating the duty of telling the truth by inference from the social fact that people are untruthful from time to time. This is where philosophy checks rhetoric: it is incorrect to justify one's wrongful behavior by pointing out that others occasionally engage in similar behavior. Unfortunately, rhetoric does not require philosophical justification to be successful.

10. Conclusions

When a Cretan says, "All Cretans are liars", he may intend to get away with lying. If we look beyond the purely formal aspects of this claim, we can see that it is intended to deceive us into believing that lying is a norm on Crete, and to discourage us from confronting the locutor. By this phrase he claims for himself the ownership of the concept of 'liar' and the authority to speak in the name of all Cretans.

He makes himself their representative, while making the interlocutor either a marginal (non-normative) Cretan or an outsider. Thus, the very act of questioning the locutor's behavior (even if it involves lying and slandering) is interpreted as putting oneself above the core group (not just one of its representatives), breaking the local norms and challenging the local authority and autonomy. The Cretan is deflecting from the real issue (of him lying) by distracting the interlocutor with dark humor, evoking his sympathy, and confusing him with a clever paradox. By shifting one's attention from the issue's content to its form, the locutor employs a *tu quoque* fallacy to deflect: *by accusing one of us of lying you are suggesting that you are better than us. Are you? Do not you ever lie? Is that even possible?*

If we are allowed to make a generalization, group self-deprecation should not be normally taken at face value. If our analysis is correct, it may often be used by an individual seeking to get away with foul behavior through exploiting the others' unwillingness to reinforce the negative stereotypes about a group that the individual belongs to. Of course, sometimes people just completely dissociate with the groups they may be perceived as members of, or simply fail to grasp the irony of their claims.

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