

Exposing the Liar

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Epimenides und andere Lügner, by WOLFGANG KÜNNE, FRANKFURT AM MAIN, KLOSTERMANN ROTE REIHE, 2013, pp. 173, € 17.80.

I. INTRODUCTION

Anyone interested in the so-called ‘Liar paradox’ and especially those planning to comment on the topic will be well-advised to have a look at Wolfgang Künné’s short, but extremely lucid and informative essay. But beware – if you are looking forward to yet another purported way out of the famous quagmire, you will almost certainly be disappointed. Indeed, the amount of ink devoted to the antinomy has multiplied over the last decades and the solutions themselves display ever higher degrees of sophistication. However, through unreflecting repetition, some conceptual confusions and historical blunders have become so entrenched in the literature on the antinomy that they are nowadays regarded almost as platitudes. It is for this reason, and it is just as well, that the ‘Liar industry’ itself has come under the scrutiny of Dr Künné’s critical attention. To find out what his own stance on truth is, as well as to revel in a thorough and personal discussion of the main strands of contemporary and not-so-contemporary thought on the topic, you should definitely leaf through his *Conceptions of Truth* [Künné (2003)].

Let us begin this review with a spoiler – according to Künné, ‘the Liar paradox’ is a misnomer due to an overly simplistic analysis of the notion of lying. ‘To lie’ does not simply mean ‘to say something false’ or even ‘to say something false in order to deceive’. And neither does a person properly called a liar have to be lying each time she opens her mouth. But whereas it is not particularly difficult to recognise that this is so, a worrying number of scholars pay little heed to the semantic complexity of these notions and end up putting their foot in it as a result. Eager to get on with their own analyses of the antinomy, they couch it in terms of lying and liars and don’t even realise that their examples often fail to give rise to a paradoxical scenario at all.

The moral is of course not that the so-called ‘Liar paradox’ (which from now on, in deference to Künne, I will call the F-antinomy, or the Antinomy of Falsity – *Antinomie der Falschheit* –) fails to amount to a genuine antinomy. The lesson of Künne’s book is rather that not everything that logicians and philosophers put forward as paradoxical is indeed problematic or bears any relation to the renowned antinomy. Such analytic carelessness, perhaps combined with a desire to embellish an otherwise drab technical prose, have notoriously led many modern scholars to ‘detect’ the antinomy in St Paul’s epistle to Titus and to identify Epimenides as the foremost historical figure to have stumbled over it. Künne, who apart from a long trajectory in analytic philosophy is also familiar with biblical studies, dispels this misconception by means of a careful conceptual and historical inquiry. Equipped with remarkable erudition, invariably accompanied by a commendable sense of measure, Künne supplies a useful rudimentary ‘Who is Who’ of the (mostly early) history of the F-antinomy and its kin.

II. BRIEF OVERVIEW

The main thread, running through the three chapters of the book, consists of Bolzano’s take on the antinomy and related problems. Both his insights and his errors provide a point of departure for Künne’s exploration of a number of philosophical questions linked with the paradox. The first chapter is introduced by Bolzano’s diagnosis of the fallacious argument he calls ‘pseudomenos’ and which Künne refers to as ‘the self-confessed liar’ (*der geständige Lügner*). The quest for the source of fallaciousness of this argument leads naturally to a semantic analysis of the notions of lying, telling the truth and being a liar. Künne shows that the results of this scrutiny are at odds with many tacit presuppositions of modern scholars of the F-antinomy, which, *pace* Bolzano, seems to have been the logical puzzle most ancient writers associated with the name ‘pseudomenos’. The solution to the ‘self-confessed liar’ also undermines the thesis that the allusion to Epimenides’ harsh judgment of his fellow Cretans (as well as, crucially, of himself) in *Titus* 1:12 contains one of the first mentions of the F-antinomy.

The backbone of the second chapter is Bolzano’s encounter with the F-antinomy itself. Since he bases his exposition on *Compendium Logicae* by Girolamo Savonarola, the latter’s approach, called *nullification* (*Nullifikation*,¹ from Latin *cassatio*) by Künne, is discussed as well. Nullifiers reject the supposition that F-sentences (sentences like ‘This statement is false’) are genuine sentences (syntactic *cassatio*) or, in their semantic variant, reject that they express propositions. Künne marshals a few arguments against the nullifiers and goes on to examine Bolzano’s own, rather unconvincing, solution.

In the third chapter the focus shifts to non-paradoxical aspects of self-referential sentences. The motivation is supplied by Bolzano's observation to the effect that an F-sentence and the corresponding 'truth-teller' do not form a contradictory pair of sentences and that in general one cannot negate a self-referential sentence by simply affixing a negation operator to it, as one might in case of an ordinary sentence. Künne explores some strategies to do so as well as the implications of self-reference in the domain of deduction and translation.

The three main chapters are followed by six annexes that deal with some historical and philological details and curiosities about the F-antinomy and some of its protagonists, such as Eubulides, Epimenides, St Jerome, Savonarola and Rüstow. Intrinsically interesting and very amusing, they had better not be glossed over by a conscientious reader, as they also denounce some of the most notorious philological blunders present in the literature.

III. THE SELF-CONFESSED LIAR AND WHAT IT ACTUALLY MEANS TO LIE

As I have already mentioned, the first chapter of Künne's short but surprisingly rich essay opens with a discussion of Bolzano's diagnosis in the *Wissenschaftslehre* of the fallacious argument he takes to be the 'pseudomenos' of Eubulides mentioned in Diogenes Laertius. The argument goes as follows:

Suppose a liar confessed to being a liar. Then he would be telling the truth. But he who tells the truth is no liar. Therefore, it is possible for a liar not to be a liar.

This argument, as both Bolzano and Künne are quick to point out, doesn't amount to a paradox, let alone an antinomy. According to the definition given by Künne, a paradox is an apparently sound argument,² whose premises are as worthy of belief as its conclusion is unpalatable. An antinomy is a paradox whose conclusion is contradictory (which is arguably the highest degree of unacceptability). The problem with the above argument is that its second premise is only apparently convincing. Telling the truth on a certain isolated occasion doesn't make a liar into an honest person.

According to Künne, in supplying this solution, Bolzano is probably following Aristotle's diagnosis of the so-called *secundum quid et simpliciter* fallacy, put forward in his *Sophistical Refutations*. If you commit this fallacy, you end up subsuming an object under a given predicate as well as under its contradictory, because of a slight shift in the meaning of the predicate across your premises. Someone who tells the truth on a particular occasion may in a certain sense (*secundum quid*) be no liar, even if strictly speaking (*simpliciter*) he may continue to be one. Thus the correct and non-paradoxical conclusion of the argument would entail that it is possible for someone who, strictly speaking, is a liar, to be, in a sense, no liar.

Now, this reconstruction of the argument assumes that if someone is telling the truth on a particular occasion, then she is not lying. If this is so, ‘to tell/speak the truth’ (*die Wahrheit sagen*) must mean something different from merely ‘to say something true’ (*etwas Wahres sagen*), for, Künne argues, you can say something true while lying. The lie you have told may, unbeknownst to you, in fact be true, but that doesn’t change the nature of your speech-act. In order to tell the truth, apart from saying something true you also have to believe what you say. ‘X is telling the truth’ in this sense is a contrary statement to ‘X is lying’, because they can’t be true at the same time, while it is possible for both of them to be false (to wit, when you are sincere but you’ve made a mistake). But there also seems to be a weaker meaning to ‘to tell the truth’. Künne claims that this expression is sometimes used as a perfect contradictory to ‘to lie’, as when Russell asked Moore if he always spoke the truth and then took his ‘No’ as the only lie Moore had told up to that moment. Russell of course wasn’t inquiring about Moore’s immunity to error, but only about his sincerity. That’s why, according to Künne, Kripke’s interpretation of Moore’s answer as paradoxical, though witty, cannot withstand scrutiny.

The question then turns towards the correct definition of a lie. The point of departure, as expected, is Bolzano’s account of lying stemming from 1810. On this account, the actual truth-value of an asserted proposition is irrelevant for the issue whether the assertion was an act of lying or not. For Bolzano, a person X is lying if X, while not believing a certain proposition, tries to fool someone into believing this proposition on the grounds that X believes it himself. X may actually be wrong – the proposition may eventually turn out to be true, but that doesn’t let him off the hook. What he said was still a lie.

By means of an array of well-chosen examples, Künne shows that Bolzano’s conditions are neither necessary nor sufficient for lying – with a slight modification, they may be viewed as capturing the notion of lying with deceptive intent. It is Frege’s account of lying that emerges unscathed from the criticism – and it proves again that the best things in life are the simple ones. In Frege’s view, to lie means nothing but to assert (*behaupten*) a thought which you take to be false, which makes ‘to lie’ the contradictory notion to ‘to tell the truth’ in its second discussed meaning. However, a caveat is in order – under this meaning of ‘assertion’, ironical utterances of a sentence do not count as genuine assertions of what the sentence literally says.³

IV. THE F-ANTINOMY: CICERO

Künne then proceeds to explain why Bolzano was probably wrong in equating the ‘self-confessed liar’ to the *pseudomenos*, which Diogenes Laertius attributed to Aristotle’s opponent Eubulides without stating it in full.⁴ He

argues that, as many philosophers over the ages have assumed, ‘the *pseudomenos*’ was rather the ancient name for the F-antinomy. Künne selects four important formulations of the F-antinomy roughly spanning the Common Era: in Cicero (45 BCE), Alexander of Aphrodisias (200), Michael of Ephesus (1150) and, of course, in Bertrand Russell (1910).

Nowadays we have become accustomed to very simple formulations of the antinomy, such as those provided by Russell’s ‘I am lying’ or ‘This statement is false.’ The situation seems to have been different in Cicero’s case, though. According to the reconstruction of the *Lucullus* dialogue subscribed to by Künne, Cicero regarded both of the following conditionals as *inexplicabilia*, that is, declarative sentences bereft of a definite truth value, that is, truth or falsity (following Künne, I have placed the reconstructed fragment between angle brackets):

(Ci) Si te mentiri dicis idque verum dicis, mentiris.

(Cii) <Et si mentiri dicis idque mentiris>, verum dicis.

Künne contends that *mentiri* should be interpreted here as ‘to say something false’ rather than as ‘to lie’ and as a result the two Latin conditionals should be rendered in English as

(Cie) If you say that you’re saying something false and you say thereby something true, you’re saying something false.

(Ciie) If you say that you’re saying something false and you indeed say thereby something false, you’re saying something true.

This translation would, in my view, benefit from a stronger argument. Künne is undoubtedly right to say that ‘the special intentional profile of someone who is lying [...] is completely irrelevant for the antinomy’ [Künne (2013), p. 39, my translation], but that doesn’t imply that Cicero himself didn’t intend this irrelevant interpretation. Classic thinkers are not *a priori* more reasonable than moderns, even if Künne’s work clearly shows that in practice, they often are.

Returning to the conditionals themselves, what Cicero has to say about them differs in an important way from the received way of analyzing the F-antinomy. As Künne points out, these conditionals are particular instances of two extremely intuitive general principles, whose plausibility eventually rests upon the denominalisation schema “ $p \leftrightarrow T('p')$ ”. For most of us it is your statement itself that cannot coherently be assigned a truth value, on pain of contradiction to which these conditionals, which we tend to regard as self-evident, naturally give rise; on the other hand, for Cicero (under this reconstruction) it is the conditionals themselves that are at the heart of the antinomy. It is not clear from Cicero’s text, nor from Künne’s exposition, why

Cicero might have denied them a (classical) truth value – certainly, to avoid the paradox it would have sufficed to declare them false. This was probably the motive that had led some scholars to attempt different reconstructions of the fragment, which, nevertheless, faced problems of their own.

V. THE F-ANTINOMY: RUSSELL

Let us now turn to Künne's analysis of Russell's enunciation of the antinomy. Russell does couch the F-sentence unambiguously in terms of lying: '[Its] simplest form... is afforded by the man who says 'I am lying'; if he is lying, he is speaking the truth, and vice versa' [Russell (1910), p. 63, quoted by Künne]. If someone who says 'I am lying' is really lying, he is decidedly saying something true – but we have seen that this may not be enough for him to be speaking the truth. He must also believe what he says.

Is Künne's criticism of Russell in this point warranted? It boils down to the question whether it is possible to lie while not believing that you're lying. Expressed like that, it certainly doesn't happen very often. I suspect we tend to associate some rudimentary kind of higher level awareness with the act of lying. If you accept that a proper act of assertion requires the agent to believe that she is involved in it (at least so that her speech act can be construed as one of lying) and that for her to lie, she must not only not believe the content of her assertion, but also believe that she doesn't believe it, then you can safely draw the conclusion that it is impossible for someone not to be aware of the fact that she is lying. Nevertheless, the conceptual boundaries are admittedly hazy and of course it is to Künne's credit that he has drawn attention to this somewhat overlooked issue.

Suppose we replace 'speaking the truth' with 'saying something true' in Russell's formulation, Künne suggests. Would that fix all the problems? Künne, following Moore, doubts that. The biconditional 'He is lying if and only if he is saying something true' is paradoxical only under the further assumption, to which Künne certainly doesn't subscribe, that all lies are false. Are they?

All things considered, Künne, Moore and Frege certainly have a point. It is the epistemic state of the agent rather than the actual state of affairs that is essential in assessing the sincerity of an assertion, with which the notion of lying is inextricably interwoven. However, it might be of some interest to track down the source of the overwhelming complacency about this formulation of the antinomy in the literature.

Suppose you are asked about an assertion of another person: 'Did he lie?' If you know he was indeed insincere and, moreover, what he said was false, you can answer with a simple 'yes' without any second thoughts. However, suppose that despite his insincerity, he managed to say something true – could you still get away with a simple 'yes' or would you feel the urge to

qualify it? Some of us may even say something like ‘He *tried to* lie, but what he said was actually true.’

How does this strong preference for ‘false’ interpretation of lying come about? I think we may shed some light on this puzzle if we turn the example on its head. Suppose the person you talk about really did his best to be helpful, but simply got it wrong. No remotely plausible analysis would mark this as a case of lying; however, a short ‘no’ would in all likelihood be as confusing as the ‘yes’ in the previous case. I believe that this is due to the fact that people who are in a position to lie are paradigmatically viewed as reliable, and often exclusive, sources of information – that’s why they are consulted in the first place. The discovery of their lying usually doesn’t invalidate the assumption of their reliability and from the fact that they don’t believe the content of their assertion we easily draw the inference that they believe it is false.

I for one don’t think most of our notions come equipped with neat semantic analyses, which a philosopher or a linguist may one day manage to enunciate in full, while explaining away the apparently offending examples of use in terms of a welter of pragmatic effects. I suspect natural language is messier than that – our notions might acquire their core meaning in a few loosely connected language games and then might be expanded, shrunk or deformed to benefit new circumstances of use (which may themselves become dominant, as witnessed by expressions such as *to give the lie to* in English or *jemanden Lügen strafen* in German, which completely suppress the original meaning of ‘lying’ in favour of simple falsity). It might be, therefore, theoretically viable to explain some of the phenomena linked with the notion of ‘lying’ we have just observed by resort to some theory of generalised implicature, but I am not sure of the interest of such an undertaking.

Let us return to Moore’s objections to Russell. Künne points out that the self-referential interpretation of the liar-dictum is by no means the only one possible, since it can refer to another assertion you’re making at the same time (e.g. in writing). To avoid this possibility, Künne devises a special symbol ‘(\leftrightarrow)’ that forces a self-referential interpretation of the demonstrative present in an F-sentence. Oddly enough, Künne doesn’t view it as an ingredient of the sentence itself, but only as an external marker of the intended interpretation. However, there doesn’t seem to be any principled objection to such an addition to our vocabulary – in Künne’s case, it would be a matter of merely changing a few examples, especially in the third chapter.

VI. EPIMENIDES – THE ILL BIRD FROM CRETE

The refutation of the long tradition of linking the ‘Liar paradox’ with Epimenides is one of the central pillars of Künne’s book.⁵ The main argument has already been provided – it is the solution to Bolzano’s self-

confessed liar. So when the author of the letter to Titus (Künne reminds us that there are very good reasons not to identify him with St Paul) quotes from Epimenides the Cretan the verse

(Tit 1:12) Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.

and goes on to endorse this testimony, he need not be aware of any paradox, for there is none involved. Despite this fact, the latter fragment of the New Testament has been considered a source of the F-antinomy since the Renaissance and beginning with Russell, it has become almost an obligatory reference for the ‘Liar industry’ – it appears in Quine, Kripke and a host of other authors. Needless to say, Künne has no intention of joining in.

After the discussion of a curious passage by Frege related to the F-antinomy, Künne shows that Epimenides’ statement must be transformed into

(f-Epimenides) Everything ever asserted by a Cretan is false.

in order to trigger what he calls *the Cretan paradox* – the mere assertion of (f-Epimenides) by a Cretan implies (with the help of some basic principles of classical logic) that there exists some other true statement made by a Cretan. The full-fledged antinomy is obtained only by adding the further premise that all other assertions by Cretans are false.

Künne shows that no ancient and medieval commentators, many of them of extraordinary stature, detected a paradox in *Titus* 1:12. They were usually pressed by other concerns – for the most part, the question whether it was admissible for a Christian to indulge in pagan literature. Within the analytic tradition, no other philosopher of relevance beside Moore seems to have thought twice about Russell’s analysis of the fragment. Künne concludes with the stern remark that St Jerome in the 4th century had done a better job interpreting the passage than most 20th century logicians.⁶

VII. BOLZANO AND SAVONAROLA

The second chapter of *Epimenides und andere Lügner* is devoted to Bolzano’s taking issue with Girolamo Savonarola’s solution to the F-antinomy, exposed in the latter’s *Compendium Logicae* from 1492.⁷ In order to explain their differences, propositions must be differentiated from the sentences that express them – a distinction that may seem hackneyed to a modern reader acquainted with analytic philosophy, but which nonetheless must be treated with care when interpreting the thinkers of the past. Künne takes little for granted in his book and it is just as well – his exposition is condensed but clear, making the text readily accessible for undergrad students as well as newcomers to analytic philosophy.

Savonarola's solution to the antinomy places him among the so-called *nullifiers* or *cassantes* – a broad group of philosophers who deny either that F-sentences are genuine sentences or that they express genuine propositions (we can find another *cassans* in Alexander of Aphrodisias, mentioned in the first chapter; even Tarski belongs to this group, given that he banishes F-sentences from the language of the object theory). Bolzano argued that a possible argument for *cassatio* invoking an across-the-board ban on self-reference on the grounds that a sentence cannot be a proper part of itself would be based on a misguided conception of how sentences convey their content and as such would be doomed to fail (Wittgenstein famously defended this very position in the *Tractatus*). However, Savonarola's argument was different. He contended that every sentence had to be either true or false; and since in case of an F-sentence either option leads to a contradiction, it follows by *reductio* that an F-sentence can't be a genuine sentence. The argument of a 'propositional' nullifier would run analogously.

Künne states three objections to the strategy of the nullifiers. The first one is that the idea of accepting another truth value beyond true and false is perhaps not as outlandish as it might seem at first sight, as witnessed by examples such as 'Have you stopped beating your father?' Whether you answer positively or negatively, you will be deemed to have admitted to unacceptable behaviour towards your progenitor. Such sentences seem to be well formed as well as to have definite meaning, but they nevertheless can't easily be construed as true or false if their presupposition is not fulfilled.

This is no knock-down argument, and Künne makes no secret of it. We saw earlier that even if a common assertion of 'This is a lie' strongly suggests 'This is false', this sort of inference doesn't have to rest on the linguistic meaning (whatever that may be) of 'lie'. 'I haven't given up smoking' strongly suggests 'I still smoke', but there doesn't seem to be anything wrong with 'I haven't given up smoking, because I have never smoked to start with.'

Another objection is that the *cassantes* have not dismissed all logical possibilities. One could namely still take Graham Priest's favourite horn of the dilemma and embrace the contradiction. Maybe the F-sentence should be regarded as both false and true?

Künne's third objection, in my view, conflates the syntactic and propositional version of *cassatio* in a way that detracts from the clarity of exposition. First, Künne argues that two different utterances of the same sentence (for instance, a self-referential and a non-self-referential utterance) may respectively turn out as paradoxical and non-paradoxical. But this argument is too weak, as Künne rightly remarks, since there is nothing amiss with the assumption that the utterance of a particular sentence may sometimes, though not always, fail to express a proposition. However, this counterargument seems to be available only to propositional *cassantes* – it is not clear what an analogous counterargument for a syntactic version of *cassatio* should look like.

Next, we are asked to consider Kripke's observation: '[...] ordinary assertions about truth and falsity are liable, if the empirical facts are extremely unfavourable, to exhibit paradoxical features' [Kripke (1975), p. 691]. Künne comes up with the example of Mr K. who says 'The proposition expressed by my last words is (will be) false' and the following second unexpectedly passes away. Again, it would be difficult to accept that the 'sententiality' (*Satzförmigkeit*) of Mr K.'s assertion depends essentially on contingent facts about the world, such as his precise moment of death. The propositional case poses more difficulties, though. After all, we all know that this world is often quite a forbidding place, capable of bringing our best efforts to naught – and why should some of our attempts at saying something sensible constitute an exception? Künne argues that the propositional nullifiers face the problem of compositionality – if Mr K.'s utterance doesn't express any proposition, neither should his utterance of the same sentence preceded by 'I fear that', 'It is possible that' or embedded in a conditional. However, all these operators modify the circumstance of evaluation of the embedded sentence and as such distort its original self-reference, so this argument is far from convincing. Künne could have pointed out that this purported solution leads to another paradox – if Mr K.'s had instead said 'The last proposition that I ever express is (will be) false', then the latter diagnosis, with the further reasonable assumption that Mr K. had expressed at least one other (?) proposition in the course of his life, itself gives rise to a contradiction. But then, Künne's book certainly doesn't intend to enter the fray and get tangled up in an overly technical debate – and that's in my opinion one of its strongest points. own solution? He rejects Savonarola's syntactic version of *cassatio* and according to Künne, neither would his theory of propositions have enabled him to espouse its semantic variant, had he considered it. Since in Bolzano's eyes each genuine sentence must be either true or false, he has to choose the truth value to be attributed to an F-sentence. He opts for 'false' on the grounds that he equates it to

(F+) I declare what I am now asserting to be false and I desist from asserting it.

Given the fact that despite your words you did assert (F+), it is false and so is an ordinary F-sentence. However, the equivalence between (F) and (F+) is, to say it mildly, far from uncontroversial.

VIII. SELF-REFERENCE IN THE SPOTLIGHT

In the third chapter Künne explores some peculiar properties of self-referential sentences not essentially linked with the 'Liar paradox'. He begins by showing that self-reference is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condi-

tion for generating the paradox. The first fact is attested by the so-called truth teller:

(TT) This (\leftrightarrow) sentence is true.

The second fact is best observed with a pair of utterances, each one referring to the other.

The first question Künne addresses is the negation of self-referential sentences. If you go about it in an ingenuous way, simply inserting an internal negation as if you were dealing with any other ordinary sentence, the result will be disappointing – the new sentence will refer to itself and thus talk about different things than the original sentence. This, of course, is impossible for a proper negation, and it is the main reason Bolzano adduces to explain why the truth-teller cannot be considered the contradictory to an F-sentence.

So what *can* you do? Künne offers two strategies: you can either abandon self-reference and somehow force your new sentence to refer to the original one (you can use Künne's new corner arrow together with a demonstrative, but a proper name should probably work just as well), or use the technical device consisting of an 'external' negation together with the symbol '[' that restricts the scope of the demonstrative that is meant to refer to the very sentence of which it is a part:

(EN) Not [the number of words in this (\leftrightarrow) sentence is ten.

Under the intended interpretation, the previous statement is true.

Deduction with self-referential sentences is also problematic, because the syntactic transformations corresponding to applications of deduction rules generate new self-referential sentences – and change of reference along a deductive chain can, of course, invalidate the reasoning.

Perhaps the most interesting and original part of the third chapter are Künne's remarks about the translation of self-referential sentences. Künne argues that on close scrutiny, only the first out of the following three apparently intuitive requirements for a satisfactory translation remains standing:

- (I) Preservation of truth value
- (II) Preservation of subject matter
- (III) Preservation of linguistic meaning

Of course, professional translators and interpreters have been aware of the utopian character of these desiderata for quite a while. Their task doesn't really consist in pouring the content of a text into the mould provided by

another language – rather, they create new texts in the target language for purposes that are somehow connected with the original texts. Possible translations vary as wildly as the purposes for which they are made. Admittedly, it is hard to think of a convincing example contravening rule I that couldn't be interpreted as an adaptation rather than a translation of the original text, but then, translators adapt all the time. For instance, when the author says something literally false by what you construe as an omission (you can still say that you've translated the intended, rather than the literal meaning of her utterance, however). Rules II and III are, of course, flouted on a grand scale – and this is how it should be.

Künne discusses at some length another purported counterexample to rule I – the case of a speaker of the source language who fails to acknowledge the synonymy of two class names and has contradictory beliefs about what he takes to be the referents of these names. If the target language only has one term for the class in question at its disposal, it has been argued that a correct translation must inevitably end up changing at least one truth value of those belief attributions. Künne takes issue with this argument and his position boils down to the principle that you must somehow mark the difference in the speaker's beliefs in the target language as well. This much is undoubtedly true; whether there is any canonical solution to such a problem is another issue.

Some non-paradoxical self-referential sentences, such as 'This (\leftrightarrow) is an English sentence' cannot be translated into another language without breaking rule III if self-reference is to be preserved. And that can be of crucial importance, especially if you translate 'Liar literature'. Whereas the latter sentence can best be rendered into Spanish as 'Ésta (\leftrightarrow) es una oración española', there are, of course, sentences lacking a single best translation. And rule II is also infringed all the time without any second thoughts. So 'The concept *syllable in the word tree* picks the word out as a whole' would probably become 'El concepto *silaba de la palabra flor* selecciona esa palabra como un todo.' Based on these insights, someone might put forward a general ban on translating expressions that are merely mentioned, and not used, in the source text. Künne convincingly argues that such translation would not in most cases (a peculiar exception would constitute Tarski's *The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages*) [Tarski (1935)] distort the original message, but would without doubt fail miserably at its primary mission, since it would only be accessible to readers already fluent in the source language.

IX. CONCLUSION

Epimenides und andere Lügner is an enjoyable book that combines analytic precision and clarity with continental erudition and interest for historical

background. Written in a highly readable style, frequently sparked with educated humour, it caters for everyone – a novice will find it a brainy introduction to the so-called ‘Liar paradox’, whereas many an expert will benefit from Künne’s historical and philological comments and warnings. Despite its modest length, it covers a lot of ground and a wide variety of topics. The annexes delve even deeper into often-neglected details. And even if of a secondary importance, the book’s layout is delightful and the chosen illustrations betray good taste. The perspicuous and carefully compiled name register makes the book even more helpful.⁹ All in all, Künne’s book is a very worthwhile read that won’t disappoint anyone whom, as Philetas of Cos, the ‘Liar’ has kept from a good night’s sleep on more than one occasion.

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NOTES

¹ Actually, Künne himself only uses the term *Nullifizierer* (nullifier).

² In Künne, this meaning of ‘paradox’ is secondary to ‘the conclusion of such an argument’.

³ This suggests a further interesting question: can one lie by means of a metaphor? And if so, which proposition should be assessed for honesty: the literal one or the one conveyed by the metaphor itself?

⁴ More on this topic can be found in the first annex.

⁵ Epimenides and the little we know about this semi-mythical figure constitute one of the topics of the third annex.

⁶ However, the case of St Jerome is admittedly a little more complicated, since, as Künne explains in the fourth annex, he seems to have interpreted a similar Biblical passage in a paradoxical vein and linked it to Titus 1:12.

⁷ Savonarola’s truncated life and the lot of his work constitute the subject of the sixth annex of the book.

⁸ There seems to be a problem with the exposition of this issue on p. 115. When discussing Geach’s translation of Frege, Künne apparently confuses use and mention of the expression ‘the concept *square root of*’.

⁹ Just two minor repeated misspellings: the name of Tarski’s teacher was Leśniewski, not *Leśniewski, and the Slovak version of Jan Jessenius’ name is ‘Jesenský’, with only one s (though even in Slovak, ‘Jessenius’ is more common).

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RESUMEN

En esta nota crítica se examina con cierto detenimiento el ensayo *Epimenides und andere Lügner* de Wolfgang Kühne. Se ensalzan sus aciertos al criticar la falta de rigor histórico y conceptual de la bibliografía tanto clásica como reciente sobre la llamada 'paradoja del mentiroso' y se realiza una reflexión sobre algunas de sus conclusiones.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *paradoja del mentiroso, autorreferencia, Epimenides, Bolzano, Savonarola.*

ABSTRACT

This critical note examines in some detail Wolfgang Kühne's essay *Epimenides und andere Lügner*. It praises Kühne's insightful criticism of the lack of historical and conceptual rigour of both classical and more recent literature on the so-called 'liar paradox' and it engages in reflexion on some of Kühne's conclusions.

KEYWORDS: *Liar's Paradox, Self-Reference, Epimenides, Bolzano, Savonarola.*