

DOES THE MEANING OF LYING POSE A PROBLEM TO PINOCCHIO'S PARADOX?¹

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Abstract: In this paper I sketch two solutions to Pinocchio's Paradox, mainly by resorting to the concept of lying, as it is conceived by Augustine in his "De mendacio". I will argue that the paradox is based on a slightly narrow conception of what it means to lie, as it confuses the meaning of lying with the meaning of falsity from the correspondence theory of truth. Furthermore, I will claim that the problems that I have highlighted are sufficient conditions to block the entire paradox and, therefore, to show that the argument that supposedly leads to a contradiction is actually fallacious.

Keywords: Pinocchio's paradox, truth, falsehood, lie, Augustine, intentionality

1. Introduction

Paradoxes have always played an important role in the history of philosophical thought, being "associated with crisis in thought and revolutionary advances" (Sainsbury 2009, p. 1) because its main effect is

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to determine “major reconstruction at the foundations of thought” (Quine 1966, p. 1), especially starting from where it leads to an obvious contradiction. Perhaps one of the most famous and intuitive paradoxes is the classical version of the Liar (also called simple-falsity Liar): “What I am now saying is false.”, forms of which date back to the paradox of Eubulides (Eubulides the Cretan says “All Cretans are liars.”).

Some classical solutions to this paradox are Tarski’s (1944) or Kripke’s (1975) well-known semantic hierarchies, but we can imagine one scenario in which these theories hold no value: what if Pinocchio, whose nose grows if and only if it tells a lie, says “My nose is growing.”? The last decade of philosophical debates regarding Peter Eldridge-Smith’s (2010) presumably non-semantic version of the Liar paradox has proven to be very prolific in terms of researching the assumptions it is based on or rather exploring the metaphysical, logical and epistemological consequences that come with its acceptance.³

In the following sections I will first highlight the main characteristics of a paradox, so that we can later establish the *Pinocchio scenario* with all its specific features as being paradoxical. Secondly, I will sketch a solution to this paradox by resorting to Augustine’s conception on lying and arguing that the paradox is based on a questionable assumption that considers falsehood to be synonymous with lying.

Thirdly, I will propose another way of resolving the paradox that has a connection with the first because it questions the nature of Pinocchio and its compatibility with our definition of what lying is. Lastly, I will tackle some possible counterarguments that may arise following my arguments, precisely regarding the two solutions and the claim that they may not take into consideration the fact that the Pinocchio scenario is a fictional one and there may not be any useful insights resulting from trying to solve it with a contextualist solution.

³ For reference, see Beall (2012, 2014), Eldridge-Smith (2011, 2012), D’Agostini and Ficara (2020) etc.

2. What, exactly, is a paradox?⁴

Given the fact that this paper's aim is to propose two ways of resolving Pinocchio's paradox, I find it necessary to first clarify what is meant by the term "paradox" and what exactly means to resolve one, if possible. In doing so, I will mainly follow W.V.O. Quine's classical understanding of what is a paradox from *The Ways of Paradox* (1966) and I will later argue that the *Pinocchio scenario* as proposed by Eldridge-Smith (2010) is indeed paradoxical even though certain conditions need to be fulfilled - and it belongs to the class of paradoxes that can be solved by proving the reasoning that leads to it is, in some way, fallacious.

Most often, a paradox is generally understood as "an apparently successful argument having as its conclusion a statement or proposition that seems obviously false or absurd" (Lycan 2010, p. 615). Sainsbury also commits to a similar definition of a paradox: "an apparently unacceptable conclusion derived by apparently acceptable reasoning from apparently acceptable premises" (Sainsbury 2009, p. 1). Even though Quine admits that by considering any such argument followed by an absurd conclusion a paradox many things may be "left unsaid" (Quine 1966, p. 1), I think this account still is very much relevant for my present aim.

Following Quine's definition we can distinguish two possible ways of resolving paradoxes: either we can "show [...] that (and why) despite appearances the conclusion is true after all" (Lycan 2010, p. 615) or we can show that "the argument is fallacious" (Lycan 2010, p. 616). The latter case, which will be relevant for my present aim, implies that there must be an error that must come from the interior of a premise or even from the reasoning that leads to the contradictory (paradoxical) conclusion itself.

Quine proposes a taxonomy of paradoxes that implies three distinct types or groups: veridical paradoxes, falsidical paradoxes and antinomies. Among the paradoxes of the first type we can find examples such as Russell's famous Barber paradox or Frederic from *The Pirates of Penzance* (Quine 1966, p. 3). Veridical paradoxes are the ones whose "conclusion is in fact true despite its air of absurdity" (Lycan 2010, p. 616).

⁴ The title of this chapter is also shared by a paper written by William G. Lycan (2010)

On the other hand, falsidical paradoxes are the ones whose conclusion is “obviously false or self-contradictory” (Lycan 2010, p. 616) and some errors from the specific proof can be detected as responsible for the fallacious argument. One example of such a paradox is De Morgan’s proof that $2=1$ or, as I will show, even Pinocchio’s paradox.

Lastly, the third type of paradoxes, also called antinomies, are the ones that cannot be traced back and, therefore, cannot be resolved in the two aforementioned ways. These are the ones that pose a problem to human thought and can make us reconsider the very foundations of our thinking. One such example is, according to Quine, Grelling’s paradox regarding the “heterological, or non-self-descriptive, adjectives” (Quine 1966, p. 4).

3. Pinocchio's paradox

In his article, Peter Eldridge-Smith offers a formulation of Pinocchio’s Paradox that is as follows:

“Pinocchio’s nose grows if and only if (iff) what he is stating is false, and Pinocchio says ‘My nose is growing’. So, Pinocchio’s nose is growing iff it is not growing.” (Eldridge-Smith & Eldridge-Smith 2010, p. 213)

According to my reading of this aforementioned statement, the reasoning can be succinctly reformulated in three distinct sentences that form the paradoxical argument, such as follows:

- (1) Pinocchio utters “My nose is growing”.
- (2) Pinocchio’s nose grows if and only if (iff) he tells a lie.
- (3) Pinocchio’s nose grows iff it does not.

Here it can be observed the classical structure of a paradox: first, we have proposition (1), which I will call the *Pinocchio statement*, then we have proposition (2) consisting of a biconditional that makes the entire displayed scenario (possibly) paradoxical. Finally, proposition (3) is a

contradiction that is easily obtained by substituting Pinocchio's utterance from (1) in the right side of the biconditional from (2): Pinocchio's nose grows iff his previous statement is a lie, thus his nose is not growing.

An important modification that I have made to the original structure of the paradox is that I have replaced the *Pinocchio condition* with a more accurate version according to the fictional story of Pinocchio as created by Carlo Collodi: "Pinocchio's nose grows if and only if what Pinocchio is saying is not true." (Eldridge-Smith 2012, p. 751) has been replaced with "Pinocchio's nose grows if and only if he tells a lie."

Eldridge-Smith considers this paradox to be a version of the Liar paradox, but one that has the advantage of not using a semantic predicate. He considers that the predicate "is growing" is rather empirical than semantic and is only used to express a "facial [...] feature" (Eldridge-Smith 2010, p. 213). Even though it can be argued that the causal chain of this predicate actually leads to the use of truth-functions, this will not be the objective of this paper.

I consider this argument to be part of the falsidical paradoxes group as described by Quine mainly because it seems to have two core assumptions, even though tacitly presumed non-problematic, that give a false appearance of argumentative validity. I will sketch the core ideas of these assumptions as follows:

(A1) The mismatch between language and reality (from now on I shall refer to this as a "falsehood") is synonymous with the mismatch between a speaker's thoughts and the language she uses to express them (called a "lie").

(A2) Pinocchio's nature is analogous to a machine that processes Pinocchio's utterance and turns it into nose growth if and only if that utterance is a lie.

For the particular examination of these problematic assumptions I will reserve the following two sections and I will consider them as constituting the main objects of a possible refutation of this argument's premises.

4. Augustine's *De mendacio* and the first way of resolving the Pinocchio's paradox

In this section I aim to sketch a solution to Pinocchio's paradox that relies on Augustine's view on what lying is. In order to do that, I will argue that the second premise of the previous stated argument is based on a very narrow conception of what lying is, that identifies it with falsehood.

The second premise, the *Pinocchio condition*, is a biconditional that directly links Pinocchio's nose growth with his utterance of a lie. However, a problem arises in the moment we wish to do the substitution: what reasons do we have in order to think that there is a connection between - almost like a "causal [...] relation" (Eldridge-Smith 2010, p. 213) - the utterance of a lie and the ontological consequence of a growing nose? My thesis is that this is only possible if we tacitly assume the correspondence theory of truth as providing a framework for the ascription of the truth-value of Pinocchio's utterance. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle offers the classical formulation⁵ of the correspondence theory of truth, making it clear that the truth-value of a proposition stands in its accordance with the factual reality - thus introducing an important ontological commitment to "an ontology of facts (or states of affairs)" (Tomi 2020, p. 116).

The definition of lying has been expressed in various different forms throughout the history of philosophy, but definitely one account still stands out among the others, namely Augustine's. His first treatise on mendacity, *De mendacio*, is "one of the first attempts in Western scholarship to provide a systematic study of lying and to provide a concise, clear-cut and reliable definition of what constitutes a lie" (Gramigna 2013, p. 447). That being said, intentionality plays a key-role in Augustine's conception mainly because he seems to assume that lying is a phenomenon that is bound to human beings⁶. Moreover, the intention

⁵ "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, it is true." (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1011b25)

⁶ Even though this may be a consequence of Augustine's Christian view on the immorality of lying, I will assume that this consideration does not directly influence

to deceive is not the only condition that an utterance needs to fulfill in order to be considered a lie: duplicity in thought (lat. *duplex cogitatio*) implies that the liar has mismatching “inwardly concealed believed truth and outwardly expressed truth” (Gramigna 2013, p. 452).

Augustine defines the act of lying such as follows, only resorting to the use of the linguistic and mental planes:

“Wherefore, that man lies, who has one thing in his mind and utters another in words, or by signs of whatever kind. Whence also the heart of him who lies is said to be double; that is, there is a double thought: the one, of that thing which he either knows or thinks to be true and does not produce; the other, of that thing which he produces instead thereof, knowing or thinking it to be false.” (Augustine, *De mendacio* III.3.)

One important consequence of this previous definition is that it implies a certain view on the nature of a lie - lifting up ‘the discussion of lying from an ontological paradigm [...] that tackled the problem of lying within the frame of objective falsehoods to the metalevel of the interpreter’s beliefs and intentionality’ (Gramigna 2013, p. 449):

“For from the sense of his own mind, not from the verity or falsity of the things themselves, is he to be judged to lie or not to lie.” (Augustine, *De mendacio* III.3.)

“Whence it comes to pass, that he may say a false thing and yet not lie, if he thinks it to be so as he says although it be not so; and, that he may say a true thing, and yet lie, if he thinks it to be false and utters it for true, although in reality it be so as he utters it.” (Augustine, *De mendacio* III.3.)

This view on what lying is strongly connected to Augustine’s view on the purpose of language and how it should be. Similarly, Quine seems to assume that what we express by means of language have to be in accordance with logical principles (such as the principle of non-contradiction) and that paradoxes are just problematic cases – “crises in

any other aspect that may be part of his philosophy of language and epistemology regarding the concept of lying

thought” - that need to be solved. In other words, language should be in accordance with logic, not the other way around. These two views can be associated with Augustine's theory of the main functions of language from *De magistro* and it can be said that “liars contradict [the very principle of communication - the transmission of knowledge]” (Gramigna 2013, p. 456).

5. Second way of resolving the paradox

This second solution to Pinocchio's paradox is based on the same premise as the first solution, namely premise (2), the *Pinocchio condition*, albeit approaches from a different perspective: how can be Pinocchio's nose growth (directly) linked to telling a lie without “deliberate conscience, on the part of the speaker” (D'Agostini & Ficara 2020, p. 252). This way of resolving the paradox resides in questioning the implied nature of Pinocchio that seems to be almost similar to a machine based on a very rigid algorithm (once it tells a lie, its nose is automatically growing) - or a “truth barometer” (Eldridge-Smith 2012, p. 750), as it has been called before. The important question is – what reason have we to believe that such a thing could possibly exist? Or more precise – even though its existence is possible, is it also plausible?

This objection, also called ‘the objection of fictionality’ (D'Agostini & Ficara 2020, p. 252), has been first raised by JC Beall (Beall 2011) and then tackled by D'Agostini and Ficara (D'Agostini & Ficara 2020), ultimately resulting in proposing the Blushing Liar paradox, which is a version of the Liar paradox similar to Pinocchio's paradox that does not have a problem with plausibility. These paradoxes have the same structure, since they both contain a character that utters a self-referencing remark about their physical characteristics, that are non-semantic (the blushing of the cheeks or the growing of the nose).

My thesis is that this condition on which the paradox takes place seems to be in direct contradiction with multiple instances in which Eldridge-Smith has described Pinocchio as acting similarly to a conscious agent – “Pinocchio was beguiled” (Eldridge-Smith 2012, p. 749) etc. The

key-question is: "What exactly is the nature of Pinocchio?". If Pinocchio is just a machine, a "truth barometer", the Pinocchio scenario is not paradoxical because, as I have argued before, he cannot possibly be capable of lying because he must be capable of deliberately and consciously telling a lie. Also, telling a lie in the Augustinian view implies the intention of the speaker and also an incongruence between what he thinks to be true and what he claims to be true.

6. Possible counterarguments

One counterargument that has been used against the Pinocchio's Paradox is a reversed form of JC Beall's objection of fictionality that says that, because my previous argumentation seems to focus on the fact that Pinocchio does not have the characteristics of a real, actual, world person, he cannot possibly utter a statement that represents a lie. This objection appeals to the use of a modal apparatus and argues that fictionality is not the same thing as possibility and, thus, cannot imply further ideas about the actual world. However, it could still be argued that the two solutions that I have proposed can be subjected to the same type of critique: what if the *Pinocchio scenario* is replaced with a more plausible scenario in our actual world, such as the heart rate of someone that says "My heart rate goes up right now."⁷

My response to this counterargument, however, implies making a clear distinction between the substrate ideas of my argumentation and the assumptions of this type of critique. First of all, the two solutions that I have proposed do not imply or necessitate the idea of availability only in the actual world. Rather, they only imply that the idea of lying is very

⁷ This is, according to my interpretation, a reformulated version of the Blushing Liar paradox, since it has the same structure as Pinocchio's paradox, but it does not have a problem with plausibility. I would like to address my thanks and accredit this formulation to the anonymous reviewer that read my text and suggested this example as a possible counterargument to my perspective

different from falsehood and this consideration has no modal commitments. Of course there can be cases in which falsehoods coincide with lies (and they are, perhaps, even the majority), but it is necessary to take a close look at the exceptions and to acknowledge the fact that a paradox cannot be based on a relation that is not identity between them.

A common use in the literature of specialty for the objection of fictionality is to block the claim of Pinocchio's Paradox to have implied the confirmation of metaphysical dialetheias (D'Agostini & Ficara 2020, p. 256) because of the fact that fictionality is not the same possibility. Moreover, this counterargument can also be extended to the idea that, due to the fictional character of the *Pinocchio scenario*, it cannot possibly represent a paradox because it does not satisfy Quine's first condition of a paradox. However, the fictional character seems to be one of the additional details about the *Pinocchio scenario* that don't actually have direct consequences upon the idea that there might be something more to the concept of lying than the non-correspondence between someone's utterance and the state of affairs.

Instead of this "fictional *vs.* actual approach", my vision implies a much broader, contextualist view upon core, essential, concepts from the specialty literature discussions about Liar-like paradoxes. In this sense, I think there is much more to learn from Pinocchio's paradox besides exploring its consequences in the framework of assuming its exclusively fictional character. Thus, my general approach and response to these types of critiques implies the assumption of a contextualist point of view upon paradoxes in general, and Pinocchio's paradox in particular. To support my previous claims, I very much adhere to Michael Glanzberg's (2001) general contextualist considerations, such as follows:

"[...] paradoxes can be much more. Beyond posing some logical puzzle, they can indicate deep problems of some kind. A solution to a paradox of this sort involves more than just finding an appropriate logical trick. It requires identifying the source of some apparent inconsistency, and explaining why it is merely apparent." (Glanzberg 2001, pp. 217–218)

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, in this paper I have proposed two connected ways of resolving the Pinocchio's paradox by exposing its deceiving appearances and arguing that it is, in fact, a falsidical paradox in Quine's sense - a fallacious argument based on traceable errors. The reasoning behind this assertion can be briefly reconstructed in the following argument:

- (1) Pinocchio utters "My nose is growing".
- (2) Pinocchio's nose grows if and only if he tells a lie.
- (3) A lie is not the same thing as a falsehood.

(C1) Telling a factual falsehood does not exclude the possibility of Pinocchio's nose growing.

- (4) Telling a lie implies the intention to deceive and a mismatch between the speaker's thoughts and language.

(C2) If Pinocchio's nose grows, he must have had the intention to deceive and a mismatch between the speaker's thoughts and language implies that the possessor must be a conscious agent.

- (5) The possession of the intention to deceive and a mismatch between the speaker's thoughts and language implies that the possessor must be a conscious agent.

(C3) Pinocchio must be a conscious agent, capable of making deliberate decisions.

But, at last, (C3) is not compatible with (2) because there cannot be imposed such a condition that implies a direct relation between a deliberate act, *i.e.* lying, and an empiric feature. I think that these conceptual errors included in Pinocchio's paradox can teach us many valuable lessons about the way we conceptualize falsehood and lying or, probably most important, the dependence of some ideas to human particularities - such as awareness, agency etc.

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