

# LIARS AND LAWYERS

## Part Three: Being Refuted Beats Refuting

Meanwhile back at the ranch, or the magnificent restaurant in which the assembly has gathered itself, Paul pleads for lawyers to redeem the world's most famous logical blunder in scripture.

We're speaking of the Epistle to Titus, chapter one, verses twelve and thirteen. All Cretans are liars, on the authority of a Cretan.

Socrates has the floor.

"Rhetoric," Socrates begins, "and I merely repeat what Plato said I said – is best used against one's own self. 'A man who has done something wrong is wretched, but a man who gets away with it is even worse off'."

"509b," Cyprian ticks off the citation.

"Perhaps you should," Titus nods to Socrates, "rewind the celluloid –

"A half a reel?" Socrates takes Tertullian's hint. "Gorgias the sophist was obliged to admit – under my blistering 'cross-ex' – that rhetoricians have power over words, but are unable to instruct their students in morality."

"A tactical concession," Cyprian ahems.

"Most certainly," Tertullian slips in, "as all statements about the world are instructions."

"Excuse me?" I blurt my confusion. "Do you mean 'jury instructions'? As in how the judge lays down the law for the jury?"

Newcomers join the assembly.

David Hume clears his throat and signals his desire to take the floor.

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“Undoubtedly,” Marie Antoinette asides while sniffing, “the Scotsman Hume seeks to expiate *is* yields *ought* for which he is justly famous.”

“Gorgias does not deny,” Xantippe continues, “that his students might use their skills for immoral purposes (such as persuading the assembly to let a guilty man go free), but he says the teacher cannot be held responsible for these crimes.”

“Old hat, counselor,” Tertullian interrupts. “Gorgias points that we do not banish the martial arts instructor because the pupil picked a fight in a dark alley.”

“456d-457c,” Cyprian ahems the citation.

“The teacher must assume that the student will not abuse the arts,” Tertullian concludes, “she receives from her teacher.”

“‘I am one of those’,” Xantippe speaks up for her husband, “‘who is glad to be refuted if I do not speak the truth. This is the greater benefit. ‘Meizon agathon’,” she concludes.

“In English and Greek,” Socrates adds. “I am impressed.”

All eyes turn to Cyprian.

He seems to have missed his cue.

“458a,” he gulps his white wine spritzer. “Meizon gar auto agathon egoumai.”

Cyprian shrugs off his lapse.

“I’m enthralled,” David Hume declares.

Edward Gibbon pulls up a chair. They exchange pleasantries in two or three Indo-European languages.

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Paul squares his shoulders and defends himself.

“I was writing Titus a letter. A training artifact,” Paul nods to me as he is familiar my work. “Instructions for dialog.”

“Allow me,” Titus cuts Paul short. “You wrote the letter to me. You quoted a guy who was so *well known* and so *really dead*,” Titus excuses his Apostle, “that mention of his name was a waste of time. ‘I cannot tell a lie,’ he said *he said*.”

“An example,” Marie Antoinette speaks up, “would be Parson Weems. Quoting George Washington.”

“I tossed out a classy quote,” Paul picks up the thread. “Let me try it again.” Paul clears his throat. “ ‘Hey, Titus, when you're out on the job as Bishop, you may run across some pretty tough hombres. They might insult you or overcharge you for a meal. They might even lie to you’.”

“Here’s the punch line,” Xantippe nudges her husband.

“Let him tell the story,” Socrates cools his wife’s jets.

“ ‘And how do I know this?’ I asked Titus,” Paul reminds us. “ ‘I’ve got a witness to prove it,’ I told Titus. The guy who said, ‘beware of Cretans, they’re all liars,’ was himself a Cretan.”

“Hot water,” Cyprian confesses the truth of the matter.

“We’ve all been there,” Tertullian sighs.

“You died in bed!” Cyprian objects.

“You lapsed under torture!” Tertullian shoots back.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen!” Charlemagne restores order.

“What if a lawyer told you,” Titus picks up the pace. “ ‘All lawyers lie’.”

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“ ‘Maybe,’ you say to yourself,” Augustine takes the bait, “ ‘when he said he was lying he was lying about lying, he was telling the truth. That would be one instance of a lawyer telling the truth.’ I would be a sap,” Augustine concludes, “to rely on a lawyer for the proposition that all lawyers lie.”

“Paul enjoys his sainthood,” I address the assembly. “His honorifics are of apostolic dimensions. Several nice cathedrals.”

“Peter’s,” Xantippe informs her husband, “is bigger.”

“Many churches of lesser dimension,” I continue. “They even named a city after him. It’s somewhere in the Midwest. Dunno where, but you could look it up.”

“Thanks for the recognition, Professor,” Paul remarks, “but nobody has flat-out, no-holds-barred saved me.”

“Wouldn’t it be kind of cool,” I drop into the demotic, addressing my remarks to Xantippe, whose raised eyebrow encourages my endeavor, “if some people did save him and they were people that everyone loved to hate, but even weirder, these people doing the saving didn’t even take credit or give themselves credit for saving Paul? Wow, that would be like stranger than fiction. And worse it would suggest that the world hasn’t really talked enough about talking, because there is something new to say on the subject.”

“Which proves,” Marcus Aurelius and Charlemagne agree, “that, if this planet needs more of anything, it needs more lawyers.”

“We’re back to your crimes,” Titus nudges Paul.

“This can be taken in one of two ways,” Holmes speaks up. “I’m Conan Doyle’s creation,” he adds, “for the benefit of those on the fringes of our assembly.”

“You’re Sherlock?” Beethoven adjusts his ear trumpet.

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“If I say, *when in the course of human events*,” O.W. Holmes, Jr. minds his cue, “you may assume ‘the author must be quoting the Declaration of Independence.’ It’s a quote everyone knows, so you and me, writer and reader, we don’t have to concern ourselves with this: am I pretending that I wrote those sonorous words? Am I lying, in essence, when I say ‘here are some words I wrote,’ when I didn’t write them?”

“There’s another possibility,” The Sherlock re-takes the floor. “When I quote an author’s phrase that seems obscure, maybe I’m winking at you, the learned reader, who is going to ‘get it’ but my wink leaves other readers ignorant of my fine scholarship.

“Hence,” The Sherlock concludes, “two classes of readers. The illuminati and the illiterati.”

“It’s a bit of a problem,” Sir William Gilbert joins the fray, “for moderns to tease through this puzzle. Authors did not write footnotes for their readers. It was simply a ‘name-and-a-quote,’ for convention’s sake (This is an age when *kai* and *de* were punctuation!) and on rare occasions, the reader was told the name of the work. The reader was supposed to know her ancient authors. For example, Paul ignores Aristotle’s discussion of this question, ‘can a sentence be both true and false at the same time?’”

“Here’s the cite, *Sophistical Refutations*, 180b1, Bekker edition,” Cyprian addendums. ‘I may be repeating myself,’ he mumbles.

“Does this happen to you,” Jean d’Arc leans over to console Cyprian, “a lot?”

“Your blouse is unbuttoned,” Cyprian gasps.

“Wanna make something of it,” she carresses his cheek, “big fella?”

“Is Paul ignorant of Aristotle?” Sherlock Holmes asks. “Or ignoring Aristotle?”

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“Or,” Justice Holmes continues, “and this is the poser. Does he think that none of his readers read Aristotle?”

The dipping of platter’d veg ceases.

We all pay close attention.

“That latter possibility is,” T. Roosevelt observes – while coring a fresh pineapple in the air, and with his cavalry saber – “disturbing. Imagine you'd like to start up a new religion. Or branch off from an old one. Do you assume that no one with an education would read your theology? Maybe you didn’t care. Maybe you figure those lacking education will take you to their unlettered bosoms.”

“Perhaps,” Paul drawls his grudging response.

“Now take Joe the Apostle,” T. Roosevelt continues. “He's a bit of a boob. But hey, I'd down a brewsky with him. Isn't it all about me? I mean, like, they've got to convert me and keep me happy. So appeal to the lowest common denominator? Writing obviously illogical stuff is the best way to get folks like me on your side. Aristotle, Smeristotle.”

“I am enthralled,” Theodora sighs, and I notice that her hand slip up Xantippe’s thigh.

“Which brings us back to Augustine,” The Sherlock picks up the thread.

“He was defending Paul, as best he could,” Justice Holmes continues, “by saying that the Liar’s Paradox was a ‘flimsy trick.’ Yep, and so it is. Self-referring sentences aren't that tough to deal with. Lawyers and judges deal with them every day without tripping and falling on the sidewalk. Juries don’t get confused when the government informant swears that he is truthfully relating the lies he told the defendants to gain their confidence.”

“Too bad,” Cleopatra sighs, “logicians get all hot and bothered over this stuff.”

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“If the Liar's Paradox is such a flimsy trick,” Dwight D. Eisenhower motors into the fray, “how come Paul didn't get it? Or, how come Paul didn't get that Aristotle got it? Wasn't anyone reading his stuff and shooting him a Tweet? ‘Yo, Paul. Your epistle to Titus needs a bit of tightening up. That's no lie’.”

*Apparatus*

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