



This dialogue is the longest and most challenging for students, yet it curiously anticipates the later Utopia and may shed light on some of the puzzles at the heart of that later masterwork. For example, the "double" title of this dialogue, "Lover of Lies or The Skeptic" is worth noting. The "lover of lies" here is one character, Eucrates (and his friends), while the "the skeptic" is the narrator and interlocutor, Tychiades. The title of More's translation suggests a dialogical tension and invites the reader to wonder over the strange drama of lies, love, reason, and truth in human life. Given this focus, the reader might further wonder: to what extent does the later Raphael Hythlodæus in Utopia live up to his last name ("speaker of nonsense") or his first name ("God heals")? Does the character of More in Utopia serve a similar function as Tychiades here? How do we judge passionate tale tellers, like Eucrates, Hythlodæus, or Ulysses? How are we to discern whether the tales shared and urged are—or are not—the full "truth," one of More's stated goals in writing Utopia?

Occasion and overview of the dialogue: *The dialogue opens with Tychiades asking his friend Philocles why mature people love to lie, a practice he has noticed with vexation: "I really am annoyed," he tells Philocles, by this strange human propensity for falsehood. Why, Tychiades wonders, do human beings lie when there is no need to do so? How could a human being "delight" in such activity and "take pleasure" in it? What "benefit" could they be seeking through this weird "engrained" habit? Neither gives an answer, and readers must form their own judgment and exercise their reason, mainly on the basis of Tychiades' humorously told tale about an old man, Eucrates, whose name suggests "good ruler."*

The Tale of Eucrates: *Eucrates is a sixty-year-old devotee of philosophy, who claims authority by reason of his experience. He has a long beard, and is apparently sick. Tychiades visits Eucrates' home where Eucrates and the following friends are discussing the old man's illness: Cleodemus: a Peripatetic; Dinomachus: a Stoic; Ion: a Platonist; Antigonus: a medical doctor; Arignotus: a Pythagorean.*

Study Questions

1. As with the earlier ironic texts of More's translations, it is important to look carefully for evidence that reveals Eucrates' motives, judgment, passions, and character. Why, for example, in section 6 does Eucrates change his voice from "speaking loudly with exertion" to "a relaxed and quiet sort of voice"? Is there any significance to this shift?
2. Regarding the overall structure of the tale, note that Eucrates does not enter the incredible-tale-telling-contest until section 17. What is your reaction to the earlier parts of the story, such as the tales of Cleodemus and Dinomachus about cures with lions' and deers' skins (sections 7-10)? Or the tale of Ion about the Babylonian snake-bit charmer and snake conjurer (sections 11-12)? Or Cleodemus' stories of the flying giant who could elaborately "conjure up love affairs" between rich Glaucias and a well-known prostitute (sections 13-15)? Or Ion's account of spells used to release individuals from terrors (section 16)? Why include these details before Eucrates speaks himself?
3. What moves Eucrates to enter the tale-telling in section 17?
4. Why do you think Eucrates appeals to fear in section 19? After his account of the giant woman monster with snake feet and hair, walking with an elephant-sized dog, what is Eucrates' reaction to his own story at the end of section 22? What is the reaction of his audience in sections 23 and 24?
5. When Eucrates transitions to his tales of the underworld, he turns to his servant Pyrrhias to confirm his truthfulness, at which point Tychiades laughs. What causes his laughter? When an author generates laughter, to which of the reader's faculties is the author appealing?
6. Cleodemus and Antigonus enter to defend Eucrates with their own marvels in sections 25 and 26 before Eucrates's two teenage sons enter at the beginning of section 27. What causes the younger son to tremble and turn pale? What causes Tychiades to blush in section 29 after Arignotus has joined them? What does a human blush signify or reveal about the blushing person and the cause?
7. After venerable Arignotus tells his tale about getting rid of a terrifying ghost by chanting an Egyptian spell, Tychiades continues to refuse to believe despite the opposition of all these respected individuals. When asked whom he would believe, Tychiades in section 32 invokes Democritus from Abdera who "firmly...believed that souls are nothing after they depart from bodies." Eucrates then tells his own story of magic in sections 33 to 36.

How does this dialogue present and probe human credence, or credulousness? Does the dialogue suggest any grounds for trust and credence, or is it skeptical of all human belief?

8. In section 37, Tychiades rebukes the old men for “telling these monstrous stories,” warning them about the “terrifying” effect they have on “young people.” What principal bad effects does Tychiades enumerate? What effect will these stories have, for example, on young people’s passions, inner calm, and habits of thinking?

9. In section 38, Eucrates, with his own young sons present, agrees with Tychiades about superstition but denies that he has indulged in any. Why make such a denial?

10. In section 38, Eucrates also denies that he was “telling incredible things for [his] own glory.” What does seem to motivate Eucrates?

11. What, finally, is the “great remedy” against loving lies, according to Tychiades? What is your response to the grounds for “good cheer” in the final advice of Tychiades? Compare Tychiades’ final counsel to More’s account of the dialogue in the letter to Ruthall – and to Tiresius’s final counsel in “Menippus.”

12. After reflecting on the dialogue as a whole, why do you think these old men love to lie?

13. Does Lucian (often called a skeptic himself) present Tychiades in a wholly favorable light? Or is he suggesting that there is anything missing in the figure of Tychiades?

Considering the three Lucian dialogues together: In the letter to Ruthall, More remarks that he chose these Lucian pieces to translate for a good reason. When you think of “The Cynic,” “Menippus,” and “Lover of Lies” together, do you see any connections or shared concerns? Considered together, do these works suggest a common vision, or are they simply a selection of interesting dialogues for translation by a young and ambitious author?