Truth, Knowledge, and the Value of False Belief in Plato

Nicholas Ryan Baima
Washington University in St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/art_sci_etds
Part of the Philosophy Commons

Recommended Citation
http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/art_sci_etds/484

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Arts & Sciences at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Arts & Sciences Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact digital@wumail.wustl.edu.
WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Department of Philosophy

Dissertation Examination Committee:
Eric Brown, Chair
Hugh Benson
John Doris
Julia Driver
G. Fay Edwards
Robert Lamberton

Truth, Knowledge, and the Value of False Belief in Plato
by
Nicholas R. Baima

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015
St. Louis, Missouri
## Truth, Knowledge, and the Value of False Belief in Plato

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: <em>Republic</em> 382a-d: On the Dangers and Benefits of Falsehood</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Philosopher Rulers and False Beliefs</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Persuasion, Falsehood, and Motivating Reason in the <em>Laws</em></td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: The Value of Drunkenness in the <em>Laws</em></td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Death and the Limits of Truth in the <em>Phaedo</em></td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank a number of people who helped with this project: Nathan Adams, Anne Margret Baxley, Lisa Cagle, Anna Christenson, Mike Dacey, Jeff Dauer, Claude Evans, John Heil, Nazim Keven, Charlie Kurth, Christiane Merritt, Lauren Olin, Shane Reuter, Gillian Russell, Katie Shanker, Katheryn Shrumm, Julia Staffel, Roy Sorensen, Ian Tully, Isaac Wiegman, Eric Wiland, Gary Williams, David Winchell.

Thank you Ryan Platte for teaching me Classical Greek and thank you George Pepe for teaching me Latin.


A number of people have helped form and improve various chapters. Chapter one grew out of a paper I wrote for Robert Lamberton’s class on Plato and Aristotle on Poetics; I thank Robert Lamberton for teaching that course and for giving me such positive feedback on my paper. A version of this chapter was presented at the Spring 2014 meeting of the Indiana Philosophical Association; accordingly, I thank the participants of the conference, as well as Lewis Trelawny-Cassity for such detailed and encouraging comments. Additionally, I would like to thank two anonymous referees and the editor of *Classical Philology*, Shadi Bartsch, for their comments and feedback on a version of chapter 1. I thank James Wilberding for reading and giving helpful feedback on a version of chapter 2. Chapter 4 benefited greatly from the feedback I received at the Workshop in Politics, Ethics, and Society (WPES) hosted by the WUSTL Political Science Department. I also thank Lewis Trelawny-Cassity for his comments on this chapter. I thank an anonymous referee at *Apeiron*, who offered very constructive comments on a version of chapter 5.
I would like to thank Christopher Heath Wellman for his support and encouragement as the chair of the Philosophy Department. I would also like to thank the WUSTL Philosophy Department and WUSTL Graduate School for their generous financial support.

In many ways the idea for this dissertation grew out of three things: Julia Driver’s work on the virtues of ignorance and epistemic vice, John Doris’ work on positive illusions and self-enhancement, and Eric Brown’s awesome teaching of Plato in Spring 2010 and his work on advising fools. I am very lucky to have the individuals who inspired this project serve on my committee—thank you!

I thank Hugh Benson for coming all the way to St. Louis to serve on my committee. Thank you G. Fay Edwards for your encouragement and input, and thank you Robert Lamberton for being on my committee.

I thank Eric Brown for being a wonderful advisor and mentor.


Philoi: I thank Tyler Paytas for reading countless drafts of everything I have ever written since 2007—your love of honor and wisdom inspire me, brother. I thank Jason Gardner for reading Plato’s corpus with me throughout the summer. Many of the ideas I have in this dissertation developed through our discussions. I thank Sarah Malanowski and Felipe Romero for reading my work and talking to me about Plato even though they have very little interest in Plato.

Lastly, I thank my family, and in particular, my Mom, Dad, and Brother, for their unwavering support and encouragement.
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Truth, Knowledge, and the Value of False Belief in Plato

by

Nicholas R. Baima

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

Washington University in St. Louis, 2015

Professor Eric Brown, Chair

In this dissertation, I challenge common readings of Plato according to which epistemic vice is either always bad, or is merely beneficial for non-philosophers. On my reading, false beliefs and defective forms of reasoning can benefit everyone in two ways. First, there are commitments—to care for the health of your soul, to care for the well-being of other human beings—that a person needs to have in order to live well, and a reliably good life requires that these commitments be entrenched and unwavering. For those people and soul-parts that lack philosophical understanding, some falsehoods can help sustain these crucial normative commitments. I argue that this is how the Noble Lie and the Preludes work in the Republic and the Laws, respectively. Second, there are some questions that outstrip our ability to answer them with full justification—questions, for instance, that concern the nature of the soul, the gods, and death. Nonetheless, sometimes the demands of living well require us to form beliefs about these questions even though we risk error. I argue that this occurs in Socrates’ attitude towards death and the afterlife in the Phaedo. This interpretation has far-reaching consequences in that it reshapes how we understand the relationship between Plato’s ethics and epistemology.
“Anyone unable to understand how a useful religion can be founded on lies will not understand this book...So be it”

John/Jonah (Cat’s Cradle, Vonnegut, 2014/1962, ch. 4, pp. 5-6)

“I thought that pain and truth were things that really mattered
But you can’t stay here with every single hope you had shattered”

Big Country (“In a Big Country,” 1983)
INTRODUCTION

“What in us really wants ‘truth’...Suppose we want truth: why not rather untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance?” (Beyond Good and Evil, 1.1)

“‘Truth! Rapturous delusion of a god! What does truth matter to human beings!” (On the Pathos of Truth, p. 12)

Nietzsche accuses philosophers of fetishizing truth and undervaluing falsehood. According to Nietzsche, Plato is the source of this problem. Perhaps, this is voiced most directly in the Gay Science:

But what I have in view will now be understood, namely, that it is always a metaphysical belief on which our belief in science rests,—and that even we knowing ones of today, the godless and anti-metaphysical, still take our fire from the conflagration kindled by a belief a millennium old, the Christian belief, which was also the belief of Plato, that God is truth, that the truth is divine...But what if this itself always becomes more untrustworthy, what if nothing any longer proves itself divine, except it be error, blindness, and falsehood;—what if God himself turns out to be our most persistent lie? (Nietzsche, The Gay Science, 3.344).\(^1\)

To be clear, Nietzsche is not accusing Plato of thinking that everyone should always seek truth and avoid falsehood. After all, Nietzsche famously congratulates Plato for making “a real lie,

---

1 Nietzsche quotes this passage at 3.24 in the Genealogy of Morals.
a genuine, resolute, ‘honest’ lie” in the Republic (Genealogy of Morals 3.19). Rather, Nietzsche’s charge is that Plato thinks that philosophers themselves only aim at truth and never accept falsehood, and in doing this, they neglect the value of uncertainty, ignorance, and falsehood.

Nietzsche’s view of Plato is not eccentric; his interpretation was prevalent in antiquity as well. It is, for instance, essential to the Academy’s turn toward skepticism. Arcesilaus extracted from Plato’s dialogues the lesson of suspending judgment in order to avoid false belief. Moreover, many scholars today agree that Platonic philosophy pursues the true and eschews the false. For instance, Katja Vogt, follows in this tradition, arguing that it is a Socratic Intuition “to avoid the acceptance of falsehoods, and that it is preferable to make no truth claims as opposed to false ones” (Vogt 2012, p. 24). Similarly, A. J. Bartlett argues that Plato is a champion and advocate of the importance of “an education by truths” (Bartlett 2011).

Nor is it difficult to find textual support for Nietzsche’s charge. After all, in Plato’s early dialogues Socrates notoriously disavows knowledge and admonishes those who claim to know that which they do not know. For example, in the Apology, Socrates tests the Oracle of Delphi’s claim that no one is wiser than him by seeking out and challenging those who profess wisdom (20e-23c). Upon doing this, Socrates discovers that he is wiser than those who think that they are wise because he is cognizant of his ignorance, but they are not—they claim to know that which they do not know, and thus they are ignorant of their ignorance. Socrates identifies this practice of self-examination with philosophy, a divine exercise he will pursue to his death (28b-32e). From this text, it is easy enough to see why one would think that Plato considers philosophy a skeptical practice that is fundamentally about avoiding false belief and expelling falsehood from others.

---

2 “That the lie is permitted as a means to pious ends is part of the theory of every priesthood...But philosophers, too, as soon as, with priestly ulterior motives, they form the intention of taking in hand the direction of humanity, at once all arrogate to themselves the right to tell lies: Plato before all” (Will to Power, 141).
Consider also the *Gorgias* in which Socrates is careful to distinguish philosophy from mere rhetorical persuasion. Philosophy is concerned with truth and goodness, while rhetorical persuasion is merely concerned with flattery and pleasure, and is indifferent to the truth. For example, when Polus attempts to refute Socrates through rhetoric, Socrates replies, “You don’t compel me; instead you produce many false witnesses against me and try to banish me from my property, the truth” (472b).

Plato’s commitment to truth and resistance to falsehood is not idiosyncratic to his early period of writing, but extends to his middle and late dialogues as well.³ The philosophers of the *Republic*, for instance, are committed to truth in the same way that Socrates was in the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*. Socrates, in the *Republic*, says, “They [viz., philosophers] must be without falsehood—they must refuse to accept what is false, hate it, and have a love for the truth” (485c). Plato’s love of truth continues into what many scholars consider his last work: the *Laws*. Through the mouth of the unnamed Athenian, Plato says that “truth heads the list of all things good, for gods and humans alike” (730c).

This interpretation, though common, nonetheless, underappreciates key passages. I argue that there are two general ways that Plato builds false beliefs into the commitments of philosophers. First, in the *Republic* and *Laws*, he thinks that everyone needs some false beliefs to acquire the basic moral commitments of a decent human being, and he does not think that one sheds all of these false beliefs upon becoming a philosopher. One example of this occurs in the *Republic*, where the non-rational part of the philosopher ruler’s soul believes the “noble lie” and this false belief harmonizes the soul by motivating virtuous activity. Second, at least in the *Phaedo*, Plato suggests that philosophers should appropriately risk false belief for the sake of cultivating the best possible

---
³ The periodization of Plato’s dialogues is a source of contention, however, nothing substantive hangs upon the way that I have grouped them.
soul. For instance, upon confronting death, Socrates clings to certain beliefs about death and the destination of soul regardless of whether or not these beliefs are true. This demonstrates that the value of truth is limited in scope for Plato; sometimes the demands of living well require us to abandon the pursuit of truth and knowledge. The upshot of this is that we need to reconsider the relationship between Plato’s epistemology and his ethics—no longer can we view truth and well-being as inseparable.

Outline of Chapters

Anyone with a vague familiarity of the Republic likely knows that Plato’s Kallipolis is founded upon a “noble lie” (γενναίον ψεῦδος); because this is the most familiar useful falsehood in Plato’s corpus, it is only fitting that the first two chapters begin here. The first chapter analyzes what kinds of false beliefs are beneficial in the Republic. I answer this question by analyzing II.382a-d, a passage in which Socrates cryptically distinguishes between dangerous falsehoods that he calls, “true” or “real” falsehoods, and potentially good falsehoods that he calls, “impure” falsehoods. I argue that true falsehoods are a restricted class of false beliefs about ethics—they are false beliefs about how one should act, I call these “normative commitments.” I argue that false normative commitments are always pernicious because they create and sustain psychological disharmony. I argue that impure falsehoods are false claims about why certain actions or laws are unjust or just, I call these “justifications.” False justifications are beneficial when they produce true normative commitments and harmful when they produce false normative commitments. My reading contributes to the secondary literature by undermining an interpretation put forth by David Simpson and Raphael Woolf, who argue that Plato tolerates falsehoods about everything except the Forms. The upshot of my interpretation is that the ignorance and false beliefs of non-
philosophers is less damning because it does not constitute a “true falsehood.” Accordingly, on my reading the non-philosophers are doing better than on the Form’s reading.

The second chapter picks up where the first chapter left off by exploring who believes the “noble lie” in the Kallipolis. Traditionally, scholars have maintained that only the non-philosophers truly believe the myth to the extent that the philosopher rulers only believe the moral of the noble lie, but do not believe the myth as a literal truth. I challenge the traditional reading by arguing that Socrates’ account of early childhood education and moral psychology demonstrate that the non-reasoning part of the philosopher’s soul does, in fact, believe the noble lie. Moreover, I argue that these false beliefs have positive ethical value because they produce harmony in the soul by motivating the non-reasoning part towards virtuous activity. If this is correct, then it raises serious problems for Nietzsche’s interpretation because it demonstrates that Plato thought it was important to build false beliefs into the basic commitments of philosophers.

In the third and fourth chapters, I depart from discussing the Republic and turn towards the Laws. The third chapter examines the Athenian’s discussion of preludes, which are messages that preface the laws and make citizens more eager to obey them. In order to make sense of the preludes, I rely upon the distinction I made in the first chapter between normative commitments and justifications. I argue that many preludes involve false justifications that entail true normative commitments. This chapter contributes to the secondary literature in two ways. First, it undermines an interpretation of the preludes put forth by Christopher Bobonich, who argues that the preludes involve “rational” persuasion. Second, it directs the debate between Bobonich and his opponents, Richard Stalley and Glen Morrow, into new and fertile ground. Both sides agree that the preludes instill true beliefs and give citizens good epistemic reasons for obeying the laws. I argue, however, that both positions are mistaken to the extent that they primarily view the preludes as a source of
epistemic reasons. I argue that the fundamental purpose of the preludes is to motivate right action—epistemic considerations are merely a subsidiary concern.

The fourth chapter analyzes the Athenian’s discussion of drunkenness (μέθη) in the Laws. Plato’s attitude towards drunkenness is surprisingly positive in the Laws, especially as compared to his negative treatment of intoxication in the Republic. In the Republic, Plato maintains that intoxication causes cowardice and intemperance, while in the Laws, Plato holds that it can produce courage and temperance. This raises the question: Did Plato change his mind? And if so, why? Ultimately, this chapter answers affirmatively and argues that this marks a substantive shift in Plato’s attitude towards drunkenness, false beliefs, and anti-rational desires. This chapter argues that the source of this change might stem from Plato losing confidence in the ability of knowledge and reason to maintain virtuous dispositions. With the exception of Elizabeth Belfiore and a few others, most scholars have underappreciated the significance that drunkenness has in the ethical education of the citizens of Magnesia. Hence, this chapter contributes to the secondary literature by engaging with important passages that are often overlooked.

The previous chapters examine Plato’s attitude towards possessing and sustaining false beliefs; nevertheless, they say nothing about the belief formation process itself. In the fifth chapter I analyze the belief formation process of Socrates in the Phaedo. I argue that in Socrates, we find the position that philosophers should sometimes abandon the pursuit of truth for the sake of cultivating the best possible soul—in certain circumstances, philosophers will be better off holding fast to certain beliefs irrespective of their truth. This is, perhaps, the most significant evidence against Nietzsche’s interpretation of Plato, because it is an example of a philosopher himself directly eschewing truth for the sake of other goods.
Methodology

My interpretation utilizes four interpretive methods. First, each chapter focuses on a single dialogue and treats the content of the dialogue mostly on its own terms. Second, I assume the standard chronological order of the dialogues. Third, I assume that the protagonist of the dialogue approximates a view that Plato is sympathetic towards. Fourth, I assume that Plato believes that false beliefs are metaphysically possible, which is to take a particular stance on philosophical issues raised in the *Sophist* and *Theaetetus*. I do not address the metaphysical and semantic issues concerning false beliefs raised in the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus* because I am primarily interested in the ethical and epistemological implications of false beliefs.

This leads into my next point of discussion—my choice of texts might strike some scholars as odd. Hence, one might ask: Why choose the *Republic*, the *Laws*, and the *Phaedo*, when there are so many other dialogues to choose from? My goal in this dissertation is to argue that not only is Plato extremely tolerant of false beliefs, but that he views false beliefs and defective forms of reasoning as having the power to contribute to flourishing. I have chosen the texts that make this point most vividly. Nevertheless, I do not think that these texts are unusual in this respect. I think that Plato’s tolerance of false belief can be found in every text in his corpus; especially, for instance in the *Apology*, the *Gorgias*, the *Ion*, the *Meno*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Philebus*, and the *Statesman*. If I had the space and the time to discuss these texts, I most certainly would. I have, however, limited space and time, and because of this, I have had to make difficult choices regarding what texts to discuss. I have chosen the texts that will allow me to make the most persuasive and interesting claims concerning false beliefs in the space and time I have to write this dissertation.

Lastly, even if one accepts my choice of texts, one still might find their arrangement to be strange since the order does not follow the traditional chronology. With respect to this, I have
arranged the chapters such that there is a progression in Plato’s toleration for false beliefs. Hence, the order in which I discuss the dialogues is a consequence of this progression.

Texts and Translations
CHAPTER ONE

*Republic 382a-d: On the Dangers and Benefits of Falsehood*

1. Introduction

Socrates’ attitude towards falsehood is quite puzzling in the *Republic*. Although Socrates is clearly committed to truth, at several points he discusses the benefits of falsehood. This occurs most notably in Book III with the “noble lie” (414d-415c) and most disturbingly in Book V with the “rigged sexual lottery” (459d-460c). This raises the question: What kinds of falsehoods does Socrates think are beneficial, and what kinds of falsehoods does he think are harmful? And more broadly: What can this tell us about the relationship between ethics and epistemology?

The key to answering these questions lies in an obscure and paradoxical passage in Book II.382a-d, when Socrates distinguishes between “true falsehoods” and “impure lies.” True falsehoods are always bad, but impure lies are sometimes beneficial. Despite Socrates’ insistence that he is not saying anything deep, his distinction is far from straightforward. Nevertheless, in order to determine why some falsehoods are beneficial and why some are always harmful, we must understand what exactly true falsehoods are and how they differ from impure lies.

In this chapter, I argue that true falsehoods are a restricted class of false beliefs about ethics; they are false beliefs about how one should live and what one should pursue. I refer to these beliefs as “normative commitments.” False normative commitments are always pernicious because they create and sustain psychological disharmony. Unlike true falsehoods, impure lies can be about anything. Nevertheless, they are only beneficial when they help produce and sustain true normative commitments. I argue that the upshot of this is that practical concerns have a kind of primacy over theoretical concerns.¹

¹ I should note that I will not focus on the political question of whether the lies in the *Republic* make Plato's
2. True Falsehood and Impure Lies

The text (viz., 382a-d) is situated at the end of Book II; Socrates and Adeimantus have been discussing the merits of the current educational system, which centers around the poems of Hesiod, Homer, and others. Socrates assesses how the poets depict the gods and whether this account is both true and proper for educational purposes. Socrates examines three aspects of the gods as presented by the poets. First, the poets represent the gods as causing both badness and goodness (379-380a). Socrates finds this objectionable, arguing that because the gods are completely good, they can only cause goodness (379c). Second, the poets depict the gods as changing forms (380d). Socrates finds this problematic because the gods cannot alter themselves. The gods are already in the best condition; any alteration from that condition would be to change into something worse (381b-c). Third, the poets represent the gods as deceiving humans by presenting themselves as something that they are not. Socrates asks, “But may we suppose that while the gods themselves are incapable of change, they make us believe that they appear in many shapes, deceiving and practicing magic upon us?” (381e8-10). Adeimantus responds, “Perhaps” (381e11). Adeimantus’ response surprises Socrates and leads him to ask, “What? Would a god be willing to deceive (ψεύδεσθαι) in either word or deed, by presenting an illusion?” (382a1-2).

When Adeimantus expresses uncertainty (382a3), Socrates attempts to identify a kind of deception or falsehood that no god or human would accept. Socrates says, “Don’t you know that all gods and humans hate at least the true falsehood (τό γε ὦς ἄληθῶς ψεύδος), if one can put it this way?” (382a4-5). The paradoxical name, “true falsehood” (τὸ... ὦς ἄληθῶς ψεύδος) confuses
Adeimantus (382a6). Socrates clarifies himself by explaining that “no one willingly deceives (ψεύδεσθαι) the most authoritative part (τὸ κυριωτάτο) of himself and about the most authoritative things (περὶ τὰ κυριώτατα), but everyone most of all fears accepting it [viz., falsehood] there” (382a7-9). Understandably, Adeimantus is still quite puzzled (382a10).

Socrates attributes this confusion to Adeimantus mistakenly thinking that he is saying something profound or holy (σεμνὸν). Socrates explains that he simply means that “to deceive and to have deceived (ψεύδεσθαί τε καὶ ἐψεῦσθαι) one’s soul about the things that are (περὶ τὰ ὀντα), and to be ignorant (ἀμαθῆ), and to have and to hold falsehood (ἔχειν τε καὶ κεκτῆσθαι τὸ ψεῦδος) there is what everyone would least accept and would most hate in their soul” (382b1-5). Surprisingly, Adeimantus expresses that he understands (382b6).

Now that Socrates has Adeimantus’ agreement, he attempts to justify his use of the paradoxical name “true falsehood” by contrasting it with a “not altogether pure falsehood” (οὐ πάνυ ἄκρατον ψεῦδος). He explains that the former occurs when one has ignorance in one’s soul (382b7-9), while the latter is a “kind of imitation in words (ἐν λόγοις μίμημά) of the condition (παθῆματος) in the soul [i.e., ignorance], an image (εἴδωλον) that arises later” (382b9-c1). With this distinction in place, Socrates explains that the “real falsehood” (τὸ ὀντὶ ψεῦδος) is hated by both gods and humans (382c3-4), whereas the falsehood in words is not always hated by humans.

“lie,” I shall translate ὡς ἀληθῶς ψεῦδος as “true falsehood.” Note that further below I will defend this interpretation when I argue that “true falsehoods” are really false beliefs about the most authoritative things.

3 At VII.535d-e, Socrates says that the philosopher rulers are to hate both voluntary and involuntary falsehoods; cf. Laws 730c. One might think that this is a continuation of the taxonomy of falsehoods at 382a-d because at 382a-d Socrates discusses voluntary falsehoods. However, I do not think that Socrates means anything technical in his use of voluntary and involuntary falsehoods at 535d-e. I think Socrates simply means that the rulers ought to hate both saying something false without knowing it is false and saying something false while knowing it is false (i.e. lying). The idea is that the rulers should develop negative dispositions to falsehoods generally (cf. 474b-475c, 485c-d, 490a-c, and 501d). This is somewhat paradoxical because the rulers must lie in order to benefit the city (cf. III.389). Nevertheless, the point seems to be that if the rulers dislike lying they will only lie when it is truly necessary and beneficial; cf. Annas (1981, pp. 107, 166-7); Brickhouse and Smith (1983, p. 84); Schofield (2007, p. 148).

4 Note that eventually I will argue that “impure lie” is a better translation than “impure falsehood.” However, because at this point in the text I am merely introducing the idea of οὐ πάνυ ἄκρατον ψεῦδος, I shall use the phrase “impure falsehood.”
(but is by gods). Socrates likens falsehood in words to a useful drug, which can be used for preventing the ignorant or mad from doing bad (382c6-10). Additionally, Socrates explains that when discussing ancient stories that one is ignorant of (cf. 376e-378e), falsehood can be useful when it is like the truth as far as possible (382d1-3).

Socrates is distinguishing between a “true” (ὡς ἀληθῶς) or “real (τὸ ὑπὸντι) falsehood” and an imitative falsehood that is “not altogether pure” (οὐ πάντα ἄκρατον). Hereafter, I shall simply refer to the former kind of falsehood as a “true falsehood” and the latter kind of falsehood as an “impure falsehood.” Socrates’ explanation of the distinction is convoluted, and thus warrants a careful analysis. It will be helpful to begin with a general summary of the distinction. True falsehoods and impure falsehoods differ in their location, ontology, content, and effect. For instance, Socrates says that true falsehoods are located in the soul and in the most authoritative place (τῷ κυριώτατῳ). In contrast, impure falsehoods are located in words (ἐν λόγοις ψεῦδος). They differ in ontology to the extent that true falsehoods are real and involve actual ignorance, while impure falsehoods are imitative and merely appear as real falsehoods. Socrates describes true falsehoods as being about the most authoritative things (περὶ τὰ κυριώτατα), but does not specify the content of impure falsehoods. True falsehoods are always worthy of hatred and thus are never useful. However, impure falsehoods are not always worthy of hatred to the extent that they are sometimes useful.

5 Socrates continues the drug metaphor at III.389a-c when he asserts that just as only physicians should prescribe drugs, only philosopher rulers should tell lies in the city. Following this, at 459d-460c, Socrates applies the drug metaphor when developing the “rigged sexual lotteries.”

6 For a discussion of what stories Socrates might be referring to, see Belfiore (1983).

7 Hence, the name “true” or “real falsehood.”

8 Plato makes it clear that no falsehood could ever be useful to the gods (382d-382e). This demonstrates a way in which gods differ from humans. Impure falsehoods can be useful to humans, but can never be useful to the gods.
A visual representation of these distinctions is found in Table 1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Ontology</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>True Falsehood</td>
<td>Soul, the Most Authoritative Part of Oneself.</td>
<td>Real</td>
<td>About The Most Authoritative Things</td>
<td>Always Harmful, Never Beneficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impure Falsehood</td>
<td>Words</td>
<td>Imitative</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Sometimes Harmful, Sometimes Beneficial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now that we have a clear overview, we can begin to examine each aspect in more detail. Let us begin with the categories of location and ontology. As I just explained, Socrates says that true falsehoods are real and are located in the soul and the most authoritative part of oneself. However, it is unclear what exactly this means. It seems that there are two possible interpretations: either the soul is the most authoritative part of oneself, or the most authoritative part of oneself is a specific part of the soul, such as the reasoning part of the soul. Both interpretations have textual support; nevertheless, for the purposes of this chapter, not much will depend on settling this dispute, and thus we can leave the issue in a stalemate.

The more pressing question is: What kind of things are true falsehoods? The most straightforward answer is that true falsehoods are false beliefs. This is the most obvious answer because true falsehoods are located in the soul, and beliefs are the psychological attitudes that are standardly understood as being true or false.

However, there is a notable objection to this reading. Christopher Gill (1993, p. 45) argues

---

9 For instance, when Plato divides the soul into parts in Book IV, he makes it clear that reason is supposed to have the most authority in the soul—it is supposed to control the spirited and appetitive parts. This lends credence to thinking that the most authoritative part of a person is the reasoning part. However, there are two things that tell against this interpretation. First, Plato has yet to divide the soul in Book II. Second, and more importantly, Plato thinks that the soul, as a whole, has authority over the body, which suggests that Plato might be thinking of the most authoritative part of oneself as the soul in its entirety.
that Socrates is using the terms “true” and “false” in a non-standard (i.e., non-propositional way). For instance, he says that “while such a state consists, in part, in having false ethical beliefs, it is clear from the larger context that such ‘falsehood’ is a property of the personality as a whole...Correspondingly, ‘truth’ (at least, ‘truth in the psyche’) must also be a state of the whole personality and not just a property of statements or beliefs.” In support of this interpretation, Gill (1993, p. 45 and n. 15) cites the fact that Socrates uses the terms “true” and “false” in other non-standard ways in the Republic. For instance, Socrates describes god as being true in deed and word (382e8) and says that pleasures can be “true” and “false” (585d-586e).

Nevertheless, the evidence in favor of Gill’s reading is lacking. First, in both of these passages (i.e., 382e8 and 582d-586e) it is not obvious that it is necessary to read “true” and “false” in non-standard ways, and it is possible to make sense of “true deeds” or “true pleasures” in a way that is compatible with standard accounts of truth. For example, in describing the gods as “true in deed,” Socrates might simply be conveying the idea that the gods are honest and do not deceive or manipulate humans. Second, and more importantly, even if we are forced to interpret these passages (i.e., 382e8 and 582d-586e) as using a non-standard account of truth, this does not force a non-standard reading of truth in the notion “falsehood in the soul.” There is nothing inconsistent in Socrates using a non-standard account of truth to talk about “true deeds” or “true pleasure” and using a standard account of truth to talk about “falsehood in soul.” Without any further reasons for entertaining an extended use of truth when interpreting falsehood in the soul, it is best to interpret falsehood in the soul simply as false beliefs.

In contrast to true falsehoods, impure falsehoods are located in words and are an imitation

10 Brickhouse and Smith (1983) defend an extended use of “true” in the Republic. For a criticism, see Woolf (2009, p. 17).
11 Cf. Philebus, esp. 40c-41a.
of ignorance. This seems to suggest that impure falsehoods are verbal assertions with false content. If we understand these false verbal assertions as lies told by people who know the truth,\textsuperscript{12} then we have a clear explanation for the imitative nature of impure falsehoods.\textsuperscript{13} For example, suppose Felipe lies to Sarah by telling her that Michael Jordan never played for the Chicago Bulls. Felipe does not actually believe this; he knows that Michael Jordan played for the Chicago Bulls. However, in order for Felipe’s lie to be successful, his assertion has to appear to represent his actual beliefs. That is, he must appear to Sarah as someone who actually believes that Michael Jordan never played for the Chicago Bulls, which is to say that he must imitate being ignorant.\textsuperscript{14} Hence, I argue that the contrast between true falsehoods and impure falsehoods is between false beliefs and verbal lies; true falsehoods are false beliefs, while impure falsehoods are verbal lies; because of this, for the remainder of the chapter I will use the term “impure lie” to refer to οὐ πάνω ἁκρατον ψεῦδος.

Many scholars disagree, however. They argue that the fundamental difference between true falsehoods and impure lies is that impure lies are false beliefs about unimportant things and thus are beneficial (or at the very least, not devastating to an agent), while true falsehoods are false beliefs about important things, and thus always harm an agent.\textsuperscript{15} I disagree with these interpretation

\textsuperscript{12} I am making this qualification because a lie does not necessarily involve telling something false. For example, even if a verbal assertion is true, it is still a lie if the person asserting it believes that it is false and intends to deceive someone by asserting this statement.

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. Adam (1963, \textit{ad loc.} 382b). Eric Brown has suggested that impure falsehoods might be imitative because they are linguistic as opposed to them being imitative because they are lies told by someone who grasps the truth. This is an interesting suggestion, but all of the references to impure falsehoods in the \textit{Republic} involve lies being told by people who grasp the truth (or at the very least, are aware they are not telling the full truth); cf. 3.389a-c; 5.459d-460c. Additionally, one advantage of my interpretation is that it can capture the impurity of impure falsehoods—they are impure because they are combined with truth. Ultimately, however, not much turns on this specific issue.

\textsuperscript{14} Simpson (2007, pp. 345-6) argues that verbal falsehoods are not lies, but deception. Simpson maintains that lies involve a betrayal of trust, while deception does not necessarily involve this. However, it is not clear that Socrates has this distinction in mind. Moreover, even if we assume for the sake of argument that Socrates is operating under this distinction, it seems that some of the impure lies involve a betrayal of trust, such as the rigged sexual lottery (V.459d-460c).

\textsuperscript{15} For example, Reeve (1988, p. 210) says, “[A verbal lie] is not an 'altogether pure lie' because it does not
for two reasons: First, it conflates the “content” and “effect” with the “location” and “form.” From 382a-d, it is clear that Socrates means to keep these things separate. Second, and more importantly, at 382c6-10, Plato makes it clear that impure lies are not always useful, but are only sometimes useful. Hence, a generic feature of impure lies cannot be that they are useful, since this is not always the case.

Although the contrast between true falsehoods and impure lies is between false beliefs and verbal lies, it is a mistake to think that all false beliefs are true falsehoods. This interpretation is problematic for two reasons. First, Plato makes it clear that true falsehoods are about the most authoritative things, which indicates that true falsehoods are false beliefs restricted to a certain domain (i.e., the most authoritative things). Second, Plato makes it clear that sometimes lies (i.e., impure lies) are beneficial. Presumably, these lies are beneficial because of the false beliefs that they produce and sustain. For example, when Felipe lies to Sarah saying that \( p \), this lie can only be beneficial for Sarah, if she forms the false belief that \( p \). In other words, there is a symmetry between the lies that are beneficial or harmful to tell and the false beliefs that are beneficial or harmful to believe, such that beneficial lies produce beneficial false beliefs and harmful lies produce harmful false beliefs. Call this the “symmetry thesis.”

With this in mind, we can distinguish between four kinds of falsehoods: false beliefs that are sometimes beneficial and sometimes harmful to possess (i.e., contingent falsehoods), false beliefs that are always harmful and never beneficial to possess (i.e., true falsehoods), lies that are sometimes beneficial and sometimes harmful to tell (i.e., impure lies that are contingently bad or

---

16 At times Annas (1981, p. 107) and Schofield (2007, pp. 144-147) appear to suggest this position.

17 This label is my own insofar as Plato does not provide a name for this category.
good), and lies that are always harmful and never beneficial to tell (i.e., impure lies that are necessarily bad).

Table 2 provides a visual representation of the various distinctions. As one can see, the content of the falsehood (either a lie or a belief) plays a fundamental role in determining whether the falsehood is necessarily harmful or contingently harmful. When the falsehood is about the most authoritative things it necessarily is harmful. Nevertheless, if the falsehood is about something else, then the falsehood can be harmful or beneficial depending on various circumstances. Because of this, we must determine what the most authoritative things are. This is the task of the next section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Ontology</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>True Falsehood</td>
<td>Soul/Reason?</td>
<td>Real</td>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>About The Most Authoritative Things</td>
<td>Always Harmful, Never Beneficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contingent Falsehood</td>
<td>Soul/Reason?</td>
<td>Real</td>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>Not About The Most Authoritative Things</td>
<td>Sometimes Harmful, Sometimes Beneficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impure Lie that is Necessarily Bad</td>
<td>Words</td>
<td>Imitative</td>
<td>Lie</td>
<td>About The Most Authoritative Things</td>
<td>Always Harmful, Never Beneficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impure Lie that is Contingently Bad or Good</td>
<td>Words</td>
<td>Imitative</td>
<td>Lie</td>
<td>Not About The Most Authoritative Things</td>
<td>Sometimes Harmful, Sometimes Beneficial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. The Most Authoritative Things

There are two plausible candidates for what Socrates means by the most authoritative things at
II.382a-d. They are either the old Socratic issues of the early dialogues (such as ethical considerations about how one should live), or, they are they are the Platonic issues that concern metaphysical or philosophical matters (such as the Forms). In other words, the question is: Does a true falsehood involve having a false belief about basic ethical facts, or does it involve being ignorant of the Forms? In this section I shall argue that the former provides the best interpretation. I shall proceed by first giving a positive argument in defense of this view. Following this, I shall explain why this position is stronger than the latter interpretation.

However, before I move on, I need to clarify what might be a source of confusion. The question I am asking is not whether some ethical truths are metaphysically independent of the Forms. Rather, the question is: Do you have a true falsehood if you have a false belief about certain ethical matters? Or, do you have a true falsehood if you are ignorant of the Forms? Notice that if you are ignorant of the former, you are necessarily ignorant of the Form of the Good because, presumably, knowledge of the Form of the Good entails grasping basic ethical truths. However, the inverse is not true, to the extent that you can have a true belief about a basic ethical fact while being completely ignorant of the Form of the Good. For instance, Susan can grasp that she should help her elderly neighbor carry his groceries into his apartment without knowing anything about the Form of the Good, and this holds true even if the Form of the Good grounds the fact that helping her elderly neighbor is a good action.

Fundamentally, what is at stake in this debate is how damning the ignorance of the non-philosophers is. From Socrates’ discussion at II.382a-d it is clear that true falsehoods are the worst and most hated kind of falsehood or ignorance one can possess. Thus, if true falsehoods involve ignorance or false beliefs about the Forms, then this bodes much worse for the non-philosophers because they do not have knowledge of the Forms. However, if true falsehoods involve ignorance
or false beliefs about basic ethical facts, which non-philosophers are capable of grasping, then Plato has a much more optimistic view of non-philosophers in the *Republic* insofar as they do not possess the worst kind of falsehood—namely, the true falsehood.\(^1^8\)

\[\textit{a. Basic Ethical Facts}\]

The key to understanding what Socrates means by the most authoritative things is found in the passages that immediately precede and follow 382a-d. In Book II, just before the introduction of the term “true falsehood,” Socrates complains to Adeimantus that the poets depict the gods acting immorally. He says, “Telling the greatest falsehood about the most important things (τὸ μέγιστον ψεῦδος καὶ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων) doesn’t make a fine story” (377e6-7). The example he gives is of Uranus, Cronus, and Zeus acting unjustly (377e-378a). The story is not “fine” because it depicts the gods acting in despicable ways, and this sends the wrong message to audience of the poems (378b).\(^1^9\)

This passage suggests that the most important things have to do with ethics and how justice is portrayed. If the greatest of gods is depicted as acting unjustly, Socrates worries that stories like this will make the citizens believe that acting unjustly is acceptable—perhaps even praiseworthy. This will lead the citizens to cultivate the wrong psychological dispositions, and as a result, they will mistake what is good for bad and bad for good.\(^2^0\)

\(^{18}\) To be clear, I do not think that what is at stake is whether or not Plato’s ethical theory can exist apart from the Forms. On the “ethical reading,” the Form of the Good still provides the metaphysical grounds for good actions. Furthermore, on the “ethical reading,” the philosophers are still in a better state than the non-philosophers insofar as they understand why actions are wrong.

\(^{19}\) Page (1991, p. 9) takes to this show that the “biggest things” (τὰ μέγιστα) have to do with the cosmic order that “dwarf the specifically human.” However, this interpretation misses the point of the passage, which is primarily about education. Plato is concerned that because humans admire the gods, humans will want to behave like them. Hence, if humans hear that the gods act unjustly, humans will act unjustly. This is why these stories deal with the most important things. Cf. 377a-b, 378a-b, 380b-c, 381e, 386a-c, 388b-d, 389d-e, and 391e.

\(^{20}\) At 377d-e, Socrates condemns these stories saying that they “create a bad image of what the gods and heroes are like, just as a painter might paint a picture that is not at all like the things he is trying to paint.” One might take this to demonstrate that Socrates’ criticism is not that these stories cause harmful dispositions, but that they are
This worry is echoed in Socrates’ criticism of the poets in Book III:

Because I think we’ll say that what poets and prose-writers tell us about the most important matters concerning human beings (περὶ ἀνθρώπων τὰ μέγιστα) is bad. They say that many unjust people are happy and many just ones wretched, that injustice is profitable if it escapes detection, and that justice is another’s good, but one’s own loss. I think we’ll prohibit these stories and order the poets to compose the opposite kind of poetry and tell the opposite kind of tales (392b1-6).

In this passage, the most important matters concerning human beings are explained in terms of how justice relates to happiness. It is dangerous if the citizens are taught that justice leads to unhappiness and that injustice leads to happiness. Stories like this will mislead citizens about what is good and bad, thereby leading them to cultivate bad psychological dispositions.

Hence, in the passages that surround 382a-d, “the most important things” (τὰ μέγιστα) are ethical matters. However, what reason do we have for thinking that “the most important things” (τὰ μέγιστα) are “the most authoritative things” (τὰ κυριώτατα)? The gap between τὰ μέγιστα and τὰ κυριώτατα is bridged in Book III. Having just discussed the types of music and poetry that are beneficial for education, Socrates asserts that music and poetry constitute the most authoritative (κυριωτάτη) education because it can affect one’s psychology in the greatest way (401d-e). Music and poetry do this in two ways: First, because rhythm and harmony permeate the inner part of the soul more than anything else, they can affect it in the strongest way. Second, a proper education in music and poetry will give one the ability to recognize what is fine and good, even if one does not simply inaccurate. However, 377e-378a reveals that this cannot be the case, because even if these stories were true, they “should be passed over in silence and not told to foolish and young people.” This passage will be discussed in greater detail in section four.

21 Cf. Laws 890b.
yet understand the reason why these things are fine and good (401d-402b).\textsuperscript{22} Thus, music and poetry constitute the most authoritative form of education because a proper education in music and poetry supplies one with the basic psychological dispositions necessary for living well.\textsuperscript{23} This was the same reason why the stories at II.377e6-7 and III.392b1-6 are the most important—they concern fundamental ethical issues about how to live. Therefore, I hold that the most authoritative things concern ethical facts about how to live. This is not a revisionary perspective, for it is just the kind of thing we see in Plato’s early dialogues. For example, in the \textit{Apology}, Socrates tells us that he has spent his life trying to persuade others that their primary concern in life should be the condition of their soul and whether it is good or not.\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{b. The Forms}

As I previously mentioned, an alternative interpretation is that the most authoritative things are metaphysical or philosophical things, such as the Forms. Hence, on this reading true falsehoods are false beliefs about these metaphysical things. Before I object to this position, I should note that this view has some plausibility. The most worked out defenses of such a position is found in both David Simpson’s (2007) and Raphael Woolf’s (2009) respective work.\textsuperscript{25} They point out that in Book VI, Socrates maintains that “the most important” (ὁ ἔγηστος) subject of learning is the Form of the Good (503e-505a). Additionally, in Book VII, Socrates describes the Form of the Good as having authority (κύριον) in the intelligible realm and providing truth and understanding (517c). This provides some evidence for thinking of the Forms as the most authoritative things.

\textsuperscript{22} This aspect of education will be discussed in more detail later in section five of this chapter.
\textsuperscript{23} Cf. 546d.
\textsuperscript{24} Cf. especially \textit{Apol}. 22d, 28a, 30a-b; \textit{Gorg}. 521d-522e. We also see this line of thought in Plato’s Middle and Late dialogues, cf. \textit{Soph}. 230c; \textit{Stat}. 302b, 308b; \textit{Laws} 689a-c, 731c3-7.
\textsuperscript{25} See also De Chiara-Quenzer (1994, p. 34).
Additionally, Plato makes it clear in the *Republic* that understanding the Forms is evaluatively more important than possessing mere true beliefs about basic facts. This interpretation has a clear explanation for why this is the case—the Forms are the most authoritative things. Moreover, at 382b1-5, Socrates says that true falsehoods are about “the things that are” (περὶ τὰ ὄντα) and later in the *Republic* (Books V-VII), Plato argues that “the things that are” are the Forms. Hence, one could take this as evidence that Plato is talking about the Forms at 382b1-5.

Nevertheless, this interpretation faces three serious problems. First, the fact that Socrates describes the Form of the Good as “important” or as an “authority” does not vindicate the Forms interpretation over the ethics interpretation because the Form of the Good is highly relevant to particular ethical matters. In other words, these passages can also support the reading that the most authoritative things are ethical facts concerning how to live.

Second, at 382b1-5, Socrates emphasizes that he is not saying anything σεμνὸν when discussing true falsehoods. The Greek word σεμνὸν means holy, profound, or majestic, and it is often used to describe the gods and other divine things. This poses a significant problem for reading “the most authoritative things” as the Forms, because Plato describes the Forms as divine. For example, in Book VI, Socrates explains that “by consorting with what is ordered and divine (θείῳ)” the philosopher “becomes as divine (θεῖος) and ordered as a human can be” (500c9-d2). I take it to be uncontroversial that the ordered and divine things that the philosopher is consorting with are the Forms. After all, a few lines later Socrates describes the study of the Form of the Good as the most important subject for philosophers (503e-505a). Additionally, in Book VII, Socrates

---

26 See the *LSJ* entry. Plato sometimes uses σεμνὸς and its cognates to refer to holy things, cf. *Crito* 51a9, *Soph.* 249a1, *Stat.* 290d8, 290e7; *Laws* 663d2. Plato also uses this term to express (sometimes ironically) that something is worthy of esteem; cf. *Crat.* 392a1; *Theaet.* 150a3, 203e9; *Phileb.* 53d6; *Sym.* 199a3; *Phaedrus* 258a6; *Euthyd.* 279a6, 303c8; *Gorg.* 502b1, 511c5; *Rep.* 475b1; *Menex.* 235b2; *Laws* 814e4.

27 Cf. *Phaedo* 80a-b.
explains that once out of the cave, the philosopher is able to look at divine images of the things that are (i.e., the Forms) (532c). Now because the Forms are divine, and divine things are σεμνὸν, it follows that the Forms are σεμνὸν. This poses a serious problem for this interpretation because at 382b1-5, Socrates makes it clear that in talking about true falsehoods he is not saying anything σεμνὸν.

Now one might object by arguing that when Socrates tells Adeimantus that he is not saying anything σεμνὸν, Socrates is not referring to the quality or property of true falsehoods. Rather, Socrates is simply telling Adeimantus that he is overthinking his explanation of true falsehoods. In other words, true falsehoods might be false beliefs about things that are holy or majestic, but it does not follow from this that one’s explanation of true falsehoods is profound or deep.28

In response to this objection I should point out that if Socrates is talking about the Forms at 382a-d, then his explanation of true falsehoods is even more elusive and cryptic than it first appears. This is because 382a-d is sandwiched between discussions which are primarily about education and not about metaphysics. Thus, if Socrates is sneaking in complex metaphysical ideas—ideas that are not explained until much later in the text—then he should have asked Adeimantus to think harder because he is, in fact, saying something quite profound. This is powerful evidence against reading “the things that are” (τὰ ὄντα) at 382b1-5 as the Forms.29

Third, and most importantly, if true falsehoods are false beliefs about metaphysical things, such as the Forms, then it follows that it is always harmful to possess false beliefs about the nature of reality. Now, assuming that the symmetry thesis is true, if it is always harmful to possess false beliefs about the nature of reality, then it is always harmful to lie about the nature of reality. The

28 I thank Tyler Paytas for raising this objection.
29 One might push back and say that Socrates is merely being ironic in an attempt to win Adeimantus' sympathy. I believe, however, that this makes for a weaker and less interesting interpretation and that it is far more interesting as a matter of interpretative method to take Socrates at his word.
problem with interpreting true falsehoods as false beliefs about the Forms is that in the “allegory of the cave” philosophers lie to the non-philosophers about the nature of reality. For instance, Socrates explains that disastrous social results could ensue if the non-philosopher were told that the sights and sounds were not real:

Soc.: Wouldn’t it be said of him [viz., the philosopher] that he’d returned from his upward journey with his eyesight ruined and that it isn’t worthwhile even to try to travel upward? And, as for anyone who tried to free them [viz., the non-philosophers] and lead them upward, if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn’t they kill him?

Glau.: They certainly would (517a3-7).

One lesson to draw from this passage is that philosophers should not attempt to teach non-philosophers about the Forms. The non-philosophers do not have the intellectual capacity nor the proper education to understand the Forms. If a philosopher attempts to teach a non-philosopher about the Forms, the non-philosopher would likely think that the philosopher was foolish and that his nonsense teachings are dangerous to the city. Hence, it is best if philosophers do not attempt to disrupt the non-philosophers’ mistaken beliefs about nature of reality by telling them the truth. If the philosophers are to guide society, they have to do it by telling falsehoods, and some of the falsehoods will be about the nature of reality—and these false beliefs will benefit the non-philosophers.

This is a point which Woolf (2009, p. 21) fails to see; for instance, he says, “That someone is not philosophical, by contrast, makes it not bad but pointless to impart certain truths, namely the

30 One might object that at 480a the non-philosophers are not supposed to be angry at the philosophers when they speak the truth. However, 480a does not actually say this. The passage only says that if non-philosophers take Socrates’ advice they should not be angry in being called lovers of opinions rather than philosophers.
philosophical ones; for they could not be grasped by such a person.” I disagree, 517a3-7 suggests that it is bad to try to communicate these truths, but it does not suggest that it is pointless. One of the upshots of this is that sometimes we ought not to tell the truth even when it is about divine things, such as the Forms. That is, sometimes we should not be gadflies (cf. Apology 30e).

One might object by arguing that although philosophers are not telling non-philosophers the truth about the Forms or the nature of reality, it is not the case that they are straightforwardly lying to them about the Forms and reality. For example, if philosophers fail to tell non-philosophers the whole truth about reality, does it follow that they are lying about reality? By my lights this seems to be a paradigm example of lying. After all, philosophers are intentionally causing non-philosophers to have and to continue to have false beliefs about facts which they know. However, a full discussion of what exactly constitutes a lie will lead us too far astray; what is essential for the purposes of this chapter is that philosophers make false verbal assertions that produce and sustain false beliefs about the nature of reality in non-philosophers, and these false assertions produce a better outcome than if philosophers were to tell the truth about these things.

Independent of my arguments against the Forms reading, one might find it odd that on my reading “the things that are” at 382b refers to ethical facts about how to live. One might wonder why Socrates is using descriptive language to refer to normative content. Admittedly, Socrates’ use of “the things that are” at 382b is strange. Nevertheless, it is possible to use descriptive language to talk about normative matters. Suppose, for instance, that the world is such that one ought to instantiate and promote goodness. Now suppose that it is also a fact of the world that certain dispositions and actions instantiate and promote goodness. If this is true, then there is a set of possible actions and dispositions that instantiate and promote goodness, and it is possible to be

---

32 I thank an anonymous referee at Classical Philology for raising this interesting objection.
ignorant about this set of things. Consider a simple example. When I was a child, my father used to tell me that I ought to clean my room and that this is “just the way things are.” In saying that this is “just the way things are,” my father was using a descriptive claim about the facts of the world to make the normative claim that I ought to clean my room. Moreover, my reluctance about cleaning my room points to me being ignorant about “the way things are,” according to my father.\footnote{To be clear, I am not saying that one can derive an “ought” from an “is.” I am merely saying that one can describe an “ought” as an “is.”}

4. Ethical Beliefs

In the previous section, I argued that it is better to interpret the most authoritative things as ethical matters rather than as philosophical or metaphysical things. However, we might wonder if all ethical beliefs count as being about “the most authoritative things” or if it is a particular subset. It will be helpful to begin by distinguishing between two types of ethical beliefs: “normative commitments” and “justifications.” Normative commitments are beliefs about how one should live and what one should pursue, while justifications are beliefs about why certain normative commitments should be held. For example, suppose that agent $A$ judges that she should $\phi$ for reason $R$. The justificatory belief is $R$, while the normative commitment is $A$’s judgment that she should $\phi$. Notice that it is possible for $A$ to judge correctly that she should $\phi$ and for her justificatory belief, $R$, to be false.\footnote{We can further subdivide these ethical beliefs. For instance, justificatory beliefs can be divided into cognitive states with metaethical content and cognitive states without metaphysical content. For example, $A$ might believe that she should $\phi$ because this it promotes the greatest amount of happiness, or $A$ might believe that she should $\phi$ because it instantiates the Form of the Good. Notice, that the latter involves more robust metaphysical commitments than the former. This distinction is not relevant for the purposes of this chapter. Additionally, we can further distinguish between general ethical commitments concerning how one should behave and ethical particulars about how one should act at a very specific moment. The useful false beliefs that I discuss in this section fit the former kind of ethical belief better. I thank an anonymous referee at \textit{Classical Philology} for clarifying this issue.}

In what follows, I argue that true falsehoods are false normative commitments. I defend
this claim by examining three beneficial false beliefs in the *Republic*. I should note, however, that I am not arguing that Plato explicitly makes this distinction. Rather, my point is that by analyzing various passages in the *Republic*, we can find this distinction in play.

The first example occurs in Book II at 377e-378a. Socrates asserts that stories about the gods acting unjustly tell the greatest falsehood about the most important things. Following this, Socrates says, “But even if it were true, it should be passed over in silence and not told to foolish and young people” (378a2-4). In this passage, Socrates is explicitly stating that even if it were true that the gods acted unjustly, people should not be told this (except in extreme circumstances). The context of the passage implies that the citizens should be told stories in which the gods always act justly, even if these stories are completely false.

Socrates is willing to sacrifice the truth about the gods because he recognizes that the stories people hear about the gods, influence the normative commitments people draw. We can represent this belief-formation process with the following model:

\[ A \text{ Reasons that:} \]

\[ B1) \text{I should emulate the gods.} \]

\[ B2) \text{The gods φ.} \]

\[ NC) \text{I should φ.} \]

Now provided that the citizens form normative commitments in this way, Socrates is

---

35 It is clear from the context that Socrates does not think that it is true. Cf. *Laws* 941b-c.
36 Grube/Reeve translate ἄφρονός τε καὶ νέους as “foolish young people.” I agree with Woolf (2009, p. 12, n. 8) that this passage should be translated as “foolish and young people.” Plato explicitly includes adults in his discussion of music and poetry, cf. 378c6-d2, 380c1-2, and 387b4.
37 Strictly speaking, Socrates does not actually say that they should be told a falsehood. He only says that they should not be told the truth. However, it can be inferred from the context that they will be told a falsehood about this.
38 Cf. 377a-b, 378a-b, and 380b-c. Additionally, notice the similarity with the *Euthyphro*; Euthyphro makes all sorts of normative mistakes because of the stories he has heard about the gods. I thank G. Fay Edwards for reminding me of this.
concerned that if it were the case that the gods acted unjustly and people knew this fact, people would form the false normative commitment that they should act unjustly. We can represent Socrates’ concern as follows:

\[ \text{A Reasons that:} \]

B1) I should emulate the gods. (False)\(^{39}\)
B2) The gods act unjustly. (True)
NC) I should act unjustly. (False)

Hence, because of this worry, even if it were true that the gods acted unjustly, the citizens should be told the falsehood that the gods never act unjustly. This false belief about the gods is beneficial because it will produce the true normative commitment that they should always act justly. This can be represented as follows:

\[ \text{1. Falsehoods about the gods} \]

\[ \text{A Reasons that:} \]

B1) I should emulate the gods. (False)
B2) The gods always act justly. (False)
NC) I should always act justly. (True)

The false justificatory belief in this example is that one should always act justly because the gods always act justly.\(^{40}\) However, Socrates is tolerant of this false belief because it will lead people to act rightly by giving them a true normative commitment. This suggests that Socrates is tolerant of false justifications when they produce true normative commitments.

The second example comes right after the first. Socrates asserts that he does not want the

\[^{39}\text{Belief (1) is false because if the gods act unjustly, it is not the case that people should emulate the gods in this way.}\]

\[^{40}\text{Again, it is important to keep in mind that Plato does not actually think that the gods act unjustly, he is merely arguing that if it were the case, then people should not be told the truth.}\]
citizens told stories about the gods hating and warring with one another because this will make the citizens think that this behavior is appropriate. Because of this, Socrates proposes that the poets adopt new stories:

But if we’re to persuade our people that no citizen has ever hated another and that it’s impious to do so, then that’s what should be told to children from the beginning by old men and women; and as these children grow older, poets should be compelled to tell them the same sort of thing (II.378c6-d3).

Socrates recognizes that people imitate behaviors that they take to be ordinary or normal (378b). If people are told stories about citizens never hating one another, they will think that it is abnormal to hate a fellow citizen, and this will lead them to judge that such behavior is inappropriate. We can represent the structure of the belief-formation process as follows:

\[ A \text{ Reasons that:} \]

\[ B1) \text{ I should act in ways that are ordinary, and should not act in ways that are not ordinary.} \]

\[ B2) \text{ It is not ordinary to } \varphi. \]

\[ NC) \text{ I should not } \varphi. \]

We can represent the beliefs that this story produces and sustains with the following model:

2. **Educative Falsehoods**

\[ A \text{ Reasons that:} \]

\[ B1) \text{ I should act in ways that are ordinary and should not act in ways that are not ordinary. (False)} \]

\[ B2) \text{ No citizen has ever hated a fellow citizen. That is, it is ordinary for citizens} \]
not to hate one another, and it is not ordinary for them to hate one another. (False)

NC) I should not hate my fellow citizens. (True)

Although B1 and B2 are false, they play an instrumental role in producing the true normative commitment that citizens should not hate each other. Moreover, it is important to note that B2 does a better job at producing this true normative commitment than if people were told the truth about human behavior. For instance, imagine that the citizens were told: “Although it is impious to hate one another, this behavior is not that uncommon, for it is actually quite ordinary for humans to fight with each other.” Provided that people formulate normative commitments based upon what is deemed ordinary or normal, such stories would lead citizens to the conclusion that it is permissible to sometimes hate one another.\footnote{This demonstrates just how perceptive Plato is when it comes to human psychology. Today, psychologists are finding that the best way to change people’s behavior towards the environment is to tell them how their peers behave in such situations. For instance, Goldstein et al. (2008) found that the best way to reduce the number of towels used by guests in a hotel was not to tell them that reusing towels helps the environment and that not reusing them harms the environment. Rather, it was more effective to tell guests that the majority of other guests in the hotel reused their towels.}

The third example is the infamous noble lie (414d-415c).\footnote{There is an interesting question as to how Plato’s attitude towards truth and falsehood in the \textit{Republic} is similar and different to his attitude in the \textit{Laws}. Schofield (2007, pp. 161-162) suggests that it is quite similar to the extent that \textit{Laws} 663d-664a seems to endorse something like “noble lies.” Recently, David Lay Williams (2013) argues that, unlike the \textit{Republic}, the \textit{Laws} does not endorse beneficial lies; cf. \textit{Laws} 730c. Although I believe Williams’ argument is interesting, I ultimately think that Plato endorses the use of noble lies in the \textit{Laws} in much the same way as he does in the \textit{Republic}. That is, in the \textit{Laws} like the \textit{Republic}, Plato is willing to tolerate falsehoods insofar as they do not mislead about the most authoritative things. Additionally, because Plato is less obviously concerned with the Forms in the \textit{Laws}, a strong case can be made for the claim that the most authoritative things in the \textit{Laws} do not concern the Forms, but concern normative commitments.}

In Book III, Socrates and Glaucon agree that in order to create the appropriate structure for their utopian city they need a creation story upon which to found the city. The citizens will be told that everything up until this point has been a dream\footnote{Lear (2006, p. 32-3) insightfully points out how this aspect of the noble lie is epistemically revolutionary in the sense that it tells one that everything up until this point has been a dream. However, Lear (p. 33-4) mistakenly thinks that this aspect of the noble lie will teach citizens to recognize allegory as allegory. This, however, is an overinterpretation; this aspect of the noble lie is simply intended to erase the other myths so that the founders of the city can instill new myths.} and that while they were dreaming, their real selves were being created...
and nurtured inside the earth, who is their mother, thus making them all related. Despite the fact that all citizens are related, different citizens have different metals in their soul: some gold, some silver, some bronze, some iron, and some brass. The myth serves two fundamental purposes: First, it unifies the city by making the citizens think that they are all related. Second, it divides the city by putting the citizens into distinct classes. The unifying aspect benefits the citizens by facilitating harmonious relations amongst them. Additionally, it gives the auxiliaries and the ruling class a personal reason to care about the well-being of the producers, which in turn, prevents the auxiliaries from bullying the weaker citizens (416a-b). The dividing aspect of the myth provides the members of different classes with an explanation for why members of different classes have different lifestyles and different political obligations.

Because there are two different aspects of the noble lie, I shall analyze each aspect separately. The unifying aspect develops or sustains the following three beliefs:

3. Unifying Aspect of the Noble Lie

4 Reasons that:

B1) I should care for my relatives. (True)

B2) All citizens are related to one another. (False)

NC) I should care for my fellow citizens. (True)

Socrates is cleverly playing off the natural belief that people should care for their relatives. Hence, by making the citizens falsely believe that they are all relatives, the citizens are led to the true normative commitment that they should care for their fellow citizens.

---

44 Essentially, the rulers are inserting a false memory in the citizens. Surprisingly there is some empirical evidence that inserting false memories can be beneficial. For instance, Clifasefi et al. (2013) found that giving alcoholics the false memory that they had a horrible experience while drinking reduced their overall level of alcohol consumption.

45 For an interesting discussion of these ideas see Schofield (2009), (2007); Bloom (1991, pp 365-367).
The separating feature of the noble lie has a similar structure. This aspect produces and sustains the following beliefs:

4. Dividing Aspect of Noble Lie

4 Reasons that:

B1) Some citizens have different metals in their soul. (False)

B2) People with different metal in their soul are suited to different tasks, such that people with metal $\gamma$ should $\varphi$. (False)

B3) I have $\gamma$. (False)

NC) I should $\varphi$. (True)

Beliefs 1-3 provide the relevant background and justification for the true normative commitment.

Each of these examples has roughly the same structure. The citizens are given false justifications in order to produce and sustain true normative commitments. This suggests that the most authoritative things are normative in nature and that true falsehoods are false normative commitments. Interpreting true falsehoods in this way provides a clear explanation for why true falsehoods are always hated by gods and humans. In Book IV, Plato equates justice to psychological health (444d-445b). He maintains that just actions create and sustain psychological health, while unjust actions produce psychological disharmony. Thus, true falsehoods are pernicious because normative commitments are inextricably tied to one’s well-being. For example,

---

46 The other beneficial false beliefs in the Kallipolis have the same structure as well. For example see Socrates’ discussion of the communal living arrangements (416e-417b) and the rigged sexual lottery (459d-460c). I’m leaving these examples out merely to avoid unnecessary repetition.

47 Notice how this is suggested at 382c6-10: “Isn’t it useful against one's enemies and one's so-called friends, when they are attempting, through madness or ignorance, to do something bad, doesn’t it then become as a useful drug for preventing them?”

48 This aspect of my interpretation has some affinities with Page’s (1993, p. 17) reading: “Only if lying did nothing else but frustrate normal human access to the truths required for good action could it be intrinsically objectionable.”
if A has a false normative commitment (i.e., a true falsehood), her false belief is going to lead her to act wrongly, and this is going to harm her well-being. Therefore, because A’s well-being is tied to the ethical quality of her actions, it is the greatest error for A to be mistaken about how she should live. However, it is much less concerning if A is mistaken about why she should perform an action, as long as the action she is performing is appropriate.

5. The Primacy of the Practical

I have argued that Socrates is tolerant of false justificatory beliefs, but intolerant of false normative commitments. The upshot of this interpretation is that practical considerations have a kind of primacy over theoretical concerns. To see this, let us reexamine why Socrates considers music and poetry to be the most authoritative form of education. As I previously discussed, in Book III, Socrates argues that one reason education in music and poetry is the most authoritative is that it allows one to grasp that something is fine and good, before one understands the reason why it is fine and good (401d-402b). Socrates is distinguishing grasping that φ is good from understanding why φ is good. The latter is much more theoretically complex than the former. This is why education of the former precedes the latter and why only philosophers truly obtain an understanding of the latter.

49 This also undermines a traditional way of understanding the falsehoods in the Republic. Commentators often say that the falsehoods are false on the surface, but produce deeper and theoretically robust truth. For example, Lear (2006, pp. 31-3) argues that impure falsehood in the Republic are connected relate to the Greek word ὑπόνοια, which means allegory, or under-thought. The idea is that the impure falsehoods are false on the surface, but have deeper layer of truth, which they convey. In Dorter’s book on the Phaedo (1982, p. 95), he offers a similar interpretation saying, “The most famous instance of this kind of technique is the ‘noble lie’ of the Republic by which people are to be made to accept the true state of affairs not by being told the truth...but by being told a lie that symbolizes the truth and that would be easier to persuade them of. See also Ferrari (1989, p. 112); Morgan (2000, p. 164); Dorter (1982, p. 7). Perhaps, also see: Gill (1993); Johansen (1998); Kamtekar (2006, p. 199); and Reeve (1988, pp. 209-10). My interpretation undermines this view because I argue that the beneficial falsehoods are about complex theoretical things and produce simple—albeit important—truths.

With this distinction in mind, let us turn to the beneficial falsehoods in the *Republic*. I have argued that Socrates is willing to tolerate false justificatory beliefs for the sake of producing true normative commitments. Normative commitments are practical in nature because they are beliefs about what one should pursue. For example, if $A$ has the true belief that she should $\varphi$, then $A$ will act rightly (assuming, of course, that she is not akratic or ignorant of some relevant empirical fact).

In contrast, justifications are more theoretically robust because they are about the reasons why one takes an action to be right or wrong.\(^{51}\) For example, if $A$ believes that she should care for her fellow citizens and not hate them because it leads to a harmonious society and that this is good because harmony and unity are by their very nature good, then $A$ has a rather complex understanding of the ethical facts concerning this matter. However, if $A$ merely believes that she should care for her fellow citizens because she falsely believes that the citizens are her relatives, then $A$ has a rather shallow grasp of the ethical fact concerning this matter. This is because, although $A$ grasps the *that*, she misunderstands the *why*. Each of the beneficial falsehoods in the *Republic* has this same structure: they mislead one about *why* something is right in order to get one to form a true belief about the action *that* one should pursue. This demonstrates a way in which practical concerns have a kind of primacy over theoretical concerns—the fact that $p$ is false is far less important than the fact that believing that $p$ will get me to behave correctly, and this holds true even when that $p$ is about complex theoretical things, such as the Forms.\(^{52}\)

---

51 Kant held that for an action to have moral worth one must understand that the action accords with moral duty. That is, one must understand why such an action is the right action. See especially Section 1 of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

52 There is an interesting comparison with Kant's account of reason. Kant maintained that practical reason has primacy over theoretical reason. By primacy Kant meant two things: First, if there is a conflict between the two, practical reason overrides theoretical reason. Second, Kant maintained that theoretical reason was ultimately grounded by practical reason, and this is ultimately why practical considerations take precedence over theoretical concerns. See the *Critique of Practical Reason* Chapter 2, Section 3. For Plato, practical considerations have the former kind of primacy, but not the latter.
“Something might be true while being harmful and dangerous in the highest degree. Indeed, it might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish, in which case the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the ‘truth’ one could still barely endure—or to put it more clearly, to what degree one would require it to be thinned down, shrouded, sweetened, falsified” (Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, 2.39).

1. Introduction

In chapter one, I analyzed what kinds of false beliefs are beneficial in the Republic; in this chapter, I examine who in the Kallipolis believes these beneficial falsehoods. Do only the less educated citizens believe the falsehoods? Or, do the sophisticated philosopher rulers also believe these falsehoods? This question is important because if only the non-philosophers benefit from having false beliefs than the first chapter does little to undermine Nietzsche’s interpretation of Plato. After all, Nietzsche’s point is that Plato thought that philosophers themselves undervalue falsehood and overvalue truth. Thus, if I can show that the philosophers in the Kallipolis do, in fact, benefit from holding false beliefs, then Nietzsche’s reading of Plato is dealt a serious interpretive blow. In this chapter, I challenge Nietzsche’s interpretation by arguing that Plato’s theory of education and moral psychology demonstrate that the philosophers of the Kallipolis believe the noble lie.1

---

1 I am focusing on the noble lie because it seems obvious that the philosopher rulers will not believe all of the falsehoods in the city. For instance, because the rulers will be running the “rigged sexual lottery” they will not believe that it is a random lottery (V.459d-460c).
Moreover, I argue that these false beliefs have positive ethical value because they motivate the non-reasoning part towards virtuous activity and without these false beliefs the philosopher’s soul will lack harmony.

In doing this, I aim to undermine a traditional view of the noble lie in which is viewed as fundamentally a device for educating the non-philosophers in the Kallipolis. On this reading, the elite and sophisticated philosopher rulers lie to the non-philosophers, who are unable to fully grasp the truth; such lies help motivate the non-philosophers towards virtuous activity and the promotion of the common good. Hence, according to many scholars, the falsehoods of the noble lie play no role in motivating fully accomplished adult philosophers towards virtue. The motivation for this view is that it would seem strange that the wisest citizens, who have knowledge of the Forms, believe something as far-fetched as the myth of the metals.

2 The Noble Lie and the Received View

In Book III of the Republic, Socrates asks Glaucon how they might devise (μηχανὴ) one noble lie (γενναίον ψεῦδος) that would “in the best case, persuade even the rulers” (III.414b9-c2). Socrates

---

2 Examples of this view or something close to it are found in: Adam (1963, ad loc. III.415d); Annas (1981, p. 108); Crossman (1963); Dodds (1951, chap. 7); Dombrowski (1997); Grote (2010/1865); Popper (1963, esp. chap. 8); Reeve (1988, chap. 4); Schofield (2009, 2007).

3 For instance, Williams (2013, p. 313, n. 51) raises the question: “A trickier question is why Socrates suggests that the myth should also be told to the rulers (Republic 414b, 414d). To be sure, he is unclear whether or not they can be similarly misled...It is possible—and maybe even likely—that Plato simply thinks that the myth is likely to take hold among the masses if the rulers also believe it. There would be no ‘leaks’ of the truth and less possibility of it ever being revealed as fiction. But again, the effectiveness of the myth does not seem logically contingent upon persuading the rulers, and Plato is dubious about the likelihood of their believing it.”

4 Cf. III.415c, Laws I.640b, II.664a, VI.752c, VI.769e, VII.798b.

5 The Greek word ψεῦδος is ambiguous between lie, falsehood, and fiction. I shall use the expression “noble lie” because parts of the “noble lie” are false and the founders of the city in speech (i.e. Socrates, Adeimantus, and Glaucon) do not believe this story as a literal truth. Also, scholars disagree about the Socrates’ use of “noble.” For instance, Page (1991, p. 21) asserts that it refers to being of “impeccable origins,” while Schofield (2007, p. 138) maintains that it refers to the massiveness of the lie. I side with Page (1991) on this issue; however, this issue is of minor relevance to the purposes of this chapter.

6 Socrates is making a clear reference back to his earlier discussions of lying at II.382a-d and III.389b; also see Socrates’ discussion with Cephalus at I.331b-d. Note that at III.414d2-4 Socrates repeats again that he wants everyone in the city to be persuaded of the noble lie. This will be discussed below.
has in mind telling a Phoenician story,\textsuperscript{7} which describes both the origins of the city and the psychological nature of the citizens. Socrates explains that he will “first try to persuade the rulers and the soldiers and then the rest of the city” that their upbringing, education and experiences “were a sort of dream” (III.414d2-4).\textsuperscript{8} He will tell them that while they were dreaming, they themselves, their weapons, and their tools were really being developed and nurtured inside the Earth and that “when the work was completed, the Earth, who is their mother, delivered all of them up into the world” (III.414e1-3). Additionally, he will tell them that different citizens are born with different metal in their soul.\textsuperscript{9} The type of metal a citizen has in her soul determines her political obligations (III.415a). For instance, those born with gold should become rulers, those born with silver should become auxiliaries, and those with bronze, iron, and brass should become farmers and craftspeople (III.415a). Socrates concludes the noble lie by conveying that the ultimate purpose of it is to make the citizens “care more for the city and each other” (III.415d3-4).

Essentially, there are three aspects to the noble lie. First, the noble lie attempts to cause an epistemic revolution in its citizens by telling them that their memories and experiences were really just a dream.\textsuperscript{10} The hope is that in doing this, the citizens will reject the things that they previously learned, and thus will be primed to absorb the content of the noble lie.

Second, the noble lie unifies the entire city by telling citizens that they are all kin.\textsuperscript{11} For instance, after Socrates explains that the citizens are born from the same mother he says,
“Therefore, if anyone attacks the land in which they live, they must plan on its behalf and defend it as their mother and nurse and think of the other citizens as their earthborn brothers” (III.414e3-6). Not only does such a story help unite citizens against external threats, it prevents internal infighting by giving the auxiliaries and the ruling class a personal reason to care about the well-being of the producers by making them believe that the producers are their family. In turn, this will prevent the auxiliaries from bullying the physically weaker citizens and the rulers from taking advantage of the intellectually inferior citizens (III.416a-b).

Further evidence for this interpretation is found in a passage that occurs just before the noble lie is introduced:

Mustn’t they [viz., the rulers] care for the city?...Now one cares most for what one loves...and someone loves something most of all when he believes that the same things are advantageous to it as to himself and supposes that if it does well, he’ll do well, and that if it does badly, then he’ll do badly too (III.412c13-d7).

The location of this passage strongly suggests that the noble lie is a device (III.414b) for getting the rulers to care for the city (III.415d) and it does this by giving the rulers a reason to love and identify with all the citizens. The importance of civic unity is reiterated in Book V when Socrates says:

Is there any greater evil we can mention for a city than that which tears it apart and makes it many instead of one? Or any greater good than that which binds it together and makes it one? (V.462a9-b2)

Glau.: There isn’t (V.462b3)

Soc.: And when, as far as possible, all the citizens rejoice and are pained by the same success and failures, doesn’t this sharing of pleasures and pains bind the
This unifying aspect of the noble lie works by instilling the following beliefs in its citizens, such that when citizen, \( C \), hears the noble lie she forms something like the following beliefs:

**Unifying Aspect of the Noble Lie**

**C Reasons that:**

U1) I should care for my relatives. (True)

U2) All citizens share the same mother and thus are all related to one another. (False)

UC) Therefore, I should care for all my fellow citizens. (True)

Socrates is cleverly playing off the natural belief that people should care for their relatives. Hence, by making the citizens falsely believe that they are all relatives, the citizens are lead to the true normative conclusion that they should care for their fellow citizens.

Third, the noble lie divides the city into different classes, but it does this in such a way that harmony can be sustained amongst the different classes.\(^{12}\) It accomplishes this by providing an explanation for why different citizens have different political obligations and lifestyles. The idea is that such an explanation will lead the citizens to believe that their place in the city is not some arbitrary function of history, but reflects their true nature crafted by the gods; the hope being that this justification for the class system will reduce the likelihood that citizens question the political structure of the city and resent individuals from different classes.

Hence, when a citizen, \( C \), hears the noble lie she forms something like the following beliefs:

Dividing Aspect of Noble Lie

C Reasons that:

D1) Some citizens have different metal in their soul. (False)

D2) People with different metal in their soul are suited to different tasks, such that people with metal $\gamma$ should $\varphi$. (False)

D3) I have $\gamma$. (False)

DC) I should $\varphi$. (True)

Beliefs D1-D3 provide the relevant background and justification for the true normative conclusion DC.

Despite the importance of the noble lie, both Glaucon and Socrates express doubts about its viability. The worry is that this myth sounds archaic and is not the kind of thing that Socrates’ contemporaries would believe (III.414b-c). Such concerns lead Socrates to ask Glaucon if he has any device for making the citizens believe it (III.415c), to which Glaucon replies, “I can’t see any way to make them believe it themselves, but perhaps there is one in the case of their sons and later generations and all the other people who come after them” (III.415d1-2). Glaucon’s point is that it would be quite difficult to convince people who have not been raised with such stories; however, if the noble lie could become embedded in the identity of the culture, children stand a chance of actually believing it, and thus are more likely to believe it as adults. In order to see why exactly Glaucon thinks this, we must turn to the discussion of early childhood education in Books II and III.

According to Socrates, early childhood education is critical because it is during this period that one’s psychology is “most malleable” and can take on “any pattern one wishes to impress on

---

13 Consider, for instance, Socrates’ hesitance in telling the noble lie and Glaucon's response to hearing it (III.414c-415d).
it” (II.377a12-b3, cf. II.377c). It is extremely important that children are exposed to stories with the appropriate content because this content will be impressed into their soul and greatly impact their development of character. For instance, if children are exposed to stories which praise injustice or cowardice, they will likely become adults who praise injustice or cowardice (II.377d-378e, III.386a-388e). The danger of hearing these stories is exacerbated by the fact that “the young can’t distinguish what is allegorical from what isn’t” (II.378d7-8). Thus, when children hear stories about gods and heroes, they will not be able to decipher between the allegorical lesson and the literal story being told. This is especially dangerous because “the opinions they [viz., children] absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable” (II.378d8-e1).14

We now have a clear explanation for why Glaucon thinks that children stand a good chance of absorbing the noble lie, while adults do not. Children are malleable and not able to discern allegory from the literal truth. Therefore, if children are taught the noble lie, they will believe that it is their true history and not merely some fictional myth. In contrast, adults can decipher between allegory and reality, and their psychological states are relatively fixed. Therefore, if an adult were not taught the noble lie as a child, then it is unlikely that she will believe it as a literal truth during her adulthood.15

From this, it is clear that Socrates anticipates that the guardian children will believe the noble lie, but do the adult philosophers continue believing the noble lie? The received view is that when guardians become philosopher rulers they no longer believe the noble lie as a literal truth,

---

14 This is why in Book III, Socrates describes education in music and poetry as the most authoritative form of education—for it is this kind of education that affects one’s psychology in the greatest way (III.401d-e). Cf. Aristotle EN 1.4. 1095b3-8. For a discussion see Brown (2004, p. 286); Gill (1996a, p. 200); (1996b, pp. 240-320); and (1985, p. 273).

but believe the moral of it. That is, the philosophers believe that they should care for all citizens (UC) and that different citizens are suited for different tasks (DC), but they do not actually believe that all citizens are born from the same mother, Earth, (U2) and that different citizens are born with different kinds of metal in their souls (D1). The idea being that when philosophers engage in dialectic and come to have knowledge of the Forms (VII.532b-541b), they will no longer believe such far-fetched things, such as U2 and D1; rather, these stories will operate as useful fictions that guide their lives.

In the next section, I shall offer a preliminary objection to the received view. Ultimately, I shall argue that this objection fails, but nevertheless is instructive in supporting a more sophisticated argument that demonstrates that philosophers continue believing the falsehoods U2 and D1 in the non-reasoning part of their soul, and that these false beliefs produce and sustain virtuous motivations and harmony in their soul.

3. Dyed Wool and the Bent Stick
   a. Preliminary Objection

There are two passages that, on the face of it, seem to tell against the received view. First, as I previously mentioned, Socrates explicitly says that the beliefs children absorb “are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable” (II.378d8-e1, cf. III.401d-e, IV.425a). This, of course, does not

16 It is not difficult to find examples of the received view, but here is a sampling. Adam (1963, *ad loc.* III.415d) in his excellent commentary remarks that “the Rulers of [Books] VI-VII might teach the legend as an ἐν δέοντι ἔνθεος [a necessary falsehood], but would themselves refuse their assent.” Annas (1981, p. 108, my emphasis) offers a similar account: “Plato seems to envisage the Guardians as eventually believing it [viz. the noble lie], so we do not have a straight case of manipulation by them of the others; but the rulers are surely thought of as believing the myth on a rather different level from the others. So there is, at the least, a double standard,” Lear (2006, pp. 32-4) argues that the noble lie has “a special belated effect on the future rulers of the city...it sets them up for a later aha! experience” in which they discover the truth about the noble lie and only believe the moral of it. For other examples of the received view see Dodds (1951, chap. 7); Grote (2010/1865); Popper (1963, esp. chap. 8); Reeve (1988, chap. 4); Schofield (2009), (2007).
mean that Socrates believes that adults necessarily retain all of their beliefs from childhood; however, it does demonstrate that he thinks that the beliefs you acquire as a child are difficult to remove.

Second, Socrates makes it clear that many of the beliefs that the guardians adopt during their education are “dyed” so deeply into their soul that they are preserved “through everything” (IV.429b8, IV.429c8, and IV.430b2-3). For instance, Socrates explains that just as “no amount of washing, whether with soap or without it” can remove the dye from wool that has been properly dyed, no amount of “pleasure, pain, fear, and desire” can remove the beliefs about what to fear and what not to fear from the guardians that have been properly educated (IV.429c-430b).

It is clear from Socrates’ discussion of the noble lie that if there are beliefs that he wants etched into the souls of the guardians, the noble lie is surely one of these. After all, he describes the best case scenario as one in which philosophers are persuaded of the noble lie (III.414c1-2), and explicitly says he wants to persuade the rulers first (III.414d2-4). Additionally, just before Socrates introduces the noble lie in Book III, he asserts that the best guardians will be able to maintain their conviction that “they must always do what they believe to be best for the city” (III.413c5-7) in the face of “labors, pains, and contests” (III.413d4-5).

Consider also that Socrates says:

Like those who lead colts into noise and tumult to see if they’re afraid, we must expose our young people to fears and pleasures, testing them more thoroughly than gold is tested by fire. If someone is hard to put under a spell...is a good guardian of himself and the music and poetry he has learned...then he is the best person both for himself and for the city. Anyone who is tested in this way as a child, youth, and adult, and always comes out of it untainted, is to be made a ruler as well as a
guardian (III.413d8-414a2).

Hence, the philosopher rulers will be those who maintain their convictions that they should care for the city in the face of everything, which is exactly what Socrates takes the noble lie to be teaching the citizens (III.415d). This suggests that the noble lie will remain with the citizens even if they become philosopher rulers.

This objection to the received view ultimately fails, nonetheless. The problem is that these passages only support the weaker claim that philosopher rulers do not lose their convictions concerning the noble lie. This does not entail that they believe the noble lie as a literal truth, but merely entails that they believe the moral of it. That is, these passages are consistent with the philosopher rulers believing that they should care for the city and all of its members (UC), while rejecting the claims that the Earth is actually their mother (U2) and that there is metal in their soul (D1). Although this objection fails, it is still instructive, in order to see how, we must turn to Socrates’ account of moral psychology in Books IV and X.

b. On the Limits of the Non-Reasoning Part of the Soul

In Book IV, Socrates divides the soul into three parts: the appetitive part, the spirited part, and the reasoning or calculating part (λογιστικόν). Unlike the reasoning part of the soul, the appetitive part and the spirited part are non-reasoning. Nonetheless, the non-reasoning part\textsuperscript{17} of the soul still possesses beliefs. For instance, in Book X\textsuperscript{18} Socrates directly says, “Then the part of the soul that forms a belief (δοξάζον) contrary to the measurements couldn’t be the same as the part that believes

\textsuperscript{17} For the remainder of the chapter, I shall speak of a non-reasoning part of the soul, however, one should remember that the non-reasoning part of the soul has two parts: the appetitive and the spirited.

\textsuperscript{18} It is a matter of dispute as to whether the non-reasoning part of the soul discussed in Book X is the appetitive part, the spirited part, both, or neither. For a discussion see Moss (2008) and Singpurwalla (2011). However, the answer to this question is irrelevant for the purposes of this chapter; all that matters is that Socrates thinks that the soul has a non-reasoning part, which has these features.
in accord with them” (X.603a1-2). Consider also the following passage from Book IV in which Socrates says:

> We call a single individual courageous, namely, when it preserves through pains and pleasures the declarations of reason about what is to be feared and what isn’t (cf. IV.429c-d)...And we call him wise because of that part of himself that rules in him and makes those declarations and has within it the knowledge of what is advantageous for each part and for the whole soul, which is the community of all three parts...And isn’t he moderate because of the friendly and harmonious relations between these same parts, namely, when the ruler and the ruled believe (ὁμοδοξία) in common that the rational part should rule and don’t raise faction against it (IV.442b11-d1, my emphasis; cf. IX.574d1-575a7, X.605c1-2).

If we take Socrates at his word, this demonstrates that the non-reasoning part of the soul is capable of forming beliefs.20 Nevertheless, although the non-reasoning part of the soul has the capacity for beliefs, it is clearly inferior to the reasoning part in that it can only form beliefs on the basis of appearance whereas the reasoning part is capable of forming beliefs on the basis of rational calculation via measuring, counting, and weighing (X.602d).21 In Book X, Socrates illustrates this with two examples. First, consider a submerged stick. When you perceive the submerged stick, the non-

---

19 Plato describes the non-reasoning parts of the soul as having cognitive abilities in other dialogues as well, see: the *Phaedrus* 247d-e, 248a-c, 253d-254d, 256a; the *Timaeus* 70a-71e. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates describes the body as having cognitive abilities, see: *Phaedo* 65b-d, 80a, 83d, 94c-e.

20 My interpretation assumes a literal interpretation of Socrates’ claim that the non-reasoning part of the soul can form beliefs and reason. For worked out defenses of this position see Moline (1978), Penner (1971, p. 100); Irwin (1995, pp. 217-8); Bobonich (2002, pp. 235-45). See also to a lesser extent Klosko (1988, pp. 347-8). Opposition to this reading has been defended by Gearson (2003, pp. 107-11); Lorenz (2004, pp. 110-11), (2006, pp. 44-8); Stalley (2007, pp. 63-83); Wilberding (2012, pp. 132-33). Additionally, for a discussion on Socrates’ use of personification in discussing the non-reasoning part of the soul; see Kamtekar (2006).

21 For an interesting discussion on how the various parts of the soul are unified see Brown (2012).
reasoning part of you believes that the stick is bent (X.602c-d). However, the reasoning part of you is not limited to forming beliefs on the basis of appearance; through calculating, measuring, counting, and weighing, the reasoning part of you can form the belief that the submerged stick is actually straight (X.602e-603a). Therefore, a person is not necessarily of one mind about the submerged stick to the extent that the reasoning part can form the belief that the stick is straight, while the non-reasoning part simultaneously believes that it is bent.

Now just as a person is not necessarily of one mind about visual perception, a person is not necessarily of one mind about “matters of action” as well (X.603c-d). For instance, according to Socrates, when a good and decent father loses a son, the reasoning part of him will deliberate about what future plans he needs to implement in order to continue living in the best way possible. Nevertheless, the non-reasoning part of the father will experience pain and suffering at the loss of his dear son because this is how the loss unreflectively appears to him (X.603e-604d). The point is that just as the non-reasoning part inside of you latches onto thinking that a submerged stick is bent, the non-reasoning part inside of you latches onto thinking that the loss of a son is disastrous and the worst thing ever. Likewise, just as the reasoning part of you can judge that the submerged stick is straight, the reasoning part of you can judge that the loss of son is not necessarily terrible and that it might actually be for the best. 22 Hence, the reasoning part has a capacity that the non-reasoning part lacks—it can form judgments on the basis of deliberative calculation, while the non-reasoning part cannot—it is restricted to the realm of appearance.

I am now in a position to explain why philosopher rulers must believe the noble lie as a

---

22 Consider what Socrates says about the death of a loved one X.604b-c: “The law says, doesn’t it, that it is best to keep as quiet as possible in misfortunes and not get excited about them? First, it isn’t clear whether such things will turn out to be good or bad in the end; second, it doesn’t make the future any better to take them hard. Third, human affairs aren’t worth taking very seriously; and, finally, grief prevents the very thing we most need [viz. reflective deliberation] in such circumstances from coming into play as quickly as possible.” Cf. Laws VII.803b.
literal truth in the non-reasoning part of their soul. As I discussed above, the young guardians will be taught the noble lie in such a way that it will be preserved “through everything”; presumably, one of the central images that the noble lie stains into the guardian’s soul is that each citizen is her true brother or sister. This belief will make the citizens appear differently—they will appear not as some distant foreigner, but as a close and special relative (U2). When a philosopher ruler completes her education, the reasoning part of her soul might (or might not) come to understand that the noble lie is not a literal truth, but merely a fictional myth, and thus her fellow citizens are not really her brothers and sisters. Nevertheless, the non-reasoning part inside of her will hold fast to the belief that her fellow citizens are her relatives (U2) because this is how the citizens appear to it, and the non-reasoning part is restricted to the realm of appearance.

Possessing this false belief, however, is actually a good thing because it produces unity and harmony in the city by motivating the philosophers to love the non-philosophers (cf. V.462a9-b6). In order to see this, let us contrast two different reasons a philosopher ruler, \( PR \), might have for holding UC.

\textit{PR’s Reasons for holding UC}

R1) \( PR \) believes that when she cares for her fellow citizens she is caring for her relatives. (False)

R2) \( PR \) believes that when she cares for her fellow citizens she is instantiating goodness, harmony, and oneness. (True)

As seen in U1-UC, the unifying aspect of the noble lie provides citizens with R1, which appeals to the natural bond and obligations that come with special relationships. In contrast, R2 appeals to the abstract ideas of goodness, harmony, and oneness, and how these concepts relate to caring for \( PR’s \) fellow citizens. This kind of understanding is only available to philosopher rulers because
only they come to know the Form of the Good.\textsuperscript{23}

Taking this into account, the nobleness of this false belief (U2) will become apparent; especially if one considers the counterfactual situation in which young guardians are not given the noble lie, but are taught the truth instead. Imagine, for instance, that young guardians are taught that different individuals have different natural abilities, and that there is no close ancestral bond between all citizens. These truths are likely to cause great disharmony amongst the citizens insofar as citizens will not appear to one another as relatives. Thus, the non-reasoning part of the soul will not form judgments, such as R1, which are conducive to having harmonious relationships amongst citizens. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the non-reasoning part of the soul lacks the capacity to grasp truths, such as R2, because understanding these truths involves deliberative calculation.\textsuperscript{24}

If this is right, then we have a clear explanation for why Socrates considers it so important that the philosopher rulers are persuaded of the noble lie (cf. III.414b-c, III.414d). The non-reasoning part of the soul is too cognitively limited to respond positively to certain kinds of reasons, such as R2. Thus, in order to motivate the non-reasoning part of the soul towards virtuous activity, it must be given cruder types of reasons, such as R1. Therefore, without the noble lie, the non-reasoning part of the soul would not be motivated towards virtuous activity and as a result one’s soul would lack harmony and the city would suffer as a result of this.\textsuperscript{25}

This might point to why Socrates believes that it is so dangerous for the young to train in dialectic. If young guardians are trained in dialectic before the non-reasoning part of their soul

\textsuperscript{23}I am making an assumption about what knowledge of the Forms is like; nevertheless, I take what I am saying here to be in line with what many others have said; see: Brown (2004, p. 287); Cooper (1999a, p. 144); Irwin (1995, pp. 272-3); Fine (1999, p. 228); Annas (1981, p. 108); Burnyeat (2000).

\textsuperscript{24}For instance, in order for a philosopher ruler, PR, to grasp R2, she has to understand the abstract concepts of goodness, harmony, and oneness, and understand how particular activities relate to these concepts.

\textsuperscript{25}Edelstein (1949) offers a similar argument with respect to Plato’s ethical myths about the fate of the soul in the afterlife.
forms stable dispositions with respect to their fellow citizens, they might not accept the noble lie, and in virtue of this, will not develop the appropriate beliefs, desires, and motivational states with respect to their fellow citizens. Socrates gestures at this in Book VII when he asks Glaucon to imagine a young boy, who unbeknownst to him, is not being raised by his biological parents. The boy is surrounded by all sorts of flatterers and wealth; nevertheless the boy gives no thought to these things, but instead honors, obeys, and cares for his mother and father. However, if the boy were to somehow discover that the people raising him were not his true biological parents, he would reject the values that they have been teaching him and would honor, obey, and care for the flatterers instead of them (VII.537e-538e). The lesson is that one should not come to dialectical training until certain dispositions and beliefs are stable, and thus will not be challenged under the scrutiny of dialectic.

Now although Socrates does not explicitly connect the story about the boy to the noble lie the connection seems clear enough. When the boy discovers that the people raising him are not, in fact, his parents, he no longer cares for them. Likewise, if a child were to discover that the noble lie is not literally true, he would no longer care for his fellow citizens because he would no longer view them as his sisters and brothers. What this points to is that there is a gap in the lives of philosophers that knowledge of the Forms cannot fill—philosophers are deprived of traditional families (III.412-IV.421c, V.457b-471c)—the noble lie fills this gap by making the non-reasoning part of their soul believe that the entire city is their family.26

26 In the “Allegory of the Cave” Socrates asserts that once the philosophers leave the Cave, they have to be persuaded (πείθω) and compelled (ἀναγκάζω) to return to the Cave (VI.500d4-8, VII.519e4, VII.520a8, VII.520e2, VII.521b7, VII.539e3, VII.540b5). Socrates, however, does not explain the means by which the rulers will be persuaded. I suggest that this might take the form of reminding them that the entire city is their family; cf. Schofield (2007), (2009). For fuller discussions on the “return to the cave,” see Brown (2004), (2000), and Kraut (1999).
c. False Beliefs in the Reasoning Part?

I have argued that the non-reasoning part of the philosopher rulers believe the noble lie as a literal truth and that this is required in order to have virtuous motivations and a harmonious soul. This undermines the received view, or at the very least, it demonstrates that the tradition has underappreciated how the falsehoods of the noble lie benefit the non-reasoning part of the soul.\textsuperscript{27}

Now we might ask the further question: Do the philosopher rulers retain the falsehoods of the noble lie in the reasoning part of their soul as well, or do they shed these falsehoods when they come to know the Forms via dialectic?

I do not believe that there is a positive argument that can demonstrate that the reasoning part of the philosopher rulers continues to believe the noble lie as a literal truth when they obtain knowledge of the Forms; nonetheless, it is, at the very least, conceptually possible that they do still possess these false beliefs. For instance, \( PR \) might have the following beliefs with respect to the unifying aspect of the noble lie.

\( PR \) believes that:

- U1) I should care for my relatives. (True)
- U2) All citizens share the same mother and thus are related to one another (False)
- U3) Caring for my fellow citizens instantiates goodness, harmony, and oneness. (True)
- UC) Therefore, I should care for all my fellow citizens. (True)

There is nothing inconsistent in the reasoning part of \( PR \) holding both U2 and U3 and because of this, there is no reason to think that \( PR \) will necessarily lose the false belief, U2, when she obtains the true belief, U3. Of course, \( PR \)'s reasons for holding the conclusion UC are

\textsuperscript{27} I am making this qualification because most scholars do not discuss how the different parts of the soul regard the noble lie.
overdetermined in the sense that the beliefs, U2 and U3, leave her with two different reasons for holding this conclusion (UC), R1 and R2, respectively. The fact that PR has two different reasons for holding a single conclusion is not necessarily problematic—after all, as I explained above R1 and R2 appeal to very different aspects. If this is right, then it is at the very least possible that philosophers do not lose the false belief, U2, when they discover the Form of the Good through dialectic.

One might worry that my thesis is defeated because I cannot definitively establish that philosophers retain R1 in the reasoning part of the soul. Nonetheless, this is not the case; my thesis is that the noble lie motivates philosophers towards virtuous activity in such a way that counterfactually philosophers would be less virtuous if they were not taught this falsehood. If my argument that philosophers retain the noble lie in the non-reasoning part of their soul is sound, then this thesis follows from it. Because it is an interesting question as to whether philosophers retain the noble lie in the reasoning part of their soul I examined this question in this sub-section. Nevertheless, my thesis stands or falls independently of this claim.28

4. Too Strong, Too Weak, and Inconsistent

a. Too Strong

Having put forth a positive account of why the noble lie motivates virtuous activity in adult philosophers, one might be left with two objections. One might worry that my thesis is too strong since it appears to preclude the possibility that someone like Socrates is virtuous. This is problematic because, as far as humans are concerned, Socrates is clearly virtuous. For instance, I have argued that the non-reasoning part of the soul cannot distinguish truth from falsity. As a result

28 It is strengthened if this additional claim is true, however; but it is not obvious that it is weakened if this additional claim is false.
of this, the core beliefs one has as a child will remain in the non-reasoning part of the soul in adulthood. Hence, humans not raised in an appropriate environment (such as Socrates) will not have the appropriate core beliefs in the non-reasoning part of the soul (such as the noble lie) as adults, and thus their soul will lack harmony.

This objection loses its force, however, once we consider that Plato himself was aware of this concern. In Book VI Socrates and Adeimantus discuss how to raise individuals to become real philosophers. Broadly speaking, this requires two things: (1) having individuals that have the appropriate philosophical nature and (2) having the appropriate environment to nurture their philosophical nature. Hence, this account appears to suggest that if one has a philosophical nature, but lacks the appropriate environment, one will not develop into a philosopher. However, at 496a-d, Socrates acknowledges that it is still possible to become a philosopher even if one is raised in a corrupt city.

He provides five examples of this happening. First, some of those who have the proper philosophical nature might avoid being overtaken by corrupters through exile. Second, a great souled individual might look beyond the affairs of the small city where she resides (496b). Third, “a very few might be drawn to philosophy from other crafts that they rightly despise because of their good natures” (496b4-5). Fourth, others might avoid a corruptive environment as a result of a physical limitation; for instance, Theages’ physical illness restrained him from pursuing politics, which would have tempted him away from philosophy (496b-c). Fifth, some individuals, such as Socrates, have daemonic signs that can guide them towards philosophy and away from corruption (496c).29

Speaking about these individuals Adeimantus and Socrates say:

---

29 To be clear, Socrates is open to the possibility that he is the only such person with a daemonic sign.
Adei.: “Well, that’s no small thing for him [viz., a philosopher surrounded by corruption] to have accomplished before departing.”

Soc.: “But it isn’t the greatest either, since he didn’t chance upon a constitution that suits him. Under a suitable one, his growth will be fuller, and he’ll save the community as well as himself” (497a1-5).

Now, the objection was raised that my interpretation was inconsistent with individuals like Socrates becoming philosophers. The objection goes that because they lacked the appropriate core beliefs as children, they will not be able to develop the appropriate philosophical dispositions. This passage (i.e., VI.496a-497a) demonstrates that Plato thinks that it is still possible for individuals who were not raised in the right environment to become philosophers; nevertheless, these individuals are rare and will always be less great as they would have been if they were raised in the appropriate environment. My response to this objection follows suit. Individuals who are raised without noble lies (or suitably similar stories) can become philosophers. Nonetheless, they are anomalies. Moreover, they will not be as great as they would have been if they were raised with the appropriate core beliefs.

b. Too Weak

Another objection is that the account I have provided is too weak to support my thesis to the extent that I have not shown that the virtuous soul always requires false beliefs. For instance, one might argue that I have only shown that false beliefs are useful for developing virtue, but these false beliefs become superfluous once one becomes virtuous. Perhaps, in the virtuous soul, the non-reasoning part simply accepts that it should follow the command of the reasoning part (cf. IV.442b-d). Accordingly, the false beliefs might guide the non-reasoning part to make this decision,
but once it makes this decision those beliefs are no longer important.

In response to this objection I would like to point out that in such a case these false beliefs are still counterfactually important. In Book IX Socrates explains that unnecessary pleasures and desires are “probably present in everyone, but they are held in check by the laws and by the better desires in alliance with reason,” but “in a few people, they have been eliminated entirely or only a few weak ones remain, while in others they are stronger and more numerous” (571b4-c1). This passage suggests two ways that inappropriate desires can be controlled: (1) they can be restrained by the law and reason and (2) they can be altogether eliminated, or at the very least, severely reduced. Notice that the latter case provides a kind of counterfactual reliability insofar as if the law or reason were temporarily absent, one would still pursue virtue because one’s vicious thoughts do not exist, or exist to only a small degree. However, this does not hold true in the former case; in such a case, when the law and reason are absent, these vicious desires will run rampant. Or as Socrates puts it, “When the rational, gentle, and ruling part of the soul slumbers, then the beastly and savage part, full of food and drink, casts off sleep and seeks to find a way to gratify itself…There is nothing it won’t dare to do at such a time, free of all control by shame or reason” (IX.571c4-9).

The noble lie promotes virtuous desire and reduces vicious desires by inspiring citizens to love each other and to care about the common good of the city. In turn, this provides a kind of counterfactual reliability, such that if it were the case that reason was not in control or if there were no laws forcing obedience, one would still be motivated to love their fellow citizens and to care for the good of the whole city.
c. Inconsistent

Lastly, some scholars might object to my interpretation on grounds that it results in the philosopher’s soul being too divided. They might argue that because on my reading different parts of the philosopher’s soul holds different beliefs (or is in different cognitive states), the soul is not properly unified, and this is problematic because philosophers are supposed to exist in a state of psychic harmony. However, my interpretation avoids this problem, and it does so in such a way that illuminates something that many philosophers have underappreciated: psychic harmony is not a matter of the different parts of the soul holding the exact same propositions for that is impossible; rather, psychic harmony is a matter of the different parts of the soul sharing certain beliefs about who should rule and what one should pursue.

To see this consider a passage from Book IX. At IX.588c-e Socrates likens the parts of the soul to three different beasts: the appetitive part is like a large many-headed beast, the spirited part is like a lion, and the reasoning part is like a little human. These creatures somehow have grown together and from the outside appear as a human being. How these three beings relate to each other depends on one’s overall psychological disposition. For instance, in the case of the person who praises injustice: (a) the many-headed beast and lion grow strong, (b) they starve, weaken, and drag the little human, and (c) all three parts fight amongst each other (IX.588e-589a). In contrast, the person who praises justice, should secure: (a) that his words and actions give the little human in him the most control, (b) that he controls the many-headed beast like a farmer, “feeding and training the gentle (τὰ ἡμερὰ), but hindering the growth of the wild (τὰ ἃγρια),” and (c) that he “make the lion’s nature his ally, care for the community of all his parts, and bring them up in such a way that they will be friends with each other and himself” (589b1-6).

If we take this metaphor seriously, then we should not expect that the different parts of the
soul share the same beliefs. The different parts of the soul are akin to different beings with different cognitive abilities and personalities. Accordingly, to think that psychic harmony requires the different parts of the soul sharing the exact same thoughts is akin to thinking that the only way a domestic dog could exist in a harmonious relationship with her owner is if they share the same thoughts. Hence, as far as virtue in the soul is concerned, what matters is that the parts of the soul care for each other and agree that the little human should rule (i.e., the reasoning part). Likewise, as far as virtue in the city is concerned, what matters is not that the different parts of the city share the exact same thoughts; rather, what matters is that the different parts of the city care for each other and agree that the philosophers should rule.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that philosophers in the Kallipolis believe in and benefit from the falsehoods of the noble lie. I have argued that the non-reasoning part of the soul cannot ascertain certain truths and that in order to be virtuous the non-reasoning part of the soul must believe certain falsehoods, such as the noble lie. Additionally, I have argued that there is nothing inconsistent in believing the noble lie and having knowledge of the Forms. This suggests that the noble lie is not necessarily lost when they discover the Forms through dialectical investigation. This demonstrates that Plato thought that philosophers themselves can benefit from falsehood; hence, this poses a serious challenge to Nietzsche interpretation of Plato as overvaluing truth and

---

30 Many scholars have questioned the justness of Plato’s Kallipolis. One issue that many find particularly morally problematic is that the philosopher rulers deceive the non-philosophers in the city. This is worrisome because a political system that relies upon one class of citizens deceiving other classes of citizens seems inconsistent with a just political structure. However, if I am right that the philosopher rulers, at least partly, believe some of the falsehoods that they are telling the other citizens, then the Kallipolis is less morally objectionable than many scholars have thought because the philosopher rulers are not fully deceiving or lying to the other citizens. For discussions of the role of deception in the Kallipolis see Annas (1981, pp. 106-7, 167), Brickhouse and Smith (1983), Dombrowski (1997), Page (1991), Popper (1966), Reeve (1988, especially chap. 4), Taylor (1999), and Williams (2013).
undervaluing falsehood. In the next two chapters, I examine Plato’s attitude towards false beliefs in the *Laws*. 
CHAPTER THREE

Persuasion, Falsehood, and Motivating Reason in Plato’s Laws

“To accomplish these things by deeds or words—with pleasures or pains, by honors or dishonors, even by monetary penalties or gifts, and in general by whatever procedure someone may use to bring about hatred of injustice and desire (or at any rate, lack of hatred) for the nature of the just—it is this that is the task of the noblest laws” (The Athenian Stranger, Laws IX.862d)

1. Introduction

In Plato’s Laws, the Athenian Stranger maintains that law should consist of both persuasion (πειθὼ) and compulsion (βία) (IV.711c, IV.718b-d, and IV.722b). Scholars are divided on how to interpret the Athenian’s use of persuasion: some, such as Christopher Bobonich, argue that the Stranger has in mind the “rational” persuasion found in philosophical discourse; others, such as Richard Stalley and Glen Morrow, argue that the persuasion is “non-rational,” and thus primarily appeals to emotion. Nevertheless, both sides agree that the persuasion instills true beliefs and gives citizens good epistemic reasons for obeying the laws. However, in this chapter I argue that both positions fail to appreciate the positive role that false beliefs play in Magnesia. Once we take these useful false beliefs into account, it becomes clear that the fundamental purpose of the preludes is to motivate right action, and epistemic considerations are merely a subsidiary concern. In other words, similar to the Republic, false beliefs are useful when they produce normative truth. The advantage of this reading is that it provides a clear explanation for why some of the preludes appear “rational” and why others appear “non-rational”—because there are different citizens, with
different educational backgrounds, the lawgiver needs to offer different kinds of reasons in order to motivate these different citizens to obey the law.

2. Non-Rational vs. Rational Persuasion

The *Laws* centers around a conversation about laws and constitutions between three elderly men: an unnamed Athenian Stranger,¹ a Cretan named Kleinias, and a Spartan named Megillus. The discussion begins with the Athenian asking his counterparts about the central purpose of government. Kleinias and Megillus, who come from cultures that esteem war and courage, hold that the purpose of government is to win wars. The Athenian Stranger finds this too myopic, however.² Of course, it is important that a city does well in war, but this should not be its primary focus (I.628 ff.); rather, the aim of government is to develop virtue in its entirety. That is, the government should seek to cultivate not only courage, but also justice, moderation, and wisdom (I.630 ff.; cf. III.688a-b, IV.705a-707d, XII.963a). This leads to a discussion on the importance of citizens developing all of the virtues.

At the end of Book III, Kleinias reveals that the discussion has been especially beneficial because he is one of ten Cretans who have been appointed to construct a legal code for a new city, Magnesia. This raises the issue of what laws and constitution Magnesia should have. The Athenian is quick to remind his friends that they should not lose sight of the fact that the purpose of government is to produce all of the virtues in its citizens; thus, the laws of Magnesia should fulfill this end (IV.705a-707d.). The Athenian proposes that this can be achieved by having a legal code

---

¹ The Stranger is never named throughout the Laws. Pangle (1980, p. 3, n. 2) points out that various scholars have speculated about who the Stranger is. For instance, both Cicero (*Laws* I.15) and the scholiast (in the *Hypothesis*) think it represents Plato himself, while Aristotle (*Politics* II.1265a) thinks the Stranger is Socrates. Malcolm Schofield (2006, p. 3) maintains that the Athenian Stranger is supposed to remind the reader of Solon.

that consists of both persuasion (πειθοῦ) and compulsion (βία) (IV.711c, IV.718b-d, and IV.722b).

The Athenian explains what he has in mind by comparing the medical practice of a free doctor with that of a slave doctor (IV.720a-720e). The doctors differ in their knowledge, whom they treat, and how they treat them. The slave doctor, for instance, primarily treats slaves, does not have systematic knowledge of medicine and health, and like a dictator, simply prescribes what he thinks is best for the patient, without giving an account (λόγος) of the treatment and the nature of the disease, or without listening to the needs and desires of the patient (IV.720b-c). After the slave doctor treats one slave, he quickly darts off to treat the next patient (IV.720c). In contrast, the free doctor, primarily treats free people, has systematic knowledge of medicine, and is very attentive to the questions and concerns of his patient:

He [viz., the free doctor] investigates these things [viz., the disease] from their beginning and according to nature, communing with the patient and his friends; in this way he himself learns (μανθάνει) something from the sick and at the same time he gives the individual patient all the instruction (διδάσκει) he can. He gives no prescription until he has in some sense persuaded (συμπείσῃ); when he has on each occasion tamed (ἡμεροφυέων) him [viz., the patient] through persuasion (πειθοῦ), he tries to complete his restoration to health (IV.720d2-e2).

According to the Athenian, the slave doctor uses a single method of compulsion, while the free doctor uses a double method of both persuasion and compulsion (IV.720e). The double method is superior because it is gentler (IV.720e). The Stranger argues that the legislator should apply the double method, like the free doctor. Thus, the lawgiver should not simply issue

---

3 R. B. Clark (2003), insightfully demonstrates the ways in which the legislation follows and moves away from Ancient medical practices. For an interesting discussion on the role of the medical analogy and Plato's theory of punishment in the Laws, see Trelawny-Cassity (2010).

4 Cf. Statesman 293a-c
commands and threaten the citizens like a dictator. Rather, the legislator should discuss and persuade citizens that it is in their best interest to follow the laws. It is only when persuasion fails, that the lawgiver should force the citizens into compliance.5

Legislators can achieve persuasion by prefacing the laws with preludes (προοίμια). Preludes in musical compositions are “artistically designed to aid the coming performance” by providing “a sort of limbering up (ἀνακινήσεις), so to speak” (IV.722d4-6). That is, they introduce audience members to the forthcoming musical composition in way that makes the performance better received. Likewise, preludes in the law make the citizens more cooperative and “more ready to learn” (εὐμαθέστερον), and thus more willing to freely accept the laws (IV.723a4-5). In turn, the lawgivers will not have to rely as heavily upon violent force in order to get citizens to comply with the law; this is a superior method because it is gentler.

We can break the “doctor” analogy into four lessons that the Athenian is attempting to teach Megillus and Kleinias about legislating. First, the free doctor differs from the slave doctor to the extent that the free doctor has systematic knowledge of medicine, whereas the slave doctor’s knowledge of medicine is in some sense deficient. The lesson is that the lawgiver should be knowledgeable of laws and constitutions. Second, the free doctor does not rush from one patient to another, like the slave doctor. Rather, he does not leave the patient until he can best treat the patient. Likewise, the legislator should not rush in creating the laws, but should take his time and carefully consider the details of the law. Third, the free doctor applies both persuasion and force, while the slave doctor only applies force. Thus, the legislator should apply both persuasion and

---

5 Stalley (1994, p. 170) points out that the doctor analogy is somewhat disanalogous: “If the patient is not persuaded he does not have to undergo treatment...If, on the other hand, those to whom the preludes are addressed are unconvinced, they will be subjected to punishment whether they like it or not.” Nightingale (1993, p. 287) notes another disanology, saying that the “ideal legislator can never engage the citizens in a personal conversation as the doctor does.” See also Nightingale (1999, pp. 118-9).
force, and should not just apply a single method of force (or persuasion). Fourth, the slave doctor’s method is shorter or briefer to the extent that it only involves force. In contrast, the free doctor’s method is longer because it involves both persuasion and force. The Athenian’s point is that when it comes to legislating, what matters is not the length of the law, but whether the law is effective at producing virtue and well-being in the city.⁶

There are two main interpretations of the persuasion found in the preludes. Some argue that Plato has in mind the “rational” persuasion that is akin to the methods of philosophers. As Bobonich (2002, p. 104) explains, “The preludes are thus designed to be instances of rational persuasion, that is, attempts to influence the citizens’ beliefs by appealing to rational considerations. They are not intended to inculcate false, but useful beliefs, or to effect persuasion through non-rational means.” Hence, according to Bobonich (2002, p. 104), through the preludes “the citizens will learn why the laws are fine and just and should also learn why following the laws, and more generally, acting virtuously is good for them.”

In contrast, other scholars maintain that the preludes involve “non-rational” persuasion and do not resemble anything like philosophical arguments. Instead, the preludes primarily appeal to emotion, fear, pain, and pleasure as means of developing sound affective dispositions and true beliefs in the citizens.⁷ R.F. Stalley (1994, p. 167) explains:

[T]here is no requirement that the preludes offer a rational justification for the laws in the sense of giving them a thorough philosophical grounding. Rather the legislator must seek by any possible means to create a condition of the soul in which the feelings and appetites harmonize with right opinion.

---

⁶ To modern ears, this point seems rather obvious; however, one should keep in mind that Megillus comes from a culture that praises laws that are brief (IV.721e-722b).
The term “non-rational” persuasion, however, is a bit of a misnomer. Defenders of this position do not think that non-rational persuasion is devoid of reason or intellectual activity. Rather, they mean to highlight the role that the emotions play and to distance this kind of activity from that of philosophical discourse. For example, Morrow (1953, p. 242) says, “I do not wish to imply nor do I think would Plato, that they [viz., the preludes] make no appeal to reason. They are intelligently persuasive; they are persuasion at the high level of rational insight suffused with emotion.” Likewise, Stalley (1994, p. 167) says:

There is, however a sense in which their powers of reason must be involved. They need rational capacities to grasp the opinions that they are taught, to understand the laws and to apply them in their own lives...Plato is very well aware that there is a close association between our opinions and our feelings.8

Both the rational interpretation and the non-rational interpretation agree, however, that the preludes produce true beliefs. For instance, Morrow (1953, p. 243) says that “the persuasions employed in the state is unquestionably concerned with instructing, i.e., inculcating true beliefs, as Plato thought them to be.”9 Viewed in this way the disagreement between both sides is really over what type of epistemic reason the preludes provide.10 The rational side maintains that it is knowledge (or something close to it), while the non-rational side maintains that it is merely true

---

8 The non-rational interpretation has three main points in its favor. First as Stalley (1983, p. 43) notes that the vast majority of the preludes in the text are mere exhortations and mostly have “the character of rather conventional sermons.” See also Yunis (1996, chap. 8 and appen. 1) Notable examples are V.726a-734e, VI.772e-773c, VII.823d-824b, IX.854b-c, IX.870a-e, X.904e-905c, XI.927a-d, and XI.930e-932a. Second, the Athenian links the preludes to musical education and musical education does not give one the kind of understanding that philosophers have, which suggests that the preludes do not give one the kind of understanding that philosophers have as well; see II.653b, IV.722c-d, V.734e, and Rep. III.401d-402b. Third, the Athenian describes persuasion as involving “enchantments” (ἐποδαί) (II.659c, II.664b, II.665c, II.666c, II.670e, VI.773d, VII.812c, and VII.944b); see Morrow, (1953); Dodds (1951, p. 212, n. 20). For a response to Morrow, see Bobonich (1991 p. 374). See also Stalley (1994, p. 170).

9 See also, Stalley (1994, p. 167).

10 I am using “epistemic reason” to broadly cover reasons for belief or related cognitive states that track the truth or are related to evidence. I am contrasting these with believing or trying to believe for reasons related to your well-being; that is, for “practical reasons.”
belief. In what follows, I argue that both sides underappreciate the role that useful false beliefs play in Magnesia. Once we consider these useful false beliefs we can no longer view the fundamental purpose of the preludes as providing epistemic reasons for obeying the law; instead, we must view them as primarily serving a practical purpose—sometimes at the cost of truth and knowledge. Before we turn towards the evidence, I need to be clear that my point is not that all of the preludes are useful false beliefs or that they do not teach the citizens anything true. Rather, my point is that many of the preludes involve useful false beliefs and because of this, the primary purpose of the preludes is not epistemic, but is practical. Let us examine the evidence.

3. On The Weakness of Moral Motivation

In Book II, the question is raised: Is the most just life always the most pleasant life, or, is there a wedge between justice and pleasure, such that the most just life is not the most pleasant life? (II.661d-662d). The Athenian argues that justice and pleasure are inextricably connected, such that it is always the case that the most just life is the most pleasant life. Nevertheless, the Athenian argues that even if this were false, citizens should still be taught this:

But just suppose that the truth had been different from what the argument has now shown it to be (εἰ καὶ μὴ τοῦτο ἦν σωτικὸς ἔχον, ὡς καὶ νῦν αὕτω ἢμη’, ὁ λόγος ἔχειν), and that a lawgiver, even a mediocre one had been sufficiently bold in the interests of the young, to tell them a lie (ψεύδεσθαι).11 Could he have told a more useful lie (ψεῦδος λυσιτελέστερον) than this, or one more effective in making everyone practice justice in everything they do willingly and without pressure? (-syntax όλλ’)

---

11 The Greek term ψεῦδος is ambiguous between “lie” and “falsehood.” I am translating it here as “lie” because the context suggests that the legislators will know that this myth is false; and thus are intending to deceive the citizens.
ἐκόντας πάντας πάντα τὰ δίκαια) (II.663d6-e2).\(^{12}\)

KL.: Truth is a fine thing, and it is enduring, but to persuade one of it certainly seems no easy task (II.663e3-4).

Ath.: Yes, but what about that fairy story about the Sidonian? That was thusly incredible, but it was easy enough to convince people of it, and of thousands of other similar stories (II.663e5-6).

KL.: What sort of stories? (II.663e7).

Ath.: The sowing of the teeth and the birth of armed men from them.\(^{13}\) This remarkable example shows the legislator that the souls of the young can be persuaded of anything; he has only to try. The only thing he must consider and discover is what conviction would do the state most good. In that connection, he must think up every possible device to ensure that as far as possible the entire community preserves in its songs and stories and doctrines an absolute and lifelong unanimity. But if you see the matter in any other light, have no hesitation in disputing my view (II.663e8-664a8).

Although the Stranger ultimately thinks that it is true that the most just life is the most pleasant life (cf. II.664b3-c1), if this were not the case, he would lie because this falsehood will motivate the citizens to act justly.\(^{14}\)


\(^{13}\) This is reference to the myth of Cadmus, which, interestingly enough, is the myth suggested in the “noble lie” of the Republic (III.414b-415d); see Schofield, (2007, pp. 101-15); Dodds (1951, pp. 211-2). With the noble lie in mind, I should note that one thing I find strange about Bobonich’s account is that he asserts that the persuasion involves the methods of a philosopher and that it does not involve useful false beliefs. However, the Republic makes it clear that Plato has no qualms about philosophers lying when it is beneficial and necessary.

\(^{14}\) Cf. Morrow (1960, p. 557) downplays the significance of the Athenian’s use of falsehood because this statement is actually true. For instance, Morrow says, “The charge that Plato advocates indiscriminate lying and deception rests more on suspicion than on Plato’s text.” However, Morrow fails to consider the relevance of the fact that, counterfactually, if this claim were not true, the Athenian would still want it told because of the positive effects of the lie.
This passage demonstrates two things. First, the Stranger is willing to tolerate lying when telling the truth is possibly harmful and insufficient to motivate just actions. Second, the Stranger thinks that morality is a weak source of motivation for the majority of citizens. For instance, the Athenian is worried that if it is true that justice and pleasure are not connected, and the citizens are taught this truth, the citizens will choose pleasure over justice. This suggests that the Athenian takes pleasure to be a stronger source of motivation than acting for the sake of justice. The problem seems to be that if citizens believe that pleasure does not accompany just actions, then the citizens will believe that their reasons for acting justly are primarily other-regarding. This is problematic because most citizens are motivated to act for reasons that they perceive to be self-regarding.

There are three passages that support this reading. In Book IX, the Athenian argues that there are three main obstacles to political success. The first obstacle is that most people fail to intellectually grasp that the goal of politics is to do what is best for the common good, and not what is in their private interest (IX.875a-b). The second obstacle is that most people do not understand that often the best way of promoting their own private interest is to promote the good of the state (IX.875a-b). That is, most people do not grasp the fact that they often have self-

---

15 Recently, Williams (2013, pp. 384-9) argues that Plato is more tolerant of lying in the Republic than the Laws. Williams points to Republic III.389b in which Plato says that only the rulers of the Kallipolis will be allowed to lie and argues that there is nothing equivalent to this in the Laws. I believe that Plato’s attitude towards lying is the same in the Laws and the Republic, but because my concern in this chapter is primarily with the Laws I will not address this claim in great detail. Nevertheless, I would briefly like to point out two problems I have with Williams’ interesting reading. First, XI.916e-917b has similarities with III.389b in that Plato makes a point of saying that one should not lie to their superiors, which leaves rooms for superiors lying to their inferiors. Second, the fact that the lie at II.663d-664a makes reference to the noble lie suggests that Plato has it still in mind, and is thinking of this falsehood in the same light as the noble lie. Additionally, I should note that I will address some of Williams’ concerns in section five.

16 This claim is further supported by the fact that at II.653a-c the Athenian describes pleasure and pain as vehicles for developing goodness or badness in the soul. Consider also the Athenian’s concern that citizens select music and dances that appear the most pleasurable, and that this usually does not result in them choosing the best music and dances (II.658a ff.). See also V.732e: “Pleasures, pains, and desires are by nature especially human; and from these, of necessity, every mortal creature is, so to say, suspended and dependent by the strongest cords of influence [viz. pain and pleasure]” (cf. I.664a ff.).
interested reasons to act for other-regarding reasons. The third obstacle is not intellectual, but purely non-cognitive. The Athenian explains that even if people had the correct intellectual grasp of the goal of politics, most individuals would still fail to act on behalf of this goal because their selfish mortal nature would drive them to pursue their own pleasure over that of the city (IX.875b-c).

We find a similar worry conveyed in Book V when the Athenian argues that the cause of every failure is excessive self-love (V.721e). The Athenian explains that love is blinding; when individuals are in love, they cannot see the object of their love as it actually is. Rather, their vision of this object is skewed (V.721e). The problem with excessive self-love is that the object of love is oneself, and thus individuals becomes trapped in a vicious circle of self-deception, which blinds them to what is truly just and beneficial. Consequently, when they act in a way that they perceive to be just and in their interest, they are quite mistaken, and are actually acting unjustly and in a harmful manner (V.722a).

Both of these examples point to two general claims that the Athenian holds of most individuals:

1) Most individuals are primarily motivated to act for reasons that they perceive to be self-regarding.

2) Most individuals fail to recognize that often they have self-regarding reasons to act for other-regarding reasons.

---

18 Consider also the cosmological myth of Book X that warns “you have forgotten about this very fact, that all generation comes to be for the sake of this: that a happy existence may belong to the life of the universe; and it does not come to be for the sake of you, but you for the sake of it. For every doctor and every skilled craftsman does all his work for the sake of all; he makes a part straining for what is best in common, for the sake of the whole, and not the whole for the sake of a part” (903c-d).
Because most citizens think in this way, most individuals are not going to be motivated by reasons that they perceive to be other-regarding. Therefore, in order to persuade the citizens to act rightly, the lawgiver needs to find a way to positively direct people’s selfish nature towards justice. The lawgiver can do this by having preludes attached to the law, which highlight, or even mislead, citizens about how it is in their self-interest to obey the law.

Hence, the reason the Athenian is willing to lie about the connection between pleasure and justice is that justice alone is a weak motivation for most citizens. It is such a weak motivator in the eyes of the Athenian that even if citizens are taught that pursuing justice leads to pleasure, the Stranger believes that the lawgiver must provide additional incentives in order to motivate the citizens to act correctly. For example, in Book XI, the Athenian explains that robbery is actually counterproductive because no monetary gain is worth as much as having a virtuous soul and stealing corrupts one’s soul; thus, one is better off not stealing (XI.913b). Following this, the Athenian says that citizens should believe the myth about robbery, which says that it leads to infertility (XI.913c). Now why does the Athenian add the myth? Why is it not enough to tell citizens that acting unjustly is bad for their soul? Most individuals are not going to believe that acting unjustly is bad for them because it harms their soul. Or, if they do believe it, the temptation for these material possessions will be too strong. Thus, by telling citizens a fanciful story about how robbery leads to infertility, the idea that injustice harms and that justice benefits becomes real in a way that has motivational force. It is obvious that this is the intention of the Athenian because after saying that the citizens should be told this myth, he considers what to tell those who are indifferent to having children (XI.913c). Hence, the Athenian is clearly trying to locate what will motivate citizens to behave rightly.19

———

19 Another example of this occurs at IV.721b-c in which the males are told that they should marry between the ages of thirty and thirty-five because this is how they will achieve immortality. Stalley (1994, p. 170) points out
4. Theology for the Unsophisticated

In the previous section, I argued that Plato is willing to tell falsehoods about justificatory ethical facts as a means to counteract people’s inclination towards selfishness. However, there is another reason Plato is willing to tell falsehoods to citizens: some subject matters are beyond the grasp of certain individuals and it is dangerous to try to explain the truth of such subjects to these individuals. This is most evident in how the Stranger handles theological matters in the city. In what follows, I shall argue that there are two different accounts of religion presented in the Laws. On the one hand, there are traditional religious myths told to unphilosophical citizens. These stories incentivize virtuous behavior and disincentivize vicious behavior. On the other hand, there are abstract theological issues, which are only to be discussed by philosophers.20

The more traditional or mythical religious views are often conveyed in the preludes that accompany the laws.21 Consider a brief sampling; the Athenian wants citizens to believe:

a) That robbing will lead them to infertility (XI.913c).

b) That the “demoness of the roads” guards and protects things left by other people

that there is a strange disconnect between this law and its accompanying prelude: the law is very specific, it is about the age males should marry, while the prelude is a general statement about procreation. Speaking about this prelude, Pangle (1980, p. 448) says, “The prelude does not justify the command to marry on the grounds of utility to the city (population growth), or on moralistic grounds (avoidance of sexual promiscuity), or on the basis of obedience to gods and parents (impiety is here identified with self-deprivation, not disobedience to god; contrast 774a). Instead, it evokes the sublimely selfish, natural longing for immortality and invites individual citizens to satisfy that longing. Rather than asking the citizens to devote his soul to his family (717c), the prelude encourages him to use his family as the instrument for his own fulfillment.” Cf. Clark (2003, pp. 130-5); Nietzsche, Genealogy of Morals, III.7: “What great philosopher up to now has been married? Heraclitus, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer—none of these got married. What's more, we cannot even imagine them married. A married philosopher belongs in a comedy, that's my principle. And Socrates, the exception, the malicious Socrates, it appears, got married ironically to demonstrate this very principle.”

20 See Dodds (1951, p. 220).
21 Morrow (1960, p. 401), notes that in many ways the Athenian is simply extending traditional stories about the gods and the divine for his own purposes: “It is not a new religion that Plato proposes for his state, but the old religion, purified of its unwitting errors, and illuminated by a more penetrating conception of the meaning of religious worship.”
c) That those who commit involuntary homicide are haunted by the ghost of those who they killed (IX.865d-e).

d) That those who commit voluntary homicide are punished in Hades and when they return to Earth, they will suffer the same fate as their victim did (IX.870d-e).

e) That those who voluntarily kill their relatives will suffer the same fate as their victim. For instance, if a man kills his father, then he will be murdered by his son. If a man kills his mother, he will be reborn as a woman and killed by her son (IX.872d-873a).

f) That the gods are more responsive to the prayers of those who honor their parents and more likely to punish those who do not (XI.931b-932a).

In each of these stories those who violate a law will face some sort of divine punishment. These stories serve three purposes: First, they disincentivize serious misconduct by making citizens fear the haunting vengeance of Justice. Second, they reassure the injured party by telling them that their perpetrator will suffer.\(^2\) Third, they convey a teleological theology, in which the gods and divine beings do not act randomly, are not unjust, and are not indifferent to the affairs of humans. but, the gods act in an orderly and systematic way, are just, and are invested in the lives of humans.\(^3\) Accordingly, these religious myths operate as noble lies (Rep. III.414d-415c): they give citizens false beliefs about why they should obey the law in order to motivate the true belief that they should obey the law.\(^4\)


\(^3\) Cf. X.885b, X.902e ff.

\(^4\) This is consistent with Plato’s general account of musical education in that musical education is fundamentally about teaching citizens what they should do and not why they should do it. Consider II.653b: “I call education the initial acquisition of virtue by the child, when the feelings of pleasure and liking, pain and hatred are formed in the soul on the right lines before the ability to understand the reason”; cf. Rep. III.401d-402b. See Aristotle EN I.4.1095b; Brown (2004, p. 386).
However, it is unlikely that Plato actually believes that the details of these stories are true. Although there is no direct evidence of this in the *Laws*, there are two general reasons to think this. First, these myths evoke the imagery of traditional myths, which Plato’s Socrates denies are entirely true in other works. For example, in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates tells Euthyphro that he is likely being prosecuted because he finds the traditional stories of the gods difficult to accept (6a-b). Additionally, consider Book II of the *Republic*, in which Socrates asserts that the myths are “false, taken as a whole, but also have truth in [them]” (II.377a4-6). With this in mind, consider Socrates’ evaluation of the “myth of Phaethon” in the *Timaeus* (22c-d). In the myth, Phaethon, the son of the Helios (the sun god), arrogantly rides his father’s sun-chariot and sets the heavens and earth ablaze. Speaking about this myth, Plato says, “This tale is told as a myth, but the truth behind it is that there is a deviation in the heavenly bodies that travel around the earth, which causes huge fires that destroy what is on earth across vast stretches of time” (22c6-d3). Hence, according to Socrates, the myth is a personification of real astronomical events; nevertheless, many people who hear this story will take the fictional aspect as true, and fail to grasp the real astronomical lessons behind the myth.25 Likewise, Plato might believe that some aspects of the religious myths in the *Laws* are true, such as that the gods are teleological and just, and that the citizens should obey the laws (cf. X.885b, X.902e ff.). Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Plato actually believes the fantastic aspect of the myths in the *Laws*, such as, that those who are killed in involuntary homicide track and haunt their killers as ghosts (IX.865d-e).

Second, there is evidence that the Athenian is thinking of the myths in much the same way in the *Laws*. Book X is largely a defense of the theological views of the city and the dangers of not conforming to the city’s religion. The Athenian is concerned that atheists, deists, and misguided

theists (who think that the gods can be bribed), are a great threat to society. Speaking about these people, the Athenian complaints that things would be better if they:

believed the stories which they heard from their nurses and mothers since the time they were still young children being nourished on milk, hearing them spoken as if incantations to them, in a playful, yet serious manner; and the same stories they heard repeated also in prayers at sacrifices (X.887d-e).

Moreover, the Athenian is clear that he wants citizens to believe in these stories not as mere myths, but as absolutely true (X.887d-e).

From this, we can construct the following argument:

1) Plato believes myths told to children are on the whole false, but can convey some allegorical truth.
2) The citizens of Magnesia will be told myths about the gods as children, which are to be believed in earnest.
3) Therefore, the citizens of Magnesia will be told falsehoods about the gods, which are to be believed in earnest.

Now before I discuss the significance of these passages I would like to address a potential objection. Both T. J. Saunders and Bobonich downplay the significance of these passages. For instance, Saunders (1991, pp. 210-11) says:

Most of the preambles are positive in content and spirit; the savage ones are to be deployed only where education and persuasion have proved ineffective. At this point Plato throws anything and everything at the potential criminal’s head; however crude and primitive, regardless of inconsistency with his official penology.
Similarly, Bobonich (2002, pp. 113-4) says, “Such stories are designed for those who have failed to benefit from the education given to all and are the next resort when persuasion and education have failed. They are followed by the last resort, which is that statement of the penalty attached to violation of the law.” However, Saunders and Bobonich are misrepresenting how these preludes work. It is not as if they are told to reckless individuals just about to commit a crime. Rather, they are built into the educational system; thus, all citizens will be taught these myths. Moreover, the Athenian makes it clear that these are not new myths, but are already traditional stories held by many people and that he wants citizens to earnestly believe these stories (X.877d-e).

Why does Plato want to tell citizens false theological stories? Why not teach them the truth? The answer is that the truth about these matters is too complex and abstract for the average citizen to understand. Hence, these abstract truths will not be able to motivate citizens and might even lead the citizens to act worse. This is why he relies upon falsehoods.

Consider the Athenian’s discussion of education in astronomy and mathematics in Book VII. Education in astronomy and mathematics produces knowledge of the “divine” or “natural” necessities that govern the cosmos (VII.818d). Because of the difficult nature of the subject matter, only a select few will study these subjects in depth (VII.818a). The majority of people will only

26 See also, Bobonich (1991, p. 381).
27 Additionally, one might object that throughout his corpus Plato is happy to use myths and that it is a mistake to think that Plato is trying to instill false, but useful beliefs through these myths, because these myths are not meant to be understood as literal truths. In response to this objection, I would like to point out that the tone of the religious myths in the Laws is very different. The religious myths in the Laws are less poetic and hyperbolic than in other dialogues—they instead, seem to evoke traditional religious imagery in order to motivate the citizens towards justice. Consider the fact that the religious myths in the Laws are specific to certain crimes, as opposed to general speculations about what happens when one dies, cf. Phaedo 114 ff.
28 Bobonich (2002, p. 107-9) argues that the fact that all citizens have some training in mathematics marks an important difference from the Republic. According to Bobonich, the importance is that because all free citizens receive some mathematical training, all free citizens will be exposed to the idea of non-sensible properties. However, Bobonich is overstating the importance of this training; only an elite few will study mathematics with any kind of precision (VII.818a). The majority will simply study what is necessary for managing practical affairs and being a decent citizen (VII.809c). Moreover, for the vast majority of citizens, their education in mathematics will come in the form of unsophisticated play during their childhood (VII.819b-d, VII.820d). See Morrow (1960, pp. 343-8).
study these complex subjects as far as it is practically necessary to organize and conduct a household properly. During this discussion, Kleinias suspects that the Athenian is frightened by his and Megillus’ lack of familiarity with such important subjects. The Stranger responds that, indeed, this is a concern of his; however, what frightens him even more is when people study such divine subjects in a bad way—this is far worse than blanket ignorance (VII.819a).29

The Athenian’s anxiety becomes more explicit in Book X. As I previously discussed, in Book X, the Athenian attempts to convince an imaginary young atheist that the gods exist. At the beginning of the discussion, Kleinias wonders why they cannot simply point out to the atheist that (a) the Earth, Sun, Stars, and all of the universe have order, and (b) that all Greeks and Barbarians believe in the existence of gods (X.886a). Kleinias’ simple argument reveals his naivety; he mistakenly attributes the cause of atheism solely to an uncontrollable lust for pleasure (X.886a-b). The Athenian explains that atheism is often caused by ideas put forth by modern astronomers who argue that the planets are soulless rocks, devoid of reason, and thus incapable of caring about the affairs of humans (X.886c-d). The Athenian continues this idea in Book XII, when he attributes atheism to amateurish and lowly studies of astronomy (XII.966e-967d).30 The Athenian argues that if such individuals had a better understanding of astronomy and the nature of soul, they would not view the planets as soulless beings that are devoid of reason and simply moving chaotically. Rather, they would understand that the planets have souls and move with reason.31

Hence, we see three different positions: the ignorant (Megillus and Kleinias), the amateur

29 The Athenian's worry seems to be well-founded. For instance, the traditional explanation for why individuals deny human caused climate change has been that most individuals have a limited knowledge of science and lack the technical proficiency to understand the data. However, recently Kahan et al. (2012) found that there is little support for this account. In fact, Kahan et al. found that greater scientific literacy correlates with greater cultural polarization. The idea is that as one's familiarity with science increases, one is able to twist and manipulate the data to conform to their ideology. This accords with the Athenian thinking that the real danger to society is not blanket ignorance, but being educated in the wrong way.

30 Cf. Apology 18a-c.

astronomer (the Atheist), and the real astronomer (the Athenian). Both the ignorant and the real astronomer believe in the existence of gods, while the amateur astronomer does not. Now, to the extent that atheism is a threat to society, the real worry is not ignorance, but receiving an improper education. An improper education occurs when one studies things that one is unqualified to study. Not only is one likely to draw the wrong conclusions, but one will become harder to persuade of the truth later on. This is why when the Athenian discusses theological matters with an imaginary young atheist in Book X, he recommends that the youngster wait until he is older to make up his mind up such important matters. In the meantime, he should listen most of all to what the lawgiver has to say about such things and not risk impiety (X.888a-d).

Hence, Plato believes that one’s theological education should be in proportion to one’s philosophical abilities (cf. XII.968d-e). Those with robust philosophical skills or capabilities will study the more advanced theological views discussed in Book X and Book XII. In contrast, those lacking in philosophical skills or capabilities will merely be taught traditional myths, which teach a shadow of the truths understood by philosophers, but nonetheless contain many falsehoods.

Support for this interpretation is found in two key passages. The first passage is from Book XII. After arguing that amateurish astronomy causes atheism, the Athenian asserts that in order for one to be an adequate ruler, one must grasp that the soul is the eldest of all things and that the stars have intelligence (XII.967e). Additionally, one should learn the necessary subjects (i.e., math and astronomy; cf. VII.818 ff.) that precede these matters (XII.967e). Following this, the Athenian asserts that such a person “should see what is common to these things and the things that concern the Muse, and should apply this understanding, in a harmonious way, to the practices and customs that pertain to the habitual dispositions” (XII.967e2-4).

---

32 Cf. Republic VI.491d-e, VII.518e-519a.
33 Cf. Republic VII.517a.
This suggests three things. First, there is a distinction between the set of things that concern the Muse and the set of theological truths discovered through the divine sciences. Second, at some points both sets overlap. Third, the ruler should apply his understanding of what is in common between both sets in a way that produces sound dispositions in the citizens. This supports my claim that some citizens only learn a portion of the theological truths that are known, and that what these citizens are taught about the gods is mainly a function of what will help produce sound dispositions.

However, this does not suggest the further point that the reason why some citizens are only taught a portion of theological truth is because it is dangerous to attempt to teach them more advanced truths. Support for this idea is found in Book X. Before the Athenian embarks on a sophisticated philosophical discussion of the soul, he issues a warning to Megillus and Kleinias:

Suppose we three had to cross a rapidly flowing river, and I, who happened to be the youngest of us and experienced with many currents said ‘I ought to try first on my own account, and leave you two in safety while I see if the river is fordable for you two older men as well, or if not, just how bad it is. If it turns out to be fordable, I’ll then call you and put my experience at your disposal in helping you to cross; but if in the event it cannot be crossed by old men like yourselves, then the only risk has been mine’...The situation is the same now: the argument ahead runs too deep, and men as weak as you will probably get out of your depth. I want to prevent you novices in answering from being dazed and dizzied by a stream of questions, which would put you in an undignified and humiliating position you’d find most unpleasant (X.892d5-893a2).35

34 Cf. VI.783a.
Hence, the Athenian’s worry is not simply that Megillus and Kleinias will fail to understand the subsequent discussion about the soul. His concern instead is that in their attempt to understand, they will drown in confusion. Because of this, the Athenian, who has a background in philosophy, will guide the discussion and will help his weaker friends ford this philosophical river. The larger point of this metaphor is that it is dangerous for those lacking philosophical skill, to investigate such complicated topics alone—they need a guide to filter the truth in a way they can grasp it.

5. Three Passages on Truth and Rational Argumentation

a. The Doctor Analogy

There are three key passages that one might take to undermine my interpretation of the preludes. The first of these passages occurs in Book IX when the Athenian compares the method of the free doctor’s educative method to that of a philosopher:

Ath.: We didn’t make a bad image, when we compared all those living under legislation that exists now, to slaves being doctored by slaves. For it’s necessary to know well some such thing as the following: if one of those doctors who practices medicine on the basis of experiences rather than reason should ever encounter a free doctor carrying on a dialogue with a free man who was sick—using arguments that come close to philosophizing (καὶ τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν ἓγγὺς χρώμενον μὲν τοῖς λόγοις), grasping the disease from its source, and going back up to the whole nature of bodies—he would swiftly burst out laughing and would say nothing other than what is always said about such things by most of the so-called doctors. For he would declare, ‘Idiot! You’re not doctoring the sick man, you’re practically educating him (σχεδὸν παιδεύεις), as if what he needed were to become a doctor, rather than
healthy!"

KI.: Well, wouldn’t he be speaking correctly when he said such things?

Ath.: Maybe—if, at any rate, he went on to reflect that this man who goes through laws in the way were doing now, is educating the citizens but not legislating (παιδεύει τούς πολίτας ἀλλ᾽ οὐ νομοθετεῖ). Would he not appear to be saying this too in the right way? (IX.857c2-e5).

Because the Athenian compares the free doctor’s method to practicing philosophy, one might interpret the point of the preludes as being primarily a means by which the lawgiver supplies epistemic reasons, like a philosopher.36

I have two responses to this objection. First, notice that the text does not say that the doctor is a philosopher, or that the doctor is educating through philosophical argumentation. Strictly speaking, the text says only that the doctor is “using arguments that come close to philosophizing.” This conveys some distance between the activity of the free doctor and the activity of a philosopher, which suggests that there is some difference between the legislator persuading through preludes and a philosopher teaching through philosophical discourse.

Second, the quip about free doctors being like philosophers has little to do with persuasion, but is fundamentally about how the founders must be philosophical in their approach to founding the city. To see this, we have to look at the broader context in which the passage is situated. The relevant discussion begins with the Athenian boldly asserting that one law should apply to all instances of stealing; that is, all thieves should face the same punishment, no matter how they steal, what they steal, the amount they steal, or the psychological states governing their action (IX.857a). Kleinias rightfully questions whether one law should apply to all instances of robbery, since there

are many varying circumstances (IX.857b). The Athenian is pleased with Kleinias’ objection, remarking that it has woken him up from mindlessly legislating (IX.857c). The objection reminds the Athenian of what he said earlier about the failure of past legislators. After this, the Athenian offers the quip about the free doctor being like a philosopher (IX.857c-e).

Following this, the Athenian mentions that they are fortunate because they are not forced to legislate immediately, but have time to inquire into what the best laws are for Magnesia (IX.857e-858a). Kleinias agrees, and the three discuss stealing and justice in greater philosophical detail. The discussion actually leads the Athenian to make nuanced distinctions in the law between crimes committed in different psychological states. For instance, he distinguishes between crimes committed while in a fit of anger or with prolonged deliberation (IX.866d-867b), and considers the degree to which another party is injured (IX.862b-c). In revising his position, the Athenian reveals to Megillus and Kleinias the value in legislating as philosophers. The passage, therefore, has little to do with persuasion, but is primarily about reminding Megillus and Kleinias that they should not mindlessly legislate, but should take their time and carefully consider the relevant circumstances that pertain to each law.

\[b. \textit{Arguing with an Atheist}\]

The second passage occurs in Book X when the Athenian asserts that “no one who believes in gods according to the laws has ever voluntarily done an impious deed or let slip an illegal utterance” (θεούς ἠγούμενος εἶναι κατὰ νόμους οὐδὲς πώποτε οὔτε ἔργον ἀσεβές ἠργάσατο ἐκών οὔτε λόγον ἀφήκεν ἄνομον) (X.885b4-5; cf. X.907d-e). The Athenian attributes deliberate wrong doing\(^\text{37}\) to

\(^{37}\) One should keep in mind that strictly speaking the Athenian thinks that all wrongdoing is involuntary (V.731c, V.734b, IX.860d). Nevertheless, he does acknowledge that different psychological states can contribute to wrongdoing and that different punishments are appropriate with respect to these varying states. For a helpful discussion, see Stalley (1983, ch. 14).
three religious beliefs: a) atheism, b) deism, and c) a misguided theism, in which the gods are easily persuaded by humans (X.885b, cf. XI.921c, XII.948b-c). Kleinias asks the Athenian how they should deal with those who do not share the religious beliefs of the city (X.885c). The Athenian responds by taking up the position of an imaginary atheist and engages in a dialectical exchange with the Atheist. Pretending to be an atheist, the Athenian says:

For some of us don’t believe in the gods at all, and others believe them to be as you say. Now we demand, just as you demanded in regard to the laws, that before you threaten us harshly (πρὶν ἀπειλεῖν ἡμῖν σκληρῶς), you first try to persuade and teach (πείθειν καὶ διδάσκειν) that there are gods, adducing adequate evidence (τεκμήρια λέγοντες ἰκανά), and that they are too good to be turned aside and beguiled from what is just by certain gifts...From lawgivers who are claiming to be not savage but gentle, we expect that persuasion be used on us first (παρὰ δὲ δὴ νομοθετῶν, φασκόντων εἶναι μὴ ἁγρίων ἄλλα ἡμέρων, ἀξιοῦμεν πειθοῖ πρῶτον χρῆσθαι πρὸς ἡμᾶς). And perhaps we would be persuaded by you, even if you didn’t speak much better than the others about the existence of the gods, so long as you spoke better as regards the truth (X.885c2-e5; cf. X.888a-891a).

The rest of Book X consists in the Athenian offering the Atheist several arguments in defense of the city’s religion, showing that: gods exist, they care about humans, and are just. The fact that the Athenian attempts to persuade the Atheist through argumentation lends credence to thinking that Plato has rational persuasion in mind in the Laws.

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that these passages are an anomaly in the Laws. The vast majority of preludes unequivocally do not involve rational argumentation. This raises the questions: Why is the Athenian relying upon rational argumentation to persuade the
Athenian debates an imaginary atheist, who has two distinct features that make rational persuasion necessary. First, because the Atheist is convinced that gods do not exist, he is not going to be motivated by preludes which appeal to divine punishment or reward. These preludes will only motivate those citizens who are already operating in a religious framework. Since the Atheist does not believe that there are gods, the Athenian must take a different approach in order to persuade him; after all, threatening atheists with divine punishment for not conforming to certain behaviors or beliefs will surely fall on deaf ears.

Second, part of the reason why the Atheist is convinced that gods do not exist is because he has been exposed to cosmological arguments against theism (X.886c-e; cf. XII.967a-d). Therefore, if the Athenian is to stand a chance at persuading the Atheist that gods exist, he is going to first have to show why the Atheist’s view of cosmology is mistaken and this is exactly what the Athenian sets out to do when he offers arguments about the nature of the soul and the cosmos to the Atheist.

In other words, the Athenian’s use of rational arguments in Book X should be viewed as a last ditch effort to get the Atheist’s compliance without force. The Athenian makes it clear that it would be far better had the Atheist unreflectively believed the myths about the gods that he was taught as a child (X.887d). The rational persuasion of Book X, hence, is not a generic feature of

---

38 The vast majority of preludes make some reference to the gods, see especially II.663d-664a, IV.713a-715d, IX.865d-e, IX.870d-e, IX.872d-873a, and XII.913c-914b.
39 Cf. VII.818c-819a, Apology 18a-c.
the persuasion that Plato has in mind in the *Laws*, but is a special instance of it used to persuade an individual who is not going to be moved by religious myths.

c. *The Value of Truth*

The third passage that one might think undermines my reading occurs in Book V when the Athenian says:

> Truth is the leader of all good things for gods and of all things for human beings. Whoever is to become blessed and happy should partake of it from the very beginning, so that he may live as a truthful man for as long a time as possible. Such a man is trustworthy. The untrustworthy man is one who finds the voluntary lie congenial; he who finds the involuntary lie congenial is foolish (ὁ δὲ ἀπιστος ὁ φίλος ψεύδος ἐκούσιον, ὅτι δὲ ἀκούσιον, ἄνους). Neither of these is enviable, because every man who is untrustworthy and ignorant is also friendless (V.730c1-6).  

One might take this passage to demonstrate that the legislators will not apply falsehoods in the city; however, a careful reading of this passage will reveal that this is not the case.

First and foremost, the passage does not say that lying is never permissible or beneficial. Rather it says that one should be truthful “for as long a time as possible,” which is consistent with the Athenian thinking that in certain circumstances lying is permissible because being truthful is not beneficial, and thus not possible.  

---

40 Catherine Zuckert (2009, p. 91) takes this passage to demonstrate that the rulers are not permitted to lie.  
41 This is consistent with Plato’s view of lying in the *Republic*. For instance, at II.383a-e Socrates asserts that it is sometimes beneficial for the humans to use the “impure lie” when talking to the ignorant or mad; nevertheless, the gods are altogether without lies because the gods are not friends with the ignorant and the mad. For additional examples of beneficial lies in the *Republic* see I.331b-d, II.377e-378a, II.378c-d, III.414d-415c, III.416e-417b, and V.459d-460c.
that they should dislike lying. There is nothing inconsistent with the Athenian thinking that the legislators should dislike lying, but that lying is necessary at certain times. In fact, teaching citizens that they should hate lying will guard against them lying when it is unnecessary or harmful. Third, although this passage makes it clear that the Stranger considers truth to be extremely valuable, there is nothing inconsistent with the Athenian also thinking that falsehoods are useful in certain circumstances. After all, as I have tried to explain, given the ineffectiveness of morality to motivate, and most citizens’ inability to understand theology, false beliefs about why actions are just are useful for teaching citizens true beliefs about what actions are just. In other words, false beliefs provide a means by which citizens can come to recognize certain practical truths about what they ought to do.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that both the rational interpretation and the non-rational interpretation make the same mistake—they underappreciate the role that useful false beliefs play in Magnesia. When we take into account these useful false beliefs, it becomes clear that the primary function of the preludes is not epistemic, but practical—the preludes are designed to motivate correct action by any means necessary (cf. IX.862d). There are two reasons that falsehoods accomplish this. First, most just actions will appear to the average citizen as being grounded in other-regarding reasons and this is problematic because most citizens are motivated by what they take to be self-regarding reasons. Second, some truths are too complicated and abstract for the average citizen to understand and it is dangerous to attempt to teach them these complex things. These two points are related; if

---

42 This is also consistent with Plato’s attitude towards truth and falsehood in the Republic. At various places in the Republic Socrates makes it clear that the philosopher rulers should love truth and hate falsehood (V.474b-475c, VI.485c-d, VI.490a-c, VI.501d, and XL.591d-e); nevertheless he permits them to lie when it is beneficial (III.389b-c).
citizens were capable of knowing abstract truths about goodness, reason, and justice, they would not need to be taught that they have self-regarding reasons to behave correctly because they would already be motivated to instantiate these concepts by any means. My interpretation of the preludes provides a clear explanation for why sometimes the preludes appear rational and other times appear non-rational. On my interpretation the fundamental purpose of the preludes is to motivate citizens to act correctly. However, because there are different citizens, with different educational backgrounds, the lawgiver needs to offer different reasons for obeying law.\textsuperscript{43} When addressing recalcitrant atheists, the lawgiver must appeal to reason; nevertheless, when addressing the average citizen, he can appeal to emotion.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{43} This idea is suggested in the Athenian's discussion of poetry in Book IV. Surprisingly, the Athenian argues that although the law must always be consistent, poets can contradict themselves. This is not a defect of poetry, but a benefit, because it can show how different people should behave in different circumstances (IV.719c-e; cf. Pangle 1980, pp. 446-7).}
CHAPTER FOUR

On the Value of Drunkenness in the Laws

“If intoxication is nature playing with human beings, the Dionysiac artist’s creation is a plaything with intoxication. If one has not experienced it for oneself this state can only be understood by analogy; it is rather like dreaming and at the same time being aware that the dream is a dream. Thus the attendant of Dionysus must be in a state of intoxication and at the same time he must lie in ambush, observing himself from behind. Dionysiac art manifests itself, not in the alternation of clear-mindedness and intoxication, but in their co-existence” (Nietzsche, The Dionysiac World View, I. p. 121).

1. Introduction

In chapter one, I defended two claims about Plato’s view of false beliefs in the Republic. The first claim is that falsehoods are beneficial when they produce normative truths. The second claim is that false normative beliefs are never beneficial—these are the “true falsehoods” that are always hated by gods and humans alike. In chapter three, I argued that Plato is committed to the former claim in the Laws; however, I did not address whether Plato maintains the latter claim in the Laws as well. In this chapter, I explore this issue by examining the Athenian Strangers’ defense of drunkenness in Book I and II of the Laws.

Plato’s attitude towards drunkenness (μέθη) is surprisingly positive in the Laws, especially as compared to his negative treatment of intoxication in the Republic. In the Republic, Plato maintains that intoxication causes cowardice and intemperance, while in the Laws, Plato holds that
it can produce courage and temperance. This raises the question: Did Plato change his mind, and if he did, why? Ultimately, this chapter answers affirmatively and argues that this marks a substantive shift in Plato’s attitude towards false beliefs and anti-rational desires. More precisely, this chapter argues that in the Republic, Plato holds that anti-rational desires and the beliefs that produce them are always detrimental to health and virtue; in contrast, in the Laws, Plato maintains that anti-rational desires and the beliefs that produce them can be instrumental to health and virtue. I conclude this chapter by explaining how this claim converges with and is corroborated by the claim that, in the Laws, Plato thinks that akrasia is more prevalent than in other texts.

**2. Intoxication in the Republic**

There are four passages in the Republic in which Plato describes the ethical quality of drunkenness. The first passage occurs in Book II when Socrates discusses the types of stories about the gods and humans that it is appropriate and inappropriate to teach to young guardians. Socrates considers a story told by Musaeus and his son in which the righteous are sent to Hades to engage in a kind of eternal drinking party (363c-d). Socrates rejects this story on the grounds that it gives the wrong impression as to what the rewards of virtue are—”as if they thought drunkenness was the finest wage of virtue” (363d1-2). This passage demonstrates that intoxication should not be viewed as a

---

1 The role of drunkenness in the Laws has been mostly neglected by scholars. For instance, Stalley (1983, p. 5) remarks that “many readers have found the section tedious,” while Post (1929, p. 16) holds that it is simply a device to “entice the unsuspecting drunkard into hearing a sermon on temperance.” The exceptions are Belfiore (1986) and North (1966, pp. 191-2). Belfiore offers the most thoughtful and interesting discussion of drunkenness. However, I disagree with her analysis in many important respects and I will discuss these issues further below. North provides a useful, but brief discussion.

2 By “anti-rational desires,” I do not simply mean non-rational, but I mean as opposed to reason; that is, desires that reason does not sanction. I will discuss this in more detail in section six.

3 My discussion of drunkenness will be restricted to the Laws and the Republic. The obvious text that I am excluding from my discussion is the Symposium. I am excluding this text for two reasons: (1) with some minor exceptions (cf. 176c-d), the Symposium does not explicitly discuss the dangers and benefits of intoxication; (2) the Symposium does not involve the construction of city, and thus the norms concerning intoxication discussed in the Symposium are taking place under a different context from the Laws and the Republic.
reward for the virtuous and it might suggest that drunkenness is not to be associated with virtue (cf. III.390a-b).

The second passage occurs in Book III when Socrates is discussing the education of the guardians. At 398e-399a, Socrates objects to the use of the Lydian and Ionic musical harmonies in the education of the guardians because they are soft (μαλακαί), lax (χαλαραί), lazy (ἀργίαι), and suitable for symposium (cf. 395e-396a). Hence, because these harmonies encourage behaviors, such as drunkenness, softness, laxness, and laziness, they will be forbidden from the guardians’ education. Instead, the guardians will only hear musical harmonies that encourage courage and temperance (399a-e). This passage suggests that Plato thinks that intoxication is harmful to one’s ethical development because it makes one cowardly, lazy, and intemperate.

The third passage occurs in Book III when discussing the training of the body for young guardians:

Soc.: We said that our prospective guardians must avoid drunkenness, for it is less appropriate for a guardian to be drunk and not to know where on earth he is than it is for anyone else.

Glau.: It would be absurd for a guardian to need a guardian (403e-7).

Although this passage (i.e., 403e) is making reference back to the discussion of intoxication at 398e, the reasons raised against drunkenness are different. At 398e, Plato objects to drunkenness on the grounds that it will hinder the development of a virtuous soul, while at 403e, the reasons against intoxication have to do with responsibility. The guardians are supposed to protect the city and they will not be able to fulfill this duty if they are drunk.6

4 The usual translation is “mode,” however, I am convinced by Woerther (2008, p. 91, n. 11) that “harmony” is a better translation. Cf. Aristotle Politics VIII.1340a-b.

5 Socrates does not know the exact harmonies that have this feature (399a).

6 Of course, issues concerning responsibility and virtue are related in significant ways. Hence, all I mean by
The fourth passage occurs in Book IX when Socrates discusses the nature of the tyrannical soul. Socrates compares the soul of a tyrant to that of a soul during drunken sleep. Socrates warns that “drunken sleep awakens the bestial and savage part in us,” which seeks to “satisfy its own instincts” (571c4-7). In such a condition, “nothing is too outrageous, being unfastened and delivered from all sense of shame (ἀναισχυντίας) and prudence” (571c7-d2). During drunken sleep one’s erotic desires run wild—seeking anyone, be it one’s own mother, man, beast, or god; additionally, one is prone to violent outbursts, gluttony, and all sorts of foolish behavior (571c-d). In contrast, during sober and healthy sleep, reason is in control, and as a result one’s sleep will likely be peaceful and lawful (571d-572b).

This passage continues with Socrates explaining how the tyrant’s soul is similar to the soul of a drunk. The tyrannical soul develops when erotic desires, “like a great winged drone,” become the leader of the soul’s desires (573a1-2; cf. V.475a). Then, “other desires—filled with incense, myrrh, wreaths, wine, and the other pleasures found in their company—buzz around the drone,” and nurture the drone and make it grow as large as possible (573a4-8). Following this, the drone adopts “madness as its bodyguard” and if it finds any reasonable beliefs or desires, “it destroys them and throws them out, until its purged him of moderation and filled him with imported madness” (573a8-b4). Hence, in both the tyrant’s and the drunk’s soul, anti-rational desires run mad and thwart reasons control of the soul (573c; Phaedrus 238b, 256c).

These four passages make it clear that Plato’s attitude towards intoxication in the Republic is negative.7 Let us now turn to Plato’s attitude towards drunkenness in the Laws. In the next

---

7 This distinction is that at 398e the criticism of intoxication concerns the fact that it causes intemperance and cowardice, while at 403, it is about the fact that while drunk one is not able to fulfill certain duties.

7 Plato, however, does maintain that there will be drinking wine in the so called “city of pigs” (III.372a-b); nevertheless, Glaucon objects to the city of pigs on the grounds that it is lacks the goods related to symposium (III.372e), so it seems unlikely that drunkenness occur in the city of pigs; cf. IV.426a-b.
section I examine Plato’s discussion of drunkenness in Laws I; following this I examine it in Laws II.  

### 3. Laws I: Wine as Testing and Training

Books I and II of the Laws are largely about “musical education.” The Athenian is quite critical of the Cretan and Spartan educational systems, arguing that their method of education is ill-equipped to develop virtue in their citizens—including the virtue of courage, which Megillus and Kleinias value over every other virtue. According to the Athenian, not only does courage “combat against fears and pains,” but it also guards against “longings (πόθους) and pleasures, and certain terrible cajoling flatteries (δεινὰς θωπείας κολακικὰς) that can turn to wax (ποιοῦσιν κηρίνους) the spiritedness (τοὺς θυμοὺς) even of those who think themselves solemn” (I.633c8-d3). This is problematic for the citizens of both Crete and Sparta because, according to Megillus and Kleinias, they only train in resisting pain, but do nothing to combat pleasure (I.635b-d).

The Stranger remarks that there is something perplexing about the Cretans’ and Spartans’ educational system. On the one hand, the Spartans’ and Cretans’ lawgiver maintains that their citizens should “keep away from and not taste the greatest sorts of pleasure and play” (I.635b5-6). On the other hand, “as to pains and fears” the lawgiver maintains “that if someone flees them, from childhood until the end of life, the result will be that when he gets into unavoidable toils and fears and pains, he will flee before those who have had gymnastic training in such things and will be enslaved by them” (I.635b6-c3). The Athenian wonders why the same lawgiver did not think the

---

8 I believe that the Laws is a unified work, and thus I am merely analyzing Books I and II separately for purposes of clarity.

9 Music, μουσική, was a broad category for the Ancient Greeks, which included rhythm, harmony, and discourses (λόγοι).

10 For instance, in Book I Kleinias and Megillus argue that governments exist to win wars and thus the primary virtue that governments should develop is courage (628 ff.).
same thing about training in pleasure as he did about training in pain. The lawgiver should have said to himself:

‘If our citizens grow up from youth lacking experience in the greatest pleasures, if they aren’t practiced in enduring pleasures and in never being compelled to do anything shameful (ἀμελέτητοι γιγνόμενοι ἐν ταῖς ἱδοναῖς καρπηρεῖν καὶ μηδὲν τῶν αἰσχρῶν ἀναγκάζεσθαι ποιεῖν), their softness of spirit before pleasures will lead them to suffer the same thing as those who are overcome by fears. They will be enslaved in another and more shameful fashion to those who are capable of enduring pleasures, who have experienced pleasures (τοῖς γε δυναμένοις καρπηρεῖν ἐν ταῖς ἱδοναῖς καὶ τοῖς κεκτημένοις τὰ περὶ τὰς ἱδονὰς), and who are sometimes human beings vicious in every way. They’ll have souls that are part slave and part free, and will not be worthy of being called courageous and free men without qualification’ (I.635c5-d5).

Kleinias and Megillus, however, are quite wary about the advantages of training in pleasure. Accordingly, the Athenian proposes that they look at the virtue of temperance (σωφροσύνη) and examine how training in pleasure can aid in cultivating temperance. This leads the Athenian to inquire into Sparta’s and Crete’s method for developing temperance. Unfortunately, Megillus is unsure how exactly Sparta trains their citizens to develop temperance, but he suggests that it is likely developed in their practice of gymnastics and common meals (I.636a). Awkwardly, the Athenian condemns this practice, arguing that it is the cause of unnatural sexual behaviors in Sparta and Crete (I.636b-e). Although Megillus is uncertain of how

11 The common meals were essentially an all-male club with a military emphasis; see Morrow (1960, pp. 389-98). In the Politics II.1271a-1272a, Aristotle notes that the Spartans developed their practice from the Cretans. For a discussion of the connection of common meals and gymnastics with pederasty see Percy (1996).

12 The Athenian points out that all Greeks accuse the Cretans of being the originators of the myth of
to respond, he ultimately defends the Spartan practice of evading pleasure (I.636e)—boasting that in his opinion “the ways of Sparta with regard to pleasures are the finest to be found among humankind” (I.636e8-a2). Megillus explains that Spartans do not host any drinking parties and that drunkenness is so disparaged that Spartans would beat any drunkard they came across, even during the festival of Dionysus (I.637a-b).\(^1\)

The Athenian, however, is not impressed with this Spartan practice; rather, he takes to defending intoxication, arguing that under the appropriate conditions it is quite valuable.\(^1\) The Athenian explains that drinking wine intensifies “pleasures and pains and the spirited and erotic emotions” (I.645d6-8), while dulling “sense perceptions (αισθήσεις), memories, beliefs, and prudent thoughts (φρονήσεις)” (I.645e1-2). Intoxication thus renders you in a childlike condition in which you have very little self-control (I.645e-646a); as a result you are bolder, more talkative, more confident, more hopeful, more joyful, more fearless, and more shameless (I.649a-d, II.666c-d, II.671b-c; cf. Cratylus 406-c). If this condition were permanent it would be awful, but because

---

Ganymede, which is the model for the Greek practice of pederasty (I.636d; cf. VIII.836c-839d). For a discussion of the history of pederasty in Greek culture see Percy (1996). Plato’s attitude towards pederasty in the Laws seems to differ from his attitude in the Symposium and the Phaedrus; cf. Republic V.458c-d. Interestingly enough, this passage was contentiously discussed in Romer v. Evans, see Clark (2000) for an overview. It should also be noted that part of the Athenian’s criticism of common meals is that the Spartans and the Cretans are only concerned with making their citizens good at war and are not concerned with the virtues that come about during peace and leisure; cf. I.625e, I.633a, VI.780b. Plato wants to extend this practice to women (VI.780e-781d) and for the focus to be not just preparation for war, but communion with fellow citizens; cf. Pangle (1980, p. 379). In Politics II.1274b, Aristotle points out that Plato’s inclusion of women in common meals was unique to him. This demonstrates an openness not found in many other Greek thinkers; nevertheless, Plato’s inclusion of women is rooted in the sexist belief that women severely lack virtue and discipline, and this practice will help them develop it (VI.781a-b).

13 Both the Spartans and Cretans were notoriously abstemious and restrained wine drinkers; cf. Minos 320a. For instance, the Helots were the only people allowed to get drunk in Sparta. The adult Spartans forced the Helots to get incapacitatingly drunk to make an example to the Spartan youth of how not to behave; see Cartledge (2004, p. 98).

Morrow (1960 p. 371, n. 255) explains that during the festival of Dionysus, a cart carrying the god was followed by wagons with raucous riders shouting insults and obnoxious things at one another and the crowd. This is likely what Megillus is complaining about at I.637a-b.

14 The Athenian is quite explicit that he is not merely talking about the value of drinking wine, but the value in getting drunk (637d); see Belfiore (1986, p. 430, n. 29). Some scholars have argued that this is not the case. For instance, England (1921, ad loc. 637d4) advises, “We must remember that the Greeks drank nothing stronger than wine, and nearly always drank that mixed with water and hence the word μύθη had not the disgusting connotation that its equivalent has among us”; while Stalley (1983, p. 124) writes that symposiasts are only “mildly intoxicated.” However, these accounts cannot explain why the Athenian would describe drunkenness as causing the effects that it does (cf. I.645d-e).
it is only temporary, it can be used medicinally to strengthen the soul. This is not unlike taking purgative medicine or engaging in vigorous exercise; both practices strengthen the body by first temporarily weakening it (I.646c).\textsuperscript{15} Drunkenness works in a similar manner: the wine temporarily weakens the soul by putting it in a base condition; nevertheless, this experience can ultimately strengthen the soul by producing “shame” (αἰδώς) in it, which is a precondition for virtue (I.646b).\textsuperscript{16}

The Athenian explains how drunkenness develops a sense of shame (αἰδώς) by distinguishing between two types of fear. On the one hand, there is the fear of expecting an evil, such as pain or death (I.646e). Fearing pain or death is dangerous because it can prevent individuals from acting courageously in battle (I.647b-c). Because of this, it is vital that individuals are trained to develop immunity to this kind of fear. This takes the form of exposing citizens to the fears that they should be fearless of; the idea being that with practice, citizens will learn to endure the “evils” that they find fearful. The Spartan and Cretan educational system focuses on this kind of fear (I.633b-d).

On the other hand, there is the fear of doing something dishonorable, especially in the presence of someone noble; this kind of fear is called “shame” (αἰδώς) (I.646e-647b). Shame is a

\textsuperscript{15} Cf. Republic II.382a-e, III.398a-e.

\textsuperscript{16} Pangle (1980, p. 27, n. 55) notes that although αἰδώς is synonymous with αἰσχύνη, the former has a more august connotation in which it can mean a “sense of honor,” “reverence,” or “respect.” Thus, Pangle translates it as “awe” and translates the latter as “shame.” Cairnes (1993, p. 415) states that αἰσχύνη refers to a shameful state of affairs, while αἰδώς refers to an individual's reaction to that state of affairs. Thus, αἰδώς has an inhibitory sense, such that if one possesses αἰδώς, one will hesitate to do something disgraceful. The Athenian tends to use αἰσχύνη to describe shameful acts and uses αἰδώς to mean something like “a sense of shame” or “fear of doing something dishonorable”; nonetheless, at other times, he seems to use them interchangeably. Consider the following example: Ath. “And often we fear reputation, when we think we shall gain a bad repute for doing or say something bad; and this fear we, like everybody else, I imagine, call shame (αἰσχύνην)...Does not, then, the lawgiver, and every man who is worth anything, hold this kind of fear in the highest honor, and name it shame (αἰδώ); and to the confidence that is opposed to it does he not call it shamelessness (ἀναιδείαν).” Belfiore (1992, pp. 203-16) argues that Plato's discussion of αἰδώς in the Laws greatly influenced Aristotle's conception of αἰδώς. Nevertheless, there is an interesting difference between Plato and Aristotle in the sense that Plato identifies αἰδώς as a type of fear, while Aristotle contrasts those who act rightly because of fear and those who act rightly because of αἰδώς, see EN X.9.1179b4-16. For another discussion of Aristotle's account of αἰδώς, see Konstan (2007, pp. 92-6).
good type of fear because when individuals have shame they are not only able to resist suffering and pain, but they are able to endure the greatest pleasures as well (I.646a). The idea is that when you confront something that frightens you, or an extreme amount of pleasure, out of fear of being viewed a disgrace by someone noble, you will not flee from pursuing excellence, but will remain on the road to virtue. Therefore, it might be appropriate to call shame a precondition for virtue because its existence aids in producing courage, temperance, and justice. Now just as citizens develop fearlessness of expecting pain by being exposed to that which they think is painful, citizens develop the fear that is shame (αἰδώς) by being exposed to and overcoming pleasures that seduce them into acting shamelessly and unjustly (II.647c-e).

Properly supervised drinking parties provide an inexpensive and safe way to cultivate and test shame (I.649c-650a). In a state of drunkenness, you become more cheerful, more fearless, and less controlled (I.649b). As a result, you will become more tempted to shamelessly pursue pleasure. Putting individuals in this condition, provides an opportunity to develop shame in much the same way that being exposed to pain and fear develops courage and fearlessness: just as one learns to overcome pain and fear by being exposed to it, one will learn to overcome the temptation of pleasure and fearlessness by being exposed to it as well (I.649c). Additionally, if a symposiast

---

17 This is why at I.647b-c the Athenian says that “each of us must be at the same time fearless and fearful.” At 647a-b, the Athenian calls “shamelessness” (ἀναίδως) the greatest evil in both private and public life. Pangle (1980, p. 27, n. 55) points out that in Plutarch’s Cleomenes IX it is noted that the Spartans have a positive attitude towards fear; they hold that it is not something that should always be avoided, but rather should be cultivated in certain ways. For instance, the Spartans believed that fear had the power to hold a regime together; cf. Euthyphro 12b. This is why the Spartans constructed temples to Phobos (Fear) and his twin brother Deimos (Terror). This suggests that the Athenian might be trying to persuade Megillus that drunkenness is valuable by showing him how it can cultivate something that his own culture values. One should also keep in mind that Dionysus is the god of battle panic; see Euripides' Bacchae 302-5, cited by Belfiore (1986, p. 436).

18 The Athenian is clear that it is necessary that drunkenness occurs under the appropriate conditions. He argues that if these conditions cannot be met, he would prefer that drunkenness be forbidden altogether (I.637e-674c).

19 There is an interesting question as to how exactly this analogy is supposed to work: Does habituation to pain make painful experiences less painful, or does it make us care less about the pain? Likewise does the exposure to pleasure make pleasurable experiences less pleasurable, or does it make us care less about pleasure? The Stranger does not provide a clear answer; nevertheless, it seems that the answer is probably a combination of both. Stalley (1983, p. 124) objects to this analogy on the grounds that wine reduces self-control, but does not
acts inappropriately there is no great danger (I.649d-650b) because a wise, sober, and elderly, symposiarch is leading the symposium (I.640d, II.671d, II.672a).\textsuperscript{22}

Furthermore, this practice provides the city with the knowledge of who has a sense of shame, and thus can resist pleasure, and who is shameless, and thus cannot resist pleasure, which is some of the most useful knowledge that the city can acquire (I.650b). In other words, there is a kind of honesty that comes from intoxication; in this state, you reveal your true character (cf. Symposium 214a, 217e; Protagoras 347c-e).

From the Athenian’s discussion in Book I, we can identify two benefits of drunkenness: (1) it is a safe and inexpensive device for testing one’s sense of shame, and (2) it provides a means by which one can train in the resistance of pleasure and develop a sense of shame. Let us turn to the Stranger’s discussion of intoxication in Book II.

4. Laws II: Pleasure, Motivation, and Evaluative Judgments

The Athenian is adamant that drinking parties are only beneficial under certain conditions. There are four conditions that matter most: (1) there needs to be a wise, sober, and elderly symposiarch (II.672a), (2) there are strict age restrictions on the symposium (II.666a-b), (3) those who engage in symposium are not on duty (II.647a-b),\textsuperscript{23} and (4) the symposium is restricted to the festival of Dionysus (VI.775b).\textsuperscript{24} For the purposes of this section, it is only necessary to focus on the age

\textsuperscript{22} At 648d the Athenian suggests that people might practice drunkenness while alone. However, as Belfiore (1983, p. 424, n. 13) explains there is no contradiction for Plato “to allow solitary, unsupervised drinking but to require a symposiarch to rule groups of drinkers.”

\textsuperscript{23} For instance, the Athenian forbids the following from drinking: female and male slaves, magistrates during the year in which they serve, pilots, soldiers, and judges while performing their services, and anyone in an important council meeting (II.674a-b).

\textsuperscript{24} The Athenian is particularly concerned about individuals getting drunk during their wedding reception. He is concerned that this will ruin one's ability to procreate or effect the development of the fetus (775b-775e); see Abel (1999). The text indicates that the symposium is not restricted to men, but women will be allowed their own
restrictions of the symposium.

The Athenian maintains that citizens are forbidden to drink wine until the age of eighteen (II.666a). After the age of eighteen, citizens will be permitted to drink and taste wine in moderation (666a). However, only those nearing the age of forty and older will be allowed to engage in drunkenness (666a-b). These ages are not arbitrarily selected, but are grounded in the Athenian’s understanding of education and moral psychology.

According to the Stranger, children have a fiery disposition in which they are always seeking to move and sing, and are incapable of remaining calm (653d-e, 664e, 672c). In contrast, adults are reluctant to sing and dance because they no longer find such activities pleasurable, but consider them shameful:

Everyone as he grows older becomes apprehensive about singing, and takes less pleasure in doing this, and when he is forced to sing, he feels ashamed (αἰσχύνοιτ᾽). The more elderly and sober (σωφρονέστερος) that he gets, the more this increases...Surely, then, he will be more than ever ashamed (αἰσχύνοιτ’) to get up and sing in the theater, before people of all sorts (665d9-e6).

This is no trivial matter, but is quite serious insofar as musical education forms the basis symposium; cf. VIII.828c.

25 One might worry that this suggests that drunkenness is not crucial to learning self-control, or that one cannot develop self-control until adulthood. However, as I explain below, this is not the case. The Athenian's point is that how one trains in self-control differs for different ages. For the youth who already have a lot of spirit, they need calm activities to lower their spirit, and as a result they will be more controlled. Adults, on the other hand, have a dearth of spirit, and need something to excite them so that their resistance to pleasure is sharpened and does not wane, and drunkenness does this.

26 The Athenian is consistent in banning wine from the youth, however the particular age at which one is permitted to drink varies. Morrow (1960, p. 318), Stalley (1983, pp. 124-5), and England (1921, p. 12) hold that Book I suggests that the Athenian wants young individuals to engage in drunkenness. However, I agree with Belfiore (1986, p. 425 and n. 15) that this is not the case.

27 Σώφρον is often translated as “temperate,” “moderate,” or “self-controlled.” In the context of this passage, “sober,” is the best translation for two reasons. First, “sober” more directly suggests that one is not interested in drinking and perhaps more serious. Second, the Athenian believes that this is a defect of old age and thus it seems inappropriate to use “temperate,” “moderate,” or “self-controlled,” because Plato generally considers these positive qualities.
for developing proper evaluative judgments and emotional responses. According to the Stranger, humans are distinct from other animals to the extent that only humans, with the help of the Muses, Apollo, and Dionysus, are capable of perceiving rhythm and harmony in song and dance (i.e., chorus) (653e-654b, 664e-665a). The idea is that through organized and systematic singing and dancing at festivals, the rambunctious movements of children become fine and harmonious, and from this, children learn to take pleasure in what is fine and good and to hate and be pained by what is ugly and bad (653b-654d). In other words, musical education forms the basis for citizens’ ethical development because it is through musical education that citizens develop correct opinions and feelings about what is good and bad.

We have the beginning of explanation for why the Athenian believes that the elderly may engage in drunkenness and why the youth should abstain from intoxication. Because the young already have fiery dispositions and are eager to participate in song and dance, they are already primed to be educated into what is fine and good through musical education. However, this is not the case for older adults since they find such activities shameful. Because adults no longer participate in choruses, their musical education and virtue are prone “to slacken” and become “corrupted to a great extent” (653c7-9). Evidence of this is reflected in the very fact that they no

---

28 Cf. Timaeus 47d-e, Soc.: “And harmony, whose movements are akin to the orbits within our souls, is a gift of the Muses, if our dealings with them are guided by understanding, not for irrational pleasure, for which people nowadays seem to make use of it, but to serve as an ally in the fight to bring order in any orbit in our souls that has become unharmonized, and make it concordant with itself. Rhythm, too, has likewise been given to us by Muses for the same purpose, to assist us. For with most of us our condition is such that we have lost all sense of measure and are lacking in grace.”

29 The third chorus, which is called the Chorus of the Elders, and referred to as a Chorus of Dionysus, is responsible for selecting the songs and dances in the festivals (II.670d). Morrow (1960, p. 315) notes that “to call this chorus of elders a chorus of Dionysus is a paradox. Dionysus, the giver of wine and the leader in frenzied dances, was a powerful god among the multitude, but scarcely the god one would choose as patron of an Academy of taste and morals”; cf. Belfiore (1986, pp. 425-7).

30 Ath.: “I call education the initial acquisition of virtue by the child, when the feelings of pleasure and liking, pain and hatred that are formed in the soul on the right lines before the ability to understand the reason (μήπω δυναμένων λόγῳ λαμβάνειν), and then when the souls do become capable of reasoning, these passions can in consonance with reason affirm they have been correctly habituated in the appropriate habits. This consonance in its entirety is virtue”; cf. Republic III.401d-402b.
longer recognize the choral dances and songs as fine and pleasurable, but mistakenly think that participating in these activities is shameful (665d-e). Drunkenness can cure this ailment by putting adults in a childlike condition, a state in which they lack self-control (I.645e), and are more excitable and eager to sing and dance (I.649a-b, II.671b-c), and thus able to become reeducated:

As a man approaches forty he is to share in the enjoyment of the common meals, invoking the presence of the other gods, and especially Dionysus, at this mystery-rite and play of older men, which he has bestowed on human beings as a drug that heals the austerity (αὐστηρότητος) of old age. Its effect is that we are rejuvenated, and the soul, by forgetting its despondency of spirit (δυσθυμίας), has its dispositions turned from harder to softer, so that it becomes more malleable, like iron when it is plunged into fire. Will not this softer disposition, in the first place, render each one of them more ready and less ashamed to sing chants and ‘incantations’ (as we have often called them), in the presence, not of a large company of strangers, but of a small number of intimate friends? (II.666b2-c8).

Thus, when drunk, older adults who are normally reluctant to sing and dance, will be more eager to participate in the chorus. Now, since a wise symposiarch will govern their drunken behavior, he will ensure that the songs and dances they perform are noble. The Athenian explains:

Just as when they were young in the hands of the man who has the skill and the ability to train and mold them. And now, even as then, the man who is to mold them is the good legislator; he must lay down symposium laws, able to control that symposiast who becomes cheerful and bold and unduly shameless and unwilling to

---

32 This suggests that the Athenian has not lost site of the “puppet metaphor” from Book I; cf. II.671b-c. This will be discussed further below.
submit to the proper limits of silence and speech, of drinking and music, making him consent to do in all ways the opposite—laws able also, with the aid of justice, to fight against the entrance of such ignorable audacity, by bringing in that most noble fear which we have named a sense of honor and shame (αιδο τε και αισχόνην) (II.671c1-d3).33

Hence, musical education will not only re-develop adults judgments about what is good and bad, but will redevelop their emotional dispositions as well, such that they will like and take pleasure in good and fine things and hate and are pained by bad and ugly things.

Part of the re-education that occurs during the symposium is a result of the physiological effects that wine has upon adults and how these effects relate to the development of shame. Essentially, there are two physiological causes of shamelessness. There is the kind of shamelessness that arises from having too much spirit or excitement of the emotions.34 In such a circumstance, you are unable to endure pleasure, and as a result you are prone to succumb to your crude appetites—not fearing the opinions of noble individuals. This is the kind of shamelessness that is often discussed. Nevertheless, there is another, more subtle, kind of shamelessness that occurs when you do not have enough spirit or excitement of the emotions. Under these circumstances, your despondency of spirit and lack of shame prevents you from pursuing virtuous activity, which is a sign that you have stopped caring about what noble people think of you.

The former kind of shamelessness primarily affects younger individual (653a-665a, 672c). For this reason, the young should not be given wine, such an activity would be akin to pouring

33 Morrow (1960, p. 315) writes, “It seems that Plato still felt, as he did when he was writing the Symposium, that ‘enthusiasm,’ or intoxication with the divine, was the driving force underlying all insight and achievement. The popular tale that Dionysus gave wine to man in vengeance for having been deprived of his reason by Hera is an affront to his divinity (II.672b).”

34 I am using the terms “spirit” and “emotions” to cover a wide range of emotions which involve vigor and energy.
“fire into the fire that is already in the body and the soul” (666a4-6). 35 Nevertheless, because older individuals lack spirit, the fire of wine will reignite their passions, and in doing this it can redevelop their sense of shame (666b-c, II.671c-d); this is why the Athenian says that wine was given to human beings to put “shame in the soul and health as well as strength in the body” (672d7-9).

In other words, Plato believes that wine can be used as a drug for inciting allopathic catharsis.36 Allopathic treatment consists in restoring health through medicine that contains ingredients that are opposite in nature to those that have caused the illness initially. An example of this would be if a doctor treats a patient suffering from an excess of “heat” with a drug that “cools” the patient. The idea being that the “cooling” agent will purge the excess “heat” in the body, and thus bring balance and harmony to the patient. In contrast, homeopathic catharsis restores health through an antidote that contains ingredients that are similar in nature to those that

35 In the Timaeus at 60a, Plato describes wine as a fiery substance that heats both the soul and the body.

36 Belfiore (1986, pp. 431-7) supports this interpretation with an interesting analysis of ancient medicine. Belfiore (1986, p. 433-4) notes that Plato discusses catharsis in other texts. For instance, in the Sophist 230b-e Plato holds elenchos is the “greatest and best catharsis”; see also, Phaedo 69 ff. However, Belfiore argues that Plato’s discussion of catharsis is unique in the Laws because, here, catharsis is beneficial because it causes disorder. Belfiore maintains Plato’s discussion of catharsis in the Laws greatly influenced Aristotle’s conception of catharsis. Nonetheless, it is not clear that the conception of catharsis in the Laws had much influence on Aristotle’s conception of catharsis to the extent that catharsis in the Laws is primarily allopathic, while Aristotle’s conception of catharsis is not obviously allopathic, but might be homeopathic. Traditionally, Aristotle's account of catharsis was interpreted as being straightforwardly homeopathic, see Bernays (1997/1880); Flashar (1956); Bywater (1909, p. 153-5); Lucas (1968, p. 285); Schadewaldt (1970); Fortenbaugh (1975); Janko (1987, intro, sec. 5); and Halliwell (1986). However, Belfiore (1992) interprets Aristotle's account of catharsis as allopathic. For a recent summary of the various interpretations of Aristotle’s account of catharsis, see Munteanu (2011). Aristotle discussions of catharsis are found in the Poetics 1149b24-8 and Politics 1342a4-15, 1341b36-41.

Although I agree with Belifore that Plato mostly advocates for allopathic catharsis in the Laws, there is one passage that suggests that he also believes that homeopathic catharsis can be useful. Consider VII.790d-e: “For presumably when mothers want to lull their restless children to sleep they don't provide stillness but just the opposite motion; they rock them constantly in their arms, and not with silence but with some melody. It's exactly as if they were charming the children with aulos-playing, even as if it is done for the maddened Bacchic revelers, to whom they administer this same cure, which consists of the motion that is dance and music”; cf. VII.791a-b; Phaedrus 228b, 234d; Crito 54d; Ion 533d-536d; Symposium 215c-e. Linforth (1950a, p. 158) explains, “The disorder which they [i.e., the Corybantic rites] relieved was an inner tumult of fear and apprehension caused by a bad condition of the soul, and the cure was wrought by the external tumult of the rites... The cure is homeopathic in that it produces symptoms identical or nearly identical with those of the disorder to be cured”; cf. Dodds (1951, p. 231, n. 59). Additionally, it should be noted that the festival of Dionysus was traditionally seen as an opportunity to purge excess irrational desires and feelings. Plato's inclusion of the festival suggests that he recognized the importance of catharsis. For a discussion of the role of dancing, music, and madness in Plato's philosophy; see Dodds (1951, chap. 3.) and Linforth (1950a), (1950b).
have caused the illness initially. An example of this would be a doctor treating an agent with excess “heat” with a drug that further “warms” the agent; the idea being that the additional heat will purge the excess heat, and thus bring harmony and balance to the patient. That Plato believes that wine can be used as a drug for inciting allopathic catharsis is clear from the fact that wine should be given to the elderly to rekindle the fire that they lack, while the young, who are already full of fire, should not be given wine; rather, they should be given something that can cool and calm their manic movements.

Accordingly, in Laws II, drunkenness provides two educational benefits: (1) it aids one in re-developing one’s evaluative judgments and affective states, and (2) it has the physiological effect of re-exciting the emotions required for virtuous activity.

5. The Textual Response

Having explored Plato’s attitude towards intoxication in both the Republic and the Laws we are now in a position to assess the similarities and differences. There are two similarities. First, both texts maintain that while in a position of responsibility, one should not practice intoxication. Second, both texts maintain that a state of permanent intoxication is not a good thing (cf. Laws I.646b-c).

There are, however, two main differences. First, in the Republic, intoxication is associated with softness, laziness, and looseness, while in the Laws it is associated with vigor, spirit, and energy. Second, intoxication in the Republic negatively affects the soul by promoting cowardice and intemperance, while in the Laws it can promote the virtues of courage and temperance. This

37 It is unclear that Plato sees these two points as being different; nevertheless, it is still useful to distinguish between them. Drunkenness is also beneficial because it contributes to friendship (I.640b, II.672a). It should be noted that the use of wine as a tool for education is part of the general idea that education should be conjoined with play (II.656c, II.671e, VII.798b-c, VII.803c-804b, VIII.832d; Republic VII.537a.)
raises the question: Did Plato change his mind about intoxication, or, are these difference merely the result of the Laws and the Republic having different focuses?

There are some obvious differences between the Laws and the Republic. The Laws is concerned with practical matters and deals with ordinary citizens, while the Republic is more theoretical and deals with more idealized citizens. Scholars generally cite two pieces of evidence to support this reading. First, in the Laws, unlike the Republic, one finds detailed discussions of practical issues. Second, the Stranger refers to the polity of Magnesia as second best (Laws V.739e4, IX.875d3-4), while in the Republic Socrates makes it clear that he is not concerned about practical limitations, but is concerned with ideals (Republic V.472c4-d2). Hence, one might argue that had Plato been interested in discussing ordinary people and practical matters in the Republic, such as how to deal with old age, he would have said many of the same things about drunkenness in the Republic as he did in the Laws.

Nevertheless, this cannot explain why Plato’s description of drunkenness is different. As I explained above, intoxication in the Laws is associated with vigor, while in the Republic it is associated with the languid. This difference cannot be the result of the texts focusing on different citizens because it has to do with the nature of intoxication itself. Additionally, even though the guardians differ from the citizens of Magnesia, Plato wants both sets of citizens to be courageous and temperate; thus, it is telling that the guardians and the citizens of Magnesia train in pleasure in very different ways. In the Republic, the guardians train in pleasure by not being exposed to gluttony, lust, and drunkenness. After all, this is why in Books II, III, and X, Socrates bans many

38 See Stalley (1983, pp. 16-7). Bobonich (2002) rejects this claim, arguing that the Laws is Plato's new utopian construction. In support of Bobonich’s claim is the fact that the first-best city that Magnesia lags behind is far more ideal than the Kallipolis in the sense that every citizen in it is virtuous.

39 Belfiore (1986, p. 428) seems to adopt this position; she argues that in the Laws Plato adopts a less idealized theory of health for the less idealized citizens. I will discuss her position in detail further below.
of the traditional stories about gods, heroes, and men. In contrast, the citizens of Magnesia learn about pleasure by being exposed to vicious behaviors so that they might develop a resistance to them. For these reasons we must conclude that Plato did in fact change his mind about intoxication.

Now one might object that at Republic III.413d-414a, Plato says that the guardians will be tested by being exposed to pleasures:

Like those who lead colts into noise and tumult to see if they’re afraid, we must expose our young people to fears and pleasures, testing them more thoroughly than gold is tested by fire. If someone is hard to put under a spell...is a good guardian of himself and the music and poetry he has learned...then he is the best person both for himself and for the city. Anyone who is tested in this way as a child, youth, and adult, and always comes out of it untainted, is to be made a ruler as well as a guardian (III.413d8-414a2).

I have three responses to this objection. First, the main focus in the educative process discussed in Books II and III is mostly concerned with only exposing the guardians to virtuous examples—so that they imitate their excellence. Second, it is revealing that Plato does not include intoxication as a means by which the guardians will be tested in pleasure (cf. II.398e, III.403e), since in the Laws intoxication is the true test to see if one is able to resist pleasure. Lastly, this passage (viz., Rep. III.413d-414a) demonstrates that the guardians who are candidates for being philosopher rulers will be exposed to pleasure as means of training. Nevertheless nothing in the Republic suggests that this training will extend to other members of the city. Hence, one reason that Socrates might not want to expose the other citizens to such pleasures is that he thinks it is obvious that it will negatively affect them. However, in the Laws, all adult citizens will be exposed to pleasures as means of training, because the Athenian believes that it will help them develop
virtue, which suggests that Plato has changed his mind about this issue.

If I am right about this, we are left with the following questions: Why did Plato change his mind about the effects of intoxication? And, why did he change his view about the role that drunkenness should play in education? I will first offer an answer to the former question, then I will consider and reject Elizabeth Belfiore’s answer to the latter question. In the *Politics* at VIII.1342b23-27, Aristotle mentions that certain musical critics disapproved of Plato’s rejection of relaxed harmonies, describing them as intoxicated, in the sense that they lack power (cf. *Republic* III.398e). George Grote (2010/1865, p. 328, n. 1) suggests that this criticism might be why Plato changed his perspective on the effects of intoxication in the *Laws*. I think Grote’s suggestion might be the best answer we can find to this question and thus I will primarily focus on the latter question in the remainder of the chapter.40

### 6. Virtue, Health, and Training

Elizabeth Belfiore (1986) argues Plato’s discussion of intoxication in the *Laws* reveals that Plato is offering a novel account of what constitutes a virtuous soul in the *Laws*. In order to understand Belfiore’s position, we must first consider her interpretation of the *Republic*. At *Republic* VII.588d-559d, Plato distinguishes between necessary and unnecessary desires.41 Necessary desires are those that are beneficial; these include things like the desire for food and water. Reason sanctions the fulfillment and pursuit of these desires because they are beneficial and required for continuous flourishing during embodiment. In contrast, unnecessary desires are those that are not

---

40 Lord (1982, pp. 215-9) has challenged the authenticity of this passage. Nevertheless, since there does not seem to be any other explanations available, we must, tentatively, accept Grote’s suggestion.

required for survival or flourishing, such as gluttony or erotic lust. The pursuit of these unnecessary desires is harmful to both the soul and the body, and because of this, reason does not sanction the pursuit and satisfaction of unnecessary desires; in other words—they are anti-rational.

For instance, in Book IV, Plato warns that reason must control the appetitive elements in the soul. For if reason is lax, the appetitive elements will grow “big and strong” and “attempt to enslave and rule” reason (IV.442a7-b2). The point is that we ought to pursue only those desires sanctioned by reason, because if we fulfill desires not sanctioned by reason, these desires will grow bigger and stronger, and eventually rule our soul. In other words, the anti-rational elements are dangerous because they undermine the rule of reason.

In Book VI, Plato illustrates what he has in mind with a “channeled stream” metaphor.42 Plato explains that “whenever someone’s desires incline strongly towards some one thing, they are weakened for other things. It is as if the stream had been diverted into another channel” (VI.485d6-8). For instance, if your desires are taught to flow into the channel of learning, your desires for bodily pleasure will weaken (VI.485d). Or conversely, if your desires are trained to flow to the channel of bodily pleasure, your desires for the pleasure of the mind will weaken. Belfiore (1986, p. 423) suggests that the metaphor “implies that just as any diversion of water into one channel deepens that channel, and thus increases the tendency of a stream to flow in that direction, so even a temporary yielding to a particular kind of desire strengthens that desire permanently and weakens opposing desires.”

Within the channeled stream metaphor we find two broad commitments about psychic health:

---
42 See Belfiore (1986, pp. 423-4) whose analysis follows Cooper (1999b).
**The Republic’s Account of Psychic Health**

a) *Harmony Condition*: Health and virtue are a kind of harmony, or lack of strife in the soul.

b) *Rationality Condition*: Reason should always be in control of the soul and anti-rational elements are always harmful.  

The harmony condition and the rationality condition explain why Plato condemns tragedy and comedy in the *Republic*. Plato worries that when you watch tragedy, the non-reasoning part of your soul takes pleasure in pitying and grieving with characters who suffer grave misfortunes (X.606a-b). This is dangerous because “after feeding fat the emotion of pity it is not easy to restrain it in our own sufferings” (X.606b5-8). Comedy and other forms imitative poetry pose the same threat by arousing anti-rational desire, which “nourishes and waters the elements that should be dried up and makes them rule over us, when they should be ruled, in order that we may be better and happier men instead of worse and more miserable” (X.606d4-7; cf. X.604a-d, X.607d).

Belfiore (1986, p. 423) explains, “Feeling these emotions at the theatre involves a satisfaction of unnecessary, anti-rational desires and a weakening of reason...Even temporary yielding to these desires permanently strengthens them, diverting energy into a channel opposed to that governed by reason.”

According to Belfiore (1986), in the *Laws*, Plato rejects both the harmony condition and the rationality condition insofar as both strife and anti-rational elements are constitutive to psychic health and virtue. Belfiore holds that in the *Laws* a “deficiency of anti-rational emotion can be as

---

43 Belfiore (1986) does not uses these terms, but they are implicit in her discussion. Additional support for this interpretation can be found in two passages. First, in Republic IV, Plato holds that just actions create and sustain psychological health, while unjust actions produce and sustain psychological disharmony (444d-445b). Second, Plato’s account of the tyrant’s soul in Republic IX.573a-c suggests that vicious desires and beliefs destroy reasonable beliefs and desires.

44 See Belfiore (1986, pp. 422-4).

45 There is also a contrast between the *Timaeus* and the *Laws* on this issue. At *Timaeus* 43a-44d, Plato asserts...
harmful as excess” (1986, p. 421). On Belfiore’s reading, virtue and psychic health involve there being two different elements—the rational and anti-rational—warring against each other, with the rational continuously overcoming and purging the anti-rational:

**The Law’s Account of Psychic Health**

a) *Strife Condition*: Strife is intrinsic to health and virtue.

b) *Anti-Rational Condition*: Anti-Rational elements are intrinsic to health and virtue.

Belfiore supports this reading in three main ways. First, she notes that the Athenian describes the disordered and mad movements of children positively, describing them as fundamental to musical education:

No creature is born having as much intelligence as it is fitting for it to have when it is grown. In that time in which it has not yet acquired the good sense proper to it, every creature is mad (μαίνεται) and makes disordered noises, and as soon as it becomes active, it also makes disordered leaps. Let us remember that we said these are the sources of music and gymnastics (II.672c1-7; cf. II.653d-e, II.664e).

Belfiore (1986, p. 427) explains, “These elements are anti-rational in that they are not in themselves amenable to reason, but always oppose it. In the Laws, paradoxically, they contribute to a well-ordered soul by means of their opposition to order and reason.”

Second, Belfiore (1986, p. 428) argues that in the Laws strife is fundamental to the virtues of temperance and courage, while in the Republic these virtues are defined as a harmony, or an absence of strife. To illustrate this, Belfiore points to Book IV of the Republic in which Socrates describes the common view of temperance as “being stronger than oneself” as laughable (430e11).

---

that the disordered movements of the child's soul are purely undesirable and must be replaced by reason.
Temperance, according to Socrates, is not battling and winning over your more primitive desires; rather, temperance involves “friendship and harmony of these parts of the soul, when the ruler and the ruled both agree that reason should rule and do not fight” (442c10-d1; cf. 432a7-9).

Belfiore (1986, p. 428) argues that this is not the account of virtue in the Laws. She argues that in the Laws Plato describes temperance as “not only as a state of health after sickness has been cured, but also as a somewhat precarious condition in which there is constant need for rehabilitation.” Likewise, she points out that the Athenian defines courage as “combat against fears and pains and also against desires and pleasures” (I.633c8-d3). Belfiore explains, “Only the soul that successfully combats the cowardice within itself can be completely brave. Similarly, only someone who has to struggle continually against pleasure and desire can become perfect in sōphrosynē, defined not as harmony and agreement but ‘victory over oneself’.”

Third, Belfiore (1986, p. 428) argues that this account of health is implicit in the hydraulic metaphor of Book VI of the Laws, which differs greatly from the “channeled stream” metaphor of the Republic. At VI.773c, the Athenian explains that citizens should not marry individuals with similar characteristics, but should seek to marry people with opposite dispositions. For instance, the rich should marry the poor, those from powerful families should marry those from weak families, and those with hasty dispositions (θάττους) should marry those with slower dispositions (βραδυτέρους) (VI.773c). The Stranger illustrates his point with a metaphor: “a city should be impure, just like a wine bowl: the wine, when poured in, is throbbing with madness, but under the punishment of another, sober god [viz., water], it forms a noble partnership that creates a good and

---

46 For discussions on temperance in the Laws see Barker (1960, p. 343); North (1966, pp. 186-96); and Stalley (1983, p. 54-8).
47 Belfiore (1986, p. 428, n. 26) points to I.626e2-6, I.636a6-b6, and I.647c7-d8. See also O’Brien (1967, p. 183); England (1921, ad loc. I.626c6-d2).
measured drink (773c7-d4)." Belfiore (1986, p. 429) explains that “the madness of wine and the soberness of water do not coexist harmoniously in the mixing bowl; rather, the battle against each other—virtue and health is produced when the madness is successfully combated.”

Belfiore offers an interesting explanation; however, there are five problems with her interpretation of the Laws. First and foremost, at I.682d2-4, the Stranger explicitly states that it is a mistake to think that a sick body that is purged of disease is superior to the body that is in no need of purgation. The Athenian’s point is clear, the person who exists in perfect harmony and does not require catharsis is superior to the person who is only healthy after medical purgation.49

Second, although it is true that Plato thinks that the manic movements and cries of youth are the source of music and gymnastics (II.672c-d), this does not entail that these disordered movements are intrinsic to health. It is possible, and more likely, that these manic feelings are merely instrumental to health because they inspire one to participate in the city’s songs and dances.

Third, it is not clear that Plato defines the virtues in terms of strife in the Laws.50 Although it is true that the Athenian describes courage as “combat against fears and pains and also against

48 Plato's mixing bowl metaphor is closely tied to a traditional myth in which wine, represented by the child Dionysus, is corrected by water, represented by his nurses, the Nymphs. The best known accounts of this myth are Athen. 11.465a: Phanodemos 325 F 12 Jac., cited by Pickard-Cambridge (1986, p. 6). Belfiore (1986, pp. 430-1) points out that similar accounts of mixing wine with water are given by Diodorus Siculus (4.3.4), Dio Chrysostom (32.58), and Rufus of Ephesus, cited by Pigeaud (1981, pp. 498-9). Belfiore (1986, pp. 431-7) ties this mixing bowl metaphor to ancient theories of medicine which describe health as a blend of various elements.

49 Belfiore (1986, p. 428) dismisses this passage arguing that the Laws is concerned with the “second best.” Cf. Laws V.739e4, IX.875d3-4; Republic V.472.c4-d2. The problem with this response, however, is that even if Plato thinks that the Laws deals with less than ideal citizens, it seems strange to think Plato would apply a lower standard of health for these citizens than he would for ideal citizens; rather, it seems more reasonable that Plato would maintain the same standard of health, but would adjust his expectations for whether or not certain citizens could reach it. In other words, in the Republic, Plato does not apply one standard of health for the philosopher rulers and another standard for the producers under which both are healthy. Instead, Plato applies one standard of health for humans and measures all humans up to it.

50 Stalley (1983, p. 55) points out that the Athenian considers temperance, understood narrowly as self-control, as worthless in itself. The broader account of temperance, which is the “mainspring” of the Laws “embraces, not only self-control, but also order, harmony, moderation and self-knowledge.” Fundamentally, temperance in the Laws is a matter of balance and harmony between reason and the emotions (I.626b-628b, II.652a-670e). See also North (1966, p. 192): “As the Athenian stranger explains the value of the duly regulated symposium, he introduces most of the psychological principles on which the Laws will be based...Each of these principles provides a reason for Plato's emphasis of sophrosyne—the virtue that controls pleasure and produces order and harmony.”
desires and pleasures” (I.633c8-d3), this description is misleading for two reasons. First, the primary purpose of this passage is to get Kleinias and Megillus to recognize that courage is not only a matter of enduring pain and fear of death, but concerns resisting pleasures and desires as well. The use of the term “combat” is likely a rhetorical device to get the agreement of the Stranger’s war-loving friends. Second, after this passage the Athenian explains that courage is a matter of being both fearless of pain and being fearful of acting shamelessly in front of noble individuals (I.647b-c). If courage is, in part, a matter of not fearing pain, then, strictly speaking, courage is not a matter of combating pain, because the courageous person will not fear pain. Likewise, if courage is a matter of not desiring shameful pleasures than the virtuous agent has nothing to combat against, because the courageous individual will not desire vicious pleasures.

Fourth, Belfiore’s account does not accord well with Plato’s puppet metaphor (I.644d7-645b1). This is damning because the Athenian introduces the puppet metaphor in Book I to explain how drunkenness affects the soul:

Let us suppose that each of us living beings is an ingenious puppet of the gods—whether contrived as a plaything of theirs or for some serious purpose, we do not know. But this we do know, that these affections in us, like sinews or cords, draw us along, and being contrary to each other, (i) pull one against the other to contrary actions; and herein lies the dividing line between virtue and vice. For, as our argument declares, (ii) there is one of the pulling forces which each person ought always to follow and in no way abandon, thereby (iii) pulling against the other sinews: this is the golden and sacred pull of calculation, called the common law of the city. The other cords are hard and iron and have every sort of shape, while this one is soft since it is of gold. (iv) With the finest pull of the law we should always
for since calculation is fine, but gentle rather than forceful, its pull needs helpers to assure that the golden kind within us may always (v) vanquish the other kinds (I.644d7-645b1, my emphasis).51

Although (i), (iii), and (v), make it clear that Plato thinks that the affections war against each other—pulling and pushing towards opposite actions—towards virtue and vice, nothing in this description suggests that this combat is fundamental to virtue. If anything, (ii) and (iv) suggest that strife is not intrinsic to virtue, but actually threatens it. Additionally, (ii), (iv), and (v), indicate that reason should always be ruling in the soul.

The fifth problem is that Belfiore’s account neglects the role that the symposiarch plays in the symposium. Drunkenness arouses passions and temporally weakens self-control, but it does this under the supervision of a wise, sober, and self-controlled leader. It is true that from the internal perspective of the drunkard, the control of reason surrenders to the madness of wine; nonetheless, from the external perspective, reason still rules insofar as the wise symposiarch is governing the symposium. For these reasons, we must reject Belfiore’s claim that the anti-rational elements and strife are intrinsic to health in the Laws.52

Although Belfiore’s account of the Laws is mistaken, I agree with her that in the Republic vicious desires and false beliefs about ethical matters are permanently damaging to the soul, while in the Laws they are not.53 However, it is a mistake to conclude from this that Plato changed his

51 Frede (2010, p. 116) suggests that “puppet” might be a misleading translation since it suggests that external forces pull the strings. Frede suggests that Plato might have in mind a wind-up toy instead. However, it is unclear to me whether this is correct; a wind-up toy suggests that the gods wind us up and then leave us alone. Surely, this is not the impression that Plato wants to give since he is clear in Book X that deism is false. Nevertheless, Frede is correct to point out that the metaphor focuses on one’s internal forces and does not focus on external forces. Bobonich (2002, p. 261, n. 77) argues that the puppet metaphor differs significantly from the metaphors Plato uses to describe the soul in other dialogues. Bobonich argues that in every dialogue except the Laws, the soul is described as having various parts, but this is not the case in the puppet metaphor. For a critical discussion, see Frede (2010). I will not take a stand on this issue; however, I agree with Bobonich that in the Laws there is a stronger divide between cognitive and non-cognitive elements than we find in other dialogues.

52 For an interesting discussion on what exactly the rule of reason means see Brown (2005)

53 Eric Brown has pointed out to me that if I am right about this, then it might be the case that Plato
mind about what constitutes health and virtue. Instead, what we should conclude from this is that Plato altered his view about how to bring about health and virtue. In the *Laws*, vicious desires and beliefs can aid in the development of health and virtue, while in the *Republic*, they cannot.\(^{54}\) This explains why Plato would permit intoxication in the *Laws*, but forbid it in the *Republic*. This idea converges with and is supported by the claim that Plato thinks that akrasia is more robust and pervasive in the *Laws* than in other texts.\(^{55}\) To be clear, my discussion of akrasia in the next section should not be read as if I am giving a full-fledged defense of these claims—this is certainly not my intent. Rather, I am merely showing that if Plato adopted a stronger view of akrasia in the *Laws* than the *Republic*, then this supports and helps explain why Plato would adopt a different form of training in the *Laws* than the *Republic*.

### 7. Akrasia

Akrasia is a moral weakness that is not due to a cognitive or intellectual mistake, but is the result of having defective non-cognitive or affective states. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates famously denied the possibility of akrasia, arguing that all moral failings are a result of cognitive or intellectual changed his mind about causal principles, because in the *Phaedo* Plato seems to think that one thing cannot cause its opposite, but can only produce itself.

\(^{54}\) One might object to my interpretation of the *Republic* by pointing out that the Plato maintains that when men and women are no longer capable of procreation, they are turned loose from the “rigged sexual lottery” and can have as much sex as they want (V.461b-c). I have two responses: first, nothing in Socrates’ discussion at 461b-c suggests that there is positive value in the elderly experiencing erotic lust or irrationality. Additionally, if we take Cephalus’ description of old age as a release and escape from erotic lust—the “savage beast of a master” (I.392c4)—seriously, then it is unlikely that Plato anticipates that the elderly have strong sexual desires. After all, the whole purpose behind giving older adults wine in the *Laws* is that old age has diminished their erotic and mad desires. This indicates that the reason Plato turns the elderly loose in the *Republic* has more to do with Plato thinking that the elderly will not desire sex than it does with the idea that erotic desires are instrumental to health and virtue.

\(^{55}\) See Bobonich (2002, pp. 644-5). Stalley (1983, pp. 50-2) points out that although Plato accepts the possibility of akrasia in the *Laws*, he still accepts the claim that no one does wrong willingly. Stalley offers a way in which these two claims can be reconciled. Recently, Wilburn (2012) has argued that Plato does not accept the possibility of akrasia in the *Laws*. However, his arguments relies upon denying that the puppet metaphor endorses akrasia. Because none of the evidence that I will discuss hinges upon the puppet metaphor, I am going to put Wilburn’s concerns to the side.
mistakes (352a-360e). However, the tripartite theory of the soul in the Republic opened the door for the possibility of akrasia. The tripartite theory of the soul allows for there to be internal conflicts between the various parts of the soul. For instance, it is possible that the reasoning part of the soul judges correctly that you should φ, but for the appetitive part or spirited part to overrule this judgment and decide that you should ψ (IV.439e-440a).

The account of akrasia put forth in the Laws, however, is more robust and poses a greater threat to morality than the account of akrasia in the Republic. Consider the following three passages of the Laws. The first occurs at III.689a-c in which the Athenian describes the greatest folly (ἡ μεγίστη ἀμαθία) as a disharmony between reason and the emotions. The Greek word, ἀμαθία, can mean “ignorance” or “folly.” “Ignorance” suggests a cognitive mental state to the extent that you are ignorant when you have a false belief or have failed to grasp some truth.56 “Folly,” in contrast, less directly suggests a cognitive mental state since it is possible to foolishly pursue ψ, even though you believe you will be better off pursuing φ.

“Folly” is the better translation for ἀμαθία here because Plato is explicit that the ἀμαθία under discussion at 689a-c is not a result of intellectual failing.57 For instance, he explains that the greatest ἀμαθία occurs when you believe that something is fine and good, but you hate it instead of loving it. Or, when you believe that something is bad, but you love and cherish it instead of hating it (689a). The problem is that there is discord between what you find pleasurable and painful, and what you judge to be good and bad (689a).58 This leads the Athenian to describe “folly” (ἄνοιαν)59 as the phenomenon that occurs “when the soul quarrels with knowledge.

56 This distinction is important because one can be ignorant of that p without having the false belief that not- p to the extent that one might not have any beliefs about p whatsoever.
58 Cf. Eudemia Ethics VII.1237a5-10.
59 The Greek word, ἄνοιαν, is also ambiguous between ignorance and folly, but it is clear from the context that the ἄνοιαν refers to non-cognitive or non-intellectual failing. It is also clear from the context that Plato is using ἄνοιαν and ἀμαθία interchangeably.
(ἐπιστήματις) or belief (ἡ δόξα) or reason (ἡ λόγος), its natural ruling principles” (689b-4). The fact that the Athenian says that folly can occur when you have knowledge (ἐπιστήματις) reveals that the moral failure is not a consequence of an intellectual mistake. The Athenian’s point is that you might have a complete intellectual grasp about what you ought to do, but still fail to act correctly because you find such an action painful (689b). This is why he says that the greatest foolishness can occur “when the noble elements of reason (λόγοι) in the soul achieve nothing, but indeed go contrary to these things” (689b-7).

The second instance of akrasia occurs at IX.875a-c in which the Athenian rejects autocratic rule for two reasons. First, most individuals do not “know” (γνῶναι) the true aim of politics (875a). Second, even if someone “grasped” (γνῶναι) the art of politics, “he would never be able to adhere to this conviction,” once he got control of the city (875b-4). The problem is that his “mortal nature (ἡ θνητὴ φύσις) will always urge him towards getting more than his share and towards private business, irrationally (ἀλόγως) fleeing pain and pursuing pleasure, and putting both of these before what is more just and better” (875b-7-c). The contrast the Athenian is drawing is simple: it is between failing to rule because of ignorance and failing to rule because the lust for power and pleasure dominates your soul.60

The third instance occurs at X.902a-b in which the Athenian considers and rejects two different ways the gods might fail to be righteous. The first possibility is that the gods fail to act rightly as a result of ignorance (ἀγνωσία) (902a). The second possibility is that the gods “know

60 The Athenian does go on to note, however, that “if ever some human being who was born adequate in nature, with a divine dispensation (θεία μοίρα γεννηθεὶς), were able to attain these things, he wouldn’t need any laws ruling over him. For no law or order is stronger than knowledge (ἐπιστήμης), nor is it right for intelligence to be subordinate, or a slave, to anyone, but it should be ruler over everything, if indeed it is really free according to nature. But now, in fact, it is so nowhere or in any way, except to a small extent” (875c-d). One might argue that this passage undermines my interpretation because it says that nothing is more powerful than knowledge. Nevertheless, the agent in the example not only has knowledge, but also a divine disposition, and this divine disposition might be responsible for the agent’s ability to control her anti-rational passions.
(γνώσκοντας) what should be done, and as the most worthless human beings are said to do, they know (εἰδότες) it is better to act otherwise than the way that they are acting, but they do not do so on account of certain weaknesses in the face of pleasure or pains” (X.902a8-b2).

Each of these examples suggest that in the Laws, Plato thinks that it is possible for an agent to know that she should φ and yet fail to φ on account of having defective affective states. This account of akrasia is stronger and more threatening to morality than the account of akrasia put forth in the Republic insofar as nothing in the Republic suggests that akrasia is compatible with knowledge; if anything the Republic suggests that knowledge is a bulwark against moral failure.61 This suggests that in the Laws, Plato no longer takes knowledge to provide the ethical stability that he took it to secure in the Republic.62 Another way of putting this, is that knowledge of what to do is not always sufficient to motivate right action because of the possibility of akrasia (cf. II.661d-664a).

If this is right, then we have an explanation for why Plato might have changed his mind about training in virtue. If Plato believes that knowledge is no longer able to completely control the emotions, he might think that more training is required with respect to the emotions so that one does not become overwhelmed when one confronts great pleasures. Likewise, if he thinks that ethical knowledge is not always sufficient to motivate right action, he might take a more positive attitude towards experiencing extreme pleasures and desires to the extent that these are strong sources of motivation (cf. II.661d-664a).63


62 This interpretation accords with the Athenian's description of injustice in the soul as not being a cognitive failure, but rather as the “tyranny in the soul of spiritedness, fear, pleasure, pain, feelings of envies and desires, whether they do some injury or not” (IX.863e6-864a1). The Athenian goes on to explain that even if one's beliefs about what are choiceworthy “are in some way mistaken, one must be called entirely just” when one's life is ordered by these beliefs (IX.863c-d).

63 In Nietzsche’s first book, The Birth of Tragedy, he accuses Socrates with ruining Greek culture. Nietzsche
8. Conclusion

In sections one through four, I explained that in the *Laws* Plato has a more positive attitude towards intoxication than he does in the *Republic*. In section five, I argued that this difference is the result of Plato changing his mind about intoxication. In section six, I considered and rejected Elizabeth Belfiore’s explanation that strife and the anti-rational elements are *intrinsically* to health and virtue in the *Laws*, but are always damning in the *Republic*. I argued that Belfiore’s account of the *Republic* is correct, but her account of the *Laws* is mistaken—the passages on drunkenness in the *Laws* only support the weaker claim that the anti-rational elements are *instrumental* to health and virtue. In section seven I argued that this difference might be the result of Plato changing his mind about the ability of knowledge to control the passions and to motivate right action.

Before I close off my discussion of the *Laws* and move on to the *Pheado*, I need to address one more issue. In chapter two, I argued that in the *Republic*, not only do non-philosophers benefit from believing falsehoods, but philosophers themselves benefit as well. However, in both chapters three and four, I have been relatively silent on whether Plato thinks philosophers benefit from false beliefs in the *Laws*. One reason for this is that unlike the *Republic*, Plato does not clearly demarcate between philosophers and non-philosophers in the *Laws*. Nevertheless, in light of the arguments I have put forth in this chapter, I have a simple and quick answer to this question—Yes—Plato does, indeed, think that philosophers can benefit from believing falsehoods in the *Laws*. This is evident because Plato anticipates that all individuals over the age of forty can benefit from false beliefs.

---

maintains that Pre-Socratic Greek culture balanced two forces: the Apollonian and the Dionysiac. The Apollonian represents the drive towards self-control, reason, and individuality, while the Dionysiac represents the drive towards excess, irrationality, and community. The clearest expression of Apollonian culture is Greek tragedy and the clearest expression of Dionysiac culture is choral singing and dancing. Greek tragedy, according to Nietzsche, represents the perfect synthesis of these two drives. Socrates’ insistence that life should be devoted to reason, destroyed the balance of these two forces. Nietzsche asserts that Plato attempted to follow his hero, Socrates, in the destruction of Dionysiac culture, I take this chapter to demonstrate that Plato is more sympathetic towards the Dionysiac forces than Nietzsche thought.
and anti-rationality. Because some of the individuals over the age of forty are philosophers, it follows that there are some philosophers who can benefit from false beliefs and anti-rational elements.
CHAPTER FIVE

Death and the Limits of Truth in the *Phaedo*

Miss Naomi Faust: “Dr. Breed keeps telling me the main thing with Dr. Hoenikker was truth.”

Jonah: “You don’t seem to agree.”

“I don’t know whether I agree or not. I just have trouble understanding how truth, all by itself, could be enough for a person.” (Vonnegut, 2014/1963, ch. 25, p. 54)

1. Introduction

In the previous chapters I have argued that for Plato both non-philosophers and philosophers can benefit from falsehoods. I have not, however, examined whether Plato thinks they can benefit from defective forms of reasoning, such as wishful thinking. In this chapter, I explore this issue by analyzing Socrates’ belief formation process in the *Phaedo*.

Socrates’ attitude towards pursuing truth is somewhat paradoxical in the *Phaedo*. At one point Socrates seems to say that he is going to try to convince himself that his soul is immortal and destined for a better place regardless of whether or not these claims are true, apparently because believing these things has some sort of practical value (91a-b). However, he also appears to tell Cebes and Simmias to relentlessly pursue the truth about the very same matter (91c). This raises the question: Why might Socrates believe that he will benefit from believing things about death irrespective of the truth, but that Cebes and Simmias will not? Why should they continue pursuing the truth? This is especially puzzling since, presumably, these beliefs about death will have the
same practical benefits for Cebes and Simmias as they do for Socrates. Additionally, one might worry that Socrates’ strategy undermines his general commitment to pursuing truth. Hence, I call this interpretive problem the “epistemic vice puzzle.”

In this chapter, I first show how the epistemic vice puzzle arises in the text and then I offer a solution to it. I argue that the relevant difference between Socrates and his friends is that Socrates is a fully accomplished philosopher, while his friends are not. This, I argue, makes Socrates an epistemic authority, and it is in virtue of being an epistemic authority that he is justified in not pursuing the truth about death. Moreover, it is in virtue of his friends not being epistemic authorities that they must pursue the truth about death. The upshot of this chapter, however, is not that the life spent pursuing truth is unimportant. Rather, it is that sometimes the demands of living well require that we abandon the pursuit of truth and knowledge. For Socrates, the value of pursuing truth is limited in certain circumstances and facing death is one of these circumstances.

2. A Puzzle about the Pursuit of Truth

Throughout the *Phaedo*, Socrates maintains that he has “striven in every way” to become a philosopher (69b3-4; cf. 66b-c), which involves a commitment to truth, knowledge, and wisdom (66a-e, 84a, 91a). Nevertheless, at 91a-b, Socrates says some curious things that raise questions about his dedication to truth.

Socrates has just offered three arguments in defense of the immortality of the soul: the argument from opposites (70c-72e), the argument from recollection (72e-77b), and the simplicity argument (77b-80c). Following this, Socrates offers a mythical description of the afterlife, in which the quality of afterlife that one experiences is in proportion to the ethical quality of life that one has lived. For example, those who have lived wickedly will experience the worst afterlife,
while those who have lived philosophically will experience the best afterlife (80d-82b; cf. 107c-115a). Call this idea the “proportionality thesis.”¹

Cebes and Simmias are unconvinced by Socrates’ defense of the soul’s immortality; nevertheless they are reluctant to object because they worry about distressing Socrates (84d). Socrates, however, encourages them to offer their objections (85a-b). After hearing their criticisms, Socrates warns them about the dangers of misology,² or hating rational discourse and thought.³ According to Socrates, misology arises in a similar way to misanthropy. Misanthropy develops from a lack of skill in dealing with humans. It arises when one trusts humans when one shouldn’t. Eventually, such a trusting person will be deceived in hurtful ways and will conclude from this that all humans are wretched. This is regrettable because most people are decent and very few are actually deplorable (89d-e).

Misology arises in a similar way. Without skill in reasoning, one will unjustifiably trust arguments and such trust will lead one to waver between contradictory positions. Eventually, one will become frustrated and fall into absolute skepticism, thinking that there is no sound position whatsoever. Hating rational inquiry is a pity because it deprives one of “truth and knowledge of reality” (τῶν ὄντων) (90d6-7, 90b-d). To overcome the dangers of misology, Socrates advises his friends that rather than thinking there is something generally unsound about arguments or theories, they should believe that it is themselves who are unsound, and that they must “take courage and

¹ The “proportionality thesis” is not unique to the *Phaedo*, but is scattered throughout the corpus of Plato; see especially, the *Gorgias* 523a-527a; the *Phaedrus* 246d-249b; the *Republic* X.614b-621d; the *Timaeus* 90a-92b; and the *Laws* IX.870d-e, IX.872d-873a, IX.881, and X.903d-e.

² “Misology” is not a common word for Plato. For examples of other uses see *Laches* 188c6 and *Republic* III.411d7. Also, it is interesting to note that at 89d1-4 Socrates asserts that one could suffer no greater evil than misology, but at 83c2-9 he maintains that the greatest of all evils is taking the sensible realm to be real.

³ Gallop (1975, p. 154) and Woolf (2007, p. 3) point out that the problem with using the word “argument” to translate λόγος is that at 90b6-8 and 90c9, Socrates says that “arguments” can be true and false. This makes for an awkward translation to the extent that arguments are not standardly understood as being true or false. However, this worry might be anachronistic; Socrates often seems perfectly happy to speak loosely, according to which speech is true or false; see *Republic* II.382e8. Additionally, Socrates infamously speaks of pleasures as being true and false, see *Republic* X.582d-586e and *Philebus*, esp. 40c-41a.
be eager to attain soundness” (90e3-4).

Immediately following this, Socrates says some curious things about his present state of mind:

I am in danger at this moment (ἐν τῷ παρόντι) of not being philosophical towards this very thing [viz., death], and of being like those who are quite uneducated (οἱ πάνω ἀπαίδευτοι), as a lover of winning (φιλονίκως). For whenever they [viz., the uneducated] dispute about something, they give no thought to the truth about the subject of discussion, but are only eager that those present will accept the position they have set forth. And it seems to me that in this present moment (ἐν τῷ παρόντι) I shall differ (διοίσειν) from them only to this extent: I shall not be eager that what I say seems true to those who are present, except incidentally, but rather I shall be very eager that it seems so to myself (91a1-b1, my emphasis).⁷

In a few lines, Socrates has identified four ways of being unphilosophical. The first is dealing with arguments without skill (i.e., the cause of misology). The second is hating rational inquiry altogether (i.e., misology). The third is trying to convince others of claims without caring about whether or not these claims are actually true (i.e., being a lover of winning or an eristic).⁸

---

⁴ Rowe (1993, p. 215) suggests that Socrates' assertion that he is in danger of being unphilosophical is a reflection of his earlier performance (cf. 84b), which “contains more persuasive description than hard reasoning.” I am quite sympathetic to this reading.

⁵ Literally, “How [the things] are in relation to which the argument (ὁ λόγος) may be”.

⁶ Rowe (1993, p. 215) takes this “I shall” to signify a “reversal” in which Simmias and Cebes take on the role of philosophers. This reading is amicable to my interpretation and it is supported by Socrates’ encouragement at 91c1-5; cf. 107b, 115b-c.

⁷ Consider the difference between Socrates' attitude here and his attitude at Republic V.450e-451a, in which he says, “But to speak, as I'm doing, at a time when one is unsure of oneself and searching for the truth, is a frightening and insecure thing to do. I'm not afraid of being laughed at...But I am afraid that, if I slip from the truth, just where it's most important not to, I'll not only fall myself but drag my friends down as well.” In the Republic passage, he is afraid that the position he is defending might be false and that this might mislead his friends about the truth. In contrast, in the passage I discuss here, Socrates is willing to defend a position that might be false and is not concerned or afraid that in doing this he might mislead his friends. Rather, at 91c1-5, he tells his friends to be the philosophers.

⁸ Examples of this might be Callicles from the Gorgias and Euthydemus and Dionysodorus from the Euthydemus.
The fourth is trying to convince oneself of certain claims without caring for whether or not they are actually true (i.e., being a self-directed eristic).\(^9\)

Notice that the first two ways of being unphilosophical develop from a lack of skill with arguments but do not necessarily develop from not caring about the truth. For instance, someone might care greatly about the truth but lack the skills needed to understand arguments, and his lack of skill might lead him to get so frustrated that he abandons rational inquiry altogether. In contrast, the latter two ways of being unphilosophical do not necessarily develop from a lack of skill with rational inquiry but instead from not valuing the truth. This seems to be why in Book VII of the \textit{Republic}, Socrates is concerned about teaching young guardians dialectic; the worry is that they will develop skills in argumentation before they develop a firm and stable love for the truth. In turn, they will become eager to win arguments without caring about whether or not the position they are defending is true (539b). Despite these differences, all four of these unphilosophical positions share the common feature that they are epistemically vicious and threaten the possibility of obtaining truth and knowledge. By “epistemically vicious,” I mean a process that commonly or likely results in falsehood, such as believing on the basis of little evidence.

What is interesting about 91a1-b1 is that immediately after noting that he is running the risk of being unphilosophical, Socrates asserts that from this moment he will\(^10\) adopt the position of a self-directed eristic who is eager to convince himself of certain things regardless of whether or not those very things are true.\(^11\) Socrates goes on to explain why he is adopting such a position:

For I calculate, my friends—see how greedily I calculate! (ὅς πλεονεκτικῶς)—that

---

\(^9\) By “self-directed,” I mean that, unlike the full blown eristic, or traditional sophist, the self-directed eristic is only trying to convince himself, and is not trying to convince others.

\(^10\) Notice the future of διοίσειν in the passage (καὶ ἐγὼ μοι δοκῶ ἐν τῷ παρόντι τοσοῦτον μόνον ἐκείνου διοίσειν) (91a6-7).

if what I say is true, it is a fine thing (καλῶς) to be convinced; if, on the other hand, nothing exists after death,¹² at least for this time before I die I shall distress those present less with lamentations and my ignorance (ἄνοια) will not continue to exist along with me—that would be a bad (κακὸν) thing—but will come to an end in a short time (91b1-7).

Socrates is asserting that he is selfishly clinging to the claims that his soul is immortal and destined for a good afterlife because he benefits from believing these claims whether or not they are true.¹³ For instance, if Socrates believes these things about death and they turn out to be false, Socrates still benefits from believing them because of the practical value of the belief. The practical value of this belief is that it pacifies the fear of death and thus prevents him and his friends from grieving and violently lamenting about his death. This idea accords with the fact that earlier in the text, Socrates makes it clear that, if he did not believe that death was a good thing, he would “be wrong not to resent dying” (63b5-9; cf. 68b-c, 84b, 88b-c).¹⁴ Moreover, even if these beliefs are false, his ignorance will not remain with him long, but will cease when he dies. On the other hand, if Socrates believes these claims and they are true, not only does he receive the practical benefits already mentioned, but he also benefits from having a true belief about something important: the nature of the soul and afterlife.¹⁵ That is to say, if such claims are true, then there are epistemic benefits to believing them.

---

¹² Literally, “Whereas if there is nothing for one who has died.”
¹³ See Rowe (1993, pp. 215-6).
¹⁴ Notice how Socrates’ attitude towards death differs from his attitude in the Apology. In the Apology, Socrates maintains that death is not a bad thing because either it is like a long dreamless sleep or it leads to a good afterlife (40c-41c); see Austin (2010). In contrast, in the Phaedo, he maintains that if one does not believe that the afterlife is good, one should resent death. Additionally, consider how it differs from that of the Gorgias, in which Socrates says, “For no one who isn’t totally bereft of reason and courage is afraid to die” (522e). I will not address whether Socrates’ attitude towards death in the Phaedo can be reconciled with these other texts.
¹⁵ Additionally, if these claims turn out true, in the afterlife Socrates will, presumably, reap the rewards of having lived philosophically.
The table below is a visual representation of Socrates’ calculation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Socrates</th>
<th>Epistemic Value</th>
<th>Practical Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$S$ Believes Claims about Death and the Claims are True.</td>
<td>High Benefits (True Belief that Will Extend Into the Afterlife)</td>
<td>High Benefits (Belief Assuages the Fear of Death)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$S$ Believes Claims about Death and the Claims are False.</td>
<td>Low Costs (False Belief, But Only For a Short Duration)</td>
<td>High Benefits (Belief Assuages the Fear of Death)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Immediately after Socrates seems to defend the merits of being a self-directed eristic, he encourages his friends to unrelentingly seek the truth like philosophers, saying:

> If you take my advice, you will give but little thought to Socrates but much more to the truth. If you think that what I say is true, agree with me; if not, oppose it with every argument and take care in my eagerness I do not deceive myself and you, and like a bee, leave my sting in you when I go (91c1-5; cf. 107b, 115b-c).

Socrates seems to be saying some rather uncharacteristic things in these passages and because of this one might be tempted to resist interpreting him as a self-directed eristic. For instance, one might argue that Socrates is merely being “ironic,” or that Plato is applying a future more vivid construction, in which Socrates is merely acknowledging that he is in danger of being unphilosophical, and if he were to act unphilosophically, this is how he would act. However, there are subtle hints scattered throughout the *Phaedo* that suggest that Socrates is not being his usual philosophical or “Socratic” self. There are three passages in particular that highlight this.

---

16 This is the route Rowe (1993, pp. 215-6) takes: “...although with his usual 'irony' he pretends to be [like the eristic]. Rather, he is as complete a philosopher (see esp. 76b-c), and therefore as skilled in argument, as anyone living. Something which appears true to him will therefore have passed the most exacting test available.” However, the problem with eristics is not that they are unskilled with arguments—that is the cause of misology. Rather, the problem is that they do not care about the truth of the position they are defending. The fact that they are usually good at arguing can make them all the more dangerous. Gallop (1975, p. 155) maintains that Socrates is sincere when he is says he is only concerned with trying to convince himself and not others and argues that this is the mark of a true philosopher; see *Charmides* 166d. However, if we take Socrates at his word here, this is hardly the conclusion we should draw because he is saying that *he will* act like the eristic; cf. 102d2-5.

17 Dorter (1982, p. 93) says, “Accordingly, throughout the *Phaedo* Socrates assumes the role of a partisan
The first hint that he is pursuing “unphilosophical” or “non-rational” methods comes at the beginning of the *Phaedo*, in which it is revealed that Socrates has been practicing poetry (60b-61b). This comes as a great surprise to everyone, since Socrates has never written poetry before (60d). Socrates explains that he has been pursuing poetry as a backup plan, just in case the gods really wanted him to practice and cultivate poetry instead of philosophy (60b-61b).

The second instance occurs immediately following the argument of recollection (72e-77b). After hearing the argument, Cebes asserts that he is not persuaded that the soul continues after death and wants to know why the soul does not dissipate when the body perishes (77a-b). In response, Socrates jokingly accuses them of having the childish fear that their souls will blow away in the wind when they die (77d-e). Cebes laughs at this, and says, “Assuming that we were afraid, Socrates, try to change our minds, or rather do not assume that we are afraid, but perhaps there is a child in us who has these fears; try to persuade him not to fear death like a bogey” (77e3-7). Socrates responds:

> You should sing a charm (ἐπᾴδειν) over him every day until you have charmed (ἐξεπᾴσητε) away his fears...You should search for such a charmer...sparing neither trouble nor expense for there is nothing on which you could spend your money to greater advantage. You must also search among yourselves, for you might not find people who could do this better than yourselves (77e8-78a9).

---

advocate rather than his more accustomed role of a disinterested inquirer.” Dorter (1982, p. 94) points out that Socrates uses the terms “convince” and “conviction” more than fifty times in the dialogue, which is unusually high for Socrates.

18 Cf. *Republic* X.607b. Speaking on this, Nietzsche, in the *Birth of Tragedy* (1.14) says, “Finally, when in prison, he agrees to play music for which he has so little respect, so as to unburden his conscience completely. In this state of mind he composes a proemium to Apollo and versifies some Aesopian fables...Perhaps there is a kingdom of wisdom from which the logician is banished? Perhaps art may even be a necessary correlative and supplement of science?”. And in the next section (I.15), Nietzsche continues, “This is why the image of the dying Socrates, of a man liberated from fear of death by reasons and knowledge, is the heraldic shield over the portals of science, reminding everyone of its purpose, which is to make existence appear comprehensible and thus justified; and if reasons are insufficient to achieve that end, then it must ultimately be served by myth.”
What is particularly interesting about this passage is that Socrates considers the fear of death a serious problem and he emphasizes that the cure for this ailment is not only philosophical inquiry but enchantment as well.

One might object that in other texts, such as \textit{Charmides} 157a-c and \textit{Republic} X.608a, Socrates is quite comfortable calling philosophical arguments “charms.”\textsuperscript{19} I have three responses to this objection. First, in other texts, such as \textit{Laws} II.659e, II.664b, II.665c, II.666c, II.670e, VI.773d, VII.812c, and VII.944b, Socrates clearly uses \(\epsilon\pi\alpha\delta\epsilon\iota\nu\) and its cognates to describe myths and non-rational means of persuasion.\textsuperscript{20} Second, that Socrates is using \(\epsilon\pi\alpha\delta\epsilon\iota\nu\) in the non-rational sense at 77e8-78a9 is suggested by the fact that he is talking about persuading the child in us and children are unable to understand reason.\textsuperscript{21} Third, Socrates uses \(\epsilon\pi\alpha\delta\epsilon\iota\nu\) in discussing the closing myth of the \textit{Phaedo} at 114d, which indicates that he has in mind non-rational enhancement. This brings us to the third instance.

After Socrates responds to his friends’ objections, he describes the structure of the earth, cosmos, and afterlife in the form of a myth (107c-115a). The myth includes both the particular details of the physical structures of the world and cosmos, as well as a detailed description of the afterlife, which includes a restatement of the proportionality thesis. Socrates concludes the myth by saying that “because of the things we have enumerated one must make every effort to share in virtue and wisdom in one’s life, for the reward is beautiful and the hope is great” (114c6-8).

Following this, Socrates says:

\textsuperscript{19} Perhaps this is also true at \textit{Laws} X.903b.

\textsuperscript{20} For a discussion on non-rational persuasion in the \textit{Laws} see Stalley (1983), (1994) and Morrow (1953). For a response see Bobonich (2002, chap. 2).

\textsuperscript{21} See \textit{Republic} III.401d-402b and \textit{Laws} II.653b. I am not alone in thinking that the application of \(\epsilon\pi\alpha\delta\epsilon\iota\nu\) and its cognates in the \textit{Phaedo} indicate non-rational persuasion. For instance, Cobb (1977, p. 175) says “The problem the dialogue addresses is an irrational fear, and, while reason alone can see that seeking wisdom is the only thing worth doing, the child in us is apprehensive about where this may lead and does not speak the language of reason. Hence it must be charmed.” See also Dodds (1951, pp. 212 and 226, n. 20) and Dorter (1982, pp. 93-4).
It is not fitting for a man having intelligence (οὐ πρέπει νοῦν ἔχοντι ἀνδρὶ) to insist that these things are as I have described them, but I think it is fitting for a man to risk the belief (μοι δοκεῖ καὶ ἄξιον κινδυνεῦσαι οἰομένῳ οὕτως ἔχειν)—the risk is a noble one—that this, or something like it, is true about our souls and their dwelling places, since the soul appears to be immortal (ἐπείπερ ἀθάνατόν γε ἡ ψυχή φαίνεται οὖσα), and a man should sing (ἐπᾴδειν) this to himself as if it were an incantation, which is why I have been prolonging my tale (114d1-6).  

Here, Socrates is advocating the use of “non-rational methods” in order to motivate the belief in certain things about “souls and their dwelling place,” even though there is insufficient evidence for these claims. Because there is insufficient evidence for these claims, believing in them is risky. Nevertheless, because the practical value one gains from believing these claims outweighs the harms one suffers if they turn out to be false; it is “fitting for a man to risk the belief.”  

These three passages provide compelling reasons to take Socrates at his word and to interpret him as actually being a self-directed eristic, in which he is attempting to persuade himself of certain claims irrespective of the truth of those claims.  

---

22 Cf. *Meno* 86b-c; *Timaeus* 29c. Also note that this passage will be discussed in more detail in section four.  
23 Wood (2007, pp. 21-2), in his response to Woolf (2007), argues that Plato is not advocating a full belief in these claims. Rather, Socrates is merely recommending that one posit these claims as if they were true, as a kind of “regulative ideal.” However, this is mistaken for three reasons. First, at 108-113c, when Socrates describes the earth and the cosmos, he explicitly says that he is convinced or persuaded of the things he is about to say. Persuasion and conviction suggest belief. Second, Socrates refers to this as an incantation and one does not religiously chant things that one merely wishes to posit, or assume for the sake of the argument. Rather, one sings and chants that which one wants to believe. Third, it is unclear how merely positing these claims as if they were true could assuage the fear of death.  
24 This is how Dorter (1982, p. 94) reads this passage: “Socrates has here abandoned his usual philosophical role of a non-partisan examiner of things in favour of that of an advocate determined to make what he believes to be true seem as true as possible. He believes that there is a meaningful sense in which we can be called immortal and he is determined not only to give proofs of this (which could be compatible also with a non-partisan role) but also to make it seem as likely as possible by unphilosophical means as well, and thus his love of victory here is contrasted with the disinterested love of wisdom, philosophy.” Also consider Cobb (1977, p. 176): “Socrates explicitly drops the role of the philosopher who seeks the truth for that of the advocate, the champion who seeks to defeat the enemy. And the enemy is the philosophical minotaur, identified as misology.”
interesting interpretive puzzle arises: Why might Socrates think that he is justified in unphilosophically clinging to certain claims about the soul and death, but that his friends should continue pursuing the truth of those very same claims? What makes this all the more puzzling is that presumably his friends stand to reap the same practical benefits as he does in believing these very things. For instance, if his friends believe in the immortality of the soul and the proportionality thesis, then they will experience less sadness and pain in response to Socrates’ death. Furthermore, such beliefs will allow them to fearlessly continue in the footsteps of Socrates—pursuing philosophy—even if it leads to death, which is what Socrates wants them to do.

Thus, Socrates seems to have backed himself into an unhealthy dilemma in which: either (a) Socrates’ attitude is unjustified, in which case he is right to advise his friends to seek the truth and wrong to think that it is beneficial for him not to, or (b) Socrates’ attitude is justified, in which case he is wrong to advise his friends to seek the truth and right to think that it is beneficial for him not to. Both prongs of the dilemma are unattractive; the former makes Socrates look psychologically unstable or cowardly, while the latter makes him a bad teacher and leader of his friends. Let us call this puzzle the “epistemic vice puzzle.” In the next section, I examine possible answers to the epistemic vice puzzle.

3. Epistemic Authority

What is the relevant difference between Socrates and his friends, such that Socrates is justified in behaving like a self-directed eristic towards issues concerning death, while his friends are not? One initially appealing response is that Socrates will die soon, but his friends will likely continue living for a longer duration. Thus, one might argue that because Simmias and Cebes will continue

25 Cf. Laws XI.922c.
living the potential epistemic costs of having a false belief are greater for them. For example, if they believe that the soul is immortal and this claim is false, then their ignorance will stay with them. This is not the case for Socrates because if he believes that the soul is immortal and this claim is false, his ignorance will perish when he dies, which is soon (91b1-7).

Undoubtedly, this is part of Socrates’ thinking; nevertheless, it cannot be the full story. The problem with this explanation is that although the potential epistemic costs are greater for Simmias and Cebes, so are the potential epistemic gains. For instance, if they believe that the soul is immortal and this belief is true, then they will benefit from having a true belief for a long duration. Additionally, they have strong practical reasons to attempt to convince themselves that the soul is immortal; such a belief will encourage them to care for the condition of their soul and not to care about money, honor, or the things of the body (cf. 61b-d, 63e-64e, 66a-e, 68b-c, 84a, 107c-d, and 114c). Therefore, this answer to the epistemic vice puzzle cannot explain why Socrates would not want his friends to be self-directed eristics towards these beliefs concerning death.

A related but more plausible explanation is that because Socrates will soon perish, he does not have time to develop epistemic vice, even if he acts in an epistemically vicious way before he dies. However, because Simmias and Cebes will continue living, if they act epistemically vicious, they seriously risk developing epistemic vice which could potentially ruin their lives. In other words, given the unique circumstance that Socrates is in, he is not at risk for developing epistemic vice and thus can act epistemically vicious without suffering any serious costs. However, because Simmias and Cebes are not in the same circumstance, if they act epistemically vicious they face very serious costs.

26 Dorter (1982, p. 94) argues that 107c-d and 114c suggest that Socrates believes that immortality is the basis for morality. I agree with Gallop (1975, pp. 222-3) that these passages merely show that Socrates believes that if the soul is immortal, then the wicked do not escape their wickedness (cf. 69a6-c3, 81d6-82d8). This does not mean, however, that he believes that if the soul is not immortal, there is no morality or that everything is permitted.
Although I think this explanation might capture part of Socrates’ rationale, it once again is not the full story. The problem with this account is that it assumes that one’s epistemic vice cannot extend into the afterlife. This assumption is problematic because one of the core claims that Socrates is trying to convince himself of is the proportionality thesis, and in the proportionality thesis living philosophically is the core criterion that determines the quality of one’s afterlife (80d-82b, 107c-115a). Therefore, this answer to the epistemic vice puzzle cannot account for why Socrates would believe that he is justified in applying an epistemically vicious process.

I argue that the relevant difference between Socrates and his friends is that Socrates is a fully accomplished philosopher, while his friends are not. Socrates is an expert at pursuing truth, knowledge, and wisdom (61b-d, 63e-64a, 66a-68b, 69b, 84a, and 91a), and because of this he is an epistemic authority. 27 Although Simmias and Cebes have a good deal of philosophical skill and do, in fact, care about the truth, they lack the philosophical expertise of Socrates and thus are not epistemic authorities. Being an epistemic authority affords Socrates two advantages over his friends who are not epistemic authorities: first, he is a good judge of when it is to one’s advantage to not pursue the truth. Second, because he has devoted his life to achieving truth and knowledge (61b-d, 63e-64a, and 67e-68b), his epistemic dispositions are relatively stable. This means that there is less of a chance that being epistemically vicious at a given time will infect and destroy his...

---

27 One might worry that describing Socrates as an epistemic authority is incompatible with his disavowal of knowledge. There are two reasons this description should not worry us. First, Socrates’ description of himself does not necessarily represent his actual characteristics. Second, even if it is true that Socrates lacks knowledge of divine things, it is still possible that he is better at reasoning and pursuing the truth than other human beings, and thus is an epistemic authority.

Additionally, it should be noted that in Socrates' autobiography he admits to having abandoned research into the natural sciences (96 ff.). However, the point of this passage is not that Socrates has abandoned the pursuit of epistemic goods. Rather, it is that he has discovered that some truths are not worth pursuing, and that the road to wisdom and real knowledge is not empirical, see esp. 100b-101a; cf. 68a-c. Woolf (2007, p. 1) argues that this demonstrates that Socrates does not value truth for its own sake, but values truth “because its content expresses a state of affairs that we value.” For instance, he says, “For he [viz. Socrates] acknowledges, in effect, that he will fight to defend the thesis of the soul's immortality not out of a love of truth for its own sake but because of the value he places on the state of affairs that would obtain if the thesis were true” (p. 1). For a response see Wood (2007).
skill as a philosopher, or his love for truth, knowledge, and wisdom.

However, because Simmias and Cebes lack the same degree of philosophical skill, when they act epistemically vicious they risk becoming habitual wishful thinkers, or worse yet, completely self-deceived. This danger is very real; especially when one considers the fact that their philosophical teacher will no longer be around to guide them. Without Socrates’ philosophical prodding, his friends seriously risk falling deep into the unphilosophical life of valuing bodily goods over the goods of the soul (i.e., truth, knowledge, and wisdom) (68b-c).

Thus, despite the fact that Simmias and Cebes might receive some immediate practical benefits from believing that the soul is immortal without giving thought to the truth of this claim, they will be better off in the long run striving to become philosophers—for philosophy is the best guide to one’s life. This is why Socrates wants to avoid leaving his unphilosophical sting in them when he dies (91c; cf. 107b, 115b-c). Therefore, Socrates is justified in not pursuing the truth because he is an epistemic authority. In contrast, Simmias and Cebes should not deviate from the philosophical path because they are not epistemic authorities, and such a move would be costly. 28

In what follows, I defend my interpretation in two ways. First, I argue that the philosophical and psychological ideas underlying it are plausible. Second, I argue that there is independent textual support for this position found in the Republic.

My interpretation holds that one’s epistemic skills, in part, determine whether an epistemic risk is appropriate or not. The more epistemic skill one has, the more risk it is appropriate to take; in contrast, the less epistemic skill one has, the less risk it is appropriate to take. 29 I call this position

28 An anonymous referee suggested that another possible reason Socrates might not want his friends to unphilosophically cling to the immortality of the soul is that they will be ill-equipped to defend the view to others, and if being refuted leads to misology, then they need philosophical practice in order to avoid misology later, or to avoid causing it in others as a result of their philosophical ineptitude. This demonstrates another way in which it is dangerous to act unphilosophically if one is not an epistemic authority.

“Skill-Based Risk Assessment” (SBRA):

SBRA: Agent A’s skill in a given field F, in part, determines whether a risk is appropriate or not for A with respect to F. The more skill A has in F, the more risk it is appropriate for A to take with respect to F. The less skill A has in F, the less risk it is appropriate for A to take with respect to F.30

I take SBRA to have great intuitive appeal. For example, the shot that is appropriate for a skilled golfer, such as Arnold Palmer, is very different from the shot that is appropriate for Duffer Hack, who is a novice. Arnold Palmer is capable of making difficult shots more often than Duffer Hack. Moreover, because Arnold Palmer is a seasoned veteran on the course, he understands when such difficult shots are worth attempting and when they are not. Since Duffer Hack lacks this experience, he lacks the awareness of when it is appropriate to take difficult shots and when it is not. In fact, if Duffer Hack were to make a difficult shot, this might actually hurt his overall performance by giving him a false sense of confidence in which he thinks that he is capable of making difficult shots all the time, when he clearly is not. For these reasons, Duffer Hack will be better off playing the course safely and not attempting the difficult shots that Arnold Palmer often makes. Now just as it is appropriate for Arnold Palmer to take risky shots that are inappropriate for Duffer Hack to take, it is appropriate for Socrates to take epistemic risks that are inappropriate for his friends to take.

In the Republic there is evidence that one’s epistemic skill determines whether telling falsehoods is risky or not.31 In Book II of the Republic, Plato distinguishes between two kinds of

30 SBRA is an application of thinking of virtue as a craft, which is a common Socratic idea; see Laches 185d-e; Hippas Minor 275d-276b; Charmides 174e-175a; Euthydemus 291b-292d; and Gorgias 460b.
31 Support for SBRA is also found in Protagoras 350a ff., in which Socrates asserts that skilled divers are the ones who dive boldly into wells.
falsehood or lie, the “true” or “real” lie and the “impure” lie (382a-d). 32 The true lie involves deceiving “the most authoritative part” (τὸ κυριωτάτῳ) of oneself about “the most authoritative things” (περὶ τὰ κυριώτατα) and because of this everyone fears and hates the true lie (382a7-9, 382b1-5, 382c3-4). In contrast, the impure falsehood is a “kind of imitation in words (ἐν λόγοις μίμημά) of the condition (παθήματος) in the soul, an image (εἴδωλον) that arises later” (382b9-c1). Although the true lie is hated by gods and humans alike, the impure falsehood is not always hated by humans, but is like a useful drug, which can be used for preventing the ignorant or mad from doing bad (382c6-10).

Before I explain how this passage supports SBRA, it will be helpful to briefly comment on Socrates’ cryptic distinction. This passage is not saying that all forms of deception, self-deception, or ignorance constitute the true lie. Rather, this passage is saying that the true lie, the lie that is hated and feared by all, involves being deceived about and ignorant of very specific content: the most authoritative things. Hence, part of the reason why the impure lie can be beneficial is because it does not mislead about the most authoritative things. 33 This raises the question: What are the most authoritative things that Socrates has in mind at 382a-d? Broadly speaking, scholars have put forth two different answers: some have argued that they concern the Forms, while others have argued that they concern ethical truths. 34 Fortunately, for the purposes of this chapter we need not

32 At II.382a4-5 Socrates describes this as τὸ γε ὡς ἁληθὸς ψεῦδος and at II.382c3-4 he uses τῷ ὡς ἁληθὸς; it is clear from the context that he is using these terms interchangeably and is contrasting them with οὐ πάνω ἄκροτον ψεῦδος, which literally means the “not entirely pure lie.” Hereafter, I shall simply refer to the former kind of lie as the “true lie” and the latter kind of lie as the “impure lie.” Additionally, I should note that the ψεῦδος can mean “lie” or “falsehood.” I shall use the term “lie,” although nothing important hangs on this translation. That Socrates is tolerant of impure lies is evident in various places in the Republic, see I.331b-d, II.377e-378a, II.378c-d, III.414d-415c, III.416d-417b, and V.459d-460c.

33 I say “can” because Socrates is clear that the mixed lie is not always beneficial, but is only beneficial in certain circumstances.

34 For examples of the former see Simpson (2007) and Woolf (2009), and for examples of the latter see Baima (forthcoming), Brickhouse and Smith (1983), Page (1991), and Reeve (1981, p. 210). I should also note that there is some overlap between these views because for Plato ethical matters are related to the Forms. The most thorough discussion of this passage is found in Woolf (2009). I hold that the true lie is a matter of being deceived about what you ought to do, or propose to do, here and now. Hence, it is fundamentally a practical matter.
settle this difficult issue here. Instead, one simply needs to keep in mind that at 382a-d Socrates is not saying that all forms of deception (including self-deception) are always bad, but rather, he is expressing concern about being deceived about very particular content—content which Socrates does not appear to be attempting to make himself ignorant of in the *Phaedo*.\(^{35}\)

In Book III, Plato asserts that just as only doctors should prescribe drugs, only the philosopher rulers should tell lies in the city (389a-c).\(^{36}\) That is, only philosophers should utilize the impure lie. The idea is that doctors know things about medicine and disease that patients do not. For this reason, patients can benefit from the medical advice of doctors. However, because patients are ignorant about medicine and disease, they should not be issuing medical advice because such advice is likely to do more harm than good. Therefore, it is the doctor’s epistemically superior vantage point that grounds her authority to prescribe drugs, and it is the patient’s epistemically defective vantage point that disqualifies her as an authority for prescribing drugs.

Similarly, philosophers know things about goodness and ruling cities that non-philosophers do not know. This includes having knowledge of when citizens can benefit from believing falsehood, and thus, when it is appropriate to lie to citizens. For this reason, the citizens can benefit from hearing the lies of the rulers. However, since citizens are ignorant about these matters, it is dangerous for them to lie; especially, if they lie to the rulers. Therefore, it is the philosopher’s epistemically superior vantage point that grounds her authority to prescribe falsehood, and it is the non-philosopher’s epistemically defective vantage point that disqualifies her as an authority to prescribe falsehood.\(^{37}\)

To highlight the dangers of non-philosophers lying to philosophers, Socrates extends his

---

\(^{35}\) In fact, it seems to be just the opposite to the extent that in the *Phaedo*, Socrates is not trying to ignore the Forms, but rather appears to be trying to convince himself of them in order to overcome the fear of death.

\(^{36}\) Cf. *Laws* XI.916d-917b.

\(^{37}\) Cf. *Statesman* 279d.
medical analogy (III.389c).\textsuperscript{38} Suppose that a patient lies to a doctor about the present condition of her health. This faulty information will lead the doctor to misdiagnose and treat the patient’s disease. Consequently, the patient’s disease will not be cured and the doctor’s prescription might actually harm the patient. Likewise, if a non-philosopher lies to a philosopher about her present condition or the condition of the city, the philosopher will likely misjudge the non-philosopher’s needs as well as the needs of the city. This faulty information will cause the philosopher to issue the wrong prescriptions and the entire city will be harmed as a result.

Plato is not, however, making the implausible claim that a non-philosopher can never benefit from lying to another citizen. There might be some particular circumstances in which non-philosophers could receive some immediate benefit from lying.\textsuperscript{39} However, on the whole, this practice is extremely dangerous because non-philosophers are likely to misjudge when it is appropriate to lie. This danger is especially severe because, unlike philosophers, non-philosophers have not been raised to hate falsehood and love truth. Thus if they are permitted to lie, they might lie without restraint. In contrast, because philosophers love truth and hate falsehood (\textit{Rep.} V.474b-475c, VI.485c-d, VI.490a-c, VI.501d, and XI.591d-e), they will only lie when it is truly beneficial.\textsuperscript{40}

Obviously, these examples are not perfectly analogous. According to my interpretation of the \textit{Phaedo}, Socrates is making the point that a philosopher’s epistemic authority justifies her in risking false belief in circumstances when a non-philosopher is not justified in risking false belief. However, in the \textit{Republic}, it is not the case that the epistemic ability of a philosopher justifies her

\textsuperscript{38} Socrates also uses the examples of athletic trainers and athletes, and captains and sailors to illustrate this point (III.389c).

\textsuperscript{39} Cf. \textit{Republic} I.331b-d.

\textsuperscript{40} Speaking on this point, Schofield (2007, p. 148) maintains that because philosophers hate falsehoods and love truth, philosopher rulers will hate telling falsehoods. For similar points see Brickhouse and Smith (1983, p. 84), Annas (1981, pp. 107, 166-7); cf. \textit{Phaedo} 115e. Additionally, consider Plato’s concern about imitation in the \textit{Republic}, see especially III.395.
in risking false belief herself. Rather, it justifies a philosopher’s ability to tell falsehoods to others, and thus to cause them to develop false beliefs. Nevertheless, both examples share the same general principle that a philosopher’s epistemic ability justifies her in doing something epistemically vicious, and that a non-philosopher’s lack of epistemic ability disqualifies her from doing something epistemically vicious. Additionally, Plato’s conception of philosophers in the *Republic* is similar to his conception of philosophers in the *Phaedo* in the important respect that in both dialogues philosophers love truth, knowledge, and wisdom, and despise falsehood, wealth, and the things of the body (*Rep.* III.416e-417a, V.474b-475c, VI.485c-d, VI.490a-c, VI.501d, and IX.591d-e).

At this point, one might object that it is the non-philosophers, not the philosophers, who benefit from being epistemically vicious in the *Republic*; after all, it is the non-philosophers who benefit from believing false things in the *Republic*. However, this objection is founded upon a mistake. It is certainly true that in the Kallipolis, non-philosophers benefit from the false beliefs given to them by philosophers. It is also true that these false beliefs benefit non-philosophers because non-philosophers are in some ways epistemically defective, and thus cannot grasp the full truth. Nevertheless, it is not the case that non-philosophers develop these false beliefs through an epistemically vicious process, such as through wishful thinking or self-deception. If anything it is just the opposite: non-philosophers develop these false beliefs from trusting and listening to the philosopher rulers who are epistemic authorities. That is to say, they trust an epistemically reliable process.

On the other side of things, one might worry that on my reading philosophers, such as Socrates, come across as excessive wishful thinkers about death. To be clear, I am suggesting that

---

41 For a discussion of why lying is epistemically vicious see Kawall (2002).
some of the beliefs philosophers form about death might be a result of a kind of wishful or hopeful thinking. However, I am not arguing that philosophers form all of their beliefs about death on the basis of wishful thinking; rather, I am arguing that in very particular circumstances, philosophers can benefit from believing things not grounded in sound evidence. Additionally, I have tried to show that this kind of activity is not pernicious for philosophers because: (1) philosophers understand when it is wise or fitting to act unphilosophically, and (2) this practice will not affect their love for and pursuit of truth, knowledge, and wisdom.

4. The Epistemic Vice Puzzle Redux

In the previous section, I argued that the solution to the epistemic vice puzzle centers around one’s epistemic skills. I argued that Socrates is justified in not pursuing the truth because he is an epistemic authority, and that Simmias and Cebes lack such justification because they are not epistemic authorities. However, a difficulty emerges for my interpretation at 114d1-6:

It is not fitting for a man having intelligence (οὐ πρέπει νοῦν ἔχοντι ἀνδρῖ) to insist that these things are as I have described them, but I think it is fitting for a man to risk the belief (μοι δοκεῖ καὶ ἄξιον κινδυνεύσαι οἰομένω οὕτως ἔχειν)—the risk is a noble one—that this, or something like it, is true about our souls and their dwelling places, since the soul appears to be immortal (ἐπείπερ ἀθάνατον γε ἡ ψυχὴ φαίνεται οὖσα), and a man should sing (ἐπᾴδειν) this to himself as if it were an incantation, which is why I have been prolonging my tale (114d1-6).

At first glance, one might think that Socrates is being inconsistent, since at 114d he is asserting that everyone should try to believe certain claims about death irrespective of the truth, while at

42 For a discussion of hopeful thinking in the Apology see Austin (2010). Additionally, for a specific discussion on what Plato thinks the dangers of wishful thinking are and are not see Vogt (2012, chap. 1).
91a-c he defends this practice only for himself. However, a careful analysis of 114d will reveal that there is no inconsistency.

First, notice that the claims that Socrates is trying to convince himself of at 91a-c are different from the claims that he is recommending that everyone should try to convince themselves of at 114d. At 91a-c, Socrates is interested in convincing himself of both the immortality of the soul and the proportionality thesis. In contrast, at 114d, he is advocating that everyone should strive to believe the proportionality thesis, including the specific details of what he thinks the afterlife would be like under this description.

Relatedly, the risk involved in believing these claims differs because the evidence for these claims is different in two ways. First, at 91a-c, Socrates has yet to provide strong arguments in defense of the immortality of the soul.\footnote{For instance, Gallop (1975, p. 103) says, “As the dialogue unfolds, the earlier arguments are criticized, refined, or superseded until Socrates' belief in immortality is finally vindicated.” Dorter (1982, p. 33) disagrees, arguing that the earlier arguments are not superseded by the arguments that come later. Nevertheless, even if Dorter is right about this, it is still true that one has more reason to believe in the immortality of the soul at 114 than at 91, because more arguments have been put forth and a more thorough discussion of this matter has ensued.} Thus, at 91a-c, Socrates is trying to form beliefs about his soul and its destiny with very little evidence. However, by the time we reach 114d, Socrates takes himself to have established firm reasons for thinking that the soul is immortal.\footnote{Cobb (1977) argues that the \textit{Phaedo} should be read as not putting forth rational arguments for the immortality of the soul. Rather, the philosophical arguments in the \textit{Phaedo} are meant to persuade one's emotions and strengthen one's confidence that the best life is the philosophical life. Although I am sympathetic to this interpretation, I see no reason why the reader of the \textit{Phaedo} is forced into an exclusive disjunction, in which either rational arguments are put forth, or it is a non-rational defense of philosophy.} This is reflected in Socrates saying that the belief is worth risking because “this, or something like it, is true about our souls and their dwelling place, since the soul appears to be immortal (ἐπείπερ ἀθάνατόν γε ἡ ψυχὴ φαίνεται οὖσα).”\footnote{One might worry that this undermines the original epistemic vice puzzle because it suggests that Socrates is not a self-directed eristic towards death. However, at 91a-c, Socrates has yet to defend the immortality of the soul soundly, and thus during this time he is behaving as a self-directed eristic because he has insufficient evidence in support of this claim. However, this changes at 114d because he takes himself to have soundly defended this claim. In other words, the evidence has changed significantly for the claim that the soul is immortal between 91a-c and 114d.} Socrates’ use of the causal conjunction ἐπείπερ demonstrates that one of
the reasons why everyone should risk belief in the proportionality thesis is that he takes it to be quite plausible that the soul is immortal and that there is an afterlife. This provides some evidence for the proportionality thesis because at the very least this demonstrates that there is good reason to believe in the afterlife. In contrast, at 91a-c, there was not much evidence for this claim.

Second, the risk involved in believing the immortality of the soul differs from the risk involved in believing the details of the proportionality thesis because these claims differ in terms of how strongly they can be established in this life. In this life, we might not be able to fully determine the nature of the soul and whether it is immortal. However, we can offer arguments or theories that shed light on the truth of this claim, and we can evaluate these arguments and theories with some degree of confidence. Nevertheless, the exact nature of the afterlife is much different; we can never be extremely confident about the particular claims we make about it. We can only speculate through myth about the specific details of the afterlife. Now as I just explained, Socrates believes that Simmias and Cebes are justified in believing that the soul is immortal at 114d. If Simmias and Cebes are justified in believing that the soul is immortal, then they are justified in believing that there is an afterlife. However, given the mysterious nature of this subject, they cannot be certain of the exact nature of the afterlife while they are living. Thus, if Simmias and Cebes follow Socrates’ advice and believe that the afterlife is a certain way, they risk false belief. But the risk primarily stems from the nature of the subject matter and not from some defect in reasoning. Therefore, Socrates is recommending much riskier behavior for himself at 91a-b than he is for everyone at 114d.

46 Cf. Gallop (1975, p. 224). To be clear, I do think the general idea of the proportionality thesis is subject to rational inquiry. For instance, one can offer arguments in defense of a teleological afterlife. Nevertheless, the exact nature of this afterlife is not as amenable to rational discourse. For instance, it does not seem that we can access through reason whether there are rivers, demons, blue skies, and unicorns in the afterlife.
5. The Limits of Truth

From this analysis, we see that there are three factors that determine whether Socrates thinks an agent A is justified in trying to convince herself of a claim irrespective of the truth of that claim. They are: (1) the epistemic benefits or costs in believing that \( p \), (2) the practical benefits or costs in believing that \( p \), and (3) A’s epistemic skill. The greater A’s epistemic abilities are, the more A can wager, so to speak.

On this model, the value of pursuing truth is limited to the extent that there are some circumstances in which one’s life can go better by forming beliefs on the basis of insufficient evidence. That is, there are some contexts in which being epistemically vicious will improve one’s life, and in these circumstances the practical considerations of living well override the epistemic concerns of reaching truth and achieving knowledge. As a philosophical thesis, we should not find such a position that startling. After all, it is well-known that utilitarians prioritize practical considerations over epistemic concerns.\(^{47}\) Thus, it should come as no surprise if a utilitarian argued that one should sometimes sacrifice the pursuit of truth for the sake of practical gain.\(^{48}\) However, it is surprising that we find such a position defended by an author who maintains that “truth heads the list of all things good, for gods and humans alike” (Laws V.730c1-2). Additionally, it is even more paradoxical that such a position is defended in a story where the protagonist dies for the sake of a practice that esteems truth and knowledge, and at times says things like, “nothing should be done contrary to philosophy” (82d1-7).

From this, we might wonder if Socrates’ endorsement of being a self-directed eristic undermines the value of truth. The answer is a no; throughout the Phaedo and his entire corpus,

\(^{47}\) Or, in the case of pragmatist, epistemic goods are defined by the practical.

\(^{48}\) For example, consider Sidgwick’s (Methods, pp. 489-90) “government house utilitarianism” and Williams’ (1985, pp. 108-9) critique of it. See also Driver (2001).
Plato makes it clear that truth is the best guide to one’s life. After all, it is in part one’s love of truth and skill in pursuing it that justifies one in engaging in epistemically defective forms of reasoning. Hence, it might be the case that there are some contexts in which one can benefit from not seeking the truth. Nevertheless, the majority of the time, one’s life will go best if one relentlessly strives for the truth. This is why Socrates wants to avoid leaving his unphilosophical sting in his friends at 91c and why Socrates reminds them of this again at the end of the text.

For instance, after Socrates tells his friends that they should risk false belief at 114d, Cebes asks Socrates how his friends might please him most (115b). Socrates responds:

Nothing new, but what I am always saying, that you will please me and mine and yourselves by taking good care of your own selves in whatever you do, even if you do not agree (ὁμολογήσητε)\(^{49}\) with me now, but if you neglect your own selves, and are unwilling to live following the tracks, as it were, of what we have said now and on previous occasions, you will achieve nothing new, no matter how much or how eagerly you agree (ὁμολογήσητε) with me at this moment (115b4-c10).

Socrates’ point is that even if Simmias and Cebes remain unconvinced about the immortality of the soul and proportionality thesis, he wants them to continue hunting for the truth and striving to become philosophers because this is the best life.\(^{50}\) However, this does not mean that one should always seek the truth because sometimes the demands of living well require one to abandon the pursuit of truth and knowledge. This demonstrates that the value of pursuing truth

---

49 Gallop (1975) and Fowler (1966) translate ὁμολογήσητε as “promise.” I agree with Grube (1997) and Rowe (1993) that it should be translated as “agree.”

50 At 107b, Socrates offers similar philosophical advice to Simmias. For instance, in response to Socrates’ concluding arguments in defense of the immortality of the soul, Simmias expresses that given the importance of the subject and his “low opinion of human weakness”, he still has “some private misgivings about what has been said” (107a). Socrates responds “You are not only right to say this, but our first hypotheses require clearer examination, even though we find them convincing. And if you analyze them adequately, you will, I think, follow the argument as far as a man can, and if the conclusion is clear, you will look no further” (107b). Hence, just as he does at 91c and 115b-c, Socrates concludes his discussion at 107b by giving his friends philosophical direction.
is limited in scope, such that in certain circumstances, practical considerations override the value of truth. Accordingly, it seems fitting to conclude with Simmias’ speech at 85c1-d4:

“I believe, Socrates, as perhaps you do, that it is impossible or very difficult to acquire precise knowledge about these matters in our present life, but he is a very weak man, who does not examine in every way what is said about them and persist until he is exhausted by examining them on every side. For he must achieve one of these things; either he must learn or discover the truth about these matters, or if that is impossible, he must take whatever human account is best and hardest to disprove, embarking upon it as a raft, to sail through the dangers of life, unless someone should make that journey safer and less risky upon a firmer vessel of some divine account.”
CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have defended three general theses regarding the role that false beliefs play in Plato’s ethical theory. First, there is the educational claim that what one is taught is in proportion to one’s ability to properly understand it. The ramifications of this is that because some individuals are incapable of understanding the truth about some subjects, they will be taught falsehoods that motivate just actions. Evidence for this thesis is found in chapters one, two, and three. For instance, in chapter one, I argued that even if it was true that the gods acted unjustly, Plato thinks that the citizens should be taught that they always act justly because this will make the citizens behave correctly. If the citizens were wiser, they would be taught the truth, but since they are epistemically deficient they need to be taught a useful falsehood. In chapter two, I argued that, to some extent, this holds true even for the philosopher rulers of the Kallipolis. I argued that the non-reasoning part of the philosopher’s soul is unable to understand certain ethical truths and because of this it needs to be taught falsehoods that will motivate it towards virtue. In chapter three, I argued that in Magnesia, the unsophisticated citizens are given misleading reasons about why it is in their interest to obey the law. Additionally, the unsophisticated citizens are taught religious myths because they are unable to understand certain cosmological and theoretical truths about the soul and the gods.

Second, there is the claim that sometimes it is beneficial to be mistaken about what the right action to pursue is. Evidence for this claim is found in chapter four. For instance, in the Laws, the Athenian argues that the false beliefs and foolishness that occurs during symposium can be instrumental to developing virtue, if it is applied correctly. I have argued that this claim is unique to the Laws and is the result of Plato changing his view about moral psychology from the Republic.

Third, there is the claim that the more philosophical one is, the more one can engage in epistemically vicious practices. Evidence for this claim is found in chapter five. As I argued in
chapter five, Plato defends this thesis in both the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*. In the *Republic*, this idea is conveyed in the idea that only the philosopher rulers are permitted to tell lies in the Kallipolis. In the *Phaedo*, this idea is conveyed in Socrates response to death—upon facing imminent death Socrates abandons the search of truth and unphilosophically clings to beliefs that will make his soul noble, while at the same time telling his friends to continue to seek the truth and to let philosophy guide their lives.

These three claims establish that Plato took the false to be a useful substitute for the true in certain circumstances. Falsehoods, for Plato, are a means by which humans can overcome their limitations, either due to circumstance or ability, and flourish. I take this to establish that Plato gives priority to practical considerations over theoretical considerations, such that one should pursue truth and knowledge only insofar as it contributes to one’s well-being. This demonstrates that Nietzsche’s accusation of Plato undervaluing falsehood is ultimately mistaken.

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which Nietzsche’s complaint is accurate. Part of Nietzsche’s criticism was that philosophers saw epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics intertwined—the abstract world of intellect, which is objectively true and real, is the source of goodness, while the world of subjective perceptions, the false, is a source of evil. Hence, the way to live well is to abandon the false world of the sensations and to discover the true and real world.¹ At times, Nietzsche locates the origins of this worry with Plato.

---

¹ Consider the following passages from *Beyond Good and Evil*: “For all the value that the true, the truthful, the selfless may deserve, it would still be possible that a higher and more fundamental value for life might have to be ascribed to deception, selfishness, and lust. It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of these good and revered things is precisely that they are insidiously related, tied to and involved with these wicked, seemingly opposite things—maybe even one with them in essence. Maybe! (1.2).

“The falseness of a judgment is not for us necessarily an objection to a judgment...The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating...To recognize untruth as a condition of life—that is certainly means resisting accustomed value feelings in a dangerous way: and a philosophy that risks this would by that token alone place itself beyond good and evil” (1.4), cf. 2.39; *Birth of Tragedy* 1.7; *Dawn of Day* 5.507; *Gay Science* 5.344, 5.347; for a discussion see Nehamas (1985, ch. 2).
This charge is raised throughout the body of Nietzsche’s work. Let us take a brief sampling of it. Consider a few passages from Nietzsche’s criticism in “the “History of an Error” in the Twilight of the Idols:

1. The true world—attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man; he lives in it, he is it.

(The oldest form of the idea, relatively sensible, simple, and persuasive. A circumlocution for the sentence, I, Plato, am the truth’...

5. The ‘true’ world—an idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating—an idea which has become useless and superfluous—consequently, a refuted idea: let us abolish it!

(Bright day; breakfast; return of bons sens and cheerfulness; Plato’s embarrassed blush; pandemonium of all free spirits).

6. The true world—we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.

( Noon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error; highest point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA).2

In (1), Nietzsche not only attributes the origins of the distinction between the true world of being and the apparent world of becoming to Plato, but also makes it clear that the real world is only accessible by the sage, the pious, and the virtuous man. In (5), Nietzsche critiques this distinction, and then in (6) he abolishes it.

In the Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche raises a similar concern:

---

2 Cf. Will to Power 567, 583, 586.
That which constrains these men [viz., philosophers], however, this unconditional will to truth, is faith in the ascetic ideal itself, even if as an unconscious imperative—don’t be deceived about that—it is the faith in a metaphysical value, the absolute value of truth, sanctioned and guaranteed by this ideal alone (it stands or falls with this ideal) (3.24).

Nietzsche’s point is that the philosopher’s desire for truth is ultimately grounded in an unquestioned faith that truth has objective metaphysical value. Nietzsche makes it clear in the Genealogy of Morals that Plato is the source of this error by citing a passage from the Gay Science, which I referenced in the introduction:

But what I have in view will now be understood, namely, that it is always a metaphysical belief on which our belief in science rests,—and that even we knowing ones of today, the godless and anti-metaphysical, still take our fire from the conflagration kindled by a belief a millennium old, the Christian belief, which was also the belief of Plato, that God is truth, that the truth is divine...But what if this itself always becomes more untrustworthy, what if nothing any longer proves itself divine, except it be error blindness, and falsehood;—what if God himself turns out to be our most persistent lie? (Nietzsche, The Gay Science, 3.344).³

Was Plato guilty of this? Yes, he was; the ideal state, according to Plato, always involves the convergence of knowledge and flourishing. This dissertation has shown, however, that when

³ At times in the Gay Science Nietzsche attributes the origins of this problem to the Eleatics, the Greek Preoscratic philosophers from the ancient city of Elea, a Greek colony in Southern Italy. Parmenides was the founder of their school; see 3.110. There are many other examples of this worry see also Beyond Good and Evil preface: “Although it must certainly be conceded that the worst, most durable, and most dangerous of all errors so far was a dogmatic error—namely, Plato's invention of the pure spirit and the good as such,” and 5:191: “Plato...wanted to employ all this strength—the greatest strength a philosopher had ever had at his disposal—to prove to himself that reason and the instincts tend toward one goal, the Good, “God.” And since Plato, all theologians and philosophers have been on the same track…” See also the preface, 1.43, and 3.448 of the Dawn of Day.
this ideal state is not realizable, falsehoods can be used to approximate it. This is why in the *Republic* at II.382a-e Socrates maintains that the “impure falsehood” is sometimes useful for humans, but is never useful for God. The ideal—God—has no need for the false. Additionally, notice that in the *Phaedo* it is Socrates’ human limitations that cause him to abandon pursuing the truth about death and the soul.

So, Nietzsche’s interpretation is right to the extent that for Plato, truth, knowledge, and goodness are inextricably bound together at the highest level. But does this commitment entail overvaluing truth and undervaluing falsehood? This only follows if one has a radical attitude towards truth and value, in which truth lacks intrinsic value. If one is not committed to such a view, then the value of knowledge, truth, and goodness seem to be valued appropriately by Plato. Plato, on my reading, valued truth instrumentally and intrinsically; nevertheless, he saw that the value of truth is limited and can be overridden by other values.
REFERENCES


---. (1996b). *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue*. Oxford:


