



PROJECT MUSE®

Plato's Republic and Greek Morality on Lying

Zembaty, Jane S.

Journal of the History of Philosophy, Volume 26, Number 4, October 1988, pp. 517-545 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: 10.1353/hph.1988.0079



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/hph/summary/v026/26.4zembaty.html>

Plato's *Republic* and Greek Morality on Lying

JANE S. ZEMBATY

IN THE *Republic* Socrates explicitly maintains that under certain specific circumstances properly trained philosopher rulers should tell lies in the interest of the *polis* as a whole and, therefore, of each of the classes in it.¹ Not surprisingly, the *Republic's* advocacy of lying has been widely discussed, criticized, and defended. Both critics and defenders frequently treat Plato's advocacy of certain lies and deceptive practices in the *Republic* in relation to his alleged totalitarianism.² One such critic, Karl R. Popper, emphatically contrasts Plato's views on lying with Socrates' strong commitment to truth as it is expressed in dialogues prior to the *Republic*.³ Neither critics nor defenders of Plato's position on lying in the *Republic*, however, make any serious attempt to relate either Plato's advocacy of certain lies and deceptive practices or various other statements about lying and deception in the dialogue to any defenses or condemnations of lying in other Greek writings. Those who write on the topic say

I wish to thank Mary Margaret Mackenzie, Myles F. Burnyeat, and P. E. Easterling for the many helpful suggestions they made while this paper was being written. I also want to extend my thanks to the anonymous referees for the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* for their constructive criticisms of an earlier version of the paper.

¹ Throughout this paper I shall use *polis* rather than "state" or "city." As Gregory Vlastos has pointed out, neither term satisfactorily translates *polis*. See Gregory Vlastos, "Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*," in *Platonic Studies*, 2d ed. (Princeton: University Press, 1981), 117, n. 21. As Vlastos has also shown, the *polis* in the *Republic* is not something over and above the individuals who compose it, with rights that take precedence over theirs. The interests of the *polis* and the best interests of its inhabitants are identical. See Gregory Vlastos, "The Theory of Social Justice in the *Polis* in Plato's *Republic*," in Helen North, ed., *Interpretations of Plato* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 15–18.

² Two seminal works here are Karl R. Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966) and R. H. S. Crossman's *Plato Today* (London: Allen Unwin, 1963). A recent interesting defense of Plato is offered by Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith in "Justice and Dishonesty in Plato's *Republic*," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 21:1 (1983): 79–95.

³ Popper, *Open Society*, 1: 140–44.

either very little or nothing about what Greek morality might hold in regard to lying. Nicholas D. Smith and Thomas C. Brickhouse, for example, state merely that "the vulgar conception of justice proscribes dishonesty, but Plato's own conception clearly does not."⁴ What Smith, Brickhouse, and others call the vulgar or ordinary conception of justice is identified with the position represented by Cephalus and Polemarchus in Book 1 of the *Republic* and the assumption is made that this position rejects all lying as morally reprehensible. But does ordinary Greek morality consider *all* lying to be morally wrong? Most scholars give a negative answer even while holding very different conceptions regarding Greek views on lying. C. M. Bowra, for example, writes, "The Greeks believed that in general it was wrong to lie. . . . Of course they knew that sometimes a lie is necessary and justifiable as the lesser of two evils. Most . . . would agree that if something really good was to be gained by it, it might be right . . . to lie. But such a lie would require considerable justification."⁵ In contrast, Stephen W. Hirsch holds that "lies and deceit were not major ethical concerns for the Greeks."⁶

In this paper I intend to bring out some of the beliefs that the Greeks held in regard to lying in order to provide a context for the *Republic's* reasoning regarding lies and deception. I aim to set the *Republic's* claim regarding some justifiable exceptions to any general prohibition of lying against what is said regarding truth-telling and lying in two Greek tragedies—Sophocles' *The Women of Trachis* and Euripides' *Helen*. This will not involve detailed accounts of the plays but rather an examination of the kinds of reasons advanced in these dramas when lying is either defended or condemned. Material from other Greek writings, including Plato's Socratic dialogues will also be used, where appropriate, in elucidating Greek reasoning about lying. While caution must be expressed about the conclusions that can justifiably be drawn from Greek literature in regard to Greek views on morality, the reasoning presented here is intended to serve two purposes: (1) provide a background against which the *Republic's* depiction of ordinary Greek views on the morality of lying can be elucidated and (2) provide a background of ethical argumentation with which Socrates' reasoning regarding lying in the *Republic* can be compared and contrasted. Parts 1 and 2 of the paper deal with *The Women of Trachis* and *Helen* respectively. Part 3 deals with the claims made regarding justifiable lying in Books 1 and 2 of the *Republic* and relates these to the moral

⁴ Brickhouse and Smith, 95.

⁵ C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944), 270.

⁶ Stephen W. Hirsch, *The Friendship of the Barbarians: Xenophon and the Persian Empire* (Hanover & London: University Press of New England, 1985), 20.

reasoning discussed in the first two parts of the paper. Part 4 shows how Plato, while drawing on this reasoning, adapts it to defend the lies and other deceptive practices he sees as necessary to the stability of the *polis*. A brief addendum relates the paper's discussion of lying to the apparent contrast between the Socratic dialogues' eschewal of deception and the *Republic's* defense of certain lies and deceptive practices.

1. THE WOMEN OF TRACHIS

Sophocles' *The Women of Trachis*, a dramatization of the death of Heracles, offers one of the few exchanges in Greek tragedy explicitly dealing with the morality of lying. When the play begins, Heracles has been away from his wife, Deianira, and their children for an extended period of time. Shortly after the start of the play, Lichas, a herald from Heracles, comes to Deianira, bringing captives from Heracles' most recent victory, and announces Heracles' imminent return. In his first exchange with Deianira, Lichas both lies to her and evasively withholds other information about Heracles' love for one of the women captives, Iole, the daughter of Eurytus, and about the reason for Heracles' recent destruction of Eurytus and his city—his love for Iole (228–34). The dialogue in the two scenes following upon this exchange reflects much of the reasoning about the morality of lying found in other Greek writings.

The first point to be elicited from the dialogue in these two scenes is that Deianira's status in relation to Lichas is seen as central to an assessment of the rightness or wrongness of Lichas' lies and deception. The first scene begins just after Lichas goes off stage. Another character, identified simply as a messenger, who had earlier heard Lichas give a true account of Heracles' activities, informs Deianira that Lichas had lied to her: "Nothing that this man told you just now was straightforwardly true; either now he is evil (*kakos*) or before he was not a just/real (*dikaios*) messenger" (346–48). In translating this speech scholars frequently render *kakos* as "false" and *dikaios* as "true," understandably so since it is Lichas' deception and lying which make him *kakos* and "true" is an acceptable translation for *dikaios*. Nonetheless, such translations obscure the fact that *kakos*, whose moral sense is "base" or "evil," is a term of condemnation, whereas saying what is untrue may not always be morally blameworthy. The chorus carries through the sense of condemnation, seeing Lichas' actions as a form of treachery: "Perish, if not all evil doers, at least he who practices what is not fitting for him and does treacherous evils" (383–84). As P. E. Easterling has noted, in these lines the word rendered here as "treacherous," *lathrai*, is given the most stress. What these lines express is the notion

that "He who practices treachery is the worst kind of offender."⁷ If this is correct, then the lines emphasize the chorus' perception of Lichas' deceit as an act of treachery, a violation of obligations which he has to Deianira. Thus its comment may be read not as a general condemnation of all lies but as a condemnation of lies told to those to whom one has certain obligations, including the obligation to tell the truth.

When Deianira confronts the returned Lichas, she asks, "Will you give me (*nemeis*) the honest truth?" (398). Literally, *nemeis* means "will you allot to me as my portion" and relates to Deianira's claim, expressed in an upcoming speech, that a true account is due her.⁸ As the scene develops, so, too, does the emphasis on Lichas' obligations to deal truthfully with Deianira, first, because of the relation between them (she is his *despoina*—sovereign/mistress)⁹ and later, because of the kind of person she is. Although Lichas responds to Deianira's question by saying that he will tell her the exact truth, he continues to lie.

Now the messenger challenges him, saying, "You, look at me! To whom do you think you are speaking?" (402). In his response Lichas explicitly states the relationship between himself and Deianira: "To the sovereign Deianira, unless my eyes deceive me, daughter of Oeneus, wife of Heracles, and my mistress" (405–07). The messenger's next words stress the crucial point in this exchange: "This is just what I needed to learn from you; you say she is your mistress" (408). After Lichas responds, "That is correct," the messenger continues, "What follows? (*ti dêta*) What sort of punishment do you deserve if you are found to be unjust to her?" (409–11). Lichas pretends not to understand just how he has been unjust to Deianira and this leads up to Deianira's long speech. The messenger's use of *ti dêta* here indicates that there is an inference to be drawn from the fact that Deianira is Lichas' mistress.¹⁰ The question which follows indirectly draws out this inference—lies told by someone in Lichas' position to someone in Deianira's are acts of injustice deserving pun-

⁷ Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, ed. by P. E. Easterling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 124.

⁸ On this reading of *nemeis* see R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments, Part V: The Trachiniae* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1892). Jebb writes, "*Nemeis* as in *nemein moiran tini*, because she claims a true account is due her: 436f. *mē . . . ekklepsēs logon*" (65). Also see Easterling, 125.

⁹ Translating both *despoina* and *kratousan* (used in line 405 and translated as "sovereign") is difficult. "Mistress," used as the feminine version of "master" may be the best translation. In Greek tragedy, *kratousa* is used to refer to the woman at the head of a household, according to the Lidell and Scott *Greek-English Lexicon*, and that is also one contemporary meaning of "mistress." Whatever the translation, what is important is that Lichas' subservient status in relation to Deianira carries certain obligations related to her being his *despoina*.

¹⁰ In support of this interpretation of *ti dêta* see J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*, 2d edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 269–70.

ishment. The exchange thus far reflects the first important, although hardly surprising strand in Greek thinking about lying. Whether A owes B the truth or not depends, at least in part, on just what the relationship is between A and B.

An early example of this way of thinking is found in Telemachus' exchanges with both Nestor and Menelaus in the *Odyssey*. Odysseus' son, Telemachus, searching for information about his father, visits first Nestor and later Menelaus. In requesting information from each of them, Telemachus uses the same formulaic statement: "I beseech you, if ever my father, noble Odysseus, promised anything to you of word or deed and did that which he promised in the land of the Trojans when you Achaeans suffered calamities, to now remember these things and speak to me the certain truth" (III. 98–101 and IV. 328–31). Telemachus' speech is an explicit reminder to both Nestor and Menelaus that they have obligations of reciprocity to Odysseus—the reciprocal obligations of guest-friends (*xenoi*). Telemachus, as Odysseus' son, is drawing on these obligations in asking for that which he now needs—truthful information about Odysseus.¹¹ Nestor's reply, acknowledging the excellence of Odysseus' counsels during the Achaeans' difficult time at Troy, includes the following statement: "But what news I have learned while sitting in our halls you will learn, as is fitting/right (*hē themis est*); I will not conceal it from you" (III. 186–87).¹² This exchange between Nestor and Telemachus is especially striking in a work in which lies and deception are commonplace.¹³ It is fitting or right for Nestor to be truthful and to give Telemachus any information he possesses about Odysseus not simply because the latter needs it but because Telemachus is the son of a man to whom Nestor owes the debts of guest-friendship.

Of course, one of the most general distinctions for the Greeks in determining what obligations are owed to whom is that between friends (*philoî*) and enemies (*echthroi*). The way this contrast is drawn changes over time, but as Grace Anne de Grouchy notes, "The antithesis *philoî/echthroi* appears to be the most frequent formulation for the basic obligations of *philia* [friendship], clarifying the issues by its polarization."¹⁴ Recent work by Gregory Vlastos stresses

¹¹ On the reciprocal obligations of guest-friends see Agatha Thornton, *People and Themes in Homer's Odyssey* (London: Methuen, 1970) and M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956).

¹² Of course, an obligation on the part of A to provide B with the information which B requests and needs (insofar as A has that information) is different from an obligation on the part of A not to lie to B. The latter obligation is consistent with B's refusal to give A any information, the former is not. However, if A has an obligation to give B true information, then A has an obligation not to lie to B in answering the request for information.

¹³ For an excellent discussion of Odysseus' lies see W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954).

¹⁴ Grace Anne de Grouchy, *Proverbial and Gnomical Material in Greek Tragedy*, unpublished dissertation (University of Cambridge, 1984), 224.

the centrality of this distinction in Greek morality. Vlastos focuses on the Greek view regarding what is owed to enemies: "To say that harming one's enemies would be morally permissible would be an understatement. It would be more exact to say that it was glorified, built into the very image of manly excellence. . . . For a faithful reflection of the general view we may look to these lines from Pindar, that highly respected mouthpiece of conventional wisdom:

Let me love him who loves me.
But on my foe as foe I shall descend
In stealth, wolf-like,
In ever varying ways by crooked paths (*Pyth.* II. 83–85)."¹⁵

The distinction between what is due friends and what is due enemies in regard to lying and truth-telling is reflected in various statements made in some of Plato's earlier dialogues and in other Greek writers. In the *Gorgias*, for example, Socrates twice chides Callicles: "And yet I did not think in the beginning that you would intentionally deceive me since you are my friend (*philos*)."¹⁶ "Nor would you concede it to deceive me; for you are a friend to me, as you say yourself" (499c2–3 and 487e6–7). In Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Euthydemus, discussing justice with Socrates, begins by assuming that it is unjust to lie to friends but just to lie to enemies (IV. ii.14–15). Although Socrates, Callicles, and Euthydemus can hardly be seen as naive representatives of conventional morality, these passages do reflect the strong Greek commitment to the moral relevance of the *philoï-echthroï* distinction. The view that truth is owed one's friends is also illustrated in Theognis when he asserts the baseness of one who deceives a friend:

But, Cyrnus, when a man deceives his friend
And carries in his breast a cunning heart,
That is the basest thing that God has made (121–23).

Furthermore, as another verse shows, Theognis sees lying to a friend as failing to show him respect (253–54).

An obverse case is found in an exchange between Menelaus and Andromache in Euripides' *Andromache*. Menelaus makes a deceitful promise to Andromache who has taken sanctuary at an altar. He tells her that she has to choose between her life and her son's. If she leaves the altar, her son will not be killed. Andromache opts for her son's life, leaves the altar, and Menelaus immediately reneges on what he had said about the boy. When Andromache

¹⁵ Gregory Vlastos, "Socrates' Contribution to the Greek Sense of Justice," *Archaiognosia* 1 (1980): 303–04

condemns him for his trickery, Menelaus says, "Announce it to the world; I do not deny it." To Andromache's taunt, "Is this considered wisdom (*sophia*) by the Spartans?" he replies, "Yes, and by the Trojans, too, to retaliate against those who have wronged you" (435–38). Although Menelaus does not explicitly describe his actions as just, he does see them as in keeping with the Greek view that actions which are not permissible in the case of friends are not only permissible but, perhaps, even required in the case of enemies.¹⁶ Other Greek tragedies provide numerous examples of lies told to enemies. In most of these cases, the rightness of the lies is never questioned.¹⁷

The second and third important strands in Greek thinking about the morality of lying can be elicited from Deianira's speech in *The Women of Trachis* and Lichas' response. Following the exchange between Lichas and the messenger, Deianira launches her speech by saying literally, "Don't steal the story away (*ekklepsēs logon*)" (437). Jebb understands Deianira as saying, "Do not cheat me of the truth . . . [do not] steal the story away, i.e., [do not] keep back from me that which ought to be told."¹⁸ Thus Deianira's opening words reinforce the notion that the truth is due her. But she proceeds to offer a number of additional reasons to convince Lichas that he ought to tell her the truth. In advancing some of these reasons, she makes several points about herself, related to the motives that Lichas might have had for lying. (1) She is not an evil (*kakē*) woman nor one who, not understanding the power of eros, is so mad (*karta mainomai*) as to consider herself wronged by Heracles and Iole. (2) She is the kind of person who is pained by not knowing the truth rather than by knowing it (438–59).

The first point is addressed to any concerns Lichas might have about what Deianira might do to Heracles, Iole, or herself if she should consider herself wronged. If Lichas' lying is intended to prevent some harmful act on Deianira's part, Deianira is indirectly informing him, he is mistaken in thinking that such bad consequences might result from her knowledge of the truth. "Wishing to be good/useful (*chrēstos*), you will be seen to be base (*kakos*)" (457–59). The second point is addressed to any concerns Lichas might have about causing Deianira pain. If Lichas is acting out of a fear that the information would pain her (*touto m' alguneien an*), then, she asserts, his fear is not right, or, more literally, that he "does not fear well (*ou kalōs tarbeis*)" (457–58).

In his response, Lichas acknowledges both motives, the first implicitly, the

¹⁶ The sincerity of Menelaus' statement is questionable, but the reason given reflects the common Greek attitude regarding enemies. Actions considered morally wrong in the case of *philoī* are seen as morally right in the case of enemies.

¹⁷ Aeschylus' *Orestes* is an excellent example.

¹⁸ Jebb, 69.

second explicitly: "Since I see that you have a human understanding of human affairs and are not senseless (*ouk agnōmona*), I will tell you the whole truth and I will hide nothing. . . . Fearing to cause you pain (*deimanōn to son mē sternon algunoimi*), . . . I erred (*hēmarton*), if perhaps you deem (*nemeis*) this an error. Since however you do know the whole story, for his and your common advantage gladly accept this woman" (472–74 and 481–86).

What conclusions can be drawn from Deianira's and Lichas' exchange, as it has been presented thus far, about the reasons that Greeks might advance to morally justify a lie? The first conclusion is based on the opposition between *chrēstos* and *kakos*. Before asserting that a lying Lichas while wishing to be the former will turn out to be the latter, Deianira had carefully described what she is not. The underlying assumption seems to be that Lichas might have considered himself as justified in lying to her and, therefore, as *chrēstos* because he did not know the kind of person with whom he was dealing and assumed erroneously that she lacked the understanding necessary not to be enraged or maddened by Heracles' infatuation. Lichas, having obligations to both Heracles and Deianira, might have seen himself as justified in lying in order to prevent Deianira from harming Heracles, Iole, or herself. It would seem then that, at least under some circumstances, some Greeks might see an obligation not to lie as legitimately overridden by considerations having to do with the mental states of the person to whom one lies.¹⁹

One example of this position is found in the *Dissoi Logoi's* arguments regarding what is just and what is unjust. Lying is among the examples advanced to show that what is usually not just may under certain circumstances be just. While ordinarily it is wrong to lie to those whom one holds dear (*philtatoi*), such as one's parents, lies and deception may be just and neither shameful (*aischron*) nor wicked (*ponēron*) when the latter are sick and unwilling to take necessary medicine. The *Dissoi Logoi's* argument regarding morally acceptable lying is not developed, however. Thus nothing is said about why lying to one's sick parents might be justified.²⁰ It seems reasonable to assume that the cases the arguer has in mind involve people whom fever, delirium, or some other debilitating effect of illness has rendered temporarily incapable of understanding the situation adequately enough to realize that the medicine is necessary for their well-being.

¹⁹ Deianira herself might not accept this since she makes the strong assertion that if Lichas has taught himself to lie, "whenever he wishes to be *chrēstos*, he will turn out to be *kakos*" (453–54).

²⁰ T. M. Robinson, *Contrasting Arguments: An Edition of the Dissoi Logoi* (New York: Arno Press, 1970), 3.2–3.4. Although the arguments here are sophistic ones, it is reasonable to hold that the examples used to defend a relativistic position on justice would not be effective unless those hearing the arguments already believed that the kind of case cited was a legitimate exception to any prohibition of lying and deception among those who are dear to one another.

Xenophon offers two examples relevant to the *Dissoi Logoi*'s argument in his report on the conversation between Euthydemus and Socrates. Euthydemus, attempting to determine what sorts of action are just, labels as just both (1) lying to one's sick children to trick them into taking medicine and (2) stealing the weapons of one's depressed friend to forestall a possible suicide (*Mem.* IV. ii. 14–18).²¹ The parent-child example differs from both the *Dissoi Logoi* example and the Lichas-Deianira exchange because Greek morality seems to take it for granted that children need not be accorded the same treatment as adults when it comes to lying and deception. Plato's Socrates chides his interlocutors for treating him like a child by deceiving him, for example (*Gorg.* 499b9–499c1–2). And Theognis rebukes Cyrnus for cheating him with stories as if he were a little child (253–54). Nevertheless, the parent-child example illustrates the relevance that the mental states of those deceived have in assessments of the wrongness or rightness of a particular act of lying. The weapons example, on the other hand, illustrates the more general point that the mental states of one's friends are relevant in determining whether in some particular case an action usually considered unjust towards friends is in fact just. Just as one ordinarily has an obligation not to lie to one's friend, so one ordinarily has an obligation not to steal from him. But if because of the friend's mental state some harm will result to the individual if he is not lied to/stolen from, the act which is usually wrong is right. What the sick child, sick parent, and depressed friend have in common is simply that their impaired mental states are such that if the act which is usually wrong were not committed, they would act in ways harmful to themselves.²² Using the *chrēstos-kakos* dichotomy, those who lie in these sorts of cases would seem to show themselves to be *chrēstos* rather than *kakos*.

The second conclusion to be drawn from the Lichas-Deianira exchange, as it has been presented thus far, is that lies told to prevent pain to the person being deceived *may* be morally acceptable. Certainly lies and deceit with this intent are commonplace in Greek literature. Telemachus makes Penelope's nurse swear to withhold the truth from Penelope about his whereabouts in order to save her pain (III. 371–76 and IV. 743–49). In Sophocles' *Antigone* a messenger exhibits a need to explain why he is going to tell the whole truth to Eurydice about her son's death (1192–95). Telemachus exhorts both Nestor

²¹ Since the arguments in Xenophon and in the *Dissoi Logoi* are similar, they may, as many scholars have noted, have the same source. On this topic see Robinson, 59–65.

²² Examples of lies told to someone to whom one owes the truth in order to prevent that individual from harming others are rarer in Greek writings. One example from the *Odyssey* is Odysseus' lie to Nausicaa's father, Alcinous, told in order apparently to save her from rebuke (VII: 299–301). A much more interesting and complicated example is found in Euripides' *Helen* and will be discussed later.

and Menelaus not to speak soothing words instead of the truth out of shame or pity for him, implying that these are common motives for lying and deception (III. 96–97). In a similar vein, Prometheus in *Prometheus Bound* tells Io that he is reluctant to tell her about her future, “fearing to break your heart,” while acknowledging that it is just (*dikaios*) to deal straightforwardly with a friend’s request for information. Prometheus overcomes his reluctance only when Io exhorts him not to spare her. Assenting to her request, he says, “Since you desire it, I must speak.” Io’s response mirrors Telemachus’ request: “Speak and don’t because of pitying me temper the true with the false” (636–38, 655–56, 711–12). Lichas’ own response, quoted above, indicates that lies intended to prevent pain may be morally acceptable.

What may be significant here is that two of the three characters who explicitly request that pity for them should not result in lying or half-truths—Deianira and Io—are women while the third is a young man referred to by Nestor as a dear child (*phile teknon*) (III. 184). The underlying presumption in these cases may be that ordinarily lying to women or to males when the latter have not yet reached full adult status in order to spare them pain is morally permissible and, perhaps, more strongly, that not to soften the truth in such cases is reason for criticism.²³ If this is correct, then there is good reason for these three characters to be so emphatic in asserting that sparing them pain should not be a motive for lying or being less than truthful. But does anything follow from these examples regarding the moral correctness of lying to an adult male friend (*philos*) in order to spare him pain? The statement that it is part of a man to endure misfortune bravely may be relevant here even though it was made by a later Greek author, Antiphanes.²⁴ In *The Women of Trachis*, for example, Heracles sees himself as unmanned by his physical suffering. He contrasts his present behavior—the pitiable behavior of one who, devoured by disease, weeps like a girl—with his past behavior—the behavior of a man who never wept but bore up under evils without sighing or groaning (1070–75). If enduring misfortune well is seen as a sign of manliness, then lying to a *philos* to spare him pain may be a demeaning act of disrespect since it implies a belief that the *philos* is unable to “play the part of a man” by bearing misfortune well.

²³ In *Antigone*, the messenger reporting to Eurydice rejects the idea that he should “soften” the truth only to be shown a liar later and asserts that it is always correct to tell the truth. The person to whom he is speaking, Eurydice, learning the truth from him, goes offstage and commits suicide. Before learning of her death, the messenger responds to concerns about her possible actions voiced by the chorus by expressing his belief that Eurydice has the kind of good judgment required to deal sensibly with bad news (*gnomes gar ouk apeiros osth’ hamartanein*), 1250.

²⁴ Antiphanes, Fragment #278 in John Maxwell Edmonds, ed., *The Fragments of Attic Comedy* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), 2: 300–301.

Thus, lying to women and youths to spare them pain may be morally acceptable while lying to adult males is not.

The fourth strand in Greek thinking about the morality of lying found in Deianira's speech has a different focus than do the first three. The first strand, as we have seen, focuses on the relationship between the person lying and the person to whom the lie is told. The second and third strands focus on some characteristic of the latter. The fourth strand, however, focuses on a characteristic of the one lying—on his being free (*eleutheros*). Deianira says, "To the man who is free, to be called a liar is a deadly reproach" (*Hōs eleutheroi pseudei kaleisthai kēr prosestin ou kalē*) (453–54). This notion, expressed in gnomic statements in later Greek thought in both Menander and in a fragment attributed to Apollonius Delius, reflects the idea that a free man, unlike a slave, does what he does of his own volition.²⁵ Implicit is the notion that those who lie under external compulsion are not subject to the same moral appraisal as those who have control over their own actions. *Eleutheros* is also used in the classical period, however, to denote the man who has a noble character. Thus Xenophon's Socrates can suggest that *eleutheros* might be defined as doing what is best (*Mem.* IV. v. 3) and Sophocles' Philoctetes can describe Odysseus as having a mind that is neither healthy nor *eleutheron* insofar as he uses lies and trickery to attain his ends (1006). But such statements tell us nothing about why lying and deception should be eschewed by the *eleutheros*. One possible answer lies in the Greek realization, expressed in writers such as Homer, Theognis, and Herodotus, that poverty, need, and fear are very strong motives for lying and deception.²⁶ Those who act on these motives are often seen as compelled to act as they do and, therefore, as not acting freely. Even if they have the legal status of free citizens and are *eleutheros* in that sense, they are not *eleutheros* in another sense. Antisthenes writes, for example, "Whoever fears others is himself a slave, even if he does not know it" (*hostis de heterous dedoike, doulos on lelēthen heauton*).²⁷ Deception can

²⁵ Menander, *Mon.*, 234: *Eleutheron gar esti talēthē legein*. ("It is fitting for the free man to speak the truth.") Stobaeus, 3.11.28: *pseudesthai aneleutheron, aletheia genmaion* ("To lie belongs to the unfree, to speak the truth to the noble."). The idea that whatever the Greek slave does he does unwillingly while the free man does what he does of his own free will is discussed in William Linn Westermann, "Slavery and the Elements of Freedom in Ancient Greece," in M. I. Finley, ed., *Slavery in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 17–32. Regarding the freedom to speak one's mind and not being a slave see Euripides' *Andromache*, 154 and 186–90. See also Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, 392.

²⁶ Homer, *Odyssey*, XIV, 121–34 and 156–57; Theognis, *Elegies*, 383–92; and Herodotus, I, 138.

²⁷ Fernanda Decleva Caizzi, *Antisthenis Fragmenta* (Milano: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino, 1969), Fragment 119.

also at times be seen as antithetical to courageous behavior. Pericles boasts that Athenians do not need to resort to deceptive devices against their enemies, relying instead upon their courage (Thuc. II. xxxix). Insofar then as courage and being in control rather than controlled by others, or even by one's own needs and emotions, are attributes of the *eleutheros*, understood as the man of noble character, a reputation as a *pseudēs* is "deadly" to the "free man" because it marks him as "unfree."

Does it follow that a free man should never lie, not even for the sort of benevolent reasons discussed earlier? Would one who tells lies of this sort be branded a liar? Greek literature of the classical period never explicitly addresses this question. True, men labeled liars are usually those who lie for malevolent or selfish reasons. For example, Cambyses' spies are called "liars" in Herodotus and Timocreon describes Themistocles as a liar when he charges him with betrayal and taking bribes.²⁸ Furthermore, the lies that are implicitly or explicitly condemned in plays such as Sophocles' *Electra* and *Philoctetes* are motivated by a hope for profit (*kerdos*) and not by a concern with the well-being of the one deceived or the prevention of harm to others. Yet, perhaps, benevolent lies, like lies told to enemies, might be seen as a sign of some failure of control on the part of the one who has to resort to lies—a sign that he lacks the strength or ability to attain his ends by either force or persuasion—and, therefore, as the acts of a man who, insofar as he lacks the relevant degree of control, is unfree.²⁹

In sum, the Messenger-Deianira-Lichas exchange illustrates very different views in regard to lying. Deianira herself seems to see all lies as *kakos* and as incompatible with the reputation appropriate for the *eleutheros*. Her speech, and Lichas' response, however, illustrate three other strands in Greek thinking about the morality of lying. (1) Whether A owes B the truth or not depends, at least in part, on just what the relation is between A and B. (2) Under some circumstances an obligation on A's part not to lie to B may be legitimately overridden by consideration of B's mental states if the lie is necessary to prevent B from harming others or from self-inflicted harm. (3) Under

²⁸ Herodotus, III:21. Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, "Life of Themistocles," xxi.2–3.

²⁹ The Greeks sometimes acknowledge that no human being is totally free. Prometheus asserts, for example, that only Zeus is free (*Prometheus Bound*, 50) while in Euripides' *Hecuba*, Hecuba says,

Truly no mortal man is free.
He is the slave of money or of fate,
Or pressure of the people or the law
Prevent him acting as his will dictates (864–67).

To the extent that his freedom is compromised, however, the individual fails to live up to the perhaps impossible ideal of nobility expressed in the Greek conception of freedom.

some circumstances an obligation on A's part not to lie to B may be legitimately overridden by consideration of B's mental states if B is a woman or a male lacking full adult status and the lie is intended to spare B severe pain.

2. EURIPIDES' HELEN

A very different justification for lying is advanced in Euripides' *Helen*. According to this play, a phantom of Helen created by Hera had accompanied Paris to Troy while the real Helen had spent the war years in Egypt, having been brought there by Hermes and entrusted to the care of King Proteus. When the play begins, Proteus, who had taken on the responsibility of keeping Helen safe for Menelaus, is dead. Proteus' son, Theoclymenus, who wants to wed Helen, is determined to kill any Hellene who comes to his palace. Intending to kill Menelaus should he come for Helen, Theoclymenus has ordered his sister, Theonoe, a seeress, to inform him of Menelaus' arrival whenever he comes. The scene relevant to this paper involves an exchange between Theonoe, Menelaus, and Helen in which the latter two attempt to convince Theonoe that she should withhold the news of Menelaus' arrival from her brother (865–1029). Convinced by their arguments, Theonoe withholds the information and, questioned by Theoclymenus, lies to him, telling him that Menelaus is dead.

Helen's central argument is simple. Proteus had an obligation to keep Helen safe for Menelaus and to restore (*apodidonai*) her to her husband. Proteus, who was good/useful (*chrēstos*), intended to do the just thing (*to dikaion*) by restoring Helen to Menelaus when called on to do so. Theoclymenus, who as his father's heir should be acting in accordance with his father's obligations, is impious and unjust in not doing so. If Theonoe, respecting her brother more than her father, tells Theoclymenus of Menelaus' presence, enabling him to kill Menelaus and to take Helen, her actions will be impious or unrighteous, evil, and unjust (894–943).³⁰ Theonoe is aware that her actions may settle Menelaus' and Helen's fate. Motivated by fear, her initial reaction is to report Menelaus' presence to her brother (887–91). Having heard Helen's and Menelaus' speeches, however, she acknowledges the existence of an obligation

³⁰ Here, as in other passages from *Helen*, I translate *eusebeia*, *eusebēs*, their cognates, and their contraries by disjunctions (e.g., "piety or righteousness," "impious or unrighteous"). As A. W. H. Adkins has pointed out *eusebēs* is used in commending certain relationships between man and god. But in the 5th century B.C., *eusebēs* also has a well established moral sense. Adkins cites the contrasts in *Helen*, for example, when *eusebeia* is contrasted with *ekdikos* (lawless) and *eusebestatē* (most pious or righteous) with *kakistē* (most evil) *Helen* 900ff. and 1632). On Adkins' analysis, these contrasts show that *eusebēs* and its cognates are sometimes used to characterize and command certain relationships between man and man. A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), 132–38 and 149 n. 3.

to restore Helen to Menelaus and asserts that it would be unjust not to do so. Theonoe sees her upcoming actions in regard to Theoclymenus as both just and right and as rendering him a beneficial service if they prevent him from acting impiously or unrighteously (998–1021). In the concluding scenes of the play, when Theoclymenus, who intends to kill his sister, accuses her of betrayal, the chorus defends her. Against his claims that he is acting in accordance with justice and right, it asserts that Menelaus has more claim (*kuriōteroïs*) to Helen than Theoclymenus and describes Theonoe as most pious or most righteous. To his charge of betrayal, the chorus responds by describing it as a noble betrayal to do what is just:

CHORUS: Master where are you going, to what murderous deed?

THEOCLYMENUS: I am going where justice calls me; stand aside!

CHORUS: I will not let go my hold; for you are hurrying to do a great wrong.

THEOCLYMENUS: You, a slave, will control your master!

CHORUS: Yes, for I intend well.

THEOCLYMENUS: Not to me, if you don't let me—

CHORUS: No, I must not allow you.

THEOCLYMENUS: Let me kill my wicked sister—

CHORUS: No, most pious she—

THEOCLYMENUS: Who betrayed me—

CHORUS: It was a noble betrayal; what she did was just.

THEOCLYMENUS: Giving my bride unto another.

CHORUS: Yes, to him who had more claim on her (1627–34).³¹

The chorus's positive moral assessment of Theonoe's actions is echoed in the remarks made by the two divine figures who appear at the end of the play—Castor and Polydeuces—to prevent Theoclymenus from killing Theonoe. Like the chorus, they defend her actions, acknowledging the rightness of Menelaus' claims and maintaining that Theonoe had acted wisely and not unjustly toward her brother (1642–57).

The moral reasoning expressed in the Helen-Menelaus-Theonoe exchange includes some of the already-discussed elements in Greek views on lying. Theonoe has certain obligations to her brother stemming from their relationship. Since she is under standing orders to inform Theoclymenus of Menelaus' arrival, a failure to do so is a violation of those obligations. Her subsequent lying is another such violation. Nonetheless, her actions, which would normally be considered unjust, are defended as just and pious or right in this case insofar as their intention is to prevent the person deceived from perpetrating a harm. What distinguishes the argument in the *Helen*, however, is its emphasis on the unjust nature of that harm and the justness and right-

³¹ The word translated "more claim" is *kuriōteroïs*. In translations of this passage the word is often rendered as "more right." Such a translation seems slightly misleading in this context.

ness of doing what would ordinarily be considered unjust in order to prevent a greater injustice. In their speeches, Helen, Menelaus, and Theonoe repeatedly use the verb *apodidonai* and its cognates in describing the obligation which Theoclymenus intends to override. The actions usually denoted by *apodidonai* include repaying one's debts, making payments in keeping with one's promises, and caring for and eventually returning that with which one has been entrusted. To perform these actions is just (*dikaios*), while to do the opposite is unjust (*adikos*). Thus justice, which requires that one "render what is due to another," requires in the case of *Helen* that one "restore" what rightfully belongs to another.³² Since Theoclymenus intends to do the opposite, "not just" (*ou dikaios*) and its cognates are repeatedly used in describing him and his proposed betrayal of trust. Since Theonoe's actions, including her lying, are intended to circumvent that betrayal, "just" (*dikaios*) and "pious" or "righteous" (*eusebēs*) and their cognates are used in descriptions of Theonoe and her actions.

No other explicit defense of lying to one's kin or *philoī* in the interest of justice is expressed in extant Greek tragedies. Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, however, provides an example of an act of deception performed in order to prevent an act of cowardice and treason—a betrayal of family and city. Tiresias has told Creon that his son, Menoeceus, must be sacrificed if Thebes is to be saved. Creon, refusing to sacrifice his son, tells him to escape. Menoeceus pretends to go along with his father's plans while intending to let himself be sacrificed. To the chorus Menoeceus describes himself as allaying his father's fears by lying in order to get what he wants, seeing escape as an act of treason as well as cowardice (911–1018).

While it would be a mistake to draw generalizations about Greek views on the morality of lying from these two instances in Greek tragedies, they do provide examples of cases where lying to one's kin or friends might be considered justified. Any dilemma posed in these cases by conflicting obligations is resolved by seeing an act of lying or deception as justified by more important moral considerations. These cases differ from the cases described in Part 1 of this paper. Although in the cases discussed in Part 1 the prevention of harm was an important factor in the justification, the focus was on some defective cognitive or emotional state of the person to be deceived which made lying necessary if the harm was to be avoided. Furthermore, when the intent was to

³² On *apodidonai* see K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), 170–71. See also Euripides' *Orestes* 643 and 651–52 where forms of *apodidonai* are used in talking about an obligation which Menelaus has to Orestes, because of the service his father, Agamemnon, had performed on Menelaus' behalf. See also Herodotus VI, 86 where Leotychides describes as *ahosios* ("impious") a failure by the Athenians to restore captives who had been entrusted to them.

prevent pain or harm to the person deceived, the lies were motivated primarily by a concern for the person's own well-being. In the *Helen* and *Phoenician Women*, however, the stress is not on some mental state of the person deceived but on making possible the performance of a morally required action which the person deceived intends to prevent. It could be argued that Theoclymenus' cognitive state is defective insofar as he expresses an inadequate understanding of the requirements of justice. However, the stress in the justification advanced is neither on Theoclymenus' mental states nor on his well-being but on the need for Theonoe to act to ensure that others receive their due.

3. THE REPUBLIC AND ORDINARY MORALITY ON LYING

Ordinary Greek reasoning regarding the morality of lying is clearly exhibited in the first two books of Plato's *Republic*.³³ In Book 1 it is found in the exchange between Cephalus and Socrates as well as in the initial stage of the dialogue between Polemarchus and Socrates (331a10–332b8). In Book 2 it is exhibited in the description of those cases of lying which do not merit hatred (382c3–382d3).

Cephalus, the first person in the dialogue to mention lying and deception, begins by asserting that to the good man wealth is advantageous insofar as it helps him to avoid wronging anyone. Among the unjust and impious actions which money enables the good man to avoid are lying, deception, and failing to pay one's debts (331a10–331b7). Socrates turns what Cephalus has said into a general statement about justice: "Justice is simply truth-telling and returning (*to apodidonai*) what one has received" (331c1–331c3). At once, however, Socrates questions this account of justice, citing two examples to illustrate that it is sometimes just both to lie and to refuse to return what one has received: "Everyone, I suppose, would agree that if someone took weapons from a friend whose mind was sound (*sōphronountos*), and the friend subsequently went mad (*mainesthai*) and then demanded the return of the weapons, it would be neither necessary to return them, nor would the man who returned them be just; nor, moreover, would the man who wished to speak the whole truth to the man in that state be just" (331c5–331d1). Cephalus, who, as scholars agree, reflects the ordinary person's views on justice, immediately agrees with Socrates. The unquestioning immediacy of this response reinforces the claim made earlier in this paper that according to Greek morality, obligations to speak the truth to one's friend can legitimately be overridden by consideration

³³ The view that Cephalus and Polemarchus articulate the ordinary person's view of justice or conventional morality is common among scholars. See, for example, Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 21 and Lionel Pearson, *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 13.

of the friend's mental states. The verb used in the *Republic* to describe that state, *mainesthai*, which can mean either "to be mad" or "to be enraged," is the same verb used by Deianira when she describes what she is not.

Having received Cephalus' agreement, Socrates asserts, "Therefore, this is not the definition of justice, to tell the truth and to return what one has received" (331d1–3). Polemarchus immediately objects that it is and gives what he takes to be Simonides' more general version of the same thought: "It is just (*dikaion*) to render (*apodidonai*) to each that which is owed" (331e2–4). Since Polemarchus seems to suppose that his proposed definition covers both conjuncts of the original statement, obligations regarding truth-telling are treated by him as simply one species of rendering to others what is owed. However, since he does not consider the two examples just cited as incompatible with this definition, he seems to take for granted that the truth is not always owed to one's friends. In this assumption and in his following acknowledgment that what is owed to friends differs from what is owed to enemies, Polemarchus, like Cephalus, reflects some of the already discussed strands in ordinary Greek moral thinking about lying and truth-telling.

Book two's assertions about lying are part of a wider discussion about the appropriate ways of describing gods and their actions. Before questions are raised about the possibility of gods' lying, it has already been agreed that god is good (*agathos*) and the cause only of good (*agathon*). Socrates had also argued to the conclusion that god would not deceive human beings by appearing to them in different forms, either by means of a self-transformation or by deceptively affecting their cognitive or perceptual states (379a7–380c8). The topic now shifts to false statements.³⁴ Whereas the sorts of deception just discussed are said to be hated by both gods and human beings, some false statements are said not to deserve abhorrence. Only three sorts of false statements fall in this category: (1) those told to enemies, (2) those told to persons whom we call friends whenever they are about to do some evil because of madness (*mania*) or folly (*anoia*) in order to avert that evil, and (3) stories about antiquity where we are ignorant of the truth and can only approximate it in

³⁴ In my initial discussion of the three-fold classification of what Plato labels "a *pseudos* expressed in words," I will translate *pseudos* as "false statement." I do so for two reasons. First, the Greek word has a much broader sense than "lie." It can be used, for example to refer to a false statement uttered without any intention to deceive. Second, and more importantly, Plato's defenders sometimes argue that the so-called "lies" that Plato advocates are actually truths expressed in mythical language. While their claim is incorrect if applied to every instance where Plato advocates "lying" in the *Republic*, they offer a convincing case in regard to the "noble lie" dealing with the myth of the metals. See, for example, R. B. Levinson, *In Defense of Plato* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1953), 424–40 and John Wild *Plato's Modern Enemies and the Theory of Natural Law* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), 51–53. A good short presentation of this view is found in Brickhouse and Smith (cited in footnote 3), 81–83.

making serviceable stories (382c3–382d3). Although these three sorts of false statements are described as useful or serviceable (*chrēsimon*), it would be a mistake to see in Socrates' words here a general defense of lies told because of some assumed utility value. Nothing is said here about lies told for reasons of economic gain or for one's own advantage, for example, yet Socrates treats the cases cited as an exhaustive list of the kinds of false statements that, being *chrēsimon*, do not merit hatred and could justifiably be uttered by those who are good. Nor is the reason for excluding other sorts of false statements from consideration the fact that the gods do not have the relevant desires or needs. If that had been the principle of exclusion, it would have been unnecessary to explore the possibility that gods might make false statements for the three reasons being considered, since the thrust of the ensuing reasoning is to show that the gods do not have the desires or needs that motivate the three sorts of false statements which do not merit hatred. At the same time, by considering the possibility that the gods might make the latter kinds of false statements, Socrates treats them as false statements which those who are good (*agathoi*) might justifiably tell—as legitimate exceptions to any general moral prohibition of lying.

Of the three kinds of morally acceptable false statements the first—lying to one's enemies—has already been shown to be a commonplace of ordinary Greek morality.³⁵ The third—telling a story or myth—is tangential to the focus of this paper. Defenders of Plato who focus on the so-called “noble lie”—the myth of the metals—have made a good case for treating such “lies” as expressions of truth couched in mythical language. On their view, these mythical accounts, intended to promote the welfare of the polis, are to be seen as persuasive stories designed for those who cannot deal directly with the truth. Since the focus of this paper is on the possible justifications of those false statements which can unquestionably be labeled “lies,” nothing more will be said about Plato's treatment of stories or myths.

Of primary interest to this paper is Socrates' description of the second kind of false statement—a description put in the form of a question: “And whenever any of those whom we call friends because of madness or some folly attempts to do some evil thing, does a lie not then become useful as a medicine in order to avert the evil?” (382c7–10). In Book 1 the example of legitimate lying cited by Socrates involved a friend who had gone mad. In contrast, Book two's description of the relevant mental states is much broader. Either madness or some folly or lack of understanding (*anoia*) justifies lying if the lie is

³⁵ It may seem surprising that Socrates uses the traditional friend-enemy dichotomy here after treating it as morally irrelevant in Book 1. In presenting the three categories, however, Socrates is drawing on ordinary moral beliefs about lying.

useful in averting the performance of an evil act by the one to whom the lie is told. *Anoia* is a very broad term which can describe individuals in the throes of sexual passion or those who lack understanding of the situation in which they find themselves and are thereby out of touch with reality.³⁶ It can also be used simply in opposition to *sōphrosunē* (moderation, self-control) and thus shares in all the ambiguities of the latter term. The related term *anoētos* is sometimes used as an antonym of *sophos* (prudent, wise, clever) and at others as the antonym of *sōphrōn* (of sound mind, temperate).³⁷ Thus, on Socrates' description, lies would seem to be justified whenever any lack of understanding or moderation or failure of self-control might lead to an attempt to perform an evil act. This broad description would cover the lie told by Theonoe to Theoclymenus insofar as he is shown to misconceive the demands of justice. It would also cover Lichas' lies to Deianira if she had lacked sufficient understanding to make allowances for the power of *eros*. The evils to be prevented in these cases include acts of impiety and injustice as well as self-inflicted harm and harm to others. To this extent, Socrates' comments here are not some novel addition to Greek reasoning about the morality of lying but reflect some of the reasoning already discussed in relation to *Helen* and *The Women of Trachis*. The novel element in Socrates' treatment of justifiable lying is brought in later.

4. THE LIES OF THE RULERS

Socrates' next comment on lying is embedded in a presentation of the models for human behavior which ought to be represented in poetry. Socrates begins by affirming the value of truth, suggests that it *may* be the case that the kinds of rulers he describes may justifiably tell certain lies, and concludes by condemning lying by others as subversive and destructive:

Moreover, we must surely prize truth most highly. For if we were correct in what we were just saying and falsehood is useless to the gods but useful to men as a kind of medicine, it is obvious that such a thing must be assigned to physicians and must not be touched by laymen. . . . For the rulers of the city then, if for anyone (*eiper tisi allois*), it is fitting to lie on account of enemies or citizens for the benefit of the *polis*; no others may have anything to do with it. For a layman to lie to rulers of that kind we shall affirm to be as great a wrong, or even greater, than for a patient to lie to his physician or an athlete to his trainer about his physical condition. . . . And if the ruler catches anyone else in the city lying, he will punish him for introducing a practice subversive and destructive of a *polis*. (389b2–389d5).

³⁶ For the first use of *anoia* see Euripides' *Phaedra*, 398–99. For the second see Sophocles' *Electra*, 920–22 and Plato's *Laches*, 197a7–b1 and *Theaetetus*, 176e3–177a1–4.

³⁷ For the first use see Aristophanes' *Clouds* 897–98. For the second see Demosthenes LIX.111 and Herodotus I.4.2. See also Dover, 123.

Socrates offers no explicit argument to show that his claim that rulers, if anybody, can justifiably lie to enemies or citizens for the benefit of the city necessarily follows from the earlier statements about morally acceptable lying. The only link between this claim and the earlier discussion is provided by repeating the analogy between lying and medicine. Even then, the conclusion follows only if it is assumed that just as only physicians ought to prescribe the latter because of their knowledge of health and disease, so only rulers, if anybody, ought to use the former because they, if anyone, will have the relevant knowledge. That the possession or lack of some sort of knowledge is relevant in determining whether a "medicinal lie" is justifiable is implicit in the arguments of *Helen* and the *Women of Trachis*. In the first case, Theonoe's knowledge of Theoclymenus' murderous and unjust intentions, as well as her knowledge of what justice and piety require, is relevant to her justification. In the *Women of Trachis*, Lichas' newly acquired knowledge of Deianira's character and understanding is supposedly the basis for his concession that he might have been wrong to lie. But whereas Theonoe's and Lichas' "knowledge" is of Theoclymenus and Deianira, respectively, and therefore about specific individuals, the analogy between physicians and rulers requires that the knowledge of the latter be general in nature and that it be a *technē*—an expertise which involves some kind of systematic understanding. Socrates' use of the qualifying phrase *eiper tisi allois* may be his way of indicating that before he can unqualifiedly assert that rulers of the city are justified in lying to other citizens, he must show what the relevant knowledge is and why only rulers will possess it. In keeping with the justification in Book 2, he would also have to show that the mental states of those to be deceived are deficient in some way so that the "drug" is required in order to keep them from performing harmful actions. It should be noted, however, that there is an interesting difference between Socrates' statement here and the description of the second kind of lying in Book 2. The latter held lies to be justifiable when they were necessary to prevent individuals with impaired mental states from perpetrating harm. Now the rulers are qualifiedly seen as justified in lying in order to *benefit* the *polis*. While the notion that true rulers act so as to benefit their subjects is familiar from Book 1, the shift here from talk about the prevention of harm to talk about benefit seems to widen the scope of justifiable lies. Given this shift and the ambiguity of *anoia*, the "drug" of lying could justifiably be used by rulers whenever their subjects lacked either sufficient understanding regarding what is beneficial to the *polis* or sufficient self-control to act only in ways that benefit the *polis* as a whole. The result is a concomitant shift in regard to what Socrates must show about the mental states of those justifiably deceived.

Socrates does not return to the subject of medicinal lying until after the description of the wisdom of rulers in Books 3 and 4 and the latter's presenta-

tion of Plato's tripartite moral psychology. In respect to the first point, rulers are distinguished from other guardians by the strength and perseverance of their conviction that they must always do what is in the best interest of the *polis* and the related conviction that what is in the interest of the latter also serves their self-interest (412c4–e3). Their function in guarding the *polis* against both external enemies and internal dissension requires them to make sound decisions which will prevent the former from having the power to harm the *polis* and the latter from *wishing* to do so (414b1–6). The rulers' wisdom (*sophia*) consists in their ability to make sound judgments which take into account the interests of the *polis* as a whole. The related knowledge (*epistēmē*), whose aim is the unity of the *polis*, requires an understanding of the means which will bring about the best relations both internally and with other cities (428a11–d7). An understanding of human psychology is a necessary part of such an *epistēmē*.

In respect to the second point, Socrates' presentation of Plato's moral psychology, it should be noted that in this presentation Socrates does not use *anoia*, *mania*, or their cognates. He does, however, draw an analogy between virtue and vice, on the one hand, and health and disease, on the other: "Virtue, then, seems to be a kind of health and beauty and well-being of the soul, while vice is disease and ugliness and weakness" (444d13–e2). A just soul, one in which reason rules, is also a healthy soul—a well-functioning, well-ordered unity. *Sōphrosunē* requires that the three parts of the soul agree that reason should rule, thereby avoiding internal dissension and fostering a harmoniously interacting unity. The soul's health is fostered and maintained by the performance of just actions. The healthy soul's wisdom lies in its knowledge (*epistēmē*) of what is beneficial to each part of the soul and what is to the common advantage of all three. This includes the knowledge that just actions are those which help to produce and preserve the soul's healthy condition. In contrast, ignorance (*amathia*) is in charge in the soul of the man who performs unjust actions—actions which work against the soul's unity and result in a disordered, unjust soul. The internal conflict in a diseased soul may be due to inflated appetites or a perverted spirit; but insofar as one's actions fail to accord with the just behavior required by the above-mentioned knowledge, *amathia* rather than *epistēmē* is in control (442c5–444a2). Since *anoia* can be attributed to those who lack understanding of the situation in which they find themselves and can also serve as an antonym of *sōphrosunē*, *anoia* could be applied to Book four's "diseased" souls. The latter are out of touch with reality insofar as they lack understanding of what is truly beneficial to them and they lack *sōphrosunē* insofar as their inflated appetites or perverted spirits reject reason's control. This understanding of *anoia* is in keeping with an account in Plato's *Laws* where it is called the "worst disease," ruining the soul and annih-

lating its power (691c5–d4). Identifying *anoia* as the worst form of ignorance, the Athenian asserts that this kind of ignorance lies in the lack of accord between feelings of pleasure and pain, love and hatred, on the one hand, and the dictates of reason, on the other. Because the emotions of the man with a diseased soul are wrongly directed, he fails to understand that what is beneficial to him and what is noble and good are the same (689a1–c2).

Socrates returns to the subject of rulers lying in presenting his ideas regarding the guardians' communal family. Asserting the need for selective breeding, Socrates twice declares that *much* medicinal lying and deception will be required in regard to both marriage and procreation. The sexual lottery is only one of the practices using lies and deception which may be necessary to conceal the truth about the means being used in the interests of selective breeding. Only a few selected rulers will know that breeding by the best is being maximized and that by the worst minimized while any defective offspring of the former and all offspring of the latter are being kept out of the guardian class, and perhaps even destroyed. The purpose of all this lying and deception is to give the *polis* the benefits of selective breeding while keeping the guardians as free from dissension as possible (459c2–460c6).

Nothing is explicitly said in this passage about the specific condition of the guardians' souls which would cause dissension if medicinal lying and deception were not widely employed. Since, as the guardians have been described thus far, they are supposedly willing to let their sexual activity be severely limited (along with other appetitive activities such as eating), it is hardly the case that their appetites are out of control. And nothing is said about eliminating all sexual activity by the most inferior guardians. If the intention was to forbid all sexual intercourse to those judged worst, there would be no need for policies dealing with the disposition of their offspring. Yet, as noted above, Socrates explicitly states that policies will have to be formulated for dealing with both the defective offspring of the best and the offspring of the worst. Nor does the threat of dissension seem to be posed simply by the fact that young guardians with their thumetic, competitive dispositions and love of honor would feel dishonored by being judged less worthy to engage in sexual interaction than their betters.³⁸ The guardians are expected to be competitive with others of their generation, vying for all sorts of honors including extra sexual privileges.

³⁸ Brickhouse and Smith see Plato as concerned with protecting the guardians who will be passed over from harsh and harmful truths. "Failing to allow them sexual contact, therefore, is not denying them something of primary importance to them, all other things being equal. But if, in failing to let them have sexual relations, one adds an element of dishonor, one will hurt them in the very worst way, for it will starve their souls needlessly of their special needs" (90).

The primary issue here seems to be neither the need to use lies and deception simply to control sexual appetites nor the need to save the guardians from unnecessary feelings of dishonor, but the need to foster unity using whatever devices are necessary without sacrificing selective breeding. A crucial element in the maintenance of unity is the emotional bond created by the "common feelings of pleasure and pain . . . when as nearly as possible all the citizens equally rejoice or feel pain at the same births and deaths. . . . But the individualization of such feelings dissolves [unity] whenever some are greatly pained while others feel great joy at the same incidents which happen to the city and its inhabitants" (462b₄–c₁). Socrates sees this emotional identification between and within generations of guardians as crucial to preserving unity and preventing dissension in the *polis*. No guardian will consider another guardian an outsider because "whenever he meets any one of them, he will think he is meeting a brother or a sister, a father or a mother, a son or a daughter, their offspring or progenitor" (463c₃–7). Bound by inter-generation ties of kinship, all the members of the younger generation will treat all the members of the older ones with the respect due to parents and grandparents while all the members of the older generations will relate to the younger ones as they would to their own children and grandchildren.

Now consider the possible effects that a knowledge of the true state of affairs in regard to breeding would have on the crucial inter-generation emotional bond. Members of the younger generation would know that some of the guardians could not be their parents while those of the older one would know that they were not the biological parents of any members of the guardian class. Furthermore, some of the "worst" guardians would know that their offspring were systematically being either destroyed or given away. Plato obviously believes that the pleasures and pains associated with one's feelings toward one's offspring are extremely strong—so strong that he advocates a system in which these feelings will be channeled to form a bond of unity by being communally shared. Knowledge of the true situation would work to privatize these feelings unless both intellectually and emotionally all the guardians, including the worst, could steadfastly identify their self-interest with that of the *polis* to such an extent that those affected would both (1) feel pain neither about having their offspring shut out from the community of guardians or destroyed nor about deliberately being denied opportunities to produce children for the community and (2) share the other guardians' pleasure at the birth of their offspring. However, if all the members of the guardian class were capable of always being steadfast in believing that their interests and those of the *polis* were identical and that they must always act to benefit the *polis* as a whole, the emotional bond of "communal parent-child" identification might not be

necessary. What distinguishes those who are earmarked as potential rulers (as a necessary but not a sufficient condition) is precisely the steadfastness of their belief that their self-interest and that of the *polis* are the same. The inability of most guardians to maintain this belief unwaveringly is implicit in Socrates' discourse on the need for continued testing during the long selection process. Most guardians at some time, Plato seems to believe, will have this crucial conviction undermined by fear, pleasure, pain, or others' arguments (412e5–414b7). The potentially undermining pleasures and pains include those whose strength Plato himself emphasizes—the pleasures and pains associated with the births, deaths, and well-being of those we consider “our own.” The condition of the guardians' souls which implicitly justifies medicinal lying in regard to marriage and procreation is the precariousness or weakness of their conviction regarding the identity of their self-interest with the interests of the *polis* as a whole. Socrates calls a guardian's mistaken belief about where the happiness (*eudaimonia*) of guardians lies foolish or lacking in understanding (*anoētos*) (466b4–c3). It is not clear, however, that the related term, *anoia*, can be correctly used to describe the condition of the guardians who will be subject to the lottery and other deceptions. In contrasting healthy and diseased souls Socrates describes virtue as a kind of health, beauty, and good state of the soul and vice as a kind of disease, ugliness, and weakness (444d13–e2). As Socrates recognizes, however, weakness and strength of the soul, like physical strength and weakness, admit of degrees (432a2–6). Judged by the constancy of the crucial belief, the strongest souls will be those of rulers and potential rulers whereas most guardians will fall in the intermediate group. In order to encompass the rulers' lies within Book two's category of lies told to friends who are “mad” or in a foolish or ignorant (*anoetic*) state, Plato would have to consider *anoia* to be a condition afflicting the soul of any individual who *might* at some time act against the interest of the *polis* because pleasure, pain, fear, or others' arguments will have temporarily shaken the conviction regarding the identity of self-interest and the interest of the *polis*. That would require a far broader sense of *anoia* than any discussed thus far. It seems then that the lies and deception advocated in Book 5 are not justified because of the madness or *anoia* of those deceived but because they are designed to prevent *anoia* and to strengthen the harmonious functioning of guardians' souls. Furthermore, since rulers are to tell medicinal lies whenever they are necessary to *benefit* the *polis* and not merely to prevent harm, and *any* weakness of the soul prevents a guardian from being maximally healthy or maximally beneficial to the *polis*, Book two's category of medicinal lies has been altered significantly. If we also note that the deceived group includes those with very strong souls—potential rulers—the contrast between Plato's medicinal lies and those supported by

ordinary Greek moral reasoning might be expressed as follows. In both cases, where A and B are friends and/or kin, let A = the person lying and B = the person to whom the lie is told.

Ordinary Morality: In order for A to be justified in lying to B (1) B's mental state must be defective; (2) because of B's defective mental state, B poses an imminent threat of harm to others or to himself or herself; and (3) the lie is necessary to prevent that harm.

Plato's Medicine: In order for A to be justified in lying to B, A must be a ruler and B must be a member of a group at least some of whose members' mental states are (1) such that if they are not lied to by A, they run the risk of being harmed by developing defective mental states which may lead them to wish to perform acts harmful to themselves and others or (2) such that without the lie, the individuals with these souls will not be as beneficial to the *polis*.

Using the medicinal metaphor at each step in making his assertions about lying, Socrates has significantly altered the nature of the "medicine" being practiced. If we use Plato's medical metaphor we can distinguish between two very different sorts of cases. In regard to the kind of case illustrated by Deianira, ordinary Greek morality might be described as accepting lies told by personal physicians to individual patients when their diseased states require the lies if harm is to be prevented. The personal physicians need have no general knowledge of human psychology but they need to have sufficient understanding of the individuals they treat to know that their mental states are defective and harm is imminent. The patients in turn, like Deianira, have opportunities to show their physicians that their diagnosis is incorrect, rendering the medicine unnecessary. A comparison to contemporary work on medical paternalism may be useful here. Recent discussions have been highly critical of physicians who engage in paternalistic lying and withholding of information. Such treatment is frequently rejected as inconsistent with the respect due individual autonomy. But current literature in biomedical ethics also contains articles that defend some lies and deceptive practices under very specific circumstances. The details of these defenses cannot be developed here but their major concern is with those cases where a patient's mental state is so precarious, due, perhaps, to the transforming effects of illness, that lying and other deceptive practices which ordinarily are not morally acceptable may be morally permitted or even required. Under such circumstances physicians are said to be acting out of a real respect for their patients' autonomy insofar as they attempt to neutralize those impediments which interfere with patients' choices and help them to regain control over their own lives. Those who argue in this way stress the physical, cognitive, and emotional factors which constrain rational decision making and result in actions and decisions harmful to the

patient. As with Greek morality and Deianira, so, too, with these patients. If the individual patient's cognitive state is not defective in the relevant way, paternalistic lying and deception are not justified.³⁹

Plato's rulers, in contrast, require a different metaphor or analogy. They might be described as public health physicians formulating policies about inoculating all the members of a group in order to prevent those with the greatest predisposition for the disease from contracting it. Plato's physicians need know nothing about the particular individuals who will be affected by the medicine. What they need to know is relevant information about human psychology and about what constitutes psychic health. They must also know what medicine will be most effective in both preventing a pathological condition and making all the members of the group as healthy as possible. Since the condition of any particular individual in the group is irrelevant to the treatment being applied, individuals do not have any opportunities to show that in their cases the medicine is unnecessary. Contemporary work on biomedical ethics is not very helpful with this analogy. It is conceivable that some ethicist might defend the telling of a lie by public health officials to a group at a moment of crisis. Such a justification might be applicable if the lie were necessary to prevent mass panic and a possibly deadly epidemic. Here there might be no time to consider the mental states of every individual in the group in order to determine whose mental states are "sound" enough not to need the lie. But, on the whole, contemporary writings are too sceptical of both professional expertise and the "benevolence" of those purportedly wielding paternalistic power to accept such justifications.⁴⁰ Is there anything in Greek writings prior to or contemporaneous with Plato that might be relevant to this analogy and support the view that lies told to a group by someone in a position of responsibility might be justified when many (but not all) of the group's members are in some defective cognitive or emotional state? The only plausible sort of case is illustrated in Xenophon's report of the conversation between Socrates and Euthydemus mentioned earlier. Here the lies told by a general to his dispirited soldiers to bolster their morale are treated, like the cases cited earlier, as possible legitimate exceptions to any general prohibition against lying (*Mem.* IV. ii.17). If this is a plausible comparison, then Plato's justifica-

³⁹ See, for example, Terrence F. Ackerman, "Why Doctors Should Intervene," *Hastings Center Report* 12 (August 1982): 14–17 and Jane S. Zembaty, "A Limited Defense of Paternalism in Medicine," in Thomas A. Mappes and Jane S. Zembaty, eds., *Biomedical Ethics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986), 60–66. See also Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 220–41 for a presentation of the various sides of the issue.

⁴⁰ See Bok (cited in footnote 39), 107–122 for a detailed discussion of the morality of lying in a crisis.

tion for lying may be more closely related to Greek moral thinking than the contrast between the two very different medical analogies might indicate.

Nonetheless there is another difference between Plato's justification for his rulers' lies and the justifications this paper has elicited from other Greek writings. Nothing in the latter justified lies told to individuals simply in order to make them better or to make them as beneficial as possible to themselves and others. Thus though Plato has worked with elements already present in Greek moral thinking, he has greatly widened the scope of justified lies (with the proviso, of course, that these lies can only be told by properly trained rulers). And it is ironic that the people who are expected to lie in Plato's ideal society are both the best and the "freest." Unlike the rest of the citizens, who, like slaves, are expected to subject themselves cheerfully to the rule of reason imposed by wise authority, the rulers are controlled only by their own reason with its knowledge of the good. In an interesting reversal of one of the strands in Greek thinking about the morality of lying, it is the noblest and freest for whom it is fitting to lie. Turning a later gnomic saying upside down, *pseudesthai gennaion, aletheia aneleutheron* ("It is fitting for the noble to lie and for the unfree to speak the truth").⁴¹

5. CONCLUSIONS

What conclusions can be drawn from the above discussion in regard to the contrast drawn by Popper between Socrates' commitment to truth in the Socratic dialogues and Plato's advocacy of lying in the *Republic*? I can only suggest a line of approach that might be taken—one which requires another paper for its development.⁴²

A study of the various comments made in the Socratic dialogues regarding truth-telling, lying, and liars reveals that there are relatively few such comments.⁴³ Socrates' commitment to the search for truth is unquestionable. He asserts in the *Gorgias*, for example, that to have false opinions on the subjects

⁴¹ The original is cited by Stobaeus at 3.11.28 and attributed to Apollonius Delius. It is quoted in footnote 25.

⁴² I owe the idea for this line of approach to Elinor J. M. West.

⁴³ In labeling certain dialogues as Socratic, I make no attempt to divide the dialogues usually placed prior to the *Meno* into early and transitional ones. That distinction is not essential to this paper. A survey of these dialogues provides only sporadic comments on lying and truthfulness. The *Hippias Minor*, which includes an attempt to define the "false man"/"liar" (*pseudēs*), is uninformative about Socrates' position on the definitions offered. Throughout the dialogue Socrates repeatedly states that the premises of the argument and, therefore, the conclusions are those of Hippias (e.g., 365d7–8, 366a2–4, and 366b1–3). A careful examination of this dialogue to determine whether Socrates' professed *aporia* points to some genuine puzzlement regarding the premises and conclusions of the arguments requires another paper.

under discussion is to suffer the greatest evil (458a8–b1). His view that lying and deception may be appropriate in the case of children but not among adult friends was discussed earlier. His description in the *Charmides* of his dream about a society in which those claiming expertise would in fact have the relevant knowledge illustrates his view that lying and deception on the part of those professing to have professional skills they lack is harmful to the *polis* (173a7–d5). His belief that those brought up without truth who lie, deceive, and break oaths have unhealthy souls is illustrated in the myth at the end of the *Gorgias* (525a1–3). Does it follow from any of this that Socrates would reject all lies as immoral? More specifically, can we elicit anything from the Socratic dialogues to support the view that Socrates might see himself as justified in making false statements to someone whose cognitive state is defective in order to benefit him or to prevent him from harming others? I suggest that Socrates' use of what is usually called "Socratic irony" might be seen in this light.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of "irony" includes the following statement: "In etymological sense: Dissimulation, pretense; especially in reference to the dissimulation of ignorance practiced by Socrates as a means of confuting an adversary (Socratic irony)."⁴⁴ Such dissimulation or pretense frequently involves saying what is, at least on the surface, untrue. Putting aside the vexing question of the sincerity of Socrates' profession of ignorance, we can still find numerous examples of "ironic" statements made by Socrates to an interlocutor, praising his knowledge and wisdom while leading him to a state of *aporia* and revealing his ignorance to the audience. Socrates' comments to Hippias in both the *Hippias Minor* and *Hippias Major* exemplify such false statements.⁴⁵ Their falsity may become apparent to the audience as the dialogue progresses, thus the irony, but, initially at least, they are accepted as true by his interlocutors. Socrates' commitment to truth and to the related requirement that those involved in an elenctic exchange "say what they believe" seems to be at odds with some of his verbal behavior in the dialogues. Commentators have tried various ways to resolve what they take to be an apparent inconsistency.⁴⁶ I suggest that it might be fruitful to examine the possibility that Socrates "lies" exemplify the second kind of false statement discussed in *Republic* 2—the use of falsity in words in order to prevent some-

⁴⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 5: 484.

⁴⁵ Especially interesting here is Gregory Vlastos' recent work. See, for example, Gregory Vlastos, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (January 1985): 1–31 and "Socratic Elenchus," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1983): 25–59.

⁴⁶ See, for example, *Hi.Mi.* 364b1–2, 369d1–369e2 and *Hi.Ma.* 281a1–282d5. For an attempt to explain Socrates' treatment of Hippias in the latter dialogue and Hippias' reaction see Paul Woodruff, *Plato: Hippias Major* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982), especially 127–32.

one in a mad or anoetic state from harming himself or others. On Socrates' view, after all, those with incorrect beliefs about virtue *are* in a defective cognitive state. If, like Hippias, they influence others' beliefs, they are potentially egregiously harmful to many. If "lies" told to them during the questioning process work to alleviate some of their ignorance or to lessen their potential to harm others, Socrates might see his "lies" as justified. Developing this line of thinking and determining how the telling of such "lies" could be reconciled with Socrates' requirement that those involved in elenctic exchanges "say what they believe" is another story.

University of Dayton