

# Plato's *Republic*

## An Introduction

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# 4. Blueprints for a Platonic Utopia

## Education and Culture

### Books II and III

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In having Socrates work out the proper education for the would-be guardians—which at least initially must include all the city’s children—Plato engages in the philosophy of education for the first time in the Western philosophical tradition. He is not the first philosopher to do so, as readers familiar with non-Western philosophy will know. Confucius’ *Analects*, which predates Plato’s *Republic* by almost a century, devotes considerable attention to the nature and value of education and in fact begins by celebrating it; indeed, the first word ‘The Master’ is quoted as saying is *xue* (學), which means learning or study. Education is a topic of sustained focus in the *Republic*. In Books II and III Plato sees education as a two-pronged endeavor, comprising ‘physical training for bodies and music and poetry for the soul’ (2.376e). A little later, he will reconsider this way of thinking about education’s objects, holding that physical training and poetic education are ‘both chiefly for the sake of the soul’ (3.410c). Later in the *Republic*, while developing the famous Allegory of the Cave in Book VII, Plato has Socrates give an account of *formal* education involving arithmetic, geometry, astronomy or physics, and dialectic, a sort of philosophical logic, more or less inventing what has come to be known as liberal education. In Books II and III, however, the focus is on education’s less formal aspects, education in the wider sense of the Greek word παιδεία (*paideia*): upbringing or enculturation.

## Supervising the Storytellers: Musical and Poetic Content (2.376c–3.392c)

Socrates is especially concerned with the effects of popular culture on the development of character, both of the would-be soldier-guardians and of the citizenry at large. We begin absorbing our culture, which is carried by the songs sung in the home and in public, so Socrates first focuses on the stories—literally the myths (μῦθοι [*muthoi*])—children hear in the songs sung to and around them. Many readers will shrink at Socrates' insisting that the first thing he and his fellow theoretical architects must do is 'supervise the storytellers' (2.377b). But even those of us who value freedom of speech and artistic expression—two values conspicuous by their absence in the *Republic*—probably do not think that all books or movies or television shows or videogames or music are appropriate at all ages. But while most readers will likely think this is a private matter, to be determined by parents, for Plato it is too important to be left to individual discretion (and thus is another of those places where his community-mindedness is evident). After all, the explicit point of education is to develop good soldier-guardians, which is surely a matter of public and not merely private concern.

At the root of Plato's educational program is a belief in the malleability of the human psyche, especially at young ages: 'You know, don't you, that the beginning of any process is most important, especially for anything young and tender? It's at that time that it is most malleable and takes on any pattern one wishes to impress upon it' (2.377b). Hence the need to regulate the stories children hear, both their content and their form. Socrates focuses first on the former, on *what* the stories say, and then in Book III he focuses on *how* the stories are told, on their form.

The most important restriction on the content of stories is that they must not convey *true falsehoods*, which are 'falsehoods [...] about the most important things' (2.382a). The phrase 'true falsehood' is easy to trip over, since it suggests the idea of stories that are literally false but convey moral truths. This is emphatically *not* what Socrates means; 'true' here means 'real' or 'genuine'; a true falsehood is something that is deeply, genuinely false. Socrates is not anti-fiction; he is not opposed to nursery rhymes that contain literal falsehoods, or what he calls 'falsehood in words' (2.382c). That there never was a person who lived in a shoe or a

race between a tortoise and a hare is not important, so long as the story's underlying moral message is not radically false.

There are three categories of stories whose content should be regulated: stories about the gods, stories about epic heroes, and stories about people. Socrates rightly avoids regulating the last kind of story at this stage of the *Republic*. Presumably, he regards Thrasymachus' claim that the unjust life is happier than a just life as a true falsehood: it is deeply, profoundly mistaken and soul-distorting, and it ruins anyone who steers their life by it. But to rule out such stories now, before the *Republic's* two questions have been satisfactorily answered, would beg the question—that is, it would assume the truth of what he should be trying to prove. It would be intellectually unfair to adopt a regulation banning such stories in his ideal city, since he is not yet entitled to claim that Thrasymachus is mistaken.

As the gods are among the most important things, we must be on guard against true falsehoods regarding the gods. There are two restrictions on stories about the gods: first, that the gods are not the cause of everything but only of good things (2.380c); second, that the gods are not shape-shifters or deceivers who 'mislead us by falsehoods in words or deeds' (2.383a). Since a god is by nature good, and what is good cannot cause something harmful and bad, a god cannot be the cause of bad things. So any story saying otherwise is promoting a true falsehood and should be disallowed, even if Homer or Hesiod or any canonical Greek poet is its author. The same goes for stories depicting gods as deceivers. Since 'the best things are least liable to [...] change' and the gods are among the best things, they would not alter their appearances or have any need to speak falsely (2.380e).

We might question the chains of argument by which Socrates arrives at these conclusions. For example, he never considers the possibility that there are no gods, or the possibility that a god might lie for good reasons. But the real take-aways here are not the particular content of any rules he arrives at, but rather three key ideas: first, that one should not uncritically accept the norms and values of one's culture; second, that reason provides a perspective from which cultural norms and values can be assessed; and third, that if there is a conflict between culture or tradition and reason, we should follow the dictates of reason. Although his community-first ethos is often associated with a kind of



conservatism that prizes tradition and the wisdom embodied therein, Socrates is no conservative. Far from it. He is a radical rationalist, believing that rationality affords a perspective from which a tradition's practices and values can be assessed. Socrates loves Homer, but he thinks that his passion for poetry must give way to what reason tells him about it. Hence he goes through Homer and Hesiod with an editor's pen, striking passages that cannot stand up to rational scrutiny, much as someone might go through the Bible or Koran striking out passages they took to express true falsehoods. (Thomas Jefferson seems to have been up to something similar in *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, in which he excised all mention of Jesus' divinity, his performing miracles, resurrection, etc.)

Much as censoring stories about the gods is designed to foster the virtue of piety, censoring stories about epic heroes is meant to foster the secular virtues of courage and moderation. If would-be guardians are to acquire the courage-grounding belief that there are things that are worse than death—slavery and dishonor, to name two—they must not be exposed to stories about the horrors of Hades or of heroes lamenting the loss of loved ones. The same goes for moderation (also known as temperance): if young people are to become temperate, they must have exemplars to imitate, which they will not have if they are exposed to stories showing heroes over-indulging in food, drink, and sex, or desiring money or acting arrogantly or being overcome by anger or even laughter. Socrates' point here is that one's culture provides models of appropriate behavior, models that we internalize from a very young age. Although the reasoning is not conscious, the process seems to go something like this: we hear stories of gods acting dishonestly or heroes wailing about death and infer that these are appropriate ways for *us* to behave. 'Everyone will be ready to excuse himself when he is bad', Socrates argues, 'if he is persuaded that similar things [...] have been done in the past by "close descendants of the gods"' (3.391e).

Hence it is vitally important that one be exposed to good models right from the start, where 'good models' does a double duty: good models of good people. That Athenian culture fails in this regard, that its stories traffic in models of clever people acting unjustly and getting away with it, is Adeimantus' complaint.

## Supervising the Storytellers: Musical and Poetic Style (3.392c–401d)

One of the fascinating features of Socrates' account of education broadly construed is that it attends not merely to the *content* of stories and songs, as we might expect, but to their *form* or *style*, as well. The main idea is that a song's musical mode—not exactly equivalent to our notion of key but close enough for our purposes—and its meter or rhythm affect us independently of its words. This issue is connected to a longstanding debate in the philosophy of music about whether music contains emotions or merely excites them—whether, for example the second movement of Schubert's Sonata in A major is sad in itself or whether the sadness is merely evoked in us by the music, which is itself emotionally unladen. How music could encode emotions is a fascinating question, but it is one we need not address here, since what Plato has Socrates say does not require—though it is consistent with—the view that music contains and encodes emotion rather than merely evoking it in listeners.

While Greek musical modes are not identical to keys in Western music, thinking about keys can help us get a sense of how different modes have different emotional tones. The internet can be a great help here, since YouTube is rife with songs in which the key has been shifted from major to minor or minor to major. Consider the Beatles' classic, 'Hey Jude', originally written in F major. Transposed to F minor, it is a very different song: sad, pensive, almost dour. Upbeat pop songs like Cyndi Lauper's 'Girls Just Want to Have Fun' or Cheap Trick's 'I Want You to Want Me' sound sad and ironic when transposed from their original major to the corresponding minor key. Regardless of whether one stands or kneels for 'The Star-Spangled Banner' before a professional football game, it seems like a different song when sung in a minor key. It works the other way, too: R.E.M.'s 'Losing My Religion' sounds happy and optimistic when modulated into A major, as does the theme from *The Godfather*. The lesson here is that the key—or, for Plato, mode—in which a song is sung matters.

So in addition to wanting to 'delete the lamentations and pitiful speeches of famous men' (3.387c), since they cultivate cowardice and indulgence rather than courage and temperance, Socrates also wants to do away with 'the lamenting modes' (3.398e) in his ideal city, since

even without lamenting lyrics, these modes will convey or cultivate these vices, too. The 'soft modes suitable for drinking parties' (3.398e) are out, too. What remains are 'the mode that would suitably imitate the tone and rhythm of a courageous person who is active in battle' and 'another mode, that of someone engaged in a peaceful, unforced voluntary action [...] acting with moderation and self-control' (3.399b), since these modes will cultivate the emotions and thus virtues proper to the would-be guardians.

Socrates pays similar attention to rhythm and meter, aiming to cultivate grace and avoid gracelessness (3.400c). It is important to see that the restrictions on form and style are not afterthoughts, secondary to the restrictions on content. They are in fact more basic, since we are exposed to music well before we can understand the words of the songs our families and fellow-citizens sing to and around us. 'Rhythm and harmony', Socrates says, 'permeate the inner part of the soul more than anything else' (3.401d). Before we can understand the words of songs, we are shaped by their modes and rhythms, and indeed the shaping done by rhythm and harmony is even more important, Socrates thinks, since it begins to work on us at once. The point of proper aesthetic education here is not to come to have knowledge *about* the beautiful, but rather to come to know it directly, to recognize it when we hear and later see it.

## The Aesthetically Beautiful and the Morally Beautiful (3.401d–403c, 412b–e)

At least three other features of Plato's account of aesthetic development are worthy of our attention. The first is that our aesthetic education is in fact the beginning of our moral education. Plato does *not* draw a sharp line, as we moderns tend to, between the beautiful and the morally good. While other approaches to ethics focus on duty and action (for example, the ethics embodied in the Ten Commandments, replete as it is with *Shalts* and *Shalt Nots*, and in the modern era Kant's duty-based deontology), Plato's ethics takes virtue to be central. For a virtue-centered ethics, the fundamental question is not 'What should I do?' but 'What kind of person should I be?' Where duty is essentially imperative, placing demands upon us, virtue is essentially attractive,



expressing ideals of character that we can approach by degrees—and, if Plato is right, that we are drawn to precisely because it is beautiful (καλόν [*kalon*]). Where Kant thought one should be motivated by duty to do one's duty, Plato—and here I am making the safe bet that he would agree with his student Aristotle, who is much more explicit about this than his teacher—holds that the proper moral motivation for performing a certain action is that the action is fine or noble or beautiful—that it is *kalon*, which seamlessly combines aesthetic and moral notions.

Our moral education begins with our aesthetic education because, Plato thinks, proper exposure to beautiful modes, harmonies, and rhythms will cultivate 'the right distastes' and tastes (3.401e) in young people. This is not so they will become cultured aesthetes devoted to the aesthetically beautiful, but rather so they will be able to recognize and become devoted to the morally beautiful. In learning to recognize ugly sounds as ugly we come to learn to recognize shameful actions as shameful. It is no accident that the same Greek word αἰσχρός (*aischros*) means both ugly and shameful. Socrates regards doing injustice as shameful, but the Thrasymachan strongman—and anyone whose moral sensibilities have not been properly cultivated—'has no scruples about doing injustice' (2.362b), since he does not find the very idea repellant. Without radically altering the kind of upbringing and education Athenian popular culture will produce, young people will not be 'disgusted by injustice' (2.366d) but will try to get away with it when they can.

A second important feature is that proper musical education will inculcate correct moral beliefs 'while [we are] still young and unable to grasp the reason' (3.401a). In other words, we will learn *that* certain traits and actions are admirable while others are not—but this will not teach us *why* the morally admirable traits are admirable. For that, we need philosophy. As I have noted already, this is essentially Glaucon's and Adeimantus' position: they believe that justice trumps convenience and self-interest, that the just life is happier than the unjust life, etc., but they recognize that they cannot justify these beliefs. But this underlying moral substrate of proper tastes and distastes—in a word, proper moral sentiments or feelings—is absolutely essential, on Socrates' view. Children who develop in a musically corrupt culture will fail to acquire the correct moral beliefs, because of the false models of beauty they will internalize.

A third feature, closely related to the second, is that properly educated children will love what is beautiful and good. 'Education in music and poetry', says Socrates, 'ought to end in the love of the fine and beautiful (καλοῦ ἐρωτικά [*kalou erôtia*])' (3.403c). It is well worth noting that the 'love' there is *erotic* love: they are in love with what is noble and fine, with what is morally beautiful. So, underlying any cognitive, philosophical grasp of justice is a pre-rational, emotional attachment to it. This comes to the fore later in Book III when Socrates, in addressing the question of who should rule, separates off the guardians from the auxiliaries. We will say more about this in a bit, but it is worth bringing out the connection between love and governing. 'The rulers must be the best of the guardians' (3.412c), Socrates thinks. But in the Book I conversation with Polemarchus he said that the best guardian of something is also its best thief (1.334a). What keeps these guardian-rulers from stealing the city—from 'going Thrasymachan', so to speak, and using their power to benefit themselves—is that they love the city? 'The right kind of love' (the *orthos erôs*) that is the product of proper musical education is 'the love of order and beauty' (3.403a). In loving the city, the guardians identify its good with theirs: '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 will do well, and that if it does badly, then he will do badly too' (3.412d).

Love certainly has an affective or phenomenological dimension: it *feels* a certain way. The variety of poems and pop songs devoted to what love feels like attests to the difficulty of describing the feeling in a non-metaphorical way: love is like a heatwave, love is a flame, etc. But in stressing the belief at the core of love, Plato plays down its affective dimension and plays up its cognitive dimension. We should note an asymmetry to the belief at the heart of Socratic love. In loving you, I identify my wellbeing with yours: I take what is good for you to be good for me. Taking what is good for me to be good for you is another way of creating an identity between your wellbeing and mine, but it is a defective form of love if it is a form of love at all. Many readers know—sadly, some know through first-hand experience—parents who force or at least foist their wellbeing and conceptions of what a good life is onto their children, insisting that the child act for the sake of the parent. In addition to this asymmetry in belief, we should note that love requires

something more than this belief and a feeling of fondness. In addition to love's cognitive and affective dimensions, there is also what we might call (for lack of a better word) its conative dimension, for loving another involves commitment to the other's wellbeing and thus taking actions to promote it, often actions that seem to go against the lover's interests. If I merely believe that your good is thereby also my good but I do nothing to promote your good when I am able to do so, it is hard to take seriously my claim that I love you.

The upshot and real point of proper musical education, then, is that the guardians love the city. Where for Thrasymachus there is a clear gap between *what is good for me* as a ruler and *what is good for the city*, Socratic love for the city closes this gap. That a certain course of action might benefit me as a ruler at the expense of the city gets no traction if I have been properly educated; there just is not any space for such considerations to have any pull. The properly educated ruler would be baffled at the thought that they could gain from selling out the city, since the city's good *is* their good, just as no amount of money would induce a good parent to sell their child into sex slavery.

As we will see momentarily, the city's founders must find ways to test the would-be guardians to discover which of them cannot be induced to give up their love of the city; they must 'make sure that neither compulsion nor magic spells will get them to discard or forget their belief that they must do what is best for the city' (3.412e).

### Physical Education—and Food (3.403c–405a)

Plato says significantly less about physical education, the other prong of the would-be guardians' education. Given that the Greek word here is γυμναστική (*gymnastikê*, from which we get the English word 'gymnastics'), we might expect a discussion of various kinds of exercises, but 'detailed supervision of the body' (3.403d) is not really necessary, Socrates thinks, as a well-cared-for soul will be able to figure out what is appropriate for the body. He will return to the topic of physical education, especially as it concerns soldiering, in Book V.

But here Socrates does offer a of bit detail where food is concerned, with examples drawn from Homer. The soldier-guardians will eat roasted but not boiled meats, presumably because this requires less

equipment to be lugged around. There will be no fish, which as we noted above is a luxury item, no sweet desserts, and no Syracusan or Sicilian delicacies (ὄψον [*opson*]) (3.404d)—though this time Glaucon raises no objection. The guardians' lifestyle should be simple, both musically and physically. Simple music conduces to personal in the soul and simple food conduces to bodily health.

### Symptoms of Poorly Educated Cities: Too Many Lawyers and Doctors (3.405a–408c)

Given how frequently one hears jokes about lawyers and complaints that American society is overly litigious (Google's fascinating Ngram Viewer shows a twofold increase in the use of the word 'litigious' in American English in the last half of the twentieth century), it is likely that many readers will agree with Socrates that an overabundance of lawyers is a symptom of something amiss, bemoaning those who 'take pride in being clever at [...] exploiting every loophole and trick to [ensure that their clients] escape conviction' (3.405c). Fewer, I suspect, are likely to bemoan the presence of doctors, as Socrates does. At least as regards illness resulting from idleness and dubious dietary choices, we may concede that he has a point. But many readers will find what Socrates says about disease and disability shocking and indeed morally abhorrent. His remarks about those who are chronically, incurably ill are apt to make one shudder: 'as for the ones whose bodies are naturally unhealthy or whose souls are incurably evil [...] let the former die of their own accord and put the latter to death' (3.410a).

One reason Socrates' attitude can seem horrifyingly wrongheaded is that it seems driven by the Specialization Principle and his community-mindedness: 'everyone in a well-regulated city has his own work to do and [...] no one has the leisure to be ill and under treatment all his life' (3.406c). Since the chronically ill cannot contribute to the city, the argument seems to go, caring for them would just be a drain on resources. Many readers will insist that individuals have a value that transcends their usefulness or instrumental worth, and that treating them as dispensable cogs in a great machine is profoundly immoral, as it fails to recognize and respect their inherent dignity. Here we seem to find the starkest of clashes between individualism and communitarianism. Without seeking to defend

Socrates' attitude, it is worth noting that this is only half the story, for he also appeals to the perspective of the diseased individual: 'such a person would be of no profit either to himself or to the city' (3.407e); 'his life is of no profit to him if he does not do his work' (3.407a). While this might blunt the sharp edges of Socrates' view, it does so in a way that many people, informed by contemporary thinking on disability or by their own life experiences, will find offensive and profoundly mistaken. For it seems to take as its guide not the perspective of those who are chronically ill or disabled but rather the perspective of healthy people imagining how they would react to permanent disability. Empirical research suggests that the perhaps commonsensical assumption that disabilities make the lives of the disabled significantly if not disastrously worse is mistaken, and many readers will themselves have lives well worth living or will have friends and family members whose lives are well worth living despite their physical and cognitive limitations. We might share some of Socrates' wariness about 'excessive care [and attention] to the body' (3.407b), being aware, as he is not, of the corrosive dangers of cultural norms of physical perfection, without sharing his attitude toward the disabled.

And many will regard Socrates' attitude as not only morally abhorrent, but philosophically suspect, as well. On the medical model of disability, a disability is thought of as an abnormality, such as an inability to walk that in itself significantly impairs its possessor's chances for a happy, flourishing life. But the social model of disability, which is now the standard view in the field of disability studies, challenges the medical model. It distinguishes impairments from disabilities, regarding the inability to walk, for example, as atypical rather than abnormal. It is an impairment, but it is a disability only in a society that is inhospitable to and stigmatizes those who cannot walk. On the social model, being disabled is largely a social fact, turning on the ways in which a society is structured with respect to various impairments. While it might seem 'obvious' that deafness, for example, is a disability, many regard it instead as a difference, and treasure it as part of their identity.

This brief discussion is not meant to suggest that the social model is correct, but rather that thinking about disability has advanced significantly since Socrates' time, and the medical model he assumes to be obviously correct has been called into serious doubt in recent decades.

## Harmony between Musical and Physical Education (3.410a–412b)

As we noted above, Socrates initially said that musical education treats the soul while physical education treats the body (2.376e) but towards the end of Book III he corrects himself, holding that both are 'chiefly for the sake of the soul' (3.410c). And here he hints at the distinction he will make in Book IV between the parts of the soul, suggesting that physical training aims at properly arousing 'the spirited part of one's nature' while musical education tends 'the philosophical part' (3.410d). His overriding concern is that the two parts be brought into harmony or balance. Remember that guardians must be both gentle and high-spirited, traits that are typically not found together and that are in tension when they are. Too much *gumnastikê* and one ends up savage and harsh rather than spirited; too much *mousikê* results in softness rather than gentleness. As noted earlier, the *Republic* is written in the decades following Athens' defeat by Sparta in the nearly three-decades-long Peloponnesian War. It is not a stretch to see Plato here trying to find a balance of the best of the Spartan and Athenian temperaments while avoiding their excesses.

Towards the end of Book III, the artistic culture of the ideal city has been morally purified, lest citizens be harmed by being exposed to 'images of evil' (3.401b), like cows grazing 'in a meadow of bad grass' (3.401c). The potential guardians are subjected from youth on to a series of tests designed to see whether 'their belief[s] that they just do what is best for the city' (3.412e) can survive the blandishments of pleasure, the pressures of compulsion, and the effects of time and rhetoric. Here and elsewhere in Book III Socrates is concerned with changes that escape notice. A potential guardian who can be persuaded by a sophist, such as Thrasymachus, will not pass muster, since clever rhetoric can 'take away their opinions without their realizing it' (3.413b).

After describing the tests employed, Socrates distinguishes 'complete guardians' from the auxiliaries, resulting in a city with three classes: guardians or rulers, auxiliaries, and craftspeople. As will become clear, these are not socioeconomic classes but rather political classes, distinguished not by wealth but by political authority. The rulers and their helpers—that is, the guardians and the auxiliaries—live a spare,



communal lifestyle, owning no private property, and living together in military-style barracks, as befits ‘warrior athletes’ (3.416e). Though it might be tempting to think that those who pass these exacting tests are guardians while those who do not are merely auxiliaries, this clearly will not do: the auxiliaries must also be ‘guardians of this conviction [...] that they must do what is best for the city’ (3.412e). The difference is age and experience: the auxiliaries are ‘young people’ (3.414b), while presumably the guardians, like good judges, are older and have more experience. A good judge, Socrates thinks, ‘has learned late in life what injustice is like and who has become aware of it not as something at home in his soul, but as something alien and present in others, someone who, after a long time, has recognized that injustice is bad by nature, not from his own experience of it, but through knowledge’ (3.409b). We will soon see that a crucial difference between auxiliaries and guardians is that the auxiliaries have unshakable and true *beliefs* about what is best for the city, the guardians have something even firmer: they have *knowledge* of what is best for the city

### The Noble Falsehood (3.414b–417b)

The structure of the ideal city now set, Socrates offers a three-part foundational myth for the ideal city, which he calls the ‘noble falsehood’ (3.414b). He imagines telling the first-generation citizens of the now-completed city that they are born from the earth, which is their mother. They literally are of the soil—the soil of *this* place. This presumably will make them eager to defend their city-state, as one would be eager to defend one’s mother. The second part of the myth follows from the first: since they are born of the same soil, they are all related, all brothers and sisters. Thinking of one’s fellow citizens as family, he thinks, will bind the city together as one, making the citizens love each other as family members ideally do. For many of us, family bonds transcend reasons in an interesting and important way: whether one’s siblings *merit* one’s love seems beside the point; the basis of family affection is the bare fact of being related: that someone is your brother or sister itself provides reasons for action. Some philosophers are suspicious of the kind of loyalty that is grounded in pure relations rather than reasons, since it can lead to immoral or illegal actions, as many a *Law & Order* episode

will attest. While we might expect Socrates to explore and question such loyalty, instead he exploits it, finding unifying power in familial love. Readers will remember that among the restrictions on stories about the gods is that no stories about gods hating or fighting each other will be allowed, since 'we want the guardians of our city to think that it is shameful to be easily provoked into hating one another' (2.378b), which is 'impious' (2.378c).

The last element of the Noble Falsehood is the famous Myth of the Metals: 'the god who made you mixed some gold into those who are adequately equipped to rule [...] He put silver in those who are auxiliaries and iron and bronze in the farmers and other craftsmen' (3.415a). So each class of the city is distinguished by the kind of metal that dominates the souls of its members. This is one of the most interesting as well as objectionable parts of the *Republic*. Its interest, I think, is its indicating Plato's awareness of the importance of myth in public life, especially myths of origin. Though humans are rational, we are not entirely rational. Earlier, Socrates appealed to the love the guardians have for the city as the glue binding them to it, although it is a love more cognitive than affective. And we just saw that the primary purpose of the second part of the Noble Falsehood is to cause the citizens to love each other. In having Socrates offer the Noble Falsehood, Plato is acknowledging the power and importance of myth, not just to human self-understanding but to the formation of a people of a nation or, here, a city-state. What the Myth of the Metals does is to provide a narrative understanding and mythic justification of the ideal city's three-part and decidedly non-egalitarian structure. The guardians' most important task, Socrates says, is to guard against 'the mixture of metals in the souls of the next generation' (3.415b), for 'the city will be ruined if it ever has an iron or bronze guardian' (3.415c). Oddly, there is no claim that letting the silver-souled auxiliaries rule would have this destructive power.

It is clear that Socrates must think of the Noble Falsehood as a merely verbal falsehood, 'one of those useful falsehoods' (3.414b) mentioned at the end of Book II, rather than a true or genuine falsehood, which is a falsehood 'about the most important things' (2.382a). Thrasymachus' belief that the unjust life is the happier life would be a true falsehood, on Socrates' view. It is not a true *lie*, since lying requires intentional

deception, trying to get others to believe what you regard as false, and there is nothing to suggest that Thrasymachus does not sincerely hold the view he espouses. But, on Socrates' view, anyway, it is a true falsehood. It is not just factually false, but morally false and profoundly damaging to someone who believes it, since someone who lives their life by it cannot be happy (a claim he will try to prove in the last third of the *Republic*). Like the allowable stories about the gods and heroes, the Noble Falsehood is factually false—the citizens are *not* in fact born from the soil and are not actually distinguished by the kinds of metals in their souls. But its message, Socrates thinks, is deeply true.

This is where the Noble Falsehood is apt to seem most objectionable, for the profound claim it expresses, cloaked in mythic garb, is that human beings are *not* created equal. The guardians are simply more valuable than the craftspeople, Socrates holds, in the same way that the sexist thinks that men are just more valuable than women and the racist thinks that white people are just more valuable, possess more intrinsic worth, than non-whites. Anyone who subscribes to the fundamental moral and political equality of human beings will have to regard Socrates' Noble Falsehood as not merely a verbal falsehood but rather a true falsehood, with profoundly harmful consequences to those who believe it. If it is a compelling myth, a craftsman will see nothing amiss in not having a voice in how the *polis* is governed; it is just not their place. Much of the power of myth is ideological: making what is contingent and constructed seem natural and necessary. In a memorable passage from *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Frederick Douglass recalls having been

taught from the pulpit at St. Michael's, the duty of obedience to our masters; to recognize God as the author of our enslavement; to regard running away an offense, alike against God and man; to deem our enslavement a merciful and beneficial arrangement [...] to consider our hard hands and dark color as God's mark of displeasure, and as pointing us out as the proper objects of slavery.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave/ My Bondage and My Freedom/ Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates (New York: Library of America: 1994), p. 306.

Douglass, being Douglass, is able to pierce the veil of racist ideology in which slavery is clothed. He recognizes that, the Bible (or supposedly authoritative interpretations of it) notwithstanding, he is *not* a proper object of slavery: no one is. But such is the power of ideology and myth to make a contingent institution like slavery seem to be metaphysically necessary and ordained by God.

I suspect that most readers will agree that the Noble Falsehood is in fact a true falsehood, rather than the beneficial verbal falsehood Socrates takes it to be, since it denies the fundamental equality of all persons. I should stress that to believe in human equality is not to believe that all humans are equally able to do calculus, hit a curveball, nurture their children, etc. It is not a belief in *factual* equality. It is a belief in *moral* equality, in the equal dignity of all persons.

There are many places where the *Republic* butts up against deeply held but often implicit and perhaps unjustified beliefs many of us have. And though there are times when we are likely to arch our eyebrows and wonder if Plato is not really onto something in thinking as he does, I do not think this is one of those times.

## Some Suggestions for Further Reading

Readers interested in philosophical issues raised by music will find Peter Kivy, *Introduction to a Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002) well worth their time.

Less is known about ancient Greek music than one might expect, but interested readers should see M. L. West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

Readers interested in Jefferson's Bible can find it at the Smithsonian Institute's webpage: <http://americanhistory.si.edu/jeffersonbible/>.

Readers interested in issues around disability will find Andrew Solomon, *Far From the Tree: Parents, Children, and the Search for Identity* (New York: Scribner, 2012), especially its first chapter, well worth reading. For a clear-headed, clearly written contemporary philosophical take on disability, see Elizabeth Barnes, *The Minority Body: A Theory of Disability* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Readers interested in exploring conceptual and ethical issues about deception and lying might start with Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).