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True in Word and Deed: Plato on the Impossibility of Divine Deception

NICHOLAS R. BAIMA AND TYLER PAYTAS*

ABSTRACT A common theological perspective holds that God does not deceive because lying is morally wrong. While Plato denies the possibility of divine deception in the *Republic*, his explanation does not appeal to the wrongness of lying. Indeed, Plato famously recommends the careful use of lies as a means of promoting justice. Given his endorsement of occasional lying, as well as his claim that humans should strive to emulate the gods, Plato's suggestion that the gods never have reason to lie is puzzling. Our solution to this puzzle centers on the fact that, unlike humans, the gods are self-sufficient. Although lying is good for the souls of neither humans nor gods, human interdependency necessitates lies that will prevent material harms and maintain a just order. In contrast, the self-sufficiency of the gods makes it impossible for them to benefit from deception.

KEYWORDS Plato, Socrates, *Republic*, divine deception, noble lie, friendship

Since God is omnipotent, he cannot die, he cannot be deceived, nor can he lie; and, as the Apostle says, 'He cannot deny himself.' . . . For if he could die, he would not be omnipotent; if he could lie, be deceived, deceive, or act in any unjust way, he would not be omnipotent, because if this were in him, he would not have been worthy to be omnipotent. (Augustine, *ymb. cat.* 1.2, CCL 46, 185–86)¹

By 'God' I mean the very being the idea of whom is within me, that is, the possessor of all the perfections which I cannot grasp . . . who is subject to no defects whatsoever. It is clear enough from this that he cannot be a deceiver, since it is manifest by the natural light that fraud and deception depend on some defect. (Descartes, *Meditations*, AT VII.52/CSM II.35)

THE PRIMARY AIM OF THIS ARTICLE is to elucidate a novel interpretive puzzle, which we call the 'Platonic divine deception puzzle.' The epigraphs above represent a

¹The citation scheme refers to section 1, paragraph 2 of the *Corpus Christianorum* version of Augustine's *ymb. cat.*, which is located in volume 46 of that series on pages 185–86.

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common theological perspective on God's ability to lie.² Augustine, Descartes, and many other philosophers and theologians maintain that God cannot lie because deception is immoral and thereby incompatible with divine attributes such as moral perfection. In the *Republic*, Plato agrees that the gods do not deceive, but his explanation is different.³ Plato does not share the view that lying is always wrong; for instance, he maintains that it is appropriate to lie in order to prevent the ignorant or the insane from doing wrong (*Republic* 382c).⁴ Further, Plato's Kallipolis is founded on a noble lie (γενναῖον ψεῦδος) in which the philosopher rulers deceive the inferior citizens in order to create and maintain a just society (*Republic* 414b–15d). Yet, according to Plato, the gods never lie because they have no reason to (*Republic* 382e). This is puzzling for at least two reasons. First, Plato claims that humans ought to strive to emulate the gods (*Republic* 383c, 500c–d, 501b, and 613a).⁵ If lying is something the gods would never do, then Plato's endorsement of human lying is in tension with the assimilation directive. Second, if lying is a legitimate and effective means of facilitating justice within both an individual and a society, then we might expect that the gods, who love justice and the good, would have similar reasons to utilize deception.⁶

After developing the Platonic divine deception puzzle, we explore a number of solutions, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each position. Our preferred solution to the puzzle is found in Plato's conception of friend and enemy in the *Republic*. For humans, friends are those individuals who are beneficial and good, while enemies are those who are useless and bad. Because we are not self-sufficient, we must live in societies and interact with individuals who stand toward us as both friend and enemy. These relations sometimes necessitate beneficial lies. Since the gods are self-sufficient, they have no need for such relations and the lies that they necessitate. Further, although the gods love all that is just and therefore love humans who are just, this does not imply that the gods benefit from humans becoming just. Hence, humans who become just are not friends of the gods in the relevant sense of 'friend,' and the fact that certain lies (such as the noble lie) can facilitate justice in humans is not a reason for the gods to tell them.

The remainder of this article is divided into five sections. In section 1, we examine the relevant passages from *Republic* 2 in order to explicate the divine deception puzzle more fully. Sections 2 and 3 comprise discussions of initially tempting solutions that are ultimately problematic, including the possibility that Socrates's claim that the gods do not deceive is itself a noble lie. In section 4, we

²For an account of how Christian theologians and philosophers have addressed this issue throughout history, see Dallas Denery, *The Devil Wins*.

³When discussing god, Plato frequently alternates between the singular and the plural. For a recent discussion, see Gerd Van Riel, *Plato's Gods*, 34–37.

⁴Translations of the *Republic* follow C. D. C. Reeve's translation, with some minor changes. For Plato's other work, we follow (roughly) those found in John Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson's *Plato: Complete Works*. The Greek text for the *Republic* follows Slings's *Platonis Rempublicam*; for Plato's other works, it follows the latest edition of the *Platonis Opera*.

⁵See also, *Theaetetus* 176a–b; *Laws* 716c–17b; *Timaeus* 90b–d; *Phaedrus* 246b–49c, 253a; *Symposium* 207d; and *Phaedo* 69a–c. For a discussion, see David Sedley, "The Ideal of Godlikeness"; and Jean-François Pradeau, "L'assimilation au Dieu"; and Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New*, 52–71.

⁶For a discussion, see Franco Ferrari, "Theologia."

present our favored solution, which appeals to the nature of certain social relations and the self-sufficiency of the gods. Finally, in section 5, we explain the sense in which humans who practice justice can become friends to the gods, despite the fact that humans cannot benefit the gods. A brief conclusion follows.

I. THE PLATONIC DIVINE DECEPTION PUZZLE

The Greek word *ψεῦδος* is ambiguous between ‘lie’ and ‘mere falsehood.’⁷ The difference between a lie and a falsehood is the intention. All instances of *ψεῦδος* involve falsehood, but not all instances involve intentionally telling a falsehood. Accordingly, the context determines whether ‘lie’ or ‘falsehood’ is the appropriate translation of *ψεῦδος*. That Plato is tolerant not only of falsehoods but also of lies is clear from his discussion with Cephalus in Book 1 of the *Republic*.

In Book 1, Cephalus tells Socrates that wealth is important for good and orderly people because it allows them to be just and thus allows them to secure a good afterlife. He explains:

Not cheating or lying to someone against one’s will [τὸ γὰρ μηδὲ ἄκοντά τινα ἐξαπατήσαι ἢ ψεύσασθαι], not owing a sacrifice to some god or money to a person, and as a result departing for that other world in fear—the possession of wealth makes no small contribution to this. (*Republic* 331b1–4)

Socrates responds by pointing out that justice is not simply a matter of speaking the truth or paying whatever debts one has incurred (*Republic* 331c). For instance, he says:

Everyone would surely agree that if a man borrows weapons from a sane [σωφρονοῦντος] friend, and if he goes insane [μᾶνεις] and asks for them back, the friend should not return them, and would not be just if he did. Nor should anyone be willing to tell the whole truth to someone in such a state. (*Republic* 331c5–8)⁸

Hence, sometimes it is inappropriate to pay back what one owes and to tell the whole truth.⁹

Socrates further explains what he has in mind in an obscure passage in Book 2, where he discusses with Adeimantus the musical education of young children. Currently, the Greeks teach their children stories of Hesiod, Homer, and other

⁷*Ψεῦδος* can also mean fiction; we will address this issue further below. For a discussion on Archaic Greek views of fiction and falsehood, see Louise Pratt, *Lying and Poetry*. The main falsehoods in the *Republic* are found at 382a–d, 414b–15c, 416c–17b, 459c–60c, 468d–69b, and 614b–21b.

⁸One might object that this does not demonstrate that Plato supports lying or telling falsehoods, but only supports the lesser claim that Plato permits not telling the whole truth, which, of course, is not the same as lying. However, if anything, this passage demonstrates that Plato is not concerned with the distinction between lying and not telling the truth. After all, Cephalus’s account of justice at 331b includes not lying; hence, for Socrates’s objection to work he must give an account in which lying or its equivalent is just, which means we must treat not telling the whole truth as equivalent to lying. See also, *Republic* 535d–e.

⁹One might think that this passage conflicts with what Socrates says at 389b–c, in which he restricts lying in the Kallipolis to the rulers. However, this conflict is easily resolved. First, this passage occurs before the discussion of the Kallipolis and what is permitted in the Kallipolis might differ from what is permitted outside the Kallipolis. Second, Socrates’s point at 389b–c is not the extreme position that good consequences can never result from a non-philosopher lying. Rather, Socrates is making a statement about what will generally happen if non-philosophers lie. See Baima, “Death,” 277.

poets. Socrates finds these stories objectionable and not suitable for his ideal city because they misrepresent the gods in two ways. First, in these stories the gods behave viciously (*Republic* 377d–78e). Socrates, for example, says that Hesiod tells the “greatest falsehood about the greatest things” (τὸ μέγιστον καὶ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων ψεῦδος) when he describes Uranus, Cronus, and Zeus warring with each other (*Republic* 377e6–78a1).¹⁰ Stories like this are incorrect because the gods are purely good, and thus, can only cause goodness (*Republic* 379c).¹¹ Accordingly, Socrates banishes all stories that portray the gods causing bad things (*Republic* 379c–80c).

Second, the current stories portray the gods as deceiving humans by changing shape (*Republic* 380c–d). Socrates objects to the gods changing because “the best things are least liable to alteration or change” (*Republic* 380e3–4). For instance, a “soul that is most courageous and most knowledgeable” is least disturbed or altered by external forces (*Republic* 381a3–4), and the same principle applies to manufactured goods (*Republic* 381a6–9). “So whatever is in good condition—whether due to nature or craft or both—is least subject to change by something else” (*Republic* 381b1–2). Since gods and the things belonging to them are best in every way, they are least likely to change because of some external force (*Republic* 381b). Moreover, because gods are in the best possible form, any alteration would be into something worse (*Republic* 381b–c). And because gods and humans do not deliberately make themselves worse, no god would intentionally alter himself and “must always unqualifiedly retain his own form” (*Republic* 381c6–8).

This leads Socrates to ask, “But, though, the gods themselves are the sorts of things that cannot change, do they make us think that they appear in multifarious guises, deceiving us and using sorcery on us?” (*Republic* 381e8–10). That is, “Would a god be willing to lie by presenting in word or deed what is only an illusion?” (*Republic* 382a1–2). When Adeimantus expresses that he is unsure, Socrates responds by distinguishing between a true or genuine lie and an impure lie.¹² A genuine lie involves being ignorant about the “most authoritative things” (τῶ κυριωτάτῳ) (*Republic* 382a7–9) and because of this all gods and humans hate a genuine lie (*Republic* 382a4–5).¹³ In contrast, an impure lie “is a sort of imitation

¹⁰See Hesiod, *Theogony*, 154–210 and 453–506.

¹¹See also, *Laws* 900c–d and 941b.

¹²At *Republic* 382a4, Socrates first describes the genuine lie as τὸ γὰρ ἀληθῶς ψεῦδος and then at 382c4 τὸ μὲν δὴ τῶ ὄντι ψεῦδος. It is obvious from the context that Socrates is describing the same thing with two different terms and it is being contrasted with the impure lie (οὐ πᾶν ἄκρατον ψεῦδος—literally, “not entirely pure lie” [382c1–2]). It is difficult to determine what the exact distinction between a genuine lie and an impure lie is, and in this article, we will deal with this issue in a rough manner for two reasons. First, one of us has already developed an interpretation in another article (Baima, “Falsehood”). Second, our present reading of this passage follows conventional lines. Debates mostly center around how to interpret “the most authoritative things.” There are two main interpretations. The first holds that the most authoritative things are Forms (see Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith, “Dishonesty”; Deborah De Chiara-Quenzer, “To Lie or Not to Lie,” 34; David Simpson, “Plato and Nietzsche”; Raphael Woolf, “Truth as a Value in Plato’s *Republic*”; and David L. Williams, “Plato’s Noble Lie”). The second holds that they are ethical facts (see Carl Page, “The Truth about Lies in Plato’s *Republic*”; Reeve, *Plato: Republic*, xx–xxii; *Philosopher-Kings*, ch. 4). For present purposes, not much will turn on what exactly Socrates means here because both views agree that “the most authoritative things” are related to goodness, they merely disagree about the relation.

¹³Socrates also describes the genuine lie as taking place in the most authoritative part of oneself, which would appear to mean either in one’s soul or in the reasoning part of one’s soul (see Baima, “Falsehood,” 3–4).

of this affection in the soul, an image of it that comes into being after it" (*Republic* 382b8–c2). Socrates describes this as "a lie in words" (τὸ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ψεύδος) and explains that it is useful "when we are dealing with enemies, or with so-called friends [τῶν καλουμένων φίλων] who, because of insanity [μανίαν] or ignorance [ἄνοιαν], are attempting to do something bad [κακόν]" (*Republic* 382c7–10). It is like a "useful drug" (φάρμακον χρήσιμον) for preventing them from doing bad (*Republic* 382c10–d1). Additionally, when we discuss ancient events that we are ignorant of (see *Republic* 376e–378e), impure lies can be useful if "they are like the truth as much as possible" (*Republic* 382d1–4).¹⁴

In these passages, we see that there are three ways that an impure lie can be useful to humans: (U₁) it can be a useful device for giving an account of historical events that you are ignorant of so long as the lie is made like the truth as much as possible; (U₂) it can be a useful device for deceiving enemies who intend to harm you; and (U₃) it can be a useful device for preventing your so-called friends from doing something bad out of ignorance or insanity.

Although a "lie in words" can be useful for humans, it is never useful for a god. Socrates and Adeimantus explain why U₁–U₃ never apply to gods. Socrates asks, for instance, "Would he [a god] lie by making likeness of the truth about ancient events because of his ignorance of them?" (*Republic* 382d7). Adeimantus responds, "it would be ridiculous to think that" (*Republic* 382d8). Next, Socrates asks whether a god "would lie through fear of his enemies" (*Republic* 382d11), to which Adeimantus replies, "far from it" (*Republic* 382e1). Finally, Socrates asks whether a god would lie "because of the foolishness or insanity of his family or friends [οἰκείων]" (*Republic* 382e2). Adeimantus rejects this possibility because "no one who is foolish or insane is a friend of the gods [θεοφιλῆς]" (*Republic* 382e3). This leads Socrates to conclude:

So both what is daimonic and what is divine is entirely free of falsehood. . . . A god, then, is altogether simple, true in both word and deed. He does not change himself or deceive others by means of images, by words, or by sending signs, whether they are awake or dreaming. (*Republic* 382e6–11)¹⁵

Although Socrates and Adeimantus do not explicitly state why U₁ and U₂ do not apply to gods, the answers are rather obvious. U₁ is a ridiculous reason for gods to lie because gods are not ignorant of ancient events. U₂ is ruled out because the gods cannot be harmed and thus have nothing to fear (*Republic* 381a–c). Simply put, the gods are too knowledgeable and powerful to benefit along the lines of U₁ and U₂.

While Plato's reasons against U₁ and U₂ applying to the gods are plausible, his rejection of U₃ is strange, at least to a modern reader. For we typically conceive of God as a sort of friend to us—at least insofar as God is a benefactor. So we might expect the gods to have reasons to lie to us when we are on the verge of behaving badly due to ignorance or insanity. This is not the kind of answer that we get, however. We are told, rather, that the gods do not lie to the ignorant or insane because they are not friends with them.

¹⁴See also, Hesiod, *Theogony*, 27–28; Elizabeth Belfiore, "Plato on Hesiod"; and Pratt, *Lying and Poetry*, 147n26.

¹⁵See also, *Republic* 383a; and *Euthyphro* 6a–c.

This is all the more puzzling when we consider two things. First, in Book 3, Plato tells us that philosophers' epistemic and moral superiority permits them to lie to non-philosophers. Consider the following passage:

Moreover, we have to be concerned about truth as well. For if what we said just now is correct and a lie is really useless to the gods, but useful to human beings as a form of drug, it is clear that it must be assigned to doctors, whereas private individuals must have nothing to do with it. . . . It is appropriate for the rulers, then, if anyone, to lie because of enemies or citizens for the good of the city. But no one else may have anything to do with it. (*Republic* 389b2–10)

Plato's point is that doctors know things about medicine and health that non-doctors do not know, and because of this, doctors are more successful at healing patients than non-doctors are. This is why doctors should issue prescriptions and non-doctors should defer to the opinion of medical experts with respect to health (389c). When Socrates says that useful lies must be assigned to doctors, he is speaking metaphorically. The philosopher rulers serve as "doctors" for the city and its citizens; they know things about goodness and politics that non-philosophers do not know, and because of this knowledge philosopher rulers are more successful at ruling than non-philosophers are. Philosophers' political expertise includes knowing when it is best to lie, and because of this they are permitted to lie. Since non-philosophers lack this knowledge, they are not permitted to lie.¹⁶

Hence, Plato appears to be advancing the following principle:

Individual *A* can justifiably lie to individual *B* if *A* is sufficiently epistemically and morally superior to *B*, and *A* has strong reasons to believe that the lie will benefit *B*.

With this principle, we would expect that the gods would occasionally have reasons to lie. Indeed, in response to Descartes's claim that God does not deceive, Marin Mersenne follows a similar line of reasoning when he asks how Descartes concludes, "that we cannot be deceived by him [God]? Cannot God treat men as a doctor treats the sick, or a father his children? In both these cases there is frequent deception though it is always employed beneficially and with wisdom" (AT VII.126/CSM II.90).¹⁷

Second, after Socrates asserts that the impure lie can be useful for humans and is never useful for gods, he tells us that humans should aspire to be as godlike as possible:

Whenever anyone says such things about a god [viz. that a god deceives], we will be angry with him, refuse him a chorus, and not allow teachers to use what he says for the education of the young—not if our guardians are going to be as god-fearing and godlike as human beings can be. (*Republic* 383c1–5)

¹⁶Additionally, philosopher rulers are permitted to lie because they have a general love for truth that non-philosophers do not have (see *Republic* 474c–75d, 485c–d, and 490a–c). This makes it likely that philosophers will only lie when it is absolutely necessary; see Baima "Falsehood," "Philosopher Rulers and False Beliefs," and "Death"; Brickhouse and Smith, "Dishonesty," 84; Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 166–67; and Schofield, "The Noble Lie," 148.

¹⁷Descartes boldly replies to this objection by saying that he thinks he is "in agreement with all metaphysicians and theologians past and future" that God cannot deceive (AT VII.142/CSM II.102). Erik Wielenberg, "Divine Deception," defends the claim that it is conceptually possible for God to deceive for reasons that are similar to those advanced by Mersenne.

Thus, Plato is committed to the following three claims:

1. Humans ought to lie on certain occasions.
2. The gods never have reasons to lie.
3. Humans should be as godlike as possible.

Of course, the qualification in (3) prevents these three commitments from contradicting each other.¹⁸ Nonetheless, it is strange that Plato would introduce a lie that humans ought to tell but gods never would and then say that humans should be as godlike as possible.¹⁹ Moreover, it would seem that the gods' love of justice would give them reason to facilitate justice by telling noble lies. We shall now explore some possible explanations for these perplexing features of Plato's discussion of divine deception.

2. CANDIDATE SOLUTIONS

One initially tempting strategy involves attributing to Plato the traditional theological position that lying is categorically immoral, and that the gods are incapable of acting immorally. This line of argument is implicit in the work of Gregory Vlastos. For instance, in response to *Apology* 21b6–7, where Socrates says that it “would not be right” (οὐ γὰρ θεῖμιν αὐτῷ) for a god (Apollo) to lie, Vlastos writes:

Why so? The gods in whom the city believes have no such scruples. They have been lying since Homer. Why should Socrates think his god would be so different? Because, as we saw earlier, unlike their gods, Socrates's god is invariantly good, incapable of causing any evil to anyone at any time. Since to deceive a man is to do evil to him, Socrates's god cannot be lying. (“Socratic Piety,” 72)

One way to defend the claim that the gods do not lie because lying is morally wrong is to argue that the “lies” told by philosophers, which are said to be justified, are really fictions. One might argue, for example, that such “genuine lies” are acceptable because they are really just didactic fictions—allegories used to educate the citizens.²⁰ One defense of this reading might appeal to *Republic* 377a4–5, where Socrates says that myths are “false, taken as a whole, but also have truth in them.”

The main problem with this proposed solution to the divine deception puzzle is that it is implausible to read the rigged sexual lottery of Book 5 (*Republic* 459e–460b) allegorically—it is a straightforward lie.²¹ In order to secure the best genetic population in the Kallipolis, Socrates wants to control the breeding of the citizens. In this system, the best citizens will procreate the most with other carefully selected citizens. Socrates realizes, however, that this will lead some citizens to complain that they are being treated unfairly. To counteract potential dissent, the citizens will be told that the mating arrangements are determined by a lottery and not chosen by the rulers. In reality, the rulers are making the decisions. This is an

¹⁸See Van Riel, *Plato's Gods*, 22–23; cf. Michael Bordt, *Platons Theologie*, 184n70.

¹⁹For a careful study on the different meanings of “godlike” (θεῖος), see Jean Van Camp and Paul Canart, *Le Sens*, 412.

²⁰See George Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, 184–87; Schofield, “Noble Lie”; Bloom, *Republic of Plato*, xviii–xix, 365; and G. R. F. Ferrari, “Plato on Poetry.”

²¹See Brickhouse and Smith, “Dishonesty,” 83–84, cf. 94n10.

unequivocal lie. Hence, Plato clearly believes that humans ought to lie sometimes, but for some unknown reason the considerations that generate these oughts cannot constitute reasons for the gods. The challenge is to uncover the respective features of gods and humans that make it the case that facilitating justice in human beings is not a sufficient reason for gods to deceive.

A variation of Vlastos's position maintains that lying is intrinsically bad but overall justified when it promotes goodness in the cosmos (e.g. by helping someone else become just, maintaining justice in the city, etc.). Here the explanation for the gods not having reason to lie would be that their divine nature prevents them from doing things that are inherently evil, even when the act would have overall good consequences. One could argue that although lying is intrinsically bad, humans (as beings without divine moral perfection) are capable of using deception and justified in doing so when this will promote goodness.

While we believe the inherent badness of lying is part of the solution to the divine deception puzzle, it cannot be the whole story. Note that when he explains why the gods have no reason to lie, Socrates never makes an explicit appeal to the inherent evil of lying. If the gods' inability to do intrinsically bad things were the entire explanation, it would make more sense for Socrates to say so rather than giving the somewhat convoluted account involving U_1 , U_2 , and U_3 . As will become clear in section 4, a desideratum for an adequate solution to the puzzle is that it directly explains Socrates's rather obscure explanation, especially concerning U_3 .

A second strategy for resolving the divine deception puzzle involves holding that the gods do deceive, and that when Socrates claims otherwise he is himself telling a lie. This is not a promising strategy. Note that when Socrates describes the gods he is both speaking about the educational program of the Kallipolis and speaking to Glaucon and Adeimantus directly. While Socrates endorses the use of deception in certain contexts, we have no reason to think that he would be dishonest when discussing important topics with his friends under normal circumstances. Aside from when he is clearly being ironic or speaking to sophists, it is reasonable to assume that Socrates is being truthful. And given the reasonableness of this assumption, Plato would be at serious risk of misleading his readers by having Socrates deceive his interlocutors without signaling that this is the case. The fact that this interpretation makes Socrates a liar and Plato a misleading writer is a significant strike against it. Hence, although this interpretation is able to overcome the divine deception puzzle swiftly, the problems it faces seem more damning than the puzzle itself. Therefore, alternative solutions to the puzzle are likely preferable.

3. SOUL-BUILDING

The divine deception puzzle shares similarities with two important topics within philosophy of religion: the problem of evil and the problem of divine hiddenness. The problem of evil is that of explaining how any of the seemingly pointless suffering on earth could be consistent with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect being. The problem of divine hiddenness arises from the lack of an explanation for why a being possessing the divine attributes would choose not to make his existence evident, given the numerous benefits that human knowledge of God would presumably bring (e.g. emotional consolation,

deterrence from harms, developing relationships with God, etc.). What these problems share in common with our present topic is the difficulty in explaining why a divine being would choose not to take certain actions that would presumably make the world a better place.²²

One influential strategy for responding to the problems of evil and hiddenness makes an appeal to the value of moral virtue and the fact that adversity is necessary for its development. The general idea is that God is justified in allowing suffering or remaining hidden because this is the only way in which genuine moral growth could occur. The suffering we encounter in the world (perhaps including the harms arising through ignorance of God) is an unavoidable byproduct of the conditions necessary for moral development, such as genuine freedom and the experience of conflict between duty and self-interest. Since human virtue is plausibly seen as one of God's primary purposes in creating the world, the purported necessities of suffering and hiddenness for morality constitute initially plausible solutions to these problems.²³

The overall success of soul-building theodicies and responses to divine hiddenness remains a highly contentious matter.²⁴ However, it is worth considering whether appealing to the necessary background conditions for human virtue might resolve the puzzle arising from Plato's claim that the gods have no reason to lie. We can begin this investigation by noting Plato's various assertions that the just and virtuous among human beings are friends to the gods.²⁵ There are a few different ways we might understand this claim, but one possibility is that the gods benefit from human beings becoming good.²⁶ In order to see the ways in which human goodness might benefit the gods, let us examine C. C. W. Taylor's interpretation of the *Euthyphro*.

At 12e, Euthyphro suggests that piety is the part of justice that is concerned with the care (θεραπεία) of the gods. Eventually, this account is rejected because it suggests that the thing being cared for is less excellent than the thing caring for it (*Euthyphro* 13c–d). For example, the dog depends on and needs the dog-trainer in a certain way that the dog-trainer does not depend on and need the

²²For a general overview of the problem of evil, see Michael Tooley, "The Problem of Evil." The most influential presentation of the problem of divine hiddenness is in J. L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*.

²³For an influential presentation of this brand of theodicy, see John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*. The corresponding response to divine hiddenness is most commonly associated with Kant (*CP/R* 5:147–48).

²⁴For critiques of this strategy in response to evil, see Tooley, "The Problem of Evil." For criticism of the Kantian response to divine hiddenness, see Watkins, "Kant on the Hiddenness of God." For a reconstruction and defense of Kant's argument, see Paytas, "God's Awful Majesty."

²⁵See *Republic* 335a, 352b, 501c, 560b, 612c–13b, and 621c–d; *Philebus* 39c; and *Laws* 716e. Aristotle, *EE* VII.3, 1238b26–30 and VII.10, 1242a32–6; *EN* X.8, 1179a23–32; cf. *EN* VIII.7, 1158b33–59a8; *MM* II.11, 1208b3–35. In Book 2, Adeimantus contends that we need not fear the gods if (a) they do not exist, (b) they are indifferent to human misconduct, or (c) they can be persuaded (*Republic* 364b–66b; see also, *Laws* 885b). The *Republic* ends with the myth of Er, which addresses these concerns. In the myth of Er, we are told that the gods exist and are not indifferent to our conduct in this life. Rather, the gods will love or hate us based on our character and will reward or punish us accordingly; see especially, 612c.

²⁶A different possibility is that virtuous humans are friends to the gods in the more minimal sense that the gods approve of them. We explain why this is ultimately our preferred reading in section 5 below.

dog. Additionally, the dog-trainer's ability to teach and care for the dog displays that the dog-trainer has epistemic abilities that the dog lacks. This clearly does not match our relationship to the gods because it would mean that humans are in some sense superior to gods, just as the dog-trainer is in some sense superior to the dog.

To avoid this, Euthyphro suggests that piety is really service (ὕπηρετική) to the gods in the way that a slave serves a master (*Euthyphro* 13d). This leads to an inquiry into what product the gods achieve through their servants (*Euthyphro* 13e). After some discussion, the question shifts to what are the fine things that the gods achieve (*Euthyphro* 14a). Euthyphro answers that pious prayers and sacrifices preserve public and private affairs, while the opposite destroys them (*Euthyphro* 14a–b). On Euthyphro's view, gods and humans are in a relationship of bartering and trading (*Euthyphro* 14e–15b). This leads to a host of questions and eventually Euthyphro contradicts himself (*Euthyphro* 15b–e). Soon after this, the dialogue ends and we are never told explicitly what good product humans could assist the gods in producing.

Taylor offers the following suggestion:

Plainly the gods do not need human help in creating and maintaining the natural world, assuming those to be divine tasks. But there is one good product which they cannot produce without human assistance, namely, good human souls. For a good human soul is a self-directed soul, one whose choices are informed by its knowledge of and love of the good. A good world must contain such souls and hence, if the beneficent divine purpose is to be achieved, human beings must play their part by knowing (and hence loving) the good and acting in accordance with that knowledge. ("The End of the *Euthyphro*," 113)²⁷

If Taylor is right about this, then we have a clear answer to the question of why the gods love us when we are good. The gods are interested in bringing about a good world, and in order to have a good world, they need us to be good humans.

Now, if the gods need us to be good for the completion of their divine project, this would make it even harder to understand why they would not have reasons to tell us beneficial lies analogous to those that philosophers tell non-philosophers and that everyone tells to friends suffering from ignorance or insanity. However, Taylor's explanation for the gods needing humans to become good might actually contain the key to solving the puzzle. The potential key is located in the notion of self-direction that Taylor refers to. It is highly plausible that the goodness that inheres in good human souls can only be realized through self-direction. While Kant presents the idea that human virtue cannot arise through external forces or mere instincts and inclinations most forcefully, expressions of this insight are found in the importance ancient writers place on deliberation, voluntariness, and habituation. Perhaps it is the case that the gods have no reason to tell us (ostensibly beneficial) lies because any sort of outside interference would undermine our progress towards virtue, which must be an exclusively human enterprise. This proposal is akin to soul-building theodicies and replies to hiddenness because it is based on the thought that the gods would be justified in depriving us of an apparent benefit on the grounds that doing so is necessary for the much greater good of our moral development.

²⁷See also, Vlastos, "Socratic Piety," 74–75.

Unfortunately, this proposed solution is unlikely to succeed. While it is true that the moral goodness of humans must be developed from within, it is not obvious that being deceived by the gods about certain matters would preclude such development. Just as being told a noble lie by philosophers does not impede the moral progress of non-philosophers, being told similar lies by the gods should not either. Here one might reply that the relevant difference is that a beneficial lie from another human being occurs as part of a shared human pursuit of virtue, whereas a lie from a god constitutes outside interference that either prevents true virtue or diminishes its value. However, while it is plausible that the value inhering in the moral goodness of humans depends on a certain level of autonomous agency being realized, the relevant notion of autonomy does not involve a lack of assistance from non-human agents. Rather, what is plausibly required is that the moral disposition develops through reasoning and free choice (likely with the aid of habituation and moral education) rather than through narrow-minded concern for personal profit or fear of punishments. Occasional lies told to the ignorant or insane, and broad deceptions such as the noble lie, do not preclude exercise of the relevant capacities, whether told by philosopher rulers or by gods. Hence, even if the gods greatly desire that humans become good, this would not explain why they never have reasons to lie.²⁸

4. FRIENDSHIP AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Our preferred solution to the Platonic divine deception puzzle is found by focusing on U₃, which holds that lies can be useful for preventing so-called friends from doing something bad through ignorance or insanity. Gods have no such need because they are not friends with the ignorant or insane (*Republic* 382e).

Now, even the best humans are occasionally ignorant and experience fits of mania. For example, in Book 8, Socrates says that the Kallipolis will eventually decay because the philosopher rulers “fail to ascertain the periods of good fertility and of infertility,” leading to children being born when they should not have been (*Republic* 546a7–b4). This is evidence that even philosopher rulers will have some ignorance. Moreover, in Book 9, Socrates expresses doubts about the human ability to eradicate vicious appetitive desires, saying:

Wouldn't someone who claims that what is just is profitable be saying that we should do and say what will give the inner human being [the reasoning part of the soul] the greatest mastery over the human being, to get him to take care of the many-headed beast [the appetitive part of the soul] like a farmer, feeding and domesticating the gentle heads and hindering the savage ones from growing. (*Republic* 589a6–b3)

The need to control the growth of vicious desires suggests that they might never be eradicated entirely (cf. *Republic* 571b–c). Hence, part of all humans will experience a type of insanity. One might infer from this that the gods have no relationship with humans because they have no interest in associating with deficient beings.

This appears to be what Allan Bloom holds:

²⁸As we will discuss in sect. 5, Taylor's reading also faces a number of textual problems.

A further important consequence of the discussion about the gods follows from the fact that the gods do not lie. In the discussion with Cephalus it was indicated that just as human justice sometimes requires not repaying debts, so it sometimes requires not telling the truth. *That gods never lie would seem to imply that they have nothing to do with men and are not their friends.* The world in which men live contains evil as well as good, and, although the dominance of the good in the *cosmos* at large is reassuring for the human estate, it does not perfect it. Men cannot live like the gods. Later we are told that rulers must lie; hence the gods are not rulers, and rulers cannot imitate the virtues of gods. Statesmen require a human prudence in which the gods can give them no guidance. (*Republic of Plato*, 353, emphasis added)

Although Bloom is onto something, there are passages suggesting that humans can have a relationship with gods. For example, when conversing with Thrasymachus in Book 1, Socrates says that injustice will make one an enemy to the just and because the gods are just (*Republic* 352a11), “an unjust person will be an enemy of the gods, while a just person will be their friend [φίλος]” (352b2–3). This is reaffirmed at the very end of the dialogue when Socrates says:

But if we are persuaded by me, we will believe that the soul is immortal and able to endure every evil and also every good, and always hold to the upward path, practicing justice with wisdom every way we can, so that we will be friends [φίλοι] to ourselves and to the gods, both while we remain here on Earth and when we receive the rewards of justice, and go around like victors in the games collecting prizes; and so both in this life and on the thousand year journey we have described, we will fare well. (*Republic* 621c3–d3)

So Bloom’s assertion that humans are not friends to the gods needs to be qualified—as long as we are just and virtuous, we will be dear to the gods; but, if we are unjust and vicious, we will become their enemies.²⁹ But Bloom’s general suggestion that the lack of divine deception is somehow connected to human deficiencies is on the right track. What is needed is an account of exactly how the negative features of human beings, along with the divine attributes of the gods, explain why the gods never have reasons to lie.

Now, because the gods are self-sufficient, they have no need to entangle themselves with enemies.³⁰ We, however, are not so lucky. Cities exist because “none of us is individually self-sufficient [αὐτάρκης], but each has many needs he cannot satisfy” (*Republic* 369b7–9). For this reason, the “real creator” of a city “is our needs [χρεία]” (*Republic* 369c10). In fact, those who can provide no benefit to the city (or to themselves), will be expelled from it. Socrates, for example, wants

²⁹To be fair, if Bloom uses “friend” in the narrow sense that involves having a give and take relationship of mutual benefit, he is probably right (for reasons we articulate in sect. 5 below). Still, it is important to note that humans can be friends of the gods in a looser sense that involves attitudes of approval. On this broader notion of “friend,” when Socrates says that the just person is a friend to the gods, he means that the gods approve of the virtuousness of the just person and the just person approves of the qualities that are approved of by the gods. Likewise, when Socrates says that the unjust person is an enemy of the gods it means that the gods disapprove of the viciousness of the unjust person and the unjust person disapproves of the qualities that are approved of by the gods.

³⁰Plato does not explicitly describe the gods as self-sufficient in the *Republic* (cf. *Timaeus* 33d), but we can infer this from his general description. Plato claims that the gods are the best in every way (381b–c), and he describes self-sufficiency as a good (369a–b and 387d; see also, *Philebus* 67a). Hence, if the gods were not self-sufficient, they would not be the best in every way because they would be lacking a good.

to follow Asclepius's "political method" of not treating someone "who could not live a normal life, *since such a person would profit neither himself nor his city*" (*Republic* 407e1–3, emphasis added).³¹

We see that Plato believes that human relationships develop from human needs and that those who are incapable of fulfilling these needs should not be individuals with whom we interact (at least not in the Kallipolis). Because one can benefit another human being only if one has some good quality, this reveals that goodness is a normative constraint on relationships—one should be in a relationship with another person only if that person has some good feature.

We find this idea directly stated in Book 1 when Socrates analyzes Polemarchus's account of justice as benefiting friends and harming enemies. Socrates inquires as to whether a "friend" (φίλος) is someone who seems "useful" (χρηστός) or is useful (*Republic* 334c). Initially, Polemarchus suggests that a friend is one who seems useful. Socrates points out, however, that people are mistaken about who is useful (*Republic* 334c). Those who make this mistake are friends with "bad" (κακός) people and are enemies of "good" (ἀγαθός) people, which is problematic since it means that justice amounts to benefiting bad people and harming good people (*Republic* 334c–d). This leads Polemarchus to adjust his view: a friend is someone who both seems useful and is useful (*Republic* 334e–35a). Hence, on this view "the friend will be the good person and the enemy the bad person" (*Republic* 335a3–4). In this passage, we see Plato freely move from talking about a person as "useful" (χρηστός) to talking about a person as "good" (ἀγαθός). This is because all beneficial things are beneficial in virtue of promoting goodness. This demonstrates that a necessary condition for friendship is goodness.

We have seen that humans form societies out of need and that this requires cooperating with people who are (in some sense) unjust. And, according to the definition of 'enemy' put forth in the preceding discussion, this means that humans must willingly cooperate and interact with some of their enemies. This is why U₃ involves benefiting one's so-called friends who are about to engage in wrongdoing through ignorance or insanity. They are "so-called friends" because insofar as they are unjust, they stand towards us as enemies—but because they are partly just and useful, they also stand towards us as friends.³²

This discussion dovetails with the overall lesson of the noble lie. There are two purposes behind the noble lie: to unify the city by teaching the citizens that they are all siblings (*Republic* 414d–e), and to divide the city by teaching the citizens

³¹Speaking of this passage, Vlastos, "The Individual as an Object of Love," 147, says, "Consider what would happen in this utopia if someone through no fault of his own were to cease being a public asset. . . . What may he then claim now that he may no longer ground his claims on the needs of his job, but only on the value of his individual existence? As I read the *Republic*, the answer is: Nothing." We mostly agree with Vlastos on this point, but Plato's qualification, "neither himself," means that he is not merely thinking about the welfare of the city, but also about the welfare of the individual. That is, Plato believes that some lives are not worth living.

³²In the *Lysis* and *Symposium*, Plato grapples with the question of whether or not friendship (and love) stems from others being useful to us. See especially, *Symposium* 200a–b and *Lysis* 215b; for Aristotle's account, see *ENIX*.9, 1169b28–70a13.

that they are each naturally suited to specific tasks (*Republic* 415a–c).³³ The division of the city is an implementation of Socrates's principle of specialization (*Republic* 370a–c and 374a–e), which secures that those unqualified for a ruler or auxiliary position will never be assigned these tasks. But this division makes the city vulnerable to faction and civil war. If the rulers and auxiliaries believe they are inherently superior to the producers, then they are more likely to treat them with unequal regard. Hence, part of the purpose of the noble lie is to counteract this line of thinking and to make the citizens “care more for the city and each other” (*Republic* 415d2–3). The noble lie attempts to do this by teaching the citizens that they are a family and that each member of that family has a unique role and function in the city.

Socrates reaffirms this in Book 5 when he says that all citizens should rejoice and be pained by the same success and failure (*Republic* 462b). Socrates illustrates this with an example. When a person hurts their finger, the entire body and soul in unison share in the pain with the part that is afflicted (*Republic* 462c–d). So too, should it be in the case of an individual and the polis. When an individual citizen feels pain, the entire polis will share his or her experience (*Republic* 462d–e).³⁴

With this in mind, we can now see that U₂ and U₃ collapse into each other in the Kallipolis. Recall that U₂ and U₃ are:

U₂: A lie can be a useful device for deceiving enemies who intend to harm you.

U₃: A lie can be a useful device for preventing your “friends” from doing something bad out of ignorance or insanity.

As it stands, there are two differences between U₂ and U₃: (a) U₂ benefits oneself, while U₃ benefits another, and (b) U₂ deals with enemies, while U₃ deals with friends.

From the foregoing discussion, we know that a friend is someone who is good and useful, while an enemy is someone who is bad and harmful. We also know that if someone is of no use to us or is completely bad, they will be cast aside and in no way will be our friend. Thus, the polis is composed of citizens who have the potential to benefit or harm us, depending on how they behave. If a producer stops producing and tries to rule, the whole city will be harmed. Likewise, if an auxiliary starts bullying weaker citizens, the whole city will suffer. This means that anyone who does something unjust in the city is an enemy, and we all have a reason to prevent him or her from doing this unjust act since it will harm us. Moreover, we have a reason to benefit them as a friend, since each citizen who is allowed to live in the Kallipolis has a pivotal role in its success or failure. Therefore, in the Kallipolis, U₂ and U₃ both involve considerations of self-interest—through lying the agent benefits herself by preventing the other individual from harming her. If we are right about this, then we can appeal to the same considerations to explain why both U₂ and U₃ do not apply to the gods: because the gods cannot be vulnerable to external threats, they have no reason to deceive enemies or so-

³³See also, Vlastos, “The Individual as an Object of Love,” 144; Schofield, “The Noble Lie”; Bloom, *Republic of Plato*, 364–69; and Calabi, “La Nobile Menzogna.”

³⁴See also, 424a, 590d–91a; *Laws* 739c–d; Vlastos, “The Individual as an Object of Love,” 149–50; and Emily Austin, “Plato on Grief.”

called friends who are suffering from ignorance or insanity. Nor do they have reason to engage in widespread deceptions such as the noble lie in order to avoid the instability and danger of an unjust society.

The foregoing constitutes part of our preferred solution to the divine deception puzzle. However, it is not the complete solution because there appear to be examples of gods doing good things for humans even when there is no obvious benefit for themselves. For instance, the gods benefit bad people by giving them just punishments (*Republic* 380b–c). If the self-sufficiency of the gods does not preclude them from having reasons to confer these benefits on humans, then why should it preclude them from having reasons to tell useful lies?

This leads us back to the initial solution we considered, which is that lying is intrinsically bad. Although Plato clearly does not think that lying is categorically wrong, he likely thinks that it is inherently bad and something to be utilized only in exceptional circumstances; hence, the reason only the rulers are allowed to use falsehoods. Lies can be useful only within an already defective state of affairs, and while those who are entangled in such circumstances can be justified in lying, the justification does not eliminate the unsavory residue of the lie. Now, Socrates might have simply appealed to this inherent badness and declared that the gods do not lie because they are incapable of doing inherently bad things (along the lines of Vlastos's suggestion). But as we have seen, Socrates instead opts for the strategy of explaining why lying is never useful for gods. There are a few possible reasons for this choice. First, Socrates might think that a bare appeal to the moral perfection of the gods is too easy and not a fully satisfying explanation. Second, he might think that describing the gods as incapable of lying would highlight a lack of power rather than a praiseworthy nature. In either case, it is clear that he wants to vindicate the veracity of the gods by demonstrating that they have *no reason* to lie.

We have already explained why the reasons that sometimes justify human lies do not apply to the gods—the gods are self-sufficient and humans are not. But we also need to know why the gods would not tell useful lies for reasons similar to those that justify other benefits they confer on humans such as just punishments, sending people like Socrates to assist us, and being the cause of all things good. And here the best explanation is that lying is distinct from those other acts because it is intrinsically bad. Again, Socrates does not go for the easy explanation of claiming that the gods are *incapable* of doing anything intrinsically bad. So, what must be taken for granted in the discussion is that the gods never have *reasons* to do things that are intrinsically bad. This might seem odd given Socrates's view that humans can be justified in doing intrinsically bad things. But the case of humans is different because, as we have seen, their interdependence means that their material welfare (e.g. health, security, enjoyment, etc.) necessitates lying on occasion. Hence, as long as a lie will have overall good consequences for society, a human being's material needs can give her sufficient reason to lie, despite the inherent badness of lying.

Here one might object that even if the gods do not need to lie in order to secure their material welfare, they should still have reason to lie when doing so would lead to overall good consequences in the cosmos. It does seem strange that, when it comes to beneficial lies, the inherent badness of lying can be rationally

overridden only if the agent's own material welfare necessitates it. But this begins to make sense when we consider the eudaimonic conception of rationality that Plato is operating under. While eudaimonism is not, as some critics suggest, merely a disguised form of brute egoism, it does posit an inextricable link between one's normative reasons and one's own flourishing. Specifically, in order for an agent to have a reason to ϕ , ϕ -ing must be beneficial to the agent in one of two respects: either the act must promote the agent's material welfare, or it must promote what we might call, for lack of a better term, the agent's spiritual welfare.³⁵ Spiritual welfare is promoted when the agent partakes in justice and goodness by acting virtuously and living in accordance with nature. In many cases, one can promote one's spiritual welfare through acts that do not directly promote one's material welfare. For instance, when a philosopher ruler returns to the cave, she sacrifices opportunities to enjoy contemplation in order to act justly, which is good for her soul (520d–21b).³⁶ Likewise, when the gods act as shepherds or distribute just punishments, they do not attain pleasure or other material gains. However, they do benefit through partaking in justice and acting in a manner befitting of their nature.

Unfortunately, some acts that might ultimately increase the amount of justice and goodness in the world are not good for the individual's soul. This is because some acts are inherently bad, and their badness precludes spiritual benefits for the agent even if the act could lead to good consequences for others. Indeed, it might be appropriate to call the case of the ruler telling beneficial lies a "mixed case." It benefits society and oneself indirectly, but it is not purely good since it involves the dirtiness of falsehood and deception. Hence, although the gods love justice and the good, and they could conceivably increase the amount of justice

³⁵Although the distinction between soul-based reasons and material-based reasons is not explicit in the *Republic*, it follows Plato's general distinction between the goods of the body and the goods of the soul. This distinction is made especially clear in the *Laws* (631b–32d and 726a–29a) and the *Phaedo* (65a–c, 66c–67c, and 68b–c).

³⁶This is not to deny the possibility that returning to the cave involves a genuine sacrifice. Nor do we mean to deny that conflicts between pursuing justice and one's overall flourishing are possible. It may be that an agent can have decisive reason to perform a just action even though the benefits of the just act are outweighed by the material costs. Christopher Buckels, "Compulsion to Rule in Plato's *Republic*," 64–67, provides a nice summary of the various positions on the return to the cave. There are roughly two strategies taken: (1) there are those who explain away the fact that the philosophers are compelled to rule, and (2) those who do not. Group 1 can be further subdivided into those who emphasize that (a) philosophers rule for impersonal reasons and those who maintain that (b) philosophers are in some way benefited from ruling. For examples of 1.a, see Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, 267; Nicholas White, *A Companion to Plato's Republic*, 23–24, 193–95; and John Cooper, "The Psychology of Justice in Plato." For examples of 1.b, see Reeve, "Goat-Stags," *Philosopher-Kings*, 202; Timothy Mahoney, "Sacrifice"; J. Davies, "Into the Cave"; and R. C. Cross and A. D. Woodley, *Plato's Republic: A Philosophical Commentary*, 101; for modified versions, see Richard Kraut, "Egoism," 336; Terence Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, 242–43 and *Plato's Ethics*, 299–301. Group 2 can also be subdivided into those who argue that (a) the compulsion to rule makes philosophers unhappy and those who argue that (b) the compulsion does not negatively affect the well-being of philosophers. For examples of 2.a, see Stanley Rosen, *Plato's Republic: A Study*, 280; Simon Aronson, "The Happy Philosopher"; Bloom, *Republic of Plato*, 407; and Michael Foster, "Some Implications." For examples of 2.b, see Eric Brown, "Gap" and "Compulsion"; and Smith, "Return to the Cave"; see also, Buckels, "Compulsion to Rule in Plato's *Republic*." For an instructive debate on the general possibility of conflict between justice and flourishing, see White, *Individual and Conflict in Greek Ethics*; and Irwin, "Review."

in the world by telling noble lies to humans, the intrinsic badness of lying means that they do not have any soul-based reasons to tell these lies. Nor do they have any material-based reasons to lie (as explained by U₂ and U₃). And while human beings do not have soul-based reasons to lie, they do have material-based reasons because of their lack of self-sufficiency and the nature of their social relations. So, as long as a lie will have overall good effects for society, a philosopher ruler can be justified in telling it.

The most contentious element of our preferred solution is the idea that the inherent badness of lying precludes the possibility of having non-material reasons to lie. Given that lies can have tremendously positive consequences, including the facilitation of justice in society, one might reasonably hold that telling a beneficial lie can bring the agent all the benefits normally associated with partaking in justice and goodness. Hence, our proposal involves a fairly strong indictment of lying. But strongly negative views of lying are not implausible in themselves, as evidenced by their prevalence in the history of moral philosophy—most notably in Kant. And note that the position we are attributing to Plato is weaker than the Kantian line insofar as there is no categorical prohibition on lying. The claim is only that lying is intrinsically bad, and this badness prevents one from attaining a moral/spiritual benefit from telling lies, even when these lies benefit others. This is not a far-fetched position, and there is good reason to attribute it to Plato. This would help explain why Socrates does not consider whether the gods could tell justice-facilitating lies analogous to the noble lie for the same reasons that they confer just punishments and other such benefits. Socrates takes it for granted that the intrinsic badness of lying means that the gods cannot have soul-based reasons to lie, even if such lies might be useful for promoting justice. He thus chooses to focus his attention on explaining why gods cannot have material-based reasons to lie. With soul-based reasons implicitly ruled out and material-based reasons explicitly ruled out, Socrates establishes that the gods and the divine are “in every way free from falsehood” (*Republic* 382e6).

5. FRIENDS TO THE GODS

We have argued that because of the intrinsic badness of lying, the gods' self-sufficiency means that they have no reason to lie, whereas humans' dependency means that they may need to lie occasionally. However, this raises the question of why the gods would have any relationship with humans at all. If the gods are entirely self-sufficient, why would goodness make us friends to the gods? This is particularly puzzling since friendship in the *Republic* appears to depend on need and use.

One possible solution involves expanding the notion of self-sufficiency such that it allows for a need-based friendship between gods and humans. Recall our earlier discussion of the *Euthyphro* and Taylor's suggestion that the gods need human beings to develop virtue on their own so that their project of creating a good world can be completed. Starting from this suggestion, we can distinguish between two notions of self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency can mean the ability to complete an activity by oneself. Examples of activities construed this way would

be a general acting virtuously in battle or a philosopher contemplating the Forms. Under this conception of self-sufficiency, the gods are clearly self-sufficient; for they do not require anything from humans in order to excel at their activities.

However, we can also think of self-sufficiency in terms of completing projects, such as a general winning the battle or a philosopher publishing a book. The gods are not self-sufficient under this conception of self-sufficiency. The gods could have the project of the world being the greatest possible place and for this to happen the world needs good human souls, and good human souls are self-directed souls. Thus, the gods cannot complete this project without the help of humans actually becoming good on their own.

This explanation for why the gods would be friends with humans has the merit of positing a reasonable motive for the purported relationship. It is fairly plausible that the gods could have the aim of making the world as good as it can be, and hence that human moral development would be needed. Nevertheless, this view faces three problems. First, appealing to a notion of self-sufficiency that allows for this type of need requires significant strain. For it would seem that the completion of one's projects is central to one's eudaimonia, and hence, if the gods need human beings for the completion of their projects then their eudaimonia is in human hands. This is certainly not the notion of self-sufficiency that we typically associate with the gods.

Second, it is unlikely that Socrates would accept that the gods lack the power to make humans virtuous. As Mark McPherran explains, "if Socrates holds that the gods created and implanted our souls, then he would probably hold that they have the power to radically affect the structure and contents of our souls" (*The Religion of Socrates*, 68). McPherran argues that we have good reason to reject Taylor's view of the gods. He points to five reasons.³⁷ First, Xenophon attributes to Socrates a commitment to the antecedent (*Mem.* 1.4.13–14).³⁸ Second, Socrates comes close to holding the antecedent in the *Euthyphro* (15a1–2) when he says, "There is no good for us they [the gods] do not give." Third, according to Xenophon, Socrates allows that the gods put beliefs into people (*Mem.* 1.4.16). Fourth, at the end of the *Meno*, Socrates claims that human beings can only become virtuous through divine dispensation (99b–100c).³⁹ Fifth, Socrates's disavowal of knowledge tells against Taylor's reading. After all, if Socrates denies having knowledge, "we ought not to expect him to be committed to a theory of *how* the gods are able to do any of this and why they have left so many of us 'unfinished'" (*The Religion of Socrates*, 69).

Third and finally, even if it were granted that under such circumstances the gods would still possess some type of self-sufficiency (and Socrates would accept this view of the gods), it would be hard to see how the gods could have no reason to tell lies that might facilitate just behavior in human beings. For certainly the fact that φ-ing will help lead to the completion of one's projects is a reason for

³⁷See McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, 68–69.

³⁸Citations of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* refer to the book, chapter, and section numbers found in *Xenophanis Opera Omnia*, vol. 2.

³⁹Note that some scholars doubt whether Socrates is being sincere in this passage. Nevertheless, even if Socrates is being insincere, the passage is still instructive in demonstrating that it is natural for the Greeks to accept that the gods have the power to dispense virtue.

one to ϕ (this would be an example of what we have been calling a material-based reason). Hence, it is worth considering an alternative explanation for Plato's claims that the just among human beings are friends of the gods.

We have seen that human friendship emerges from need and that friendship is preserved by recognizing mutual usefulness. However, this does not preclude a disjunctive account of friendship in which friendship consists in either goodness or usefulness. We have been discussing friendship in the context of humans, and because humans need others and are not perfectly good, we have yet to consider a friendship based solely on goodness. Since the gods are in need of nothing, they will only form friendships on the basis of goodness. So, by making ourselves good, we can become friends with the gods.

This answer still leaves us to wonder why the gods would want to be friends with anyone, even if the person is good. A passage in Book 5 suggests an answer. In Book 5, Socrates describes the dispositions of a philosopher (or a philosopher in training). He begins by describing what it is to love or desire something. He explains that the lover of boys loves all boys even if they have apparent defects (*Republic* 474c–75a). Likewise, the lover of wine loves all wine (*Republic* 475a). The lover of honor loves honor so much that if they cannot be the leader of the military they will take a lesser position, and if they cannot have that they will take an even lesser position—they will do whatever it takes to receive honor (*Republic* 475a–b). The lover of wisdom (or philosopher), like these individuals, loves all wisdom and not just a particular part (*Republic* 475b–c). Provided that the gods love goodness, it makes perfect sense for them to love humans when they are good, since this is just a particular instance of Plato's principle of what it is to love something.

In this context, we see that Plato uses 'friend' in a particular and rather loose sense when he claims that good humans are friends of the gods. Such friendship is not a relationship involving reciprocal caring and mutual benefits. All that the relationship consists in is an attitude of approval from the gods directed towards these humans. Now, this might seem to imply that the gods would have reasons to tell lies that could facilitate human beings becoming good. However, it is perfectly reasonable for one to be a lover of X and approve of all members of the set of things that are X without desiring to maximize the quantity of X or the proportion of objects that are members of the relevant set. For instance, if you love great music and approve of those who create it, you are not thereby under a rational requirement to desire the creation of even more great music and thus have reasons to facilitate the development of new musical talent. For while you will approve of any new great music that is created, this does not mean you will benefit from it. For it may be the case that the great music already in existence is enough for you to receive the maximum benefits. Likewise, it may be that while the gods will approve of anyone who becomes good, adding members to the set of good individuals does not constitute a benefit for them.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have developed a novel interpretive puzzle—the Platonic divine deception puzzle. Despite his belief that lying is occasionally warranted as a means of facilitating justice, Plato denies that the gods can have reasons to lie. Thus, as

interpreters we must figure out why Plato thinks lying is sometimes acceptable for humans yet never reasonable for the gods. We have explored various possible solutions and suggested that the best solution centers on the fact that the gods are self-sufficient and humans are not. Self-sufficient beings gain no material advantage from lying, and the inherent badness of lying precludes any spiritual benefit. In contrast, because humans depend on each other to live well, this means that they must interact with people who are sometimes good and sometimes bad. Given the nature of human dependency, when fellow citizens act wrongly, everyone is harmed. Thus, human welfare sometimes necessitates beneficial lies, despite the intrinsic badness of lying.

As we noted at the outset, philosophers and theologians typically claim that divine deception is incompatible with God's goodness because lying is categorically wrong. The problem with this answer, as Marin Mersenne pointed out to Descartes, is that we can conceive of good parents lying to their children in order to benefit them; thus, deception does not always appear to be incompatible with benevolence. For those religions that take God to be like a benevolent parent, adherents must explain why deception and benevolence are incompatible for God but not for parents. Of course, one could respond to Mersenne's objection by arguing that lying is never morally acceptable, but such a position will appeal only to those with staunch Kantian intuitions.

Plato's answer avoids this trouble by denying that lying is always wrong. In this respect, we find Plato's account of divine deception favorable. Two additional features of Plato's view (as we have interpreted him) strike us as quite plausible: (1) that the gods do not benefit from human conduct; (2) that humans do not have personal relationships with gods—we can at most become dear to them by becoming good and valuing what they value. Many theists will want to resist Plato's view because they believe that we can develop personal relationships with God, and that God loves us even when we fail to do good. Though our sympathies are with Plato on these issues, a proper adjudication of this dispute requires its own substantial treatment.

There is one important point on which we disagree with Plato regarding divine dishonesty. If lies can sometimes help us to become just and good, then we believe this would give the gods normative reasons to lie to us even if doing so would not benefit them in any way. Perhaps these reasons are outweighed by other considerations. But since we agree with Plato that lying is not always wrong, and we also accept that lies can facilitate justice, we do not see adequate grounds for ruling out the possibility that the gods occasionally deceive us.⁴⁰

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