

A Truth “Too Weak” Not To Lie On Its Behalf: The Popper-Strauss Assumption and the
Metaphorological Basis Of Plato's Politics Of Lying

The two arguably most influential readings of Plato's famous lines in the *Republic* dealing with the necessity for the perfect state to lie to its citizens—those of Karl Popper and Leo Strauss—share the basic assumption that the nature of such a lie is both a *deliberate* and *political* one: that it aims at “preserving unity” and “preventing political change”. No systematic account of references to lying in the *Republic* (or any other dialogue), however, informs either interpretation. The text in book III is thus taken to single-handedly describe one of the many “mechanisms of power” in the state “founded in speech” by Socrates and his companions.

The present paper aims at offering a reading of this section in book III that challenges these two assumptions by linking it to other such references throughout the *Republic* and the *Laws*. Book II of the *Republic* and its treatment of the “true lie” will prove especially helpful. Lying “nobly” and lying “truthfully” seem to belong to the same *dialectical process*. The psychology and politics of lying seem to coincide in what they are meant to achieve: convincing citizens of things that are *already known* to be *true* and *good*. There is a set of politics to the “noble lie”, but that does not mean that such a lie is *utterly* political. This necessity of resorting to “lies” to convince citizens of truths springs from the Platonic conviction that truth is *too weak to convince most people by itself*. This metaphor, in *opposing* truth to force, seems to make “lying” not just an ethically admissible *possibility*, but a political *duty* for any state seeking to render its citizens *whole* and *happier*, and not just *normalized* or *well-ruled*.