

Abstract for paper to Triennial Meeting of the International Plato Society on
Republic, to be held in Tokyo 2010

Title of Paper: Falsehood and Ignorance; Truth and Simplicity

At *Republic* II, 382a4-b5, Socrates identifies as what is “truly false” ignorance in the soul. Falsehood in speech, he suggests, is a kind of copy or image of this. Socrates’ characterization of falsehood raises a number of questions that will be the focus of my paper.

First, is it possible to identify a univocal understanding of ‘being false’ that applies to all the seemingly diverse contexts in which Socrates holds that falsehood is found: deceptive speech (*logos*) or act (*ergon*), and – the true falsehood – ignorance?

I shall argue that it is. To be false is to be engaged in the production of a *phantasm*, something such that a subject (the producing subject or another) who formed a judgment on the basis of this *phantasm* would form a false judgment about the relevant aspect of the world. And I shall argue that this can be understood in such a way as to explain why being false is associated with deception: both as the activity of one who deceives and as the plight of one who is deceived.

Second, does this give a plausible conception of ignorance and of our attitude towards it? Socrates claims that everyone hates what’s truly false or ignorance. Socrates’ claim can be made intelligible, I argue, if ignorance is understood not merely negatively as the absence of knowledge, but positively as an active state of being possessed of some false impression about the world that one endorses, as a kind of self-deception; and if his target is a certain kind of irrationality.

Finally, I shall consider whether this picture of falsehood can help, in turn, to explain (a) Socrates’ assimilation of truth and simplicity and (b) Socrates’ notoriously complicated attitude towards lies.

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