Truth as a Value in Plato’s *Republic*

Raphael Woolf  
*Philosophy Department, King’s College London, Strand, London WC2R 2LS, UK*  
raphael.g.woolf@kcl.ac.uk

Abstract

To what extent is possession of truth considered a good thing in the *Republic*? Certain passages of the dialogue appear to regard truth as a universal good, but others are more circumspect about its value, recommending that truth be withheld on occasion and falsehood disseminated. I seek to resolve this tension by distinguishing two kinds of truths, which I label ‘philosophical’ and ‘non-philosophical’. Philosophical truths, I argue, are considered unqualifiedly good to possess, whereas non-philosophical truths are regarded as worth possessing only to the extent that possession conduces to good behaviour in those who possess them. In the non-philosophical arena it is an open question, to be determined on a case-by-case basis, whether falsehood is more efficacious in furthering this practical aim than truth.

Keywords

truth, falsehood, value, philosophical, *Republic*

I

‘No man is to be valued more than the truth’, says Socrates near the start of Book X of the *Republic* (595c3-4).1 How, then, is the truth to be valued? This paper stems from a general interest in Plato’s views on the value of truth,2 and a more specific interest, with regard to the *Republic*, in what one might call the normative robustness of truth. Is it a good thing always and everywhere to possess the truth? Or is the possession of truth sometimes to be considered not a good thing, even a bad one?

1) Translations in this paper are based on Grube/Reeve 1992, with some amendment.
2) For some thoughts on how the *Phaedo* approaches the issue, see Woolf 2007.
My answer, in a nutshell, will be that, as far as the Republic is concerned, it depends on what sort of truths we are talking about. There is a privileged set of truths (which I shall call ‘philosophical’) which it is unqualifiedly good to possess; other truths (‘non-philosophical’) may or may not be good to possess, and this is determined by considering whether their possession will bring benefit or harm.3 In the case that they would cause harm, truth is no protection: the dialogue’s view is that people should not be in possession of them. By the same token, it might be beneficial to possess certain falsehoods; if so, then people should possess these, their falsity being no bar.

More specifically, the benefit or harm at stake when it comes to the possession of non-philosophical truths is practical: the criterion for assessment of whether or not it is good to possess such truths is whether or not they conduce to good behaviour on the part of their possessor. Philosophical truths, by contrast, will be good to possess irrespective of their effects on the agent’s behaviour. This distinction in turn, I shall argue, reflects the distinction, set out at the beginning of Republic II, between what is valued for its own sake and what is valued for its results.

In considering how the Republic values truth I shall mainly be assessing the dialogue’s stance on how truth is to be treated within the ideal society it constructs — Kallipolis. Since much of the Republic is centered on laying down arrangements for Kallipolis, this is not in itself an unfair procedure. Indeed most of what the dialogue has to say about truth occurs in the context of these arrangements.4 So I shall not be overly sensitive to the possibility that these views may not be intended to apply outside it.5 To the extent that Kallipolis is supposed to represent an ideal way of organizing

3) The distinction sketched here is similar to that adopted, with regard to the Republic, in Simpson 2007.
4) The most clear-cut case of truth being flagged outside Kallipolis, at VIII 560b-c, concerns the soul of the oligarchic character’s son, which, lacking ‘fine studies and practices and true accounts (λόγον ἀληθὸν)’, becomes infiltrated by ‘false accounts and beliefs’. The young man is then on his way to acquiring a democratic character. The pieces missing, through his father’s ‘lack of knowledge’ (ἀνεπιστημοσύνη, a10) of how to educate, appear to derive ultimately from the programme for Kallipolis, given that the timocratic character was said to lack the ‘reason (λόγος) mixed with music’ (549b6) that picks up its key elements. So we are brought back to the question of how truth features within Kallipolis.
5) In fact Socrates famously asserts at I 331c that truth-telling may sometimes not be right, a sentiment quite in tune with the way he regards the dissemination of falsehood within Kallipolis, as we shall see. It seems plausible that regarding lying Plato ‘ist . . . kein moralischer Rigorist’ (Szaif 2004, 203).
human beings, we may even be entitled to suppose that the way truth is treated therein is meant to be paradigmatic.

Does Socrates think that these arrangements themselves get it right, in the sense of accurately describing the ideal city? Yes, but it does not follow for him that this ideal could be realized in practice. He notes that the account of the model will have been a good one even if it could not be established exactly along the lines proposed, and adds that ‘practice by nature grasps truth less well than theory does’ (V 473a1-2). It would, however, be a mistake to infer from this remark that ‘truth is evidently what he is interested in’, as opposed to feasibility. The correct moral is indeed that ‘practicability is only a fallible sign of truth’, but that is a point, so to speak, internal to truth and its relation to theory and practice. Though what Socrates says here is certainly consistent with a view that finds more truth in abstract paradigms than in their concrete realizations, nothing follows about the way he ranks truth versus, say, practicability. Maybe an over-zealous concern for truth can stand in the way of getting things done; the question of its normative robustness remains open.

II

That being so, let me suggest that the Republic appears, at first blush, to adopt a rather inconsistent position on the value of truth; and since, with one exception (T3 below), the relevant texts occur in the context of arrangements (particularly for education) within Kallipolis, it is of no avail to appeal to an inside/outside distinction in addressing them. At times, we seem to be told that it is always a good thing for people to possess the truth:

T1. [Soc:] I mean that to be false in one’s soul about the things that are, to be ignorant and to have and hold falsehood there, is what everyone (πάντες) would least of all accept, for everyone hates a falsehood in that place most of all. (II 382b1-4)

T1’s explicit concern is falsehood and ignorance, not truth. But it seems fair to infer that, in hating ignorance and falsehood about the things that

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6) Both quotations are from Schofield 2006, 239 and 240 respectively. On the feasibility of Kallipolis see Burnyeat 1992.
7) The Republic is not insensitive to this issue: consider Adeimantus’ challenge to Socrates to combat the typical complaint that even the best of those who pursue philosophy turn out to be ‘useless’ to the city on account of their studies (VI 487d3-5).
are, what ‘everyone’ wants for their soul is not a state of (say) blankness but of truth. The view of ‘everyone’ might be wrong of course. But it appears to receive stout endorsement from Socrates:

T2. What’s that? Don’t you consider that people (τοὺς ἀνθρώπους) are voluntarily deprived of bad things, but involuntarily deprived of good ones? And isn’t being deceived about the truth a bad thing, while possessing the truth (τὸ ἀληθέειν) is good? Or don’t you think that to believe the things that are is to possess the truth? (III 413a5-8)

T1-2, then, suggest a high score for truth on the scale of normative robustness. But a rather different outlook is presented elsewhere, albeit initially in a not particularly troubling fashion. Though Kant might have objected, one would think that the following nostrum is no more than common sense:

T3. [Soc]: No one should be willing to tell the whole truth to someone in this condition [madness]. (I 331c8)

There is surely no great problem, thus far, in tacitly qualifying T1-2 with the proviso that possession of truth is a good thing ‘except in the case of the mad’.

Yet there are passages which seem considerably to extend the scope of prohibition. From the mad we move to the young and foolish and beyond:

T4. [Soc:] Even if it were true [that the gods behaved badly] it should not so readily be told to foolish and young people, but ideally passed over in silence, and if there is some need to tell it, only the smallest possible number should hear in secret… (II 378a2-5)

Now Socrates is convinced that it is not true that the gods ever behave badly – he has an argument to offer that gods would never fall short of perfection (II 380d-381c, cf. 379a-c). Our passage nonetheless makes a

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8) One might, with Grube/Reeve 1992, translate ἄφρονας τε καὶ νέους here by hendiadys as ‘foolish young people’ (53); but Socrates hardly considers foolishness to be a monopoly of the young, and as Ferrari 1989 notes (114 with n. 27), he is explicit at times in including adults as part of the audience for poetry: cf. παισι καὶ ἀνδράσιν, III 387b4; also II 380c1-2, and 378c6-d2 quoted below.
crucial point about the value of truth. Evidently tales of gods behaving badly are undesirable because of the dangerous signals they may send about what sort of behaviour is legitimate. What Socrates makes clear in spelling out the counter-factual case is that, true or false, this is what matters in determining whether such tales are passed on.

Still, one might at least continue the strategy of qualifying T1-2 in a relatively innocuous way by adding ‘the young and foolish’ to our list of people for whom it is not always good to possess the truth. One might, however, wonder how large a category ‘the foolish’ may turn out to be; and the final segment of the passage presumably indicates not that the fewest possible number of the young and foolish be told in secret, as if there might be some elite grouping of them granted such privileges, but as few people as possible in general, the notion of secrecy perhaps indicating a small cabal who might be able to take in the information without being led astray. In any event, we soon move from younger folk to older:

T5. [Soc:] If we’re to be persuasive that no citizen has ever hated another and that it’s impious to do so, then that’s what should be told to children from the beginning by old men and women; and as they grow older (πρεσβυτέροις), poets should be compelled to tell them the same sort of thing. (II 378c6-d2)

Perhaps this text is out of place as evidence for a demotion of truth? Socrates does not actually say that it is false that no citizen ever hated another. However, it is hard to believe that even in Kallipolis, with its emphasis on unity and harmony, he could be confident that this would not have occurred. More to the point, he is surely not making the necessity of imparting the sense that no citizen ever hated another dependent on that being true. His interest is in the beneficial effect on the citizens’ behaviour that he assumes the production of such a belief, true or not, will have. Doubtless he is hoping to engineer a virtuous circle, the engendering of such beliefs producing an outcome whereby citizen amity will be at a maximum; conversely, if citizen enmity turns out to be rife, the task of persuasion will be correspondingly harder. But it would be incomprehensibly fastidious to let past exceptions to the desired outcome – which is to say, the possibility of the slogan being false – veto the whole project. Truth cannot plausibly be taken as normatively robust here.

9) One sympathizes with the strictures of Brickhouse and Smith 1983 in labelling it ‘a patent falsehood’ (83), though it may be less blatant if Socrates has Kallipolis in mind.
Finally, there are falsehoods that it is preferable for all to have in their souls:

T6. [Soc:] How, then, could we devise one of those useful falsehoods we were talking about a while ago, one noble falsehood that would, in the best case, persuade even the rulers, but if that's not possible, then the others in the city? (III 414b7-c2)

Socrates and Glaucon turn out to be rather sceptical (415c) about the feasibility of inculcating the Myth of the Metals that is foreshadowed here; but the desirability of doing so is not in question. They go on to assert that though the first generation of citizens may not be persuadable, subsequent generations might be (c-d). Who would do the persuading? Perhaps that element that Socrates says at VI 497c-d (cf. 501a, III 412a-b) will be needed to maintain the ‘theory of the constitution’ (λόγος τῆς πολιτείας) that the Republic sets out to devise. Whatever the mechanics, Socrates’ basic point here about the generations is clear: the further away from the city’s actual founding we are, the easier it will be to establish, at all levels, a fictional one; preservation of truth is the main obstacle to the myth taking hold.10

III

At this point, it seems to me, the attempt to deal with T1-2 by exempting certain limited categories of persons from their application is close to bankruptcy. If there are significant falsehoods that even rulers should ideally absorb, together with the acceptance that in a potentially much wider range of cases awkward truths may be suppressed and their contraries disseminated, then these texts appear emptied of meaning in their trumpeting of truth as a universal good and falsehood as its opposite.

A possible tension between the rulers’ love of truth and their preparedness to purvey falsehood within Kallipolis is noted by Julia Annas,11 but if

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10) One should not, I think, seek to soften the point by imputing, with e.g. Kamtekar 2006, 199, ‘moral truths’ that the myth is intended to express. No such appeal is made in the text, the myth’s purpose being to imbue the citizens, by hook or by crook, with a sense of commitment to the arrangements of Kallipolis. In general interpreters of the Republic are more inclined than the dialogue is itself to present the conveyance of deeper truth as the reason for its use of falsehood. See further section IV below.

anything this understates the problem, since it is not obviously inconsis-
tent with an agent’s – even a ruler’s – love of a certain good to be willing to
give it away. Socrates does distinguish (II 382a-b) between the
‘true falsehood’ that everyone hates to have – that is, the holding of a false-
hood by one unaware that it is so – and the less troublesome ‘falsehood in
words’ – one that is formulated by someone in awareness of what it is, and
which can be useful to purvey to others (c7); but the result of that, of
course, will be the holding of falsehood unawares by the recipients. Para-
dox is given by the idea that the incurring of falsehood by some might be
desirable when truth is supposedly a good (and its opposite bad) for all.

How, then, can one reconcile the apparent generosity of T1-2 as far as
possession of truth is concerned with the restrictiveness of T3-6, respecting
all the while what both groups of texts appear to say? I want to suggest that
instead of qualifying T1-2 with regard to category of person, which would
maintain their consistency with T3-6 at the cost of their sense, a more
promising approach for dissolving the tension is to do so with regard to
category of truth: the truths that it is always and everywhere good to pos-
sess are themselves a restricted set. Read with scope thus appropriately
constrained (as, I shall argue in section V below, one may do without
straining their sense) T1-2 will be perfectly consistent with the notion
that, when it comes to truths generally, there may be plenty that it is good
for people not to possess.

The truths that it is always good for people to possess I shall label ‘philos-
ophical’ truths. These will be, roughly, those truths expressed by the
accounts of Forms that it is the task of the philosopher in the Republic to
discover. Other truths I shall call non-philosophical. This division, I shall

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12) So Brickhouse and Smith 1983 exaggerate somewhat in claiming that one might be
tempted to see ‘a paradox of the first order’ (84) in the juxtaposition of the rulers’ love of
truth with their willingness to employ falsehood.

13) Hence Socrates describes this latter as a ‘not altogether unmixed falsehood’ (382c1-2).
His description should not be explained, with Reeve 1988, 209-10, as meaning that these
(literal) falsehoods are intended to convey something ethically true or at least not mislead
in that regard; even if this were the reason why Socrates recommends their use (which I
doubt), he clearly thinks they are only useful to purvey in certain circumstances (cf. ποτὲ
καὶ τῷ χρήσιμον, c7), so that aspect is unlikely to be part of their generic account.

14) One might say at this point that possession of truth is a good alright, just a lesser good
than e.g. orderly conduct, to be jettisoned where the two conflict. That is already to answer
the question of normative robustness in the negative, which I shall argue, at least with
regard to non-philosophical truth, is the correct approach.
further suggest, maps on to the distinction, given in Book II (357b-d), between items that are valued for their own sake, those that are valued because of what results from them, and those that are valued in both ways. Philosophical truths will, I shall argue, fall into the third category, non-philosophical truths into the second, so that what is distinctive about philosophical truths will be that possession of them is of value for its own sake.

Further explication of the distinction between what is of value for its own sake and what is of value for its results will be undertaken in sections X and XI below; but my key claim, as it pertains to truth, is that the latter is dependent, as the former is not, on the promotion of good behaviour in those who possess the truths in question. The value of non-philosophical truth is, in this sense, purely practical.

IV

This dualism about truth (the philosophical and the non-philosophical), though I think it serves the main purposes of the present paper, does not aspire to capture the dialogue's position fully. It is noncommittal, for example, on where one would place such items as the truths of the mathematical sciences, though in brief the view would seem to be that when conducted properly mathematical studies are closely akin to, and vital preparation for, the study of Forms. In similar vein, we must note that there are four segments of the divided Line, even before one considers the special position of the Form of the Good; and one of the Line's main criteria is that of truth:

[Soc:] Would you be willing to say that, as regards truth and untruth, the division [of the Line] is as follows: As the opinable is to the knowable, so the likeness is to the thing that it is like? (VI 510a8-10)

[Soc:] Arrange them [the four kinds of cognition] in a ratio, and consider that each shares in clarity to the degree that the subsection it is set over shares in truth (VI 511e2-4)

15) They facilitate the turning away of the soul 'from becoming towards truth and being' (VII 525c5-6), that is, towards the Forms. Geometry is for the sake of (ἐνεκα) 'knowledge of what always is' (527b4), to which Glaucon eagerly ripostes that it is knowledge of what always is (b6-7), though this sentiment does not receive explicit endorsement from Socrates. For discussion of the role of mathematics in the Republic, and its connection with value, see Burnyeat 2000.
Consideration of the Line, while throwing up a complexity that I shall not attempt to do justice to, does provide an opportunity to stress an important negative point: we should not take there to be different *senses* of truth in play here. The last thing an author who wished to convey that a notion is being used equivocally would be expected to do is construct a model with a single (albeit divided) line as its main feature. To say that higher sections of the Line have a greater share of truth than lower is surely to imply that it is the very same quality we are talking about in each case.\textsuperscript{16} As we advance along the Line, we advance along the same dimension; this would seem to be just the point that a linear representation is designed to make. I shall, then, speak paradigmatically, if not always rigidly, of different sets of truths, not senses of truth.

That there are two senses of truth at work in the *Republic* is, however, argued by Brickhouse and Smith,\textsuperscript{17} who claim that, in both Greek and English, in addition to having a ‘sentential’ meaning concerning what is the case, the term ‘true’ ‘can also be used in an evaluative sense as a synonym for “real” or “good”’. It is perhaps noteworthy that the authors cite no straightforward usage in the Platonic corpus as evidence for this alleged sense. Nor is it easy to pin down exactly what the sense is supposed to capture, since ‘real’ and ‘good’ are not obviously themselves synonyms (in either language). The example that Brickhouse and Smith offer is ‘true friend’, used ‘when we wish to assert that [someone] is indeed a “real” friend or a “good” friend’. But ‘friend’ is already a term of positive evaluation, so in calling someone a real friend one is bound to be saying something positive. Try substituting ‘good’ into, for example, ‘he’s a real cad’ to discover how dubious the semantic connection with goodness actually is.

Even if ‘real’ and ‘true’ might be correlated in a fairly straightforward way (such that, for example, ‘Socrates is wise’ would be true iff Socrates’ wisdom is real), ‘true’ and ‘good’ are a much more contentious pairing, though it is this aspect that Brickhouse and Smith emphasize in explaining,

\textsuperscript{16} I say this without prejudice to the question of what kinds of item the dialogue takes truth to be a quality of. Nor shall I pursue the question of what exactly it means to speak of a thing’s having a greater or lesser share in truth (clearly the ‘Compresence of Opposites’ said at e.g. V 479a-d to be a feature of the sensible but not intelligible realm is of relevance). These are central issues for any full discussion of the role of truth in the *Republic*. But attempting to elaborate on them here would blur rather than sharpen the questions about value that I wish to focus on.

\textsuperscript{17} 1983, 86.
with regard to the *Republic*, that evaluative truth measures the degree to which goodness has been realized, by reference to the appropriate Form, in the sensible world. Thus they appeal to Socrates’ claim at VI 501b-d that one who is a lover of ‘what is and truth’ (τοῦ ὄντος τε καὶ ἀληθείας, d1-2) will endeavour to produce the best possible image of the Forms of the virtues in the city. But here we are dealing with items that are, in being what the virtues are, already something good. So reproducing in the sensible world (as far as one can) the truth about justice – what is the case about justice – will of course endow that world with a degree of goodness. It is simply a mistake to infer from this that in Platonic usage ‘truth’ can mean ‘goodness’. One might as well claim (to borrow from the *Phaedo*, cf. 65d-e) that since the Form of Health, an example of ‘what is and truth’, endows things in the sensible world with health, then for Plato ‘truth’ can mean ‘health’.

A similar moral applies to the other main evidence from the *Republic* cited by Brickhouse and Smith for an evaluative sense of ‘true’, Socrates’ assertion, at 508d-e, that the Form of the Good produces truth. Here Socrates’ point is about the relation of that Form to the individual Forms, particularly of the virtues (cf. 505a, 506a). The Good brings truth to them insofar as it is the cause of their being what they are – objects that, as virtues, must be good. Again, this carries no implication that one meaning of ‘true’ is ‘good’, a point reinforced by Socrates’ insistence that, although the cause of truth, the Good is ‘other than’ truth (VI 508e4-5); an incongruous statement from one supposedly treating truth here as synonymous with goodness.

Nor, from a different perspective, do I think it correct to say, with Christopher Gill, that in its complaints about the content of Greek poetry, the
Republic employs ‘certain special and extended senses of “falsehood”’, designed to encompass not just factual falsity but ethical wrongness. On the contrary, Socrates goes out of his way to keep the two notions apart, introducing as his first criterion for acceptance of a poem whether it is ‘fine’ (καλὸν, II 377c2), only subsequently asserting that the poets tell false tales (d4-5), and then identifying the resultant misrepresentation of the gods as being especially problematic ‘if one does not lie finely (καλῶς, d8)’. Outrageous lies about the gods will be far from fine (377e): given the gods’ perfection what is thereby portrayed is bound to be morally ugly. But these are the sentiments of someone interested not in extending the term ‘falsehood’ to cover ethical wrongness, but in explaining that his main worry is not falsehood as such but falsehoods which present morally ugly exempla, a point that depends on treating the foul as distinct from the false. There is, it seems to me, no credible evidence, here or elsewhere, for an ethical or evaluative reading of the true/false pairing in the Republic.

V

Here, then, with allowance made for a dualism that is less refined than the ontology it purports to reflect, is an outline of the Republic’s position as I read it:

(A). Philosophical truths are always and everywhere good to possess, and this is because, for reasons to be discussed, the possession of them is in and of itself a good thing. Even if their possession will generally also have further good results – for example, by contributing towards their possessor acting well – the actual possession of these truths is of value independently of considerations of their effect on the agent’s actions.

(B). Non-philosophical truths are not always good to possess, and this is because possession of them is not a good thing in and of itself. Whether or not they are good to possess will be a matter of assessment on a case-by-case basis of the benefit or harm they will cause. This in turn will depend

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23 Concerning ethically positive content, assimilation with truth is read on Socrates’ behalf in like manner by Ferrari 1989, 112: ‘what Socrates intends to disseminate is in the deepest ethical sense not false at all, but true’. So too Morgan 2000, 164, on educational myth of the sort used in Kallipolis as ‘surface falsehood reflecting ethical truth’.
chiefly on whether possession of them is likely to conduce to good or bad behaviour on the part of those who do possess them. Often enough it will be better (more conducive to good behaviour), with regard to the non-philosophical realm, to possess falsehoods rather than truths.

To begin my defence of these theses, a closer look at T1-2 will reveal that they can be read in a somewhat restricted way as far as the set of truths to which they are applicable is concerned. For both talk of that about which it is bad to have falsehood or ignorance as being ‘the things that are’ (τὰ ὄντα). Now the latter phrase, although it can be used non-technically to refer to items in the world generally, also has a technical usage in which it refers specifically to the Forms, those items that are the only unqualified bearers, strictly speaking, of the epithet ‘to be’.

It is of course true that at this stage of the dialogue we have not yet been introduced to the Forms. But having read the whole work, we are entitled to wonder if T1-2 hint at a narrower point about the value of truth, in terms of those truths (the ones I have labelled ‘philosophical’) to which later passages can be seen to apply. When one first encounters T1-2, it is natural enough to read them non-technically. Once we have digested the later metaphysics, however, it is unlikely that we are intended to read phrases such as ‘the things that are’ with wholly innocent eyes. It would be remiss not to take account of the metaphysics in considering interpretive possibilities, the more cautious sentiments about truth that we have also looked at providing an extra motivation to do so.

Even in the original context there is definite indication that T1 at any rate is not to be read with unrestricted scope. For a few lines earlier Socrates had declared that what no one would willingly possess is not falsehoods about any old thing but about ‘the most authoritative things’ (τὰ κυριώτατα, II 382a8). What these things are is again not specified, but an important restriction on scope is nonetheless explicitly signalled, to be filled out as the dialogue unfolds.

24) Indeed T2 talks of ‘believing’ (δοξάζειν) the things that are (413a8), which does not correspond to the later metaphysical schema in which knowledge is the proprietary form of cognition of that which is, though Socrates could hardly have offered ‘knowing the things that are’ as an adequately general description of what it is to have the truth, his official purpose here.

25) In the more immediate context there may be a back reference to 377e6-7 where ‘the most important things’ (τῶν μεγίστων) concern the behaviour of the gods; and an
Now it is, I take it, uncontroversial that the label ‘being’, together with kindred phrases, is reserved in more theoretical contexts of the Republic for the Forms. The key passage in this regard is the argument with the lovers of sights and sounds at V 475-80, which attempts to establish that it is only ‘the F itself’ as opposed to the many F things that can be called ‘that which is’, this phrase in turn delimiting the scope of what can be known. Moreover, at the outset of the argument, Socrates distinguishes lovers of sights and sounds from genuine philosophers (lovers of wisdom) by calling the latter ‘lovers of the sight of truth’ (475e4), so here we seem to have some backing for the idea that one might identify a category of specifically philosophical truths encapsulated in the knowledge of Forms.

Having previously claimed that it would be a mistake to read T1-2 as restricted to a certain category of person, I do not deny that Socrates thinks that only a select few are capable of arriving at philosophical truth. ‘The majority cannot be philosophic’ he remarks pithily at VI 494a3. The crucial difference is that with, say, the mad or the young, these characteristics were the reason why it would be bad that certain truths be imparted. That someone is not philosophical, by contrast, makes it not bad but pointless to impart certain truths, namely the philosophical ones; for they could not be grasped by such a person. One might as well try imparting the finer truths of quantum theory to most of us. If the majority could grasp philosophical truth, they would benefit from it in the same way as anyone else. In this important sense the value of philosophical truth remains unqualified; anyone who did grasp it would be in possession of a good.

It may, however, still be a little quick to conclude at this point that once the dialogue’s metaphysics is on the table we may speak without further ado about a particular body of truths that can be labelled philosophical. To be sure, a number of passages do sustain the connection between ‘that which is’ as referring to Forms, and truth. For example:

anticipation of III 392b1, where the same phrase is applied to (what is told about) happiness and justice in humans; but when we reach VI 503e-504a, ‘the most important subjects’ (τὰ μέγιστα μαθήματα) that demand the ‘longer road’ (504b2) of dialectical enquiry for discovery are the Forms of the four cardinal virtues (cf. a5-6). The Form of the Good is itself described as ‘having authority’ (κυρία) in the intelligible realm in the provision of truth and understanding (VII 517c2).

Whether this is to be regarded as a puzzling feature about the distribution of human talents is a question that I shall not pursue here.
[Soc:] When it [the soul] focuses on something illuminated by truth and what is, it understands, knows and appears to have understanding; but when it focuses on what is mixed with obscurity, on what comes to be and passes away, it opines and is dimmed, changes its opinions this way and that, and seems bereft of understanding. (VI 508d3-8)

Similarly, after stressing how the philosopher-ruler will look to Forms in establishing the right kind of city and citizens, Socrates asks of potential critics of philosophy:

Then how could they possibly dispute it? Will they deny that philosophers are lovers of what is and of truth? (VI 501d1-2)

Given that these critics were said at 499d to be ‘the many’ (τῶν πολλῶν), and are presumably the same ‘crowd’ (πλῆθος) who at 493e-494a will not hold that there is such a thing as beauty itself, as opposed to the many beautiful things, it may be that what they concede here cannot in their mouths concern ‘what is’ in its technical aspect. Yet, both here and in the discussion about knowledge and belief in Book V, of which there is some resonance here, Socrates seeks to reform the critics by trying to persuade them that the philosopher looks beyond the world of multiplicity. To this extent, even though the critics may be unable to acquire knowledge of the Forms (cf. V 476b-c), they can be brought to accept the basic outline of Platonic metaphysics, such that ‘that which is’ can be acknowledged by them to have a special referent.

VI

Be that as it may, there are also texts that seem to indicate that philosophers remain concerned with truth more broadly construed. Indeed the following two passages occur when Socrates is laying down his criteria for the genuinely philosophic nature:

They [those with philosophic natures] must be without falsehood – they must never voluntarily accept what is false, but hate it, and have a love for the truth. (VI 485c3-4)

27 At 476d-e the task is to calmly persuade (πείθειν, e1) the angry objector; at 501c Socrates hopes that they are persuading (πείθομεν, c5) those who were angry and making them gentle.
Then someone who really loves learning must above all strive for every truth (πάσης ἀληθείας) from childhood on. (VI 485d3-4)

One should, however, be clear about what Socrates means in speaking of a philosophic nature. He is describing the attributes not necessarily of a fully-fledged philosopher, but rather of the kind of person capable of becoming one – hence, for example, the reference to childhood above. This is explicit at VI 489e-490a where Socrates says that what they have been doing is identifying the nature that must belong to one who ‘is going to be’ (ἐσόμενον, a1) a fine and good person; such a person, to share in genuine philosophy, must pursue truth ‘in every way and everywhere’ (πάντως καὶ πάντῃ, a2). Socrates goes on to say that they must investigate how the philosophic nature gets corrupted (490e) and then remarks that whether it is fulfilled or spoiled will depend on the education it receives (492a).

What emerges from this is that the quality of being interested in truth of every kind is not a mark of the mature philosopher, but of the kind of young person capable of becoming one. The acquisition of philosophical truth is not on the curriculum in the earlier stages of the philosopher’s education – Socrates famously bars from participation in dialectic (the route to acquiring such truths) those who are too young to reap its benefits (VII 539a-d). Rather, the test of those who can, when old enough for it, perform the search in the unflagging way required to gain philosophical truth, is that when younger they show an unflagging interest in finding things out quite generally: a criterion of some psychological plausibility.

The presence of dialectic in turn makes it correct to view certain passages that bring philosophy and truth together as concerned with (what I have been calling) philosophical truth rather than truth more generally. Thus in complaining that critics of philosophy have not listened sufficiently to ‘fine and free arguments’ (λόγων... καλῶν τε καὶ ἐλευθέρων, VI 499a4) that seek the truth ‘in every way’ (ἐκ πάντως τρόπου, a6), Socrates surely refers in speaking of such arguments to dialectical discussion, with the truth in question being that concerning the nature of justice, beauty and so on. In similar vein, when Socrates implies that the philosophical soul will not be content to accept falsehood, but will be angry ‘when caught being ignorant’ (ἀμαθαίνουσα... ἁλισκομένη, VII 535e4), this catching unmistakably refers to that painful phenomenon of dialectical refutation.
It remains the case, then, that the interest of the philosopher as such is in a particular set of truths – those concerning Forms. One is correspondingly entitled to continue speaking of such truths as a distinct category in the *Republic*, identifiable as philosophical, once the dialogue’s metaphysics is brought into view.28

**VII**

Let us turn to the non-philosophical realm. Here, as we have seen, when it comes to beliefs about, say, the behaviour of the gods or the origins of the city, it is not their truth that will determine whether people should come to possess them. Rather, it is, as I shall now argue, the effect that possessing these beliefs, true or not, will have on the subject’s actions.

There are actually two separate strands here. I want to consider, firstly, the question of *who* the possession of the appropriate non-philosophical beliefs is supposed to benefit and, secondly, *how* it is supposed to benefit. Regarding the first question, it might be thought that the criterion is that the city as a whole should benefit; this would, after all, be consonant with the dialogue’s emphasis on the welfare of the city as a whole being paramount, rather than that of any segment within it (e.g. IV 418e–421c). This might also offer a satisfactory alternative way of reading T1-2, which can now be left to state that it is indeed good for any (let us say sane and mature) individual to possess the truth, the further restrictions elsewhere being a recognition that sometimes the good of the individual must be subordinated to a greater good.

Now no doubt Socrates would affirm that the possession of the appropriate beliefs (true or false) will be of benefit to the city as a whole. Nonetheless, his main criterion for determining which beliefs should be possessed is the welfare of their possessor not society overall. In this regard Socrates’ approach is not a utilitarian one, in the sense of one that takes it as justification for doing harm to some that a wider good is thereby served.

Thus in speaking of why tales about heroes’ bad behaviour should not be told, Socrates says that they are ‘harmful to people who hear them’ (τοῖς

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28) This is the category at issue in two important applications of the metaphysics: the discussion of true pleasures in Book IX (‘That which is related to what is always the same, immortal and true, is itself of that kind’, 585c2–3), and of the imitative arts in Book X (the painter of a bed, for example, is ‘third from the truth’ (597e7), as represented (in the example) by the Form of Bed).
γε ἀκούουσιν βλαβερά, III 391e4). It is, then, those who would be in possession of such beliefs about heroes who are picked out as the primary subjects of harm, and it is this fact that justifies the tales not being told. More generally, Socrates avers that the rulers of the city will need to make considerable use of falsehood and deception ‘for the benefit (ὡφελία) of those ruled’ (V 459c9-d2; he is anticipating the introduction of the rigged marriage lotteries). Again, it seems clear that the justification for the deception is in terms of the benefit conferred on those who are being deceived.

This is reinforced by Socrates’ talk here of falsehoods being dispensed as a kind of ‘drug’ (φαρμάκου, d2), with the rulers acting as doctors, a theme already spelled out at III 389b (cf. II 382c-d). Those who are not rulers are strictly forbidden to purvey falsehoods (389b-d), but this has no tendency even partially to convert falsehood into a thing bad in itself; the worry, rather, is that the non-ruler will lack the expertise to dispense falsehood appropriately (b5-6). Evidently the primary purpose of a doctor giving a drug to a patient is to benefit the patient. It may have wider beneficial effects too, but for a doctor qua doctor it is the patient’s welfare that is the objective (cf. I 341c-e).

When Socrates does mention telling falsehoods ‘on account of enemies or citizens for the benefit of the city’ (III 389b9-10), he leaves it open whether the particular citizens to whom the falsehood is told might not benefit too (by being prevented from acting badly, for example). It may not be an accident in this regard that the term translated ‘on account of’ – ἓνεκα – may

29) How exactly those who lose out in the rigged lotteries are supposed to benefit is unclear; but that Socrates is justifying the falsehood by reference to those who are told it seems not in doubt, especially given (as we shall now see) Socrates’ use of medical terminology.

30) There follows an interesting twist (c1-2): ordinary citizens should no more lie to their rulers than a sick person to his doctor. The test in this instance is the benefit of the agent of the lie not the recipient, though presumably doctors and rulers alike are hindered in the proper performance of their function (and in that way harmed) by the receipt of false information from the non-experts they serve.

31) As in the metaphorical case at II 382c-d, where Socrates mentions that falsehoods can be a ‘useful drug’ (φάρμακον χρήσιμον, c10-d1) for preventing one’s ‘so-called friends’ (τῶν καλουμένων φίλων, c9) from doing something bad through madness or ignorance. Still, the reference to friends – ‘so-called’, presumably, because one cannot be a genuine friend of the ignorant or mad (cf. 382e3) – in combination with the drug motif indicates that it is they who remain the primary recipients of benefit, bad actions being bad chiefly for their agent, on familiar Socratic principles (the point is of course asserted, with particular reference to unjust actions, at IV 444c-e).
just as well mean ‘for the sake of’. Perhaps even the treatment of enemies with falsehood is thought of as bestowing benefit on them to the extent that it prevents bad behaviour on their part. The fact that the passage is governed by the medical analogy would suggest so.\textsuperscript{32} On balance, one should conclude that Socrates’ principal justification for the dispensing of falsehoods is that they benefit those to whom they are dispensed.

\section*{VIII}

How does it benefit them? By helping them, as already indicated, behave well rather than badly. The useful drug of falsehood may stop friends who, through madness or ignorance, are ‘attempting to do something bad’ (κακόν τι ἐπιχειρῶσιν πράττειν, II 382c9-10).\textsuperscript{33} Portraying gods as sinners, even if they were that, is tantamount to telling the young that ‘one would do nothing untoward’ (οὐδὲν ἄν θαυμαστὸν ποιοῖ, 378b2-3) in committing the gravest wrongs, an impression likely to be given if, for example, Ouranos is represented as doing what Hesiod ‘says that he did’ (φησι δρᾶσαι αὐτὸν, 377e8). Picturing life in Hades as miserable is neither true nor beneficial for future warriors (III 386b10-c2) and will clash with the objective of turning out soldiers who ‘will prefer death in battle to defeat or slavery’ (386b5-6). Now here Socrates implies that the beneficial view of Hades is also the true one. But there is no indication that it is beneficial because it is true. The benefit at stake is a practical one: courageous behaviour on the battlefield, to be engendered by fostering the attitude that death is no great evil.

Socrates does say at II 382d3-4 that ‘in making falsehood as much like truth as possible, we thereby (οὕτω) make it useful’. But the context is specifically tales about the gods, who Socrates has just argued indepen-

\textsuperscript{32} Against this, one might cite the fact that in the later, slightly tongue-in-cheek discussion of the merits of Asclepius’ approach to medicine, getting a patient who can lead a normal life back to health is said to be ‘in order that he not harm the city’s affairs’ (III 407d4). On the other hand, the granting of treatment to one incapable of living a normal life is described as profitable ‘neither to himself nor to the city’ (e2, cf. 408b2-3). For all its bracing tone, there is insufficient here to support a notion that Socrates would countenance sacrificing the interest of a subject for the wider good of the city.

\textsuperscript{33} Falsely informing one’s crazed friend who demands the return of a borrowed knife that one has lost it would be in the spirit of Socrates’ celebrated example at I 331c.
dently cannot be bad (380d-381c), his point then being that in telling stories no doubt factually inaccurate (or at least unverifiable given the antiquity of the events they purport to describe, d2), but in the spirit of what has been shown to be the truth about the gods (cf. II 377a4-5), we thereby achieve the desired practical outcome of a well-behaved citizenry.

One must note, however, that the notion of making falsehood like truth also has a less wholesome resonance. The terminology Plato uses cannot but be a deliberate echo of Hesiod’s famous line (Theogony 27) in which the Muses claim that they know how to ‘speak falsehoods like truths’, and one plausible reading of this is that the Muses, through the cunningness of their art, can make anything sound true (hence persuasive), whatever its actual relation to the facts. The task envisaged by Socrates for the poets from this viewpoint would be akin to the production of accomplished rhetoric.

Moreover, as we saw earlier (T4 above), when it comes to the behaviour of the gods, Socrates is clear that they should not be portrayed as acting badly even if this were true. The correct inference to draw is that he does not think that possessing the truth in one’s soul about gods, heroes or Hades is itself a good thing. Rather, it is good if it produces good behaviour, bad if it produces bad. By the same token, imparting falsehoods on these topics is the right thing to do if it benefits the recipients by helping them to act well.

IX

I want to bring out further the lack of importance that the Republic attaches to truth in the non-philosophical arena by considering the particular case

34) Heroes may also be included under this rubric as children of gods (391d5-e1), though when it comes to tales of that doughty hero Achilles’ bad behaviour, Socrates will merely ‘deny that they were truly said’ (οὐ φήσομεν ἀληθῆ εἰρῆσθαι, 391b7-8) – and one may have other grounds for denying a thing to be true than the belief that it is false. Grube/Reeve 1992 mislead here in translating ‘Nor is it true . . . So we’ll deny that’ (67); no such inference is in the Greek.

35) The stories would simply be relating the sorts of things gods might actually have done: there is no call to follow Schofield 2007, 143, in reading Socrates’ talk of making falsehood like truth as indicative of a contrast between ‘fact’ and ‘moral truth’.

36) ψεύδει . . . λέγειν ἐτύμοιον ὀμοίως; Socrates talks of ἀψυμοιούντες τῷ ἀληθεὶ τῷ ψεύδος at 382d3. For a discussion of this relation (which adopts the more wholesome reading) see Belfiore 1985.
of the Auxiliaries. They seem to me to provide a good touchstone for the view I am arguing here because, firstly, they are, so to speak, the best of the non-philosophers within Kallipolis; so if it turns out that it is of little or no moment that the beliefs they possess are true, one can infer that non-philosophical truth has limited significance overall. Secondly, the city’s courage exists precisely in virtue of the Auxiliaries’ preservation of their beliefs about what should and should not be feared (presumably concerning such issues as defeat and slavery in the former case, pain and death in the latter); and this enables one to ask directly: is it the case that these beliefs of the Auxiliaries must be true?

With one possible exception (which I shall come to shortly), the official account of civic courage does not mention truth. Thus Socrates says:

The city is courageous, then, because of a part of itself that has the power to preserve through everything its belief about what things are to be feared, namely that they are the things and kinds of things that the lawgiver declared to be such in the course of educating it. (IV 429b8-c2)

That preservation of the belief that has been inculcated by the law through education about what things and sorts of things are to be feared [is courage]. (IV 429c7-8)

[We contrived] that because they had the proper nature and upbringing, they would absorb the laws in the finest possible way, just like a dye, so that their belief about what they should fear and all the rest would become so fast that even such extremely effective detergents as pleasure, pain, fear, and desire wouldn’t wash it out . . . (IV 430a2-b2)

Or [is the most important virtue] the preservation among the soldiers of the law-inspired belief about what is to be feared and what isn’t? (IV 433c6-8)

Rather than associate ‘the things that are to be feared’ with what is actually worthy of fear, these passages tie the Auxiliaries’ beliefs about what is fearful to what the lawgiver declares to be so, with no particular indication that the lawgiver’s aim in laying down the law is to transmit truth. Socrates’ description of courage’s counterpart in the soul also makes no mention of truth:

And it is because of the spirited part, I suppose, that we call a single individual courageous, namely, when it preserves through pains and pleasures the declarations of reason about what is to be feared and what isn’t. (IV 442b10-c2)

There might be paradox in reason knowingly passing on falsehoods to another part of the soul (if that is what reason would be doing in the event
that what is passed on were not true), as there would not be in the case of Guardians doing this to Auxiliaries. But that would be a merely pragmatic constraint on the truth status of what is being conveyed, not an objection to their falsity as such. Socrates is in any event silent on the truth status of these declarations.

What receives prominence with regard to courage in both city and soul is not that the beliefs be true but that they be well-entrenched, capable of being preserved through thick and thin. The fundamental point when it comes to the Auxiliaries is thus twofold. The beliefs that they take on must be (a) ones that will in principle produce the appropriate behaviour in the fulfilment of their duties, and (b) well enough inured against the forces of pleasure and pain to ensure that such behaviour is consistently displayed. With this in mind, let us turn to the passage which may indicate that civic courage is in fact the preservation of true belief:

[Soc:] This power to preserve through everything the correct and law-inculcated belief about what is to be feared and what isn’t is what I call courage, unless, of course, you say otherwise.

[Glaucon:] I have nothing different to say, for I assume that you don’t consider the correct belief about these same things, of the sort found in animals and slaves, and which is not the result of education, to be inculcated by law, and that you don’t call it courage but something else. (IV 430b3-9)

The first point to notice here is that the term Socrates and Glaucon use to describe the beliefs in question is not ‘true’ (ἀληθής) but ‘correct’ (ὀρθή). Though the latter may be simply functioning as a synonym for the former, it may alternatively indicate that what the beliefs need to be is not true in the sense of corresponding to the facts, but correct in the sense of fitting the purpose, this being, in the principal case under discussion, the eliciting of courageous behaviour from the city, in the shape of its military wing.

37) The Guardians, it is later implied, do establish regulations in Kallipolis on moral matters on the basis of having seen ‘what is most true’ (τὸ ἀληθέστατον, VI 484c7): the Forms. What, if anything, this commits Socrates to regarding the truth content of the regulations themselves is another question.

38) This is a recurrent sense of the word in the Republic. See e.g. V 451c5 (the correct way to possess women and children), III 403a7 (the correct way to love); generally, correctness (ὀρθότης) is ‘related to nothing other than the use for which each thing is made or naturally adapted’ (X 601d4-6).
Let us assume, however, at least for the sake of argument, that the term does carry the sense of ‘true’ in this passage. What can be gleaned from it, on this reading, about the importance of the Auxiliaries’ beliefs being true? The striking thing is the way that the notion gets downplayed. For Glaucon is perfectly happy to suggest (and Socrates concurs) that the possession of correct beliefs as might be held by slaves and animals about what should and should not be feared does not qualify as courage. What allows us to speak of a virtue is that the beliefs are lawlike (νόμιμον, 430b8), that is, inculcated through a systematic educational programme, thus making them particularly immune to the influence of the passions. To the extent that the Auxiliaries’ beliefs are true, this aspect of them is pointedly downgraded. No wonder that, if it does feature at all, in the majority of the descriptions of their beliefs it is notable by its absence.

X

Thus far, I have argued for a distinction in the Republic between philosophical and non-philosophical truth, such that only the former is considered worthy of possession in itself. In the case of the latter, I have tried to show that its value is a matter of how possession affects the way the possessor acts; if it conduces to acting well, it is a good thing to possess; if not, then not. With the Auxiliaries, and perhaps more widely, even if the beliefs that conduces to acting well should happen to be true, what is important is that they be well-entrenched, else we do not have a guarantee of reliability as far as the agent’s good behaviour is concerned. In introducing the curriculum of Books II-III, Socrates emphasizes how the young soul ‘takes on any pattern one wishes to impress on it’ (377b2), which means it must be ensured that the young acquire no beliefs ‘opposite to what we think they ought to hold when mature’ (b6-8). Beliefs imbued when young ‘are hard to erase and tend to become unalterable’ (378e1). Not that Socrates is tak-

39) ὀρθή as applied to slaves and animals carries the same potential ambiguity between true, on the one hand, and conducing to desired behaviour, on the other (consider the various unpleasant but useful tasks that slaves and animals might be required to carry out).

40) The reading of the manuscripts, adopted by Burnet’s OCT. Slings’s OCT has Stobaeus’ μόνιμον (‘stable’). Little turns for present purposes on which reading one adopts, though the MSS seem more in keeping with the earlier descriptions of civic courage, as well as differentiating the Auxiliaries’ condition more precisely from that of slaves and animals.
ing any chances on that score with the content he deems appropriate. Entrenchment, not truth, is the issue.

With truth in the non-philosophical realm at best a muted presence, I want now to focus a little more on philosophical truth, and to flesh out my claim that with regard to it at any rate possession is valuable for its own sake. Since I have suggested that what possession for its own sake is contrasted with when it comes to truth is effect on action or behaviour, I want to show that philosophical truth is seen as distinctively valuable regardless of its effects on its possessor’s behaviour. This is not, of course, to deny that to the extent that possession of philosophical truth does affect an agent’s behaviour, it will affect it positively. Knowing what justice is will surely help the agent to act justly in appropriate contexts, and so on. What I am asking, however, is whether possession of these truths would be valuable even if there were no question of it being connected with action.

Let us consider the examples Socrates gives, in his classification of goods, of those that are valued both for their own sake and for what results from them (II 357c2-4). These are three: ‘thinking’ (φρονεῖν), ‘seeing’ (ὁρᾶν) and ‘being healthy’ (ὑγιαίνειν). Now thinking and seeing might in a rather general sense both be said to be things one does. On the other hand, φρονεῖν might also be translated as ‘be intelligent’, in which case it refers to a state or attribute rather than an activity; and this is unequivocally true of being healthy. Whether or not one would still be moved to classify seeing as something one does, it would hardly count, given that it simply requires (together with some external conditions) that my healthy eyes be open, as a case of acting or even behaving.

Assuming a certain degree of unity in these examples, we might read the contrast here, despite the verbs, as one between having a certain attribute (intelligence, vision, health) and what having that attribute enables us to get done. Intuitively, we do just like being healthy, intelligent and perceptive regardless of what further things they help us achieve; but we also value these goods because they contribute in fairly obvious ways to the furtherance of our plans and projects; we are, it seems reasonable to say, generally able to act more successfully with them than without them.

41 This need not exclude (if we wish to give the verbs full weight) the idea of our enjoying the use of our eyes and our minds independently of it furthering the achievement of some separately specified goal.
If this is one plausible way of construing the contrast between an item's being valued for its own sake and for what results from it, we next need to show that the possession of philosophical truth is regarded as something that is valuable for its own sake. A firm indication that it is to be so regarded may be found in perhaps a rather unexpected place, namely the splendid remarks about philosophical dogs at II 375d-376b. Socrates and Glaucon have been worrying, at 375b-c, about how one might find in the same person (as potential guardian) the quality of being both harsh (to enemies) and gentle (to friends). Socrates notes that these characteristics do coexist in well-bred dogs, thus enabling the pair to conclude that they need not despair of finding it in humans.

Then Socrates adds that what this means is that a good guardian must be philosophical (375e9), and remarks that this quality too is found in dogs! How so? Socrates continues:

When a dog sees someone it doesn’t know, it gets angry even without having suffered anything bad. But when it knows someone, it welcomes him, even if it has never received anything good from him... How could it not be a lover of learning, if it defines what is its own and what is alien to it in terms of knowledge and ignorance? (II 376a5-7; b6-7)

One cannot but be struck by the humour of the passage, and might (at the risk of spoiling the joke) even ask: why is it humorous? A plausible response is that it seems an exaggeration (to put it mildly) to label even the best trained dog ‘philosophical’. There is, on the other hand, no reason not to take Socrates’ account of what it is to be philosophical at face value. Indeed if we did not, the very humour of applying this account to dogs would lose its edge.

Note, then, one important element of the account. The dog proves itself to be philosophical because it welcomes someone it knows even if it has

42) I make no claim that, even if correct, this is the only way to construe it, particularly with regard to the latter element. When he turns to things valued only for their results, Socrates talks of ‘the rewards and other things’ they may bring about (357d1-2), indicating that he has in mind a variety of sorts of outcome that might be valued, not confined to successful action.

43) The term for ‘welcome’ used here – ἀσπάζεσθαι – perhaps deliberately recalls the classification of goods earlier in Book II, where it describes the attitude of the subject both to goods valued simply for their own sake (357b6) and to those valued for their own sake and for what results from them (c4).
never received anything good from him, and likewise is angered when encountering one it doesn't know even without having suffered anything bad. Socrates infers that it must be a lover of learning – philosophical – in regarding knowledge and ignorance this way.

Whatever its merits as a description of canine psychology,44 Socrates goes out of his way here to emphasize that the mark of the philosopher is to value knowledge for its own sake, regardless of what further goods may result from it. That he speaks of knowledge rather than truth is appropriate enough, since as we discover later (from Book V on) knowledge will turn out to have Forms as its proprietary objects, and these correspond to the restricted class of truths that I am calling philosophical.45

XI

The hypothesis, then, is that it is good to possess philosophical truths for their own sake, where this in turn implies good regardless of any beneficial effects that possessing them may have on one's actions. Now it seems to me that one very strong test of this hypothesis would be the following: imagine that one who possessed such truths, and would thereby presumably be in the best possible position, on the basis of possessing them, to act well, had a choice not to act at all, but rather to be simply in the state of possessing these truths. Would being in that state be of such value that the subject would not be motivated to go out in the world and act at all? Here is what Socrates has to say:

And what about the uneducated who have no experience of truth? Isn't it likely – indeed doesn't it follow necessarily from what was said before – that they will never adequately govern a city? But neither would those who have been allowed to spend their whole lives being educated: the former because they don't have a single goal at which all their actions, public and private, inevitably aim; the latter because they won't

44) My thanks to Nick Denyer and Shaul Tor for instruction on Greek views in this regard.
45) I doubt in fact that there is much of a wedge to be driven between knowledge and truth at this level, assuming (as the repeated refutations in the Platonic corpus of actual attempts to answer 'What is F' questions may indicate) a rather high degree of complexity in the correct accounts of Forms. Merely having a complex formula in one's head (because, say, one had been told it and learned it by heart) without really understanding what it means is, I think, intuitively insufficient to be regarded as possessing the truth about the subject-matter in question.
be willing to act, thinking that they had settled while still alive in the Isles of the Blessed. (VII 519b7-c6)

The truth that Socrates is speaking of here is evidently something like what I have been calling philosophical truth, since he has just spoken of the desirability of one’s soul being turned around from the earthly realm to look at ‘the true things’ (τὰ ἀληθῆ, 519b4), that is, the Forms, those entities the apprehension of which gives us the truth about the qualities they represent.46 Left to their own devices, those who have this vision, Socrates tells us, ‘won’t be willing to act’ (ἑκόντες εἶναι οὐ πράξουσιν, c4-5).47 And this despite the fact that, as he also informs us, those who lack this vision will not be able to act as well as they might, since they will lack the unified aim that a grasp of the correct account of a virtue (rather than more piecemeal information) can provide.48

Nor should one restrict Socrates’ claim about unwillingness to act to the public sphere. It will of course be a particular concern of his that the philosophers of Kallipolis should bear the burden of ruling, despite the attractions of living permanently outside the Cave. But the contrast he draws in the present passage is not limited to public life.49 The uneducated fail to act optimally in private or public; those who have received nothing but education simply won’t be willing to act – by implication, in private or public. In imagining themselves already settled on the Isles of the Blessed, they place themselves outside the realm of action, content to experience their own version of heaven constituted by possession of the truth.

Since the philosophers of Kallipolis owe their education to having been reared within it, and perhaps could not have reached that level without it

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46) As sight is to visible objects, so dialectic is to Forms, with the Good its ultimate end (532a-b). One might thus consider the unified goal of action to be given above all by a grasp of the Form of the Good. Given his talk of ‘true things’ (plural), Socrates seems less focused at this juncture on its special role; that it remains at least in the background is, however, indicated by the resonance of the claim that those who lack this aim will be hampered in their actions ‘in private and public’ (519c4) with the earlier assertion that if one is to act properly ‘in private or public’ (517c4) one must see the Good.

47) Compare 517c-d, where those who ascend to the intelligible realm are said to be ‘unwilling to do human actions’ (οὐκ ἔθελοσυν τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράττειν, c7-8), eager instead simply ‘to pass the time above’ (ἀνω . . . διατρίβειν, c8-d1).

48) Compare the importance of dialectic for achieving a ‘unified vision’ (σύνοψις) at 537c.

49) Note the responsibility of the educated philosopher to shape human character ‘both in private and public’ (500d6).
(as VI 497a-c seems to imply), Socrates can at least claim that ruling is the just thing for them to do (VII 520a-e), and given that the just life is better than the unjust (the central contention of the Republic), the life in which one takes one’s share of ruling will in fact be better for the philosopher than the practicable alternatives. Pointedly, the Isles of the Blessed recur as the philosopher’s dwelling-place only, if naturally, on death (VII 540b6-7). What this echo reinforces, though, is the notion that a life in which ruling were not required stands as the ideal, even if the ideal and the attainable do not go hand in hand. Philosophical truth is valuable for its own sake, then, just in the sense that in a world where there were no actions to be made good by its possession, it would still be a good thing to possess.

XII

Why exactly is the state of possessing philosophical truth so good in itself? There are, I think, two related aspects. First, it is clear (particularly with regard to the Form of the Good) that what one who is in possession of philosophical truth has a grasp of is the fundamental nature of reality. There is incomparable satisfaction in having such a grasp:

[Soc:] And as for a philosopher, what do you suppose he thinks the other pleasures are worth compared to that of knowing where the truth lies and always being in some such pleasant condition while learning? Won’t he think that they are far behind? (IX 581d9-e1)

That, at any rate, is the philosopher’s view; but the philosopher’s combination of intelligence and experience means it is also an accurate one (582e-583a).

However, the reason this state is so satisfying is connected less with the fact that it grasps the fundamental nature of reality than with what that nature is – namely an orderly structure. It is this kind of structure that is the ultimate possessor of value, and it is because of this that to grasp it in turn has value. Moreover, a grasp of the structure of reality is endowed with this value in a peculiarly direct way, in that one who recognizes it cannot help but become as much like it as possible:

[Soc:] As he looks at and studies things that are organized and always the same, that neither do injustice to one another nor suffer it, being all in a rational order, he
imitates them and becomes as like them as he can. Or do you think that someone can
consort with things he admires without imitating them . . . So the philosopher, in con-
sorting with what is ordered and divine, becomes as divine and ordered as a human
being can. (VI 500c3-7; d1-2)

One might wonder at this point whether the taking on of the structure of
the intelligible realm that makes one divine is not to be classified as a result
of grasping that structure rather than what the grasping of it consists in.
But what Socrates seems to emphasize here is that the grasping and the
taking on are not really successive but simultaneous – on both sides he uses
the present tense throughout. In contemplating the Forms the philosopher
cannot but be engaged in imitating them and becoming like them, acquir-
ing as far as possible the quality of being ‘divine’ (θεῖος), surely the highest
term of approbation in the Platonic vocabulary. It is this orderly structure,
then, that has supreme value; one who takes it on is in possession of what
is most desirable.

Note that, as one might expect when the paradigm is inanimate objects,50
nothing follows directly about action except negatively, the reference being
to the non-commission of injustice (500c4). It is, however, just action that
has previously been said to promote and preserve a harmonious tripartite
soul (IV 443e-44a). It seems plausible, then, that the reason why rulers
should rule, given the requirements of justice, is ultimately for the preser-
vation of their soul’s orderly structure. Only if one were considering a
purely rational soul would the taking on of the structure of the intelligible
realm be all there were to the achievement of psychic order. If orderly
structure is the ultimate value, then ruling will be a condition of its mani-
festation in the soul of the philosopher of Kallipolis.

The philosopher, in love with the realm of reason, may understandably
feel reluctance at having to return to and remain in the Cave. But the fact
is that the embodied philosopher’s soul is not one of pure reason; the
orderly structure of a tripartite soul demands for its maintenance those
actions called for by obedience to the requirements of justice. When death,
with perhaps disembodiment of the soul to accompany it, sweeps the phi-

50) That these objects are the Forms (rather than, say, astronomical entities) seems con-
firmed by their being referred to a few lines earlier as ‘the things that are’ (c1), though
Socrates’ later words would apply quite naturally to the celestial order, a perhaps deliberate
choice given the elevated place that objects of mathematical study have in the dialogue’s
ontology.
losopher off to the Isles of the Blessed, a life of pure reason, and with it the achievement of the soul’s essential nature, is at hand (cf. X 611b-612a).

XIII

Where does this leave the relation between value and truth? The contingencies of embodiment aside, let us accept that in grasping the truths of the intelligible realm I grasp its orderly structure and that in grasping its orderly structure I take on that structure – the ultimate locus of value – as far as is possible. To be in possession of philosophical truth is, one might then say, to be in a state that is of the highest value. Is the value of philosophical truth in the Republic thereby confirmed?

Let me approach the question by returning to the one I posed at the start of this paper: how normatively robust is truth as far as the Republic is concerned? When it comes to non-philosophical truth, the answer is, I hope to have demonstrated, not robust at all. For what matters in this regard is not whether the subject has the truth, but whether what is had is of practical benefit. These two elements will sometimes fail to coincide, and when that happens, truth is dispensable. When truth and benefit do coincide, Socrates is clear that what matters is the practical benefit; even in those cases where the relation is tighter (as with truths about the gods, for example) Socrates takes time to insist that were tales of gods behaving badly to be true, they should not be told.

With regard to philosophical truth, the case would appear to be rather different. Certainly, it does not seem to be just a coincidence that the ultimate structure of reality, insofar as it is intelligible, is orderly. The Form of the Good is ‘that which gives truth to the things that are known . . . it is the cause of knowledge and truth’ (VI 508d10-e3). The import of this is that to be an intelligible realm just is to be underwritten, so to speak, by the Form of the Good; that which is intelligible is, necessarily, good. And if the primary manifestation of goodness is orderly structure, then the truths of the intelligible realm will express such goodness. The tight connection between philosophical truth and order is outlined as early as VI 486d7-11,

51) One can, it seems to me, explain along these lines why the philosopher evidently at some level minds having to rule, but is also prepared, in the embodied life, to do so.
52) ‘If lying or deception will be of assistance in fostering an individual’s moral development, he [Plato] will use it’ (De Chiara-Quenzer 1994, 43). See also Page 1991, 8-9.
when Socrates and Glaucon agree that truth is akin to ‘due measure’ (ἐμμετρία), such that one whose thought possesses this latter quality will be easily led to ‘the form of each thing that is’.

This, I think, does allow us to vindicate philosophical truth as normatively robust. For in possessing it one thereby, necessarily, manifests goodness, explicated as orderly structure. So there is no question of disjoining philosophical truth from goodness; it is always and everywhere, insofar as it manifests orderly structure, a good thing to possess. Yet a qualification of considerable importance remains. We are entitled to ask: what if, per impossibile, philosophical truth were disjoined from goodness? What makes this a legitimate question is the fact that one can perfectly well give an account, by the Republic’s own lights, of goodness as orderly structure, without so much as mentioning the notion of truth. That is to say, philosophical truths are of value not because they are true but because they are philosophical; it is in expressing the order of the intelligible realm that they are endowed with goodness. If the intelligible realm were (as admittedly it could not be) lacking an orderly structure, its truths would carry no special value.

And this means that in the final analysis it would be a mistake, with regard to philosophical truth, to locate its value in the quality of being true. How should this affect our assessment of the Republic’s stance? On the one hand, there is no direct evidence that the conceptual separability of order and truth is intended to undermine the normative robustness of the latter. But it should undermine it; and one can be fairly confident that Plato would not have the slightest worry about conceding that, when disjoined from order, truth as such does lack normative robustness – and here there is considerable indirect evidence in the dialogue’s attitude towards non-philosophical truth. If that is so, then there may be less than one supposes to the view that truth, of whatever stripe, is a source of value in the Republic.53

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