

The Department of Philosophy Presents:

# The Ethics and Politics of Plato's "Noble Lie"

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Reception  
to Follow

**Abstract:** The Noble Lie proposed by Plato for the Just City in Republic III has been much misunderstood. Its agenda is twofold: to get the citizens of the City to see their society as a natural entity, with themselves as all 'family' and akin; and to get the Guardians in particular to make class mobility, on which the justice of the City depends, a top priority. Since the second is taken to depend on the first, the Lie passage amounts to an argument (1) that the survival of a just community depends on the existence of social solidarity between elite and mass, which allows for full class mobility and genuine meritocracy; (2) that this solidarity in turn depends on an ideology of natural unity; and (3) that such ideologies are always false. So the Lie really is a lie, but a necessary one; as such it poses an awkward ethical problem for Plato and, if he is right, for our own societies as well.