I. Introduction

When one thinks of Plato and the image he portrays of Socrates in the dialogues, what comes to mind are persons of great integrity. One of the most telling examples of Socrates' character can be found in the Crito. Faced with an unjust sentence and a sure plan of escape, he stays and is put to death. His friends are unable to convince him and themselves that it is more just to escape than to stay.

Yet even Socrates and Plato, men of virtuous character, did not believe that all lying is immoral. They believed that in certain circumstances lying is permissible, and in those circumstances lying is not immoral.

This paper will discuss under what circumstances and why lying is permissible for Plato. The account given of Plato's views will derive from the Republic, although it can be found to be operative in other Platonic dialogues.

Plato does not expressly define lying in the Republic or elsewhere. It will be helpful, therefore, to begin the discussion by defining lying. In Part II of this article I will present working definitions of the concepts of lying, deception, and error. Part III will consider the lying or absence thereof which is associated with the gods, auxiliaries, and ordinary people in the ideal polis. It will also consider the lying permitted by the philosopher-kings, the noble lie, and the lying surrounding the marital practices of the guardians. Having established, in Part III, why lying is sometimes permissible and not immoral in the ideal polis, I will consider in Part IV whether some of Socrates' exchanges with Polemarchus and Thrasymachus in Book I are instances of lying or deception, and why Plato apparently believes that either lying or deception is permissible for Socrates.
II. Lying, Deception, and Error

In order to give a working definition of lying, it is also helpful to consider the concepts of deception and error. Although lying, deception, and error are different from one another, they share some important characteristics. Listed below are six characteristics which help to define lying as well as to distinguish it from deception and error. A lie is:

(a) a verbal or nonverbal expression;
(b) which is a misrepresentation of a truth;
(c) believed by the author to be a misrepresentation;
(d) intended by the author to mislead the receiver;
(e) committed in a setting in which the receiver could reasonably expect the author to tell the truth, and the author is aware of this expectation;
(f) regardless of whether the statement appears to the receiver to be true.

Let us now compare the most contrary of the terms. These are lying and error. Lying and error both involve a verbal or nonverbal expression (a) which is a misrepresentation of a truth (b). They differ, however, with respect to the author's awareness of the statement as a misrepresentation. The author of a lie necessarily believes the statement is a misrepresentation (c); otherwise it would not be a lie. The author of an error does not believe that his or her statement is a misrepresentation. A lie and an error also differ with respect to intention. In the case of a lie, the speaker intends to mislead the receiver (d). In the case of error, the intention of the speaker is not to mislead someone else, but rather to speak the truth. It turns out, however, that what the speaker believes is true, and communicates to others, is not true. For example, the speaker believes that $7 + 5 = 11$. When the speaker reports this to others, he or she is not trying to mislead the receivers. To the contrary, the speaker is attempting to communicate the truth. The liar, on the other hand, knows that $7 + 5$ is not equal to 11 yet intends to mislead the receiver into believing that $7 + 5 = 11$. 