

## Prologue

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Liman seemed sympathetic to North for having taken an unanticipated fall. But while presumably disarming North with this tactic, he was also drawing from the witness repeated acknowledgements that his behaviour in lying and deceiving was in violation of the Naval Academy's values of honour and trustworthiness that he had sworn to uphold as a midshipman.<sup>1</sup>

Now Nields would try to lecture North: In certain communist countries the government's activities are kept secret from the people. But that's not the way we do things in America, is it?<sup>2</sup>

A man can do you no greater injustice than tell lies. For in a political system based on speeches, how can it be safely administered if the speeches are not true?<sup>3</sup>

Two congressional committee members attempt to make Oliver North realise that he was wrong to have deceived Congress, the American people and the Iranian government. Liman appeals to an oath he took when he became an American serviceman. Nields makes an explicit link between openness, honesty and normative political behaviour in America. He implicitly grounds that link in America's democratic constitution. He contrasts such ideal behaviour with the practices of countries which are not democratic. The contrast reproduces Karl Popper's influential distinction between 'the open society and its enemies' – even more so when we read Senator Lee Hamilton's verdict on North's testimony.<sup>4</sup> After insisting that North lied to the Iranians, the CIA, the Attorney General, friends, allies, Congress and the people, Hamilton goes on 'I cannot agree that the end has justified

<sup>1</sup> From an account of the United States congressional committee hearing on the 'Iran-Contra' affair, where Colonel Oliver North was summoned to give evidence. Quotation from an extract in Kerr (1990) 519. Extract taken from B. Bradlee Jr. (1988), *Guts and Glory: The Rise and Fall of Oliver North*, New York.

<sup>2</sup> Kerr (1990) 513.

<sup>3</sup> Dem. 19.184: οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔσθ' ὁ τι μείζον ἂν ὑμᾶς ἀδικήσειέ τις, ἢ ψευδῆ λέγων. οἷς γὰρ ἔστ' ἐν λόγοις ἢ πολιτείᾳ, πῶς, ἂν οὔτοι μὴ ἀληθεῖς ὦσιν, ἀσφαλῶς ἔστι πολιτεύεσθαι;

<sup>4</sup> Popper (1966).

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the means . . . The means employed were a profound threat to the democratic process . . . Methods and means are what this country is all about.<sup>5</sup>

In the third of my opening quotations, the fourth-century Athenian *rhētōr* (politician, speaker) Demosthenes represents deceit by elite *rhētores* as a profound threat to democratic process. Mobilising similar arguments to those of Oliver North's inquisitors, he goes on to state that official deceit is relatively unproblematic for a tyranny or an oligarchy, because those systems do not require mass debate and decision-making (19.185–6).

Senator Hamilton is disturbed by North's appeal to the notion that it is sometimes necessary and justifiable to lie to the people. He sees such arguments as threatening to democracy and the ideal identity of his country.<sup>6</sup> North's defence of his deceptions bears some resemblance to arguments offered by Plato's Socrates in the *Republic*. Socrates' ideal polis is governed by rulers who are permitted to lie to their subject-citizens for the good of that state (2.369b7–c6, 3.414b8–415d5).<sup>7</sup> Although embarrassed by his proposal, Socrates also argues that the survival of this state is dependent on the dissemination of and universal belief in a 'noble lie' concerning the natural and biological basis of the state's division of labour. This fiction will convince people that they were born either to rule or be ruled. Plato's Socrates takes the view that lying can be justified when it is deployed for 'good' political ends. Like Congressman Niels and Senator Hamilton, Karl Popper saw this justification of lies by political rulers as a hallmark of totalitarian political thought and he indicted Plato as the originator of such beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

Popper's interpretation of Plato can be, and has been, criticised from a variety of perspectives.<sup>9</sup> But Popper's book, originally published in the wake of the Third Reich and at the onset of the Cold War, illustrates the way in which modern liberal and democratic thought has sought to render notions of 'deceiving the people' as alien to a genuine spirit of democratic government and procedure. Popper locates the

<sup>5</sup> Kerr (1990) 520.

<sup>6</sup> See Miller and Stiff (1993) 4: 'In democracies such as the United States . . . the prevailing ideology holds that political actors must evince a concern for both political ends and the means used in their pursuit. Stated differently, some communicative strategies are suspect even if they achieve the desired ends because the strategies are at odds with the democratic processes. Two obvious examples of such dubious strategies are deception and coercion.' See also Bok (1978) 165–81.

<sup>7</sup> See Page (1991) 16–26 which traces the development of the argument.

<sup>8</sup> Popper (1966) 138f.

<sup>9</sup> The most direct and sustained criticisms are in Levinson (1953), Wild (1963) and Bambrough (1967).

origin of the ‘noble lie’ in the writings of a thinker whom most critics would still characterise as out of sympathy with, or at least disillusioned with, the ideals, structures and practices of the democratic society of which he was a member.<sup>10</sup> Brian Vickers, who draws heavily on Popper’s views, has mapped Plato’s attack on rhetorical theory and practice in democratic Athens onto Plato’s authoritarian philosophy.<sup>11</sup> Where Plato sees the use of rhetoric in Athens’ assembly and lawcourts as a case of the ignorant few manipulating the ignorant masses, Vickers views rhetorical discourse as the life blood of open debate, pluralism and democracy. Plato is again indicted, not only for his totalitarianism, but for initiating the traditional denigration of rhetoric as a medium for deceptive communication and falsehood.

Vickers and Popper construe Plato’s attack on sophistry and rhetoric as hypocritical. On the one hand, Plato champions truth and philosophy through a condemnation of the lies of contemporary politicians and rhetorical theorists. On the other, his moral and political vision, along with the persuasive strategies of his Socrates, give pride of place to the notion that it is acceptable and necessary for the right leaders to tell the right lies to the people. Vickers echoes Aristotle and the Platonic Gorgias when he points out that rhetoric can be used for good or evil ends and that it is no different from any other form of knowledge in this respect.<sup>12</sup> His commitment lies with the deployment of rhetoric ‘in a state where free speech is still possible’.<sup>13</sup> He insists that while rhetoric can be deployed in any constitutional system, it is more important to ‘understand what rhetoric really can do in the right hands at the right time’.<sup>14</sup>

### The argument

One of the aims of this study is to demonstrate that the theoretical denigration of rhetoric as a deceptive technology and the conception of the political ‘noble lie’ cannot be characterised as a solely ‘totalitarian’

<sup>10</sup> For Plato as an ‘intellectual critic’ of democracy see Ober (1998) and, from a specifically rhetorical perspective, Yunis (1996). Von Reden and Goldhill (1999) discuss the ‘oblique and difficult relations between Platonic dialogue and the *polis*’ (284).

<sup>11</sup> Vickers (1988) 83–147.

<sup>12</sup> See Pl. *Grg.* 456c6–457c3; Arist. *Rh.* I.1355b1–7. Grimaldi (1980) 30–1 notes the parallel between these passages. See also Garver (1994) 221ff.

<sup>13</sup> Vickers (1988) viii. Contrast the polemical essay of Fish (1994) 102–19. Fish argues that appeals to and endorsements of the notion of ‘free speech’ can never escape the bind of *restricting* certain arguments or forms of speech. Fish’s ‘neo-pragmatism’ is not free of ‘ideology’ or ‘rhetoric’ however: see the excellent critique of Norris (1992) 126–58 and my brief comments below.

<sup>14</sup> Vickers (1988) viii.

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or purely Platonic strategy. Nor is Plato's desire to subordinate rhetorical practice to the goals of political and ethical 'truths' and 'goods' completely original to him or solely the product of his anti-democratic agenda. Rather, the emergence of these ideas about rhetoric and deceit can be located in political, legal and cultural discourses which defined Athenian democracy itself.

Modern attempts to separate rhetoric from its dubious connotations fail to acknowledge the way in which the idea of 'rhetoric' was strategically reified and theorised as a mode of deceptive communication in the Athenian democracy's very own competitive institutions of speech and performance. If modern commentators champion Athenian theories and practices of 'rhetoric' as notions which can improve modern institutions of democracy and 'free speech', Athenian oratory's persistent demonisation of the sophist, the logographer and the 'clever speaker' as peddlers of self-serving lies should alert them to the dangers of privileging the ideals of pluralism implied by Greek rhetorical theory over and above the example of how rhetoric comes to be represented and viewed in the 'practical' performances of Athenian democratic discourse itself.<sup>15</sup> I will argue in my fourth chapter that legal and political oratory at Athens deploy what can be termed a 'rhetoric of anti-rhetoric' and a more general 'meta-discourse' concerning the powers and perils of deceptive communication on the part of elite speakers.<sup>16</sup> These anti-rhetorical and 'meta-discursive' strategies do not constitute a philosophical project. Nor do they add up to a treatise on rhetoric and deceit. But they do mark out an area of (self-)representation in which mass-elite democratic discourse could

<sup>15</sup> The liberal criticism of Popper (1966) and Vickers (1988) and their defence of 'rhetoric' as the lifeblood of pluralism is curiously close to *some* 'postmodern' accounts of rhetoric. From a 'postmodern' perspective (also hinted at by Foucault (1981) and noted by Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982)) Jarratt (1991) 81–117 calls for the reintroduction of 'sophistic' thought and argumentation to modern western pedagogy without addressing the possibility of their co-optation by dominant regimes of truth and power, not to mention the likely emergence of an 'anti-rhetorical' discourse. See Graff (1989) for 'co-optation'; Fish (1994) 141–79 on why law can never really admit its 'rhetoricity'. Swearingen (1991) also ignores the 'anti-rhetorical' topoi of practical oratory in her (Plato-centred) account of how rhetoric and lies come to be associated. Chomsky (1989) and Arendt (1972) dissect deceptive rhetoric, 'disinformation' and 'noble' lies deployed by the United States federal government in recent decades.

<sup>16</sup> I borrow 'the rhetoric of anti-rhetoric' from Valesio (1980), who uses it to analyse renaissance tracts and speeches in Shakespeare. For references and discussion on what I will be calling 'anti-rhetorical' topoi against opponents, see Dover (1974) 25–8; Ostwald (1986) 256–7. On the orators' attacks on opponents as sophists and 'clever speakers' see Ober (1989) 156–91; on logography see Bonner (1927) 320–3; Dover (1968) 148–74; Kennedy (1963) 126–45; Lavency (1964); Carey and Reid (1985) 13–18; Sinclair (1988) 186; Usher (1976); Cartledge (1990a) 49–52.

self-consciously police and theorise its own risky dependence on the performance of speeches (*logoi*) by both defining and renegotiating classifications of, licences for and limits to deceptive communication and rhetorical performance on the part of elite speakers (*rhētores*) and ‘ordinary’ citizens (*idiōtai*). This argument seeks to build on, and at the same time modify Josiah Ober’s excellent study of Athenian oratory as a discourse of mass-elite negotiation which maintained the relative stability of a democratic constitution despite conditions of financial and educational inequality.<sup>17</sup>

The final chapter of this study continues to isolate ‘the rhetoric of anti-rhetoric’ as an important trope in Athenian democratic culture. By offering readings of Thucydides, Aristophanic comedy and Euripidean tragedy I seek to show how Athenian historical narrative and civic drama stage the difficulties of securely assessing ‘speech’s ambiguity’ and anti-rhetorical rhetoric in the democracy’s political and forensic institutions. These readings will suggest that conceptions of rhetoric as deceptive communication are important for the development of anti-democratic political theory and for our understanding of Attic drama’s contribution to the political and cultural education of Athens’ democratic citizenry.

My third chapter will show that while Athenian oratory and other Athenian texts constantly censure notions of lying to the democratic community, there are occasions when an (almost Popperian) Athenian ideological distinction between the open and closed society is problematised through the invocation and evaluation of several versions or trajectories of ‘noble lies’ and ‘good fictions’. The contribution of Athenian oratory and civic drama to this area of problematisation and anxiety is marked. I also argue that Plato’s ‘noble lie’, despite its pro-Spartan and authoritarian overtones, is represented in terms which draw on Athenian popular morality and civic mythology. It is especially with regard to these public and philosophical confrontations with the ‘noble lie’ that I hope to fill some gaps in Marcel Detienne’s important study of archaic and classical notions of ‘truth’, ‘oblivion’, ‘seeming’, ‘lies’ and ‘deception’ (*alētheia*, *lēthē*, *doxa*, *pseudē* and *apatē*).<sup>18</sup> I argue that Detienne’s study is usefully supplemented by an account of Platonic and democratic confrontations with what he calls the problem of ‘speech’s ambiguity’.

My opening chapter leads off from the ground-breaking work of another member of the ‘Paris School’ of classicists and establishes a

<sup>17</sup> Ober (1989).

<sup>18</sup> Detienne (1967), now available in English with a new introduction as Detienne (1996).

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strand of inquiry which runs throughout this study. In three essays, Pierre Vidal-Naquet discusses the association between the myths and practices surrounding the ‘liminal’ Athenian age-class known as the *ephēbeia*.<sup>19</sup> These essays inform my reconstruction of the crucial role played by representations of deception (*apatē*) within Athenian public projections of civic ideology, national identity and military values. The substance of his arguments and the controversies surrounding them will be raised in the first two chapters and by building on Vidal-Naquet’s work I will also reveal some of its limitations.

The first chapter concerns itself with the differing ways in which notions of trickery and deceit are put to work within the areas of national, civic and military identity and within the symbolic fields which enforce and represent ‘democratic’ conduct. Alongside persistent representations of deceit as ‘unAthenian’, typically Spartan, feminine and cowardly in a range of texts, we will see the opposition between *apatē* and the Athenian male self being articulated and problematised in Euripidean drama. This problematisation will evoke the threat of deceit in democratic politics. I will also show how legal oratory manipulates and renegotiates some of the ideological, political, legal and religious connotations of the citizen who deceives the demos.

My second chapter concentrates on a range of texts which offer conflicting evaluations of the ideological admissibility of using deceit and trickery against a military enemy. Legal speeches, Platonic dialogue, tragedy, historiography, theories of *paideia*, sophistic display and vase painting will attest to the moral and ideological ‘negotiability’ of military trickery at Athens. But this range of evidence reveals some significant limits to, and colourings of, military trickery’s negotiable status. Xenophon’s writing adds other dimensions here; a supposedly pro-Spartan writer who commonly speaks of the necessity of military trickery nevertheless allows his historical characters to discourse anxiously on the wide social implications of using certain forms of education to instil the practice and value of military trickery.

### Approaches and methods

Twenty years ago, W. Kendrick Pritchett remarked in the context of military trickery that ‘there is clearly a need for further investigation of

<sup>19</sup> These are Vidal-Naquet (1968), reprinted and revised in Vidal-Naquet (1986a); additional thoughts and assessments in Vidal-Naquet (1986b). See also Vidal-Naquet (1988) which applies these ideas concerning the *ephēbeia* to a reading of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*.

the concept of ἀπάτη (*apatē*: deception) in Greek society'.<sup>20</sup> There is still no full-length study of deceit and trickery in ancient Greek culture and society, but a lot of work has been done in the meantime. I suspect that Pritchett may have had in mind different material to that presented in, say, Detienne and Vernant's investigation of the semantic field and cultural connotations of 'cunning intelligence' (*mētis*) as a category of thought in ancient Greek culture and society.<sup>21</sup> I should make it clear that I do not intend to speculate on who was really lying in a lawcourt speech or reconstruct the complex *Realien* of Athenian military tactics. But it must also be made clear that I do not dispute recent anthropological, sociological and comparative studies which suggest that lying and trickery (not to mention self-deception and 'misrecognition') were crucial strategies in the various performances that constituted Athenian social, commercial, cultural and political relations.<sup>22</sup>

My interest lies in examining *representations* and *evaluations* of deception (*apatē*), lies (*pseudē*) and trickery (*dolos*) in Athenian texts. As anthropological work repeatedly demonstrates, individuals do not necessarily preach what they practise when it comes to lying – and this is also true for the relationship between a culture's stated norms and the behaviour of its members. Recent studies also show that different cultures vary enormously as to whether their dominant representations of deceit are positive or negative. But it is hard to find a culture where norms and evaluations of deceit are consistent and non-negotiable.<sup>23</sup> What constitutes a 'lie' can vary enormously. Friedl describes the way in which the modern Greek word *psemata* is sometimes used of 'lies' which are actually tall stories performed in social contexts where all participants are aware that the stories are not true. She also records that parents in a Greek village will tell lies to their young children as a means of teaching them not to take other people's action and behaviour at 'face value'.<sup>24</sup> Du Boulay argues that although the Greek word *psema* can be translated as 'lie' it does not carry the overtones of moral failure that 'lie' does in English.<sup>25</sup> Lying, and representations of it, are culturally specific phenomena, but it seems that every culture needs

<sup>20</sup> Pritchett (1979) 330.

<sup>21</sup> Detienne and Vernant (1978).

<sup>22</sup> On the sociology of lying in twentieth-century Western society: Goffman (1974) 83–123; Barnes (1994) who has a comprehensive bibliography; Bok (1978). On deceit in modern Mediterranean societies: Friedl (1962); Campbell (1964); Herzfeld (1985); du Boulay (1974), (1976); Bourdieu (1977). For applications to ancient Greece and Athens see Walcot (1977); Winkler (1990b) 173f.; Cohen (1991), esp. chs. 2 and 3.

<sup>23</sup> See Barnes (1994) 136–46.

<sup>24</sup> Friedl (1962) 78–81.

<sup>25</sup> Du Boulay (1976).

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deceit both as a practice *and* as an idea (which can be *either* praised or blamed according to context) in the exercise and control of power and knowledge.<sup>26</sup> The nature of an ethical evaluation of deceit depends on *who* is making the evaluation, who is receiving it, and *what* is perceived to be at stake in that evaluation. It is with the modern social anthropologist's sensitivity to areas of contradiction or conflict in normative systems and her awareness of individual actors' strategic manipulations of norms and values that I attempt to approach the Athenian representation of deceit.<sup>27</sup>

Having said this, I do not intend to make extensive use of 'comparative' material from recent anthropological work on modern Mediterranean societies. This is partly because, as I have already suggested, much of this work is focused on deception as a practice or process, rather than its *representation*. Where representations are discussed, the context of those representations makes them of limited use for my project. But a brief look at some anthropological work on twentieth-century Mediterranean deception will help to locate my own concerns.

Juliet du Boulay offers a fascinating account of the 'defensive' and 'offensive' use of lies on the Greek island of Euboea. Lies are told with great frequency in order to preserve family honour or to increase family wealth or to make mischief on the government. Lying in court on oath is frowned upon as unChristian. But the villager has a 'moral duty to quarrel with, cheat or deceive the outsider in support of the house' and there is a Euboean saying that 'God wants people to cover things up.'<sup>28</sup> Du Boulay argues that Euboeans have less opportunity to use violence for the maintenance of honour and reputation than the Lebanese community studied by Gilsenan.<sup>29</sup> In the Lebanon the use of lies and slander was tempered by the threat of retaliatory violence. In Euboea, individuals could use offensive lies much more freely.

Michael Herzfeld's superb analysis of sheep-stealing ('kleftism') in a Cretan mountain village shows how the 'Glendiots' whom he studies regard kleftism as a mark of *poniria* ('low cunning'). There is a bewildering array of protocols and poetic possibilities through which the Glendiots can extend networks of friendship, exact vengeance and increase revenge through kleftism. Sheep-stealing is also regarded as a

<sup>26</sup> Cultural specificity: Simmel (1950) 312–16; Barnes (1994) 144–5. On the ubiquity of lying in systems of power and control, see Gilsenan (1976) 191. As far as I know, the *representation* of lies as a component of modern civic or democratic ideologies has not received much attention.

<sup>27</sup> See Bourdieu (1977); Herzfeld (1985) and the approach of Cohen (1991) 24–34.

<sup>28</sup> Du Boulay (1974) 74, 82.

<sup>29</sup> Du Boulay (1976); Gilsenan (1976).



mark of the Glendiots' distinctive identity as mountain shepherds. The Glendiots regard their *poniria* as an expression of manliness (*andrismos*) and their quintessential 'Greekness' but, as Herzfeld points out, this is a 'far cry' from 'that nationalist rhetoric which treats all forms of "brigandage" as foreign importations' and official attempts to re-describe sheep-stealing as 'cowardly and demeaning'.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, not all Glendiots are proud of their 'kleftic' reputation. Sheep-stealing and its attendant qualities of cunning and opportunistic deceit are prized by traditional shepherds, but the Glendiots who have taken up different occupations are embarrassed by kleftism and are unimpressed by the shepherds' additional arguments that sheep-stealing is an economic necessity.

These findings demonstrate that lying and its evaluation are closely related to the politics and ideology of reputation. As Cohen, Winkler and Hunter have shown, Athenian forensic oratory reveals a similar emphasis on honour and reputation in classical Athens.<sup>31</sup> It may be that Athenian parents taught their children that 'Zeus wants people to cover things up': we will see that a fragment of Aeschylus says something similar. But Herzfeld's analysis shows how a community's evaluation of deception can be contested by 'official' discourse and social or economic conflict. The 'manliness' or 'Greekness' of deception and cunning in one Cretan village cannot be viewed as synecdochal for a 'Greek' outlook. Thus, regionalism, Christianity, and divergences between 'official' and 'local' ideology all make a comparative anthropological approach to classical Athens' representation of deception highly problematic. However, du Boulay's account of a relationship between deception and the operations of a 'surveillance culture' and Herzfeld's nuanced emphasis on the relationship between 'kleftism' and differing conceptions of national identity and manhood do at least lend general support to the *focus* of this book.

Whilst my starting point has been to trace the usage and significance of the nouns *apatē*, *pseudos*, *dolos* and their cognates, this study demonstrates that all three terms are deployed across a range of discourses (dramatic, legal, political, epideictic, paideutic, philosophical, historical . . .). These different discourses often share the same social, political and cultural anxieties or evaluations concerning deceit, but they also exhibit some telling idiosyncracies, silences or internal conflicts. It emerges that *apatē*, *pseudos* and *dolos* are associated with or opposed to other significant terms (*phobos*: 'fear', *paraskeuē*: 'preparation', *poikilia*:

<sup>30</sup> Herzfeld (1985) 41, 45.

<sup>31</sup> Cohen (1991), (1994); Winkler (1990b); Hunter (1994).

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‘intricacy’, *technē*: ‘craft’, *sophistēs*: ‘sophist’, *nikē*: ‘victory’, *hoplitēs*: ‘hoplite’). However, these relations of opposition or association will often be revealed as unstable and slippery.

I do not wish to deny that the specific notion of *mētis* (which often involves the performance of deception) was an important category of thought in Athenian culture.<sup>32</sup> To be sure, actions and achievements which come under the rubric of ‘cunning intelligence’ as identified by Detienne and Vernant were often represented as admirable. But it is clear from their study that not all manifestations of *mētis* involve the deployment of *apatē*, *pseudē* or *dolos*, and I have found that not all representations of deceit necessarily fall within the semantic field of *mētis* with its various demands of ‘stochastic’ thought, adaptability, craftsmanship and opportunism.

Occasionally, I will indicate that a discussion or representation of deceit seems to be located within the semantic field of *mētis*. But the material I have selected should demonstrate that in Athenian writings, any pre-democratic notion of deception and trickery as an admirable facet of cunning intelligence is placed under severe strain by the new circumstances of democratic culture and ideology. While we will see the positive public representation of the military trickery and self-sacrifice of the Athenian king Codrus as an example of *apatē* and laudable *mētis* going hand in hand, we will also confront images of sophistic deception where it is hard to detect any clear evocation of this wider category of thought. At the same time we will see Thucydides suppressing Themistocles’ skill in deception when he finally appraises the general’s life. His qualities of adaptability, foresight and quick-wittedness are reiterated and emphasised by the historian and these are qualities which clearly mark him as a man with *mētis*. But it seems that Thucydides cannot reiterate his triumphant trickery on behalf of the polis.

*Apatē*, intentional *pseudē* and *dolos* are not so much categories of thought as categories of communication and behaviour.<sup>33</sup> Detienne and Vernant have a tendency to mix and match sources spanning several centuries in their quest for *mētis*’ special operations. Although I have left many texts and considerations to one side, I hope that my study of the representation of deceit over a period of roughly one hundred and twenty years (440–320 BC) in texts produced in, or for Athens will exemplify the importance of considering a category of

<sup>32</sup> See Detienne and Vernant (1978).

<sup>33</sup> Whilst *apatē* denotes an intentional lie or trick, *pseudos* can denote either an intentional or an unintentional falsehood. See Pratt (1993) 56 and Ferrari (1989) 112.