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The Division Of Labor and the Noble Lie

A Reflection on the Relationship of Economic Necessity to Consciousness in Plato, Smith, Frost, and Roddenberry

Plato famously explores a relationship between the roles a complex economy must fill and the necessity of deceiving the people who fill those roles. This deception, most often unintended, is what he called a *gennaion pseudos*, generally translated as “noble lie.” (That is the translation I will use though I like noble misapprehension better). The noble lie prepares people for the work they will do. It is typically reinforced when they begin their work by both the work itself and by the way that work is perceived by others. The lie teaches them that they occupy an appropriate niche—that the work they do is a function of their natural aptitudes and their strength or weakness of character. The noble lie is not optional. Plato accurately sees it as an integral requirement of the division of labor.

Freedom from the lie can only come from seeing it for what it is. Most of us, most of the time, are in Plato’s view, not able to do that. Philosophers can transcend the lie (the rest of us also can see the lie for what it is at those moments when we have achieved some philosophic remove from our circumstances) but all of us, even Socrates, slip back into self-deception in everyday life. To be a philosopher in the Platonic sense requires an ability to self-consciously examine one’s life and live it too. One must be able to go back and forth between deconstructing the self and affirming it. The first fosters a deeper self-understanding. The second, the noble lie, allows both accommodation to one’s place and the acceptance of a sense of personal responsibility for that place. I will develop these thoughts beginning with Plato’s comments on the division of labor and the noble lie in *The Republic*, going on to Adam Smith’s comments on the same two themes in his *Inquiry into*

the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (WN) and *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS), and finally exploring what seem to me useful contemporary connections to Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* and Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken."

II

Plato's case for the necessity of a "noble lie" begins with Socrates urging his students (Glaucou and Adiemantus in particular) to recognize that it must follow from the division of labor. If his students are to have specialists who can prepare the kind of food they enjoy eating, make the kind of sandals they like to wear, and build the kind of homes they want to live in, these specialists will have to be deceived. They will have to be taught that they are less capable of more ambitious pursuits than they really are. Although taking up philosophy, in Plato's view, would make these people more fully realized and bring them nearer to God (*The Republic*, Book VII, 518c), economic realities require that they had better adapt to their necessary roles as farmers or weavers or builders instead (*The Republic*, Book III, 414-415).

All societies, Plato suggests, need to produce people to fill the roles critical to their ongoing function. That means not only that every society must produce people with the ambition and creativity to be leaders but also that they must produce others with enough self-doubt and passivity to assume more menial roles. He dwells on the particular problem of the military (guardians) who could easily be imagined to come to prey on the state if they were not convinced of both their brotherhood with other citizens and the natural superiority of philosophers. His comments, however, extend to people in all stations of life. If they are to be reconciled to doing what needs to be done, some children must learn that their souls are made of gold and other, very similar children, learn that they have souls of iron, brass, or silver. Andrew (1989) interestingly suggests that a variant of the noble lie is the myth of equal opportunity. Plato uses both. The lies about the metallic content of our souls are lies about the differences between our innate capabilities (*The Republic*, Book III, 415a-c) and are justified by the societal need for us to accept our place in things. Plato's stipulation of a kind of equal opportunity (*The Republic*, Book III, 412d-e, 414a-415a)

leaves us with only ourselves to blame or credit for our situations, and in so doing, similarly reconciles us to our situations. Those accommodations to the requirements of the specialized tasks available to us are critical to Plato's vision of the Republic.

The origins of the noble lie are described in a short passage which has been variously interpreted. It is:

nothing new...but a Phoenician thing which has already happened...in many places before...but one that has not happened in our time. (*The Republic*, Book III, 413c)

Page (1991) has argued that by the phrase, "a Phoenician thing," Socrates was tying the lie to trade, which the Phoenicians were noted for. Socrates, he suggests, was implying that it was a lie that the large money making class in Athenian society would particularly have had to embrace. Socrates says that the lie has been told, "...in many places before" but he denies its immediate relevance. It "has not happened in our time." However, it is clear that, despite Socrates denial, the lie must have been relevant to Fifth Century Athens, and Socrates must, at least at some points, have known that. He had already pointed out that all but the simplest economies required that people be adapted to their economic roles (*The Republic*, Book II, 370c-373d) and he well knew that fifth century Athens was far from a simple economy. People capable of greater things in his time (and in our own time too), then would have had to be convinced to accept lesser roles if the society's needs were to be served. Only a small number of their fellows

could be given the opportunity to realize themselves very fully—at least in the sense that their self-realization was tied to their work—and in the *Republic* it is suggested that the two are closely tied. There is a good deal of modern empirical literature, some of it referred to below, to support that suggestion. This work-related constraint on self-realization does not seem likely to be something that would have pleased Socrates any more than it is likely to please us today (see Castro, 1994). That is why, Plato suggests, we with Socrates, are likely to lie, even to ourselves, about it.

Of course, Plato knew that there were natural differences between people. He introduces the noble lie because these natural differences cannot be assumed to generally match the available economic roles. To assert that they do, as Socrates often does later in *The Republic*, is to embrace the lie. Plato alludes to the social utility and the comfort to be found in believing that the relatively small natural differences between people match the widely disparate economic and social roles available in any particular society. He has Socrates, who is after all a member of a particular society as well as a philosopher, find that thought comforting too. Socrates seems not to remember anything of his discussion of the noble lie when he brings natural selection forward (e.g., *The Republic*, Book II, 370b; Book IV, 429a, 433a, 443c). I am suggesting that Plato does that neither because he was absent-minded nor because he meant to imply that Socrates was, but because he wants to let us know how difficult it is, even acknowledging the lie, to resist the comfort it provides. Many otherwise admirable commentaries on the noble lie (Foley, 1974 and 1975, McNulty, 1975, Martin, 1981; Andrew, 1989; Bloom, 1991; Page, 1991; Fell, 1997, and Robbins, 1998) miss what seems to me to be this important point.

Plato clearly knew that accommodating to one's work involved accommodating to a societal image of what one was and was not capable of. Powerful people, full of their own power, he observes (*Socrates' Apology*, 21b-22a) are encouraged to believe that they know more than they do. Those consigned to work that does not confer status or respect, learn to regard their work as an index of their own incapacity. Plato notes that even women (*The Republic*, Book V, 451d-452a) or slaves (*Meno*, 82b-85d) can be much more than they are

ordinarily asked to be, that their social roles are not a function of their innate capacity. Craftsmen, in a variant of this process, are good at the challenging things that they do, but because they can see things only in terms of their craft, deceive themselves into thinking they understand what Plato considered to be “greater things,” and thus fail to ask the necessary questions (*The Apology*, 22d-e). These trained incapacities are precisely what I believe Plato had in mind when he suggested that some citizens of the Republic could be told that their souls were made of gold or silver but that many more would have to learn that they had souls of brass or iron.

Adam Smith similarly, but more strongly, commented on factory workers more than two thousand years later in *The Wealth of Nations* (*WN*) when he shared his fears about the dehumanizing consequences of specialization.

... the understanding of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments. The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding or to exercise his invention in finding expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become... But in every improved and civilized society, this is the state into which the labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall....(*WN* 839-40)

The acceptable trade-off for Smith, offsetting the corruption of body and mind to which the majority of the people are doomed, is that “...the consequence of the division of labor is “a universal opulence which extends itself even to the lowest ranks of the people” (*WN* 840). Smith does not explain his reasons for finding that trade-off acceptable. At one point he seems to deny it.

A great part of the machines made use of in those manufactures in which labor is most subdivided, were originally the inventions of common workmen, who being each of them employed in some very simple operations, naturally turned their

thoughts toward finding out easier and readier means of performing it. Whoever has been much accustomed to visit such manufactures, must frequently have been shewn very pretty machines which were the invention of such workmen (*WN* 10)

It does not seem likely that men “as stupid and ignorant as it was possible for a human creature to become” could have invented these very pretty machines. Neither does it seem likely that a universal opulence extended to the lowest ranks of the people would be the reward of a class fallen to as stupid and ignorant a place as these men had fallen to. Finally, it is not clear that the projected opulence should be regarded as an acceptable trade-off for the mindlessness he expected it to occasion. Smith does not deal with the apparent contradictions. It may be that he was projecting an anticipated negative outcome on the one hand and commenting on observed positive outcomes on the other. It may even be that he, like Socrates, is falling into a kind of noble lie. However, if he is, he never lets the reader know that he is aware of it, and we can do no more than speculate about the meaning of the apparent contradictions.

Smith notes that the poor man is taught to be ashamed of his poverty and that the fortunate grow resentful of the poor. “The man of rank and distinction ...is observed by all the world...Everybody is eager to look at him, and to conceive, at least by sympathy, that joy and exultation with which his circumstances naturally inspire him.” The poor man “...is

taken no notice of. He goes out and comes in unheeded ... in the same obscurity as if shut up in his own hovel" (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. TMS 51). While reason, Smith suggests, would indicate that "...kings are the servants of the people, to be obeyed, resisted, deposed or punished as the public may require..." we are taught "to submit to them for their own sake, to tremble and bow down before their exalted station, to regard their smile as a reward sufficient to compensate any service..." (TMS 53-54). "...This disposition to admire and almost to worship the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition...[is] necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society..." It is also, for Smith, "the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments" (TMS 61). Smith goes much further than Plato in giving us the process through which the "noble lie" is disseminated but he never acknowledges that there might be a sense in which it applies to him too.

Smith's observations of the consequences of industrial work have been strongly confirmed (see for example Chinoy, 1955; Fisher, 1960; Kornhauser, 1965; and Shephard, 1969) but that literature precedes the more recent concern with the disappearance of manufacturing jobs. The negative consequences of industrial work have come to interest us less than the similar but still more negative consequences of chronic unemployment (see for example Kasl and Cobb, 1979; Bluestone and Harrison, 1982; Jacobson, LaLonde, and Sullivan, 1993; Wilson, 1996; Parnes, 2000). There is little question but that both long term unemployment and machine paced industrial work in large factories are strongly associated with low self-esteem, chronic distrust of others, strong hostilities, and depression. Whatever of these qualities may exist before machine-paced factory work is undertaken, there is strong evidence that they are substantially deepened by both the work itself and unemployment. Plato and Smith both believe that these costs are in a terrible sense functional. They keep the worker at monotonous and demeaning work that needs to be done. They may also keep unemployed workers blaming themselves and disincline them to much by way of organized protest.

There are other more subtle mechanisms to convey the lie. Why do young men almost never seek secretarial work? Why do our universities rarely include the study of pneumatics, hydraulics, mechanics and electricians as part of their general education requirements? Why do so many university students come to think of philosophy and mathematics as boring and esoteric? I think Plato would say that it might well be because we are busily learning our social roles. The secretarial role emphasizes quiet competence, low public profile, grace, and discretion—all supportive of women's traditional roles at home and therefore seen as inappropriate for men. Pneumatics, hydraulics, mechanics, and electricians may make the world work and promise to enhance our understanding of our everyday lives but they suggest blue collar jobs and are generally not regarded as a suitable socialization for those aspiring to middle class careers (see Castro, 1984). Philosophy—reading Plato for example—is for people smarter and/or richer than most students regard themselves to be. The implicit message is that people who study mechanics have souls of brass and those who study philosophy are made of finer stuff. Plato's point, made more generally than Smith makes it, is that people stuck in the necessary work that you and I do not want to do, must collectively lack the confidence to leave it. Plato suggests that most of us will know of both work that we regard as beneath us and work that we regard as beyond us. Individuals can, of course, leave one kind of work and go on to something else at any point. Our various jobs, however, must continue to be done. They cannot be collectively abandoned. Neither can we rely on wage incentives to get the undesirable work done (it is almost never very well paid). Plato's point implies that the way we learn to define ourselves is the underpinning for whatever more fine-tuned adjustments wage incentives will effect. He suggests that all this is not a function of the way any particular economy is organized but that it follows from an all but universal reliance on the division of labor.

Plato's second commentary on the relationship between economic organization and consciousness can be drawn from the context of *The Republic* (Book I, *passim*). The whole of that dialogue takes place in the home of a wealthy man, a traditional man in a very prosperous society in which tradition has lost its hold.

Cephalus is civilized and graceful but personally closed to philosophic dialogue. Polemarchus, his son, is neither civilized nor graceful but he proves very open to reasoned argument. We are led to believe that Socrates and philosophy are necessary substitutes for what Cephalus and an inherited tradition would otherwise have been able to provide. Cephalus seems to know this and urges Socrates to give his son what he himself no longer can. He has no personal need to talk to Socrates. The entire dialogue takes place in the shelter provided by his house (and his traditions) but Cephalus never reappears. When he takes his leave, Socrates uncharacteristically does not try to keep him. Tradition suffices for Cephalus, and Socrates seems to recognize that. It is not, however, at least not in the same way, available to Polemarchus who seems therefore vulnerable to the vices of an open society.

Philosophy is assigned the task of providing Polemarchus with the qualities necessary to carry on his life in a serious and moral way. Polemarchus was planning to return to the spectacle of Thracian horsemen passing a literal torch that night (*The Republic*, Book I, 328a). He is detained by the dialogue of *The Republic* and a much more exciting metaphorical passing of the torch. That dialogue into the meaning of justice, with a fair claim to be as much as any single work at the heart of philosophy, then can be seen as one consequence of rapid economic growth and the accompanying breakdown of tradition. It is hard to understand how it could have happened without them. It is also hard to understand how it could

have been resisted once it became clear that the world was becoming too pluralized, was shifting around too quickly, for any particular tradition to be compelling. Certainly the Athens of the late fifth century, rapidly growing, engorged with the revenues of an Empire, and cut off from its own traditional rural hinterland, was such a place.

The relationship I believe Plato was suggesting between economic circumstances and philosophy is an irony of some moment if one considers the stance of many philosophers toward economic considerations. It is an important irony because one consequence of philosophic disdain toward economic matters is to not attend to the way that they matter. Plato has Socrates seek to help his students to attain what wisdom they can by recognizing the constraints imposed by their economies. They are encouraged to understand these constraints rather than see themselves in a romantic struggle with them. The difficulty in the way of following that Socratic advice is what I want to next address.

III

Consider the ongoing struggle between the Starship Enterprise and the Borg—a struggle that seems to me to be a useful way to explore the ways we deceive ourselves about our relationship to corporate business. The Borg—the Burg—historically the place of commerce, and arguably an allusion to a projected future for the organization of corporate commerce, is a threat to both the Starship Enterprise and to individual enterprise more generally. It has never been defeated. It is sometimes represented as if it was an individual but we are given to believe that its individuality has been displaced by a collective consciousness. The Borg is not an association based on a common heritage, shared ideals, or territorial continuity. It is rather a composite of intelligence, technology, and information, compelled by its perpetual need to grow and to reinvent itself. The Borg is clearly a very dangerous enemy but its voice is reasoned. Unlike earlier adversaries of the Enterprise, it is free of passion and irrational anger. The Borg has visible wiring and mechanical parts but it can also be sensual and seductive. Its intention is to lure our protagonists into its employ—to make each of them part of its continually expanding whole—and in securing their participation in

that whole, to destroy their identities. Its members have none of the quirky individuality of various generations of the Enterprise crew, no traces of the wide spectrum of cultures from which they are drawn.

Captain Kirk, (yes, the name does suggest churches and churchyards) does not encounter the Borg. His conflicts with his enemies are straight-forward conflicts between good and evil. Kirk's successor in "The Next Generation" is Captain Picard. (His name alludes to a Seventeenth Century French astronomer who paved the way for Galileo's work, and in that important sense, the modern world). Captain Picard does not have the strength of Kirk's underlying faith in his own way of thinking. He is more complex than Kirk, more comfortable with ambiguity, and less sure of himself. He is particularly shaken because he has been, for a time, "assimilated" by the Borg. Moreover, it is never clear that he is altogether free of that experience.

Borgs have no names of their own, only positions, but when the Enterprise takes a Borg prisoner, he is given a name by the crew. They call him Hugh, and Hugh, who like all Borgs always speaks of himself in the plural, makes a game of reminding the crew that Hugh (you) are the Borg. They believe themselves to be in battle with an alien force and don't get it.

One cost of imagining ourselves in successful battle with the Borg, of imagining that our role in that battle is a struggle between our "real" selves and something alien and corporate, may be a failure to see either the corporate entity or ourselves very clearly. Such a failure, it seems to me, implies a willingness to accept Plato's "noble lie" as the truth. If we are to have a complex society, Plato contends, we must accept the social roles we are assigned as if they were an integral part of who we are. We must be willing to be farmers, craftsmen, warriors, or philosophers in appropriate numbers and we will only be willing to accept those roles if we are made to believe that defining ourselves in terms of them is natural.

There is a literary tradition (think of Wordsworth or Thoreau) that sees the way to escape the Borg as physically removing oneself from it—becoming a recluse in the countryside. Alternatively, there is heroic resistance (think of Emerson or Orwell). Plato, on the other hand, suggests that the only way we have of transcending

the constraints of the noble lie is to seek to understand it. Characterizing our battle with the Borg as heroic struggle rather than disciplined self-examination, as *Star Trek* for the most part does, seems to me to leave it, and the mass culture it speaks to, vulnerable to a Platonic critique. It settles for the comfort we can get from self-congratulation rather than the freedom that might follow from a better understanding of ourselves and of the context in which we live and work. We welcome the Borg as caricature because it dulls our awareness of the subtlety of the real forces (many of them economic) with which we have been assimilated. Our starship is called the Enterprise (perhaps "free enterprise" would have been better) because we are uncomfortable about examining the extent to which its crew is very much part of a corporate venture. David Newhouse's (2000) essay on this general theme in the context of relations between the capitalist world and aboriginal people in Canada ends on a parallel theme. The Borg have arrived. Resistance has been largely futile. Existence as we have known it has already come to an end. His aborigines still think the struggle is ahead of them.

Life on the Enterprise interestingly leaves little room for individual enterprise. The Enterprise clearly requires the subordination of private inquiry, private loyalties, and private affections to the good of the ship. There are engineers, doctors, scientists, and in "The Next Generation," a coach to help with empathic self-understanding. Their professions, however, are all at the service of the command structure. Private profes-

sional commitments are subordinated to the discretion of the Captain as they arguably would have to be in a warlike situation. This war, however, is permanent, and the costs of that permanent state of war, particularly its costs in causing the crew not to examine themselves too deeply, are never considered.

IV

Individual differences are celebrated in much the way Robert Frost, in the frequently cited and almost as frequently misinterpreted “The Road Not Taken,” thought they were likely to be. Frost ascribes the self-congratulation that can follow from a simplistic understanding of these differences as a silly human foible.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

The poem’s protagonist expects that he will be remembering that he took the road less traveled by—that he has successfully resisted conformity—but that will not actually have been what happened. Frost makes that clear.

Though as for that, the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.

Frost’s point is that his protagonist will be deceiving himself in satisfying his need to feel good about himself. The power of the poem is reinforced because readers, seeking an inspirational message, so often do not notice that they have been told that the roads looked essentially the same. The film *Dead Poet’s Society*, for example, invokes the poem altogether as an affirmation of the struggle against conformity. The film’s young students too are busy pretending that they are fighting the Borg (Carmola, 2003 interestingly suggests that young people are especially likely to buy into this kind of thing). Like the crew of the Enterprise they have no interest in taking note of their propensity for self-deception. Like the crew of the Enterprise, their reluctance to examine themselves may ironically be at the heart of their surrender to the Borg.

Claims made on behalf of individual difference—the celebration of our plurality and of the uniqueness of each one of us—are often used to sustain this self-deception. Of course these differences exist and they matter a great deal. We are neither automatons nor autonomous. The existence of individual difference does not deny the power of what we have learned both from the sort of society we live in, and from the particular place we occupy in that society. We cannot learn about our own socialization—learn to know ourselves better—while bragging about our successes and proclaiming our autonomy. In not inquiring into the sources of our parochialism, we are to a very substantial degree rendered even more parochial—even less able to attain the freedom that seeking an external perspective could give us.

V

When individual consciousness is celebrated rather than examined, trivial differences in the way we come at this or that, reduced to differences in taste or style, give us what passes for a sense of self. We affirm ourselves by the kind of clothes we wear, the way we cut our hair, and the food preferences we cultivate. We are Republicans or Democrats, pro-life or pro-choice, meat eaters or vegetarians. We go on about freedom and individual difference with a great deal of fervor but without much substance. We are comforted by picturing the Borg as a kind of corporate Frankenstein—more mechanical than any of us. We do not like to look at the ways in which we have been collectively shaped—the ways in which we cannot avoid a place in the Borg. Our affirmations of individuality can be covers, for better or worse, for having signed on with the Borg long ago.

The illusion of individual autonomy protects us from an assessment of the sources of our ways of being and thinking. It also reduces the powerful case that can be made for the necessity of holding ourselves and others individually responsible for our actions to an indefensible assertion that we simply exercise free will. An assertion of free will is a conversation stopper, a matter of faith that cannot be discussed further. Plato could not have invented a more apt device to keep the Republic's citizens from understanding their actual situations.

It seems to me that when we are willing to look at ourselves hard, we must all know that we can be infinitely deconstructed in principle. Who would we be if our genders were not what they were? Who would we be if we had been born in a different time, had different friends, different parents, a different nationality, different work, different brain cells, or perhaps even different toilet training? The whole is awfully difficult to affirm if the parts are variable. On the other hand, we need to be deconstructed into an infinite set of questions about our parts if we are to understand something of their role in the larger organism. Respecting the integrity of the organism is important for many purposes but subverting that integrity by deconstruction is important too.

What is at issue is not the possibility of deconstruction but whether or not deconstruction is appropriate in a particular context. There are clearly many contexts in which we have to regard ourselves as responsible for our actions—clearly many contexts in which we have to hold others responsible for their actions too. At those times we take ourselves and others as integrated wholes. We do not embark on deconstructing anyone. The impact of various differences in our experiential and physiological parts should not then be denied. They are at those times simply irrelevant.

Like Popeye, one needs to affirm that “I am what I am,” when an assignment of responsibility to one's self is appropriate. Those with whom we are dealing are then what they are too. We should in those circumstances assume the integrity of a specific set of brain cells, a particular blood chemistry, and

one of the perhaps infinitely various experiences of adolescent socialization, weaning, and the like, to be built into the definition of the individual in question. One can take responsibility and be assigned responsibility. Individual integrity cannot, however, be posited as a counterpoint to the Borg. The Borg, the collective social milieu, controls a great many of the inputs through which individuals get to be who they are. It can potentially control a great many more. Individuals are not independent of the Borg. We need to be clear about that if we are to understand the Borg and, in so doing, constrain its influence.

We need to be aware too that an absence of clarity here serves many interests. It spares those in positions of relative power from too much concern about the implications of the way they are using that power. An officer of Philip Morris notes that smokers choose to smoke. A CEO of a firm with operations in Malaysia suggests that cultural differences promote very different safety and health standards there, and that it would be arrogant for him to impose his own standards. A teacher complains that her students seem to care only about grades, and wishes she could find students with more authentic priorities. Of course, what they say is true. The smoker does choose to smoke. The Malaysian industrial worker does regard standards of health and safety that would be scandalous here as normal over there. Students can be altogether focused on grades. They make their choices but the people making those choices are who they are in substan-

tial degree because of their social and economic roles. If we do not see that, do not see the Borg, the Borg triumphs. If we see only that, we adopt too passive a posture toward the Borg. The trick is to fight the good fight, recognizing the degree of integration we have with the Borg, and the many desirable functions of that integration as well as its dangers. *Star Trek* never takes us there.

The Borg may win by not seeming to win. It is much more powerful than the mechanical seductress Rodenberry gave us. Corporate business is a great generator of power but it often presents itself in an entrepreneurial individualistic mask. The good ship *Enterprise*, had it been subsumed into the Borg, might go on looking just as it did. Its crew might perceive itself just as it had. Nobody would sprout electrodes or take to wearing a black hat. Our most profound defense is in understanding that.

Some degree of self-deception, as Plato suggests, is necessary. Imagine the dialogue. "Ah," the Borg might say tauntingly, "you fight hard only because it is convenient for me that you preserve the illusion of your autonomy." "Yes," Picard might counter, "that may be, but I must inquire carefully into what else preserving that illusion may accomplish. Too many of us have struggled to maintain it for too long to let it go lightly." "What would you be," the Borg might have added, "if your earliest ancestors had not surrendered to me many times in far away kingdoms long ago?" "What would we be," Picard could say, "if we had not maintained our assumption, however ill-founded, of responsibility?" That would have been an episode worth tuning in to.

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