

Notes and Study Questions for Plato's *Crito* (in *The trial and death of Socrates*)

Introduction

(1a) Why wasn't Socrates executed right after his trial? What is Crito's reason for visiting Socrates?

43a to 46c

(2a) When he arrived, why didn't Crito wake Socrates up?

(2b) What news does Crito bring? What is Socrates's response? When does Socrates think that he will die?

(2c) If Socrates dies, in what two ways will that be a misfortune for Crito?

(2d) How does Socrates respond to what Crito says (right above 44d)? Notice that Socrates refers to "the majority." The majority (or *the many*) are referenced several times in this dialogue. The meaning of *the majority* is similar to what we, today, would call *the masses*.

(2e) What kind of plan does Crito outline from 44e to 45c?

(2f) On pp. 45 - 45, what does Crito say about Socrates's sons?

(2g) In the middle of p. 46, what does Socrates say that they must do?

46b to 48c

(3a) What argument does Socrates decide that they should first consider? (See 46d. This refers back to 44c.) Why, in particular, does Socrates want to examine this argument now? (See between 46d and 46e.)

(3b) Once Socrates lays out the statement that they are going to examine, how does Crito respond?

(3c) On p. 47, Socrates discusses an example about "a man professionally engaged in physical training." What point is this example supposed to illustrate?

(3d) What happens, according to Socrates, if the man professionally engaged in physical training listens to the many? What does Crito add?

(3e) At 47d, Socrates considers someone engaged in learning about actions that are just and unjust, or learning about actions that are shameful and beautiful, or learning about actions that are good and bad. Whose opinion does he say should be followed? Why?

(3f) From 47e to 48a, Socrates is focusing on “that which is improved by health and corrupted by disease” and “that part of us ... that unjust action harms and just action benefits.”

What is “that which is improved by health and corrupted by disease”?

What is “that part of us ... that unjust action harms and just action benefits”?

(3g) According to Socrates and Crito, is life worth living with either of these parts of us ruined?

(3h) What is Socrates’s conclusion to this investigation?

(3i) But, then, Socrates points out, “‘But,’ someone might say, ‘the many are able to put us to death,’” and Crito agrees. Does Socrates change or modify his conclusion based on this thought?

48c to 50a

(4a) At 48c (the third time he speaks on this page), what issue does Socrates say that they must now examine? Does Socrates think that the possibility of being put to death should be a consideration when they are evaluating this issue?

(4b) On p. 49, when Socrates is speaking in the passage next to 49b, he asks five questions. Some of these are just re-stating what he has just said, but the first and fourth are important. What is the first question Socrates asks? What is the fourth question he asks (the one that begins “Above all, is the truth such as we use to say it was, ...”)?

(4c) In that fourth question, what is Socrates saying about “whether the majority agree or not”? What is he saying about “whether we must still suffer worse things than we do now”?

(4d) What is the theme of the second, third, fourth, and fifth times that Socrates speaks after the passage next to 49b? What opinion does Socrates attribute to “the majority”? Does he agree or disagree with this opinion?

(4e) In the passage next to 49d, Socrates says, first, “One should never do wrong in return, nor do any man harm, no matter what he may have done to you.” In the third sentence of this passage, does he say that a lot of people hold this view (that he has articulated in the first sentence) or do only a few hold it? Does Crito agree with this view or not?

49e to 54e

(5a) What type of scenario is Socrates referring to at 50a?

(5b) The last time that Socrates speaks on p. 50, he is trying to clarify what he said just previously (at 50a). He puts it this way:

- As he is planning to escape ...
- he’s confronted by “the laws and the state.”

- What do “the laws and the state” say?
- What would (or could) Socrates say in response? (See 50c.) This is important because an obvious rational for escaping is that the sentence is unjust.
- The laws and the state would then say what? (Look at the first time that Socrates begins speaking [after Crito has spoken] on p. 51.)
- The laws and the state, then, add some more thoughts, just in case “we wondered at their words.” What points do they (the laws and the state) add between 50d and e?
- What do the laws and the state say about “our offspring and servant” in the middle of p. 51?
- The laws and the state ask “do you think that we are on an equal footing as regards the right, and that whatever we do to you it is right for you to do to us?” (p. 51) This question isn’t answered immediately, but what’s the implied answer?
- The “laws and the state” continue this line of reasoning to the top of p. 52. Do you agree with this position that the “laws and the state” are taking?

(5c) This is, of course, Socrates (the character) who is speaking on behalf of the laws and state. How well does what he says here fit with the Socrates from the Apology?

The passage that begins with “Reflect now, Socrates” on p. 52 (and continues onto p. 53) is kind of lengthy. It’s useful to split it up in order to get the main points that Socrates is making. (Inside the quotes here are the words spoken by “the laws.”)

- (1) From the beginning, up to 51e. (“what you are planning” is referring to escaping)
- (2) “We say that the one who disobeys does wrong in three ways,”
 - “first because in us he disobeys his parents” (Another translation of this is “first, because in disobeying us he is disobeying his parents”)—“his parents” is referring to the state.
 - [second, he disobeys] “those who brought him up”
 - [and third,] “in spite of his agreement, he neither obeys us nor, if we do something wrong, does he try to persuade us to do better”
 - (Another translation: “secondly, because we are the authors of his education; thirdly, because he has made an agreement with us that he will duly obey our commands; and he neither obeys them nor convinces us that our commands are wrong;”)
- (3) “We do say that you too, Socrates, are open to those charges if you do what you have in mind [i.e., escape]; you would be among, not the least, but the most guilty of the

Athenians.” And if I should say ... [and the rest of this paragraph and the first sentence of the next.]

(4) “Then at your trial you could have assessed your penalty at exile ...” [to 52d]

(5) “First then, answer us on this very point, whether we speak the truth when we say that you agreed, not only in words but by your deeds, to live in accordance with us.” What are we to say to that, Crito? Must we not agree?

Get that passage all split up and organized, and then read it again.

(5d) What point are the laws making at 52e to 53a?

(5e) At the beginning of the last paragraph on p. 53, what do the laws say will happen to Socrates’s friends? What about to Socrates himself?

(5f) From 53c – 53d, the issue is escaping from Athens and going to a city that is not well governed. If, in one of those cities, Socrates discusses and says the same things as he said in Athens, then what corner, so to speak, will he have gotten himself into? Why do the laws say, “Do you not think that Socrates would appear to be an unseemly kind of person?”

(5g) What does Socrates seem to think about the possibility of escaping and going to Thessaly?

(5h) At 54a Socrates refers back to a point that Crito made in the beginning of the dialogue about Socrates’s children (at 45d). What does Socrates say about that issue here?

(5i) In the middle of p. 54, there is “Be persuaded by us who have brought you up, Socrates. Do not value either your children or your life or anything else more than goodness, in order that when you arrive in Hades you may have all this as your defense before the rulers there.” Who is the *us* in the first sentence?

At 54c there is “As it is, you depart,” – *depart* refers to dying.

(5j) What will make the laws of the underworld unhappy?

(5k) What is Socrates saying from 54d to the end of the dialogue?