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**Plato: *The Crito*:  
Summary of the Argument Against Escaping from Prison**

**by Gordon L. Ziniewicz**

1. At stake here are right proportion within the soul (individual justice), right proportion between persons (friendship), right proportion among citizens (social justice), and right proportion between citizens and laws or customs (*nomoi*).
2. The opinion of the wise (expert opinion) is to be followed in matters of justice and injustice. The opinion of the many is not to be followed, even though the many have the power to put one to death. The many cannot do the greatest harm to the individual (make him unjust), nor can they do the greatest good (make him just).
3. Deserting the opinion of the wise regarding justice will injure (disorder) the soul, that "principle" or part of the person that is improved by justice and deteriorated by injustice.
4. One should follow the opinion of the wise (physicians and trainers) with regard to the health of the body. Life would not be worth living with an unhealthy body.
5. Life would not be worth living even more with an unjust soul. The well-being or health of the soul (justice) is more important than the well-being or health of the body. Not life, but a *good life*, is to be chiefly valued.
6. What counts is whether it is just or unjust to escape from prison and enlist the help of others to do this.
7. We are never intentionally to do wrong. Doing wrong is always an evil and a dishonor to him who acts unjustly. [Doing wrong injures or disorders one's own soul.] We must injure no one, not even in return (revenge for) an injury another has done to us. [Revenge disorders the soul of the perpetrator of revenge.] This is not an opinion held by the many.
8. Escaping prison would be doing wrong to the principles acknowledged by us to be just. [One of these principles is to persuade individuals and customs to improve in the light of higher principles. This persuasion requires attachment to individuals and customs.]
9. Escaping prison would be subversive of respect for laws and customs. [Laws and customs cannot exist without the respect for laws and customs of law-abiding citizens. Acts of injustice injure the moral and cultural atmosphere created by laws and customs.]
10. Laws and customs are like parents and perhaps even more important than parents for young persons' upbringing and improvement (or corruption). Laws and customs governing marriage and education, as well as other laws and customs, have made Socrates' life and activity possible. [The institution of language (Greek) has been especially important for Socrates' career of cross-examining citizens and customs.]
11. Having gained from the laws, it would be unjust to turn one's back

on the laws. [That would indicate a lack of proportion, especially since Socrates has benefited so much from Athenian *mores*. He has rarely left the city in seventy years. Getting without giving back shows a lack of geometrical proportion -- fairness or equity. Furthermore, Socrates is not equal to the laws; they are his superiors.]

12. In relation to the laws, one must be subservient. They are "to be soothed, and gently and reverently entreated when angry, even more than a father, and if not persuaded, obeyed..." One has the obligation to respectfully persuade laws to change in the light of higher standards (such as the form of justice); failing that, one must obey them. [The ideal form of justice (right proportion) includes respect for nurturing parents and, even more, for nurturing custom.]

13. That Socrates rarely left the city shows his willingness to abide by its laws and customs. Even his questioning of custom took place within a context of respect and loyalty, demonstrated in his courage in time of war. Socrates loves Athens, its laws, and its customs. This implies a bond or contract between Athens and Socrates. [Compare to the implied contract of a common law marriage.]

14. To do injury to the laws by breaking them amounts to (1) disobeying one's parents, (2) rejecting the authors of his education, which made possible the conditions allowing Socrates to pursue his life-work of cross-examining citizens and laws, (3) breaking an implied contract to abide by the laws [to which he has been voluntarily wedded]. Socrates has failed to persuade that the laws be changed or at least be understood differently. Failing to persuade or convince the laws, Socrates must now obey.

15. [Injuring the laws and customs, by injuring respect for laws and customs, indirectly harms one's fellow citizens. Laws and customs must be improved and respected so that they may be effective parents for future citizens, for their upbringing and education. It is presumed that Socrates' facing death, with reverence for the laws, despite respectful disagreement with some of them, will improve and enhance the moral atmosphere of the city, which present and future citizens must breathe. To escape from prison would make Socrates guilty of corruption of youth.]

#### Questions:

1. How does one reconcile devotion to moral principles with devotion to fellow human beings and to one's society and its customs, laws, and traditions?

2. Evaluate Socrates' deliberation. Did he take into account a full range of conditions and consequences? Did he make the right decision?

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