

Political Philosophy I at Stockholms Universitet

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1 Reading assignment 1: Plato - Crito

Socrates' friend, Crito, soon before his planned execution, to attempt one last time to convince Socrates to accept help from his friends in escaping the prison.

Crito cites three reasons why Socrates should accept. Firstly, he is a beloved friend who cannot be replaced. Moreover, if Socrates is executed, Crito will be disgraced in society's eyes because people will think that Crito either couldn't or didn't want to save him. Finally, Socrates' children will be left as orphans.

There begins Socrates' explanation why he refuses to escape his penalty.

Firstly, he preaches to Crito that he should not be concerned with the public opinion. Good men will know things as they are, and the others' opinion is irrelevant. He uses multiple analogies, for example that of a gymnast and their trainer. The athlete should pay attention to their coach's criticism but not to anyone else's.

Then he presents arguments against escaping:

By escaping, he would undermine the authority law and the state. He would be setting an example for other Athenians to ignore the law and the collective decisions of direct democracy.

He claims that Athenians have a moral obligation to be obedient to the state out of gratitude for what they have already received: an upbringing, education.

Socrates also brings up the fact that every free Athenian, once they come of age, is free to take their belongings and leave where they wish. Therefore, by staying in Athens, they have implicitly accepted the social contract embodied by the law.

For Socrates, there are two acceptable stances in relation to the law: either obey the commands, or convince your co-citizens that the commands are wrong. Disobedience is out of question and in his eyes it is wrong in three ways: it wrongs ones' parents, it wrongs ones' teachers and it breaks the social contract.

Finally, Socrates states that by escaping, he would confirm the verdict of the judges, who deemed him as someone who corrupts the youth, someone who destroys the laws. By accepting his sentence, he will prove them wrong and show his virtue and justice.