

Plato, *Crito*

Two separate issues that Crito and Socrates discuss, both pertaining to whether or not Socrates should escape Athens:

- *Whether the majority opinion should matter in our decision making
- *Whether it would be *just* for Socrates to escape

Plato, *Crito*

Q: Should we care about the majority opinion?

Crito gives an argument that we should care about the majority opinion:

“(T)he majority can inflict not the least but pretty well the greatest evils if one is slandered among them.” (44d)

Plato, *Crito*

Socrates doesn't think this is a good argument:

“Would that the majority could inflict the greatest evils, for they would then be capable of the greatest good, and that would be fine, but now they cannot do either. They cannot make a man either wise or foolish, but they inflict things haphazardly.” (44d)

Plato, *Crito*

How exactly does Socrates' reply work?

Let's look at Crito's argument first:

- P1** If the majority can inflict the greatest evils on a person, then we should care about the opinion of the majority.
- P2** The majority can inflict the greatest evils on a person.
- C** We should care about the opinion of the majority.

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How exactly does Socrates' reply work?

Socrates attacks the *soundness* of Crito's argument by arguing that P2 is false:

P1 The majority cannot make a person foolish.

P2 The greatest evil is to be foolish.

C The majority cannot inflict the greatest evil on a person.

P2 sounds noble, but is it *true*? Is it really worse to be foolish than dead?

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Socrates thinks that the second of our two initial questions is more important than the first. Why?

1. The most important thing is not life but the good life. (48b)
2. The good life, the beautiful life, and the just life are the same. (48b)
3. If I act unjustly by fleeing Athens, then it doesn't matter whether it will save my life. (48c)
4. It is more important to know whether I will act justly by fleeing than it is to focus on whether so doing will save my life. (48d)

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Is it just for Socrates to flee?

- P1** Injustice and wrongdoing is in every way harmful and shameful to the wrongdoer. (49b)
- P2** One must never do that which is harmful and shameful to oneself. (implied)
- P3** One must never do wrong. (49b—derived from P1 and P2)
- P4** Mistreating others is the same as doing wrong. (49c)
- P5** If I flee, I mistreat the city. (50a)
- C** I must not flee. (from P3, P4, and P5)

Plato, *Crito*

Is it just for Socrates to flee?

Is it true that Socrates mistreats the city by fleeing?

Socrates gives two interesting reasons for his view.

Plato, *Crito*

Is it true that Socrates mistreats the city by fleeing?

FIRST REASON:

It is not possible “for a city not to be destroyed if the verdicts of its courts have no force but are nullified and set at naught by private individuals.” (53b)

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Is it true that Socrates mistreats the city by fleeing?

SECOND REASON:

- P1** Athens nurtured me. (50d)
- P2** If Athens nurtured me, then I am Athens' servant. (50e)
- P3** A servant is not on equal footing with his master regarding what is right. (51a)
- P4** If your master undertakes it to destroy you and deems it right, you do not have the right to retaliate. (51a)
- C** If Athens deems it right to destroy me, I do not have the right to retaliate.

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What options, then, does Socrates think he has?

“You must either persuade (the state) or obey its orders, and endure in silence whatever it instructs you to endure, whether blows or bonds, and if it leads you into war to be wounded or killed, you must obey.” 54b

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Final thoughts: In the *Apology* Socrates presented a very strong case for his release. As we know, he failed to persuade the state to his point of view. This raises a troubling question for us: What if you can't persuade the state to see your point of view because the state is *unreasonable*? Are we *really* obligated to endure the orders of an *unreasonable* authority?