

Socrates: Should I Stay or Should I Go?



TRAD 104: Mind, Matter & God

September 23, 2008



It's the funnest iPod ever.

Today's Menu

Amuse Bouche

- **Socrates Starter:** *A bite-sized summary of the lecture material covered so far.*

Main Course

- **Plato's *Crito*:** *A delectable dialogue featuring Crito's impassioned pleas for Socrates' escape from prison in order to avoid his execution.*

Includes:

- **The Reputation Argument:** *Back by popular demand!*
- **The Argument from Justice:** *So good, it's a shame to let it go to waste.*
- **Non-Retaliatio:** *A bittersweet revenge.*
- **The Laws Speech:** *Your taste buds will obey.*

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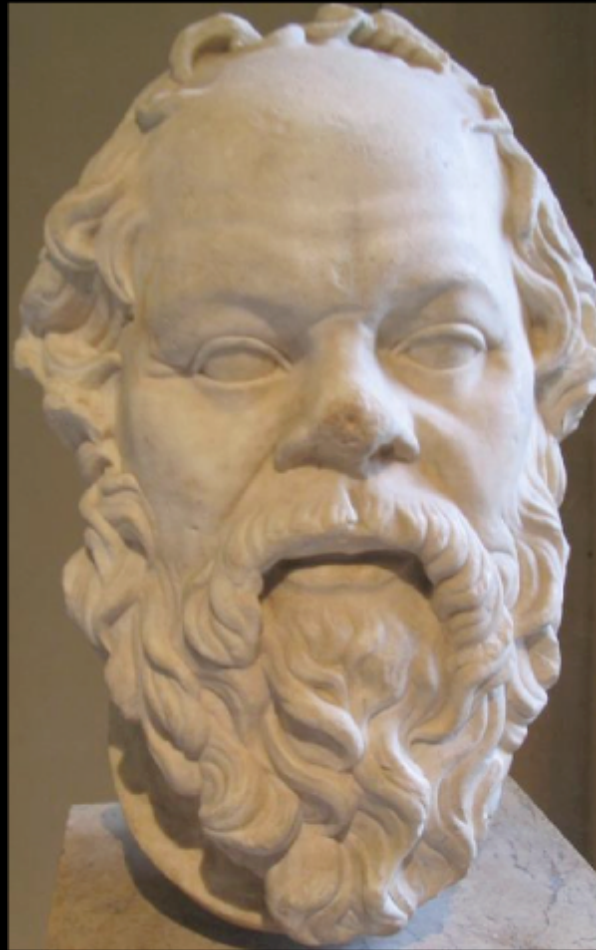
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Socrates
(469 – 399 BCE)

Getting Back Up to Speed



Once upon a time in a land far, far away...

- Questioned the traditional morality of the day.
- Non-retaliation.



Became famous (and infamous) for “Socratic” conversations.

- Developed a following of “groupies.”
- One groupie, Plato, would later make Socrates famous.

Threat to the establishment in Athens. Tried for impiety and corrupting the youth.

Was found guilty and was executed.

His life and death would leave an impact on the rest of history.

Plato's *Apology*



Two Charges Against Socrates:

1. Impiety

- Accused of “not believing” in the Gods of the city.
- Meletus explains the charge by claiming Socrates is an atheist.
- **Serious Charge:** Religious observance was a kind of civic duty.
- **Defense:** The charge is inconsistent.

2. Corrupting the Youth

- **Socrates' Groupies:** Socrates diverted a generation of rich, young men.
- **Aping Socrates:** The youth participated in the same “gadfly” activities.
- **Defense: Socratic Paradox**

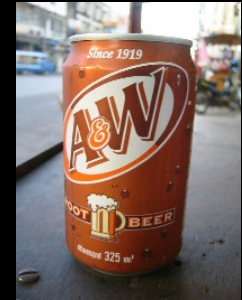
A Socratic Paradox

Socratic “Rationalism”

Human beings always aim at what they believe is best.

Example: Drinking “Root Beer” on the Eve of a Final Exam.

- **Ordinary Opinion:** Audrey knows she shouldn’t drink the “root beer.” It would be better for her if she studied and got a good night’s sleep. But she does it anyway.
- **Socratic Opinion:** Human beings always do what they think is best. Hence, it is not correct to say that Audrey knows it would be better for her to study. If she actually believed that, she wouldn’t drink the “root beer.” Her action reveals that **she must, deep down, believe that drinking the “root beer” is better for her.**



A Socratic Paradox

Corrupting the Youth?

- **No one would intentionally corrupt the youth.**
 - When people are corrupted, they harm those who corrupt them.
 - Hence, Socrates would be essentially training people to **harm him**.
 - This is absurd.
- **Upshot: If Socrates corrupts, he corrupts unwillingly.**
 - If he is a corrupter, he doesn't do it intentionally.
 - Those who make mistakes are **in need of education and correction**.
 - They do not deserve **punishment**, let alone death.



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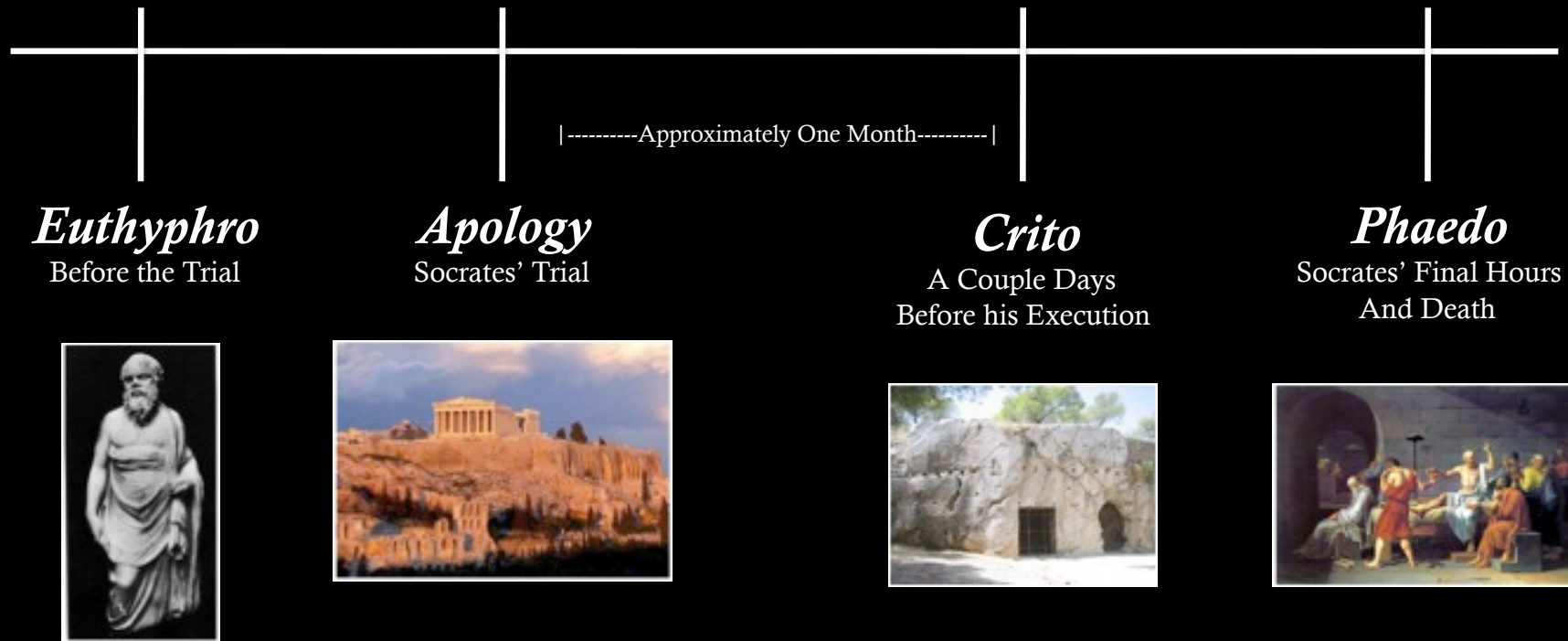
Plato's *Crito*

τί τηνικάδε ἀφῆξαι, ὦ Κρίτων; ἢ οὐ πρῶ ἔτι ἐστίν;

Why have you come at this time, Crito? Or isn't it still early?

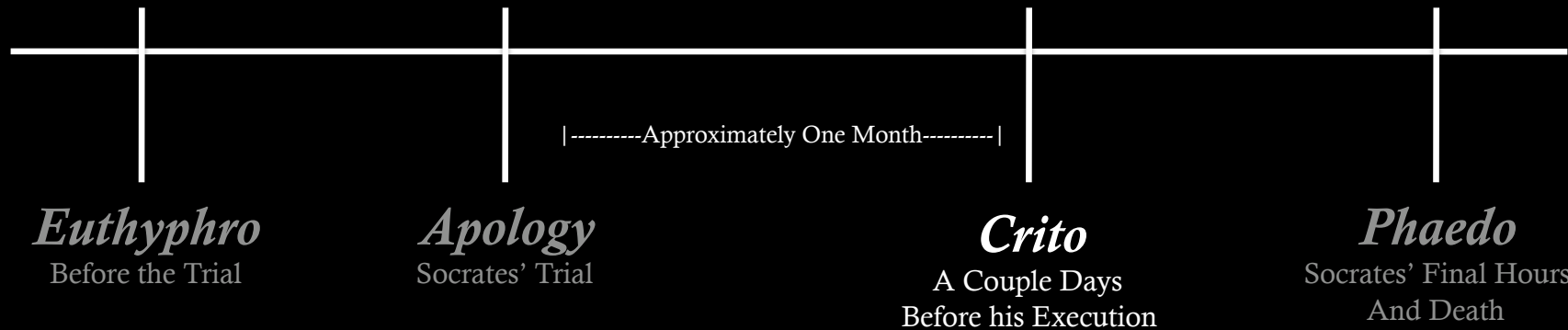
Plato's *Crito*

(Κρίτων)



Plato's *Crito*

(Κρίτων)



Central Question of the *Crito*



Should Socrates escape from prison before he is executed?



- **Who is Crito?**
 - One of Socrates' oldest and best friends.
- **Why has he come in the early morning hours?**
 - The ship is returning from Delos, signaling the end of his life.
 - Crito has made the necessary arrangements to help Socrates escape.
 - Socrates needs to leave *now* or he will most certainly die.
- **What does Socrates do?**
 - Exactly what he always does.
 - He sits down with his friend to determine what he should do.

Role-playing: Crito



Imagine that your friend has been unjustly condemned to death by the state.

She is (arguably) innocent.

1. Would you try to convince her to escape?
2. How would you convince her to escape from prison?
3. What sorts of arguments would you use?



Crito's Arguments



4 Basic Arguments for Socrates' Escape

1. **Friends:** Socrates will abandon his friends.
2. **Family:** Socrates will abandon his children.
3. **Reputation:** Socrates' friends will be thought ridiculous for not saving their mentor and friend.
4. **Justice:** It is unjust to give into one's enemies and accept an unjust verdict.

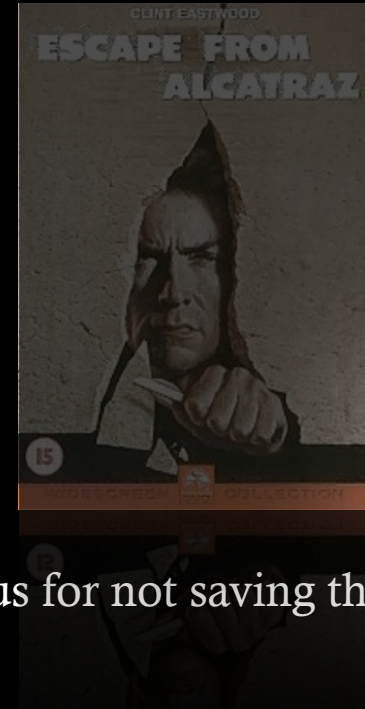


Crito's Arguments



2 *Critical* Arguments for Socrates' Escape

1. **Friends:** Socrates will abandon his friends.
2. **Family:** Socrates will abandon his children.
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Crito: Reputation

What will the neighbors say?



REPUTATION

We will be known forever by the tracks we leave.
-American Indian Proverb

The Reputation Argument



Crito: *Many people...will think that I could have saved you if I were willing to spend money, but that I did not care to do so. Surely, there can be no worse reputation than to be thought to value money more highly than one's friends. (44b-c)*

Argument:

- I will gain a bad reputation if I do not save you.
- **Implicit Claim:** One should care about what the majority thinks and values.

Evidence:

- **Common Opinion:** One should care about one's reputation.
- **Current Situation:** Where has Socrates' reputation landed him?
- **Mob Power:** The "majority" have sentenced Socrates to death.
- **Harm:** Clearly, then, the majority can harm an individual.

Socrates' Response



My good Crito, why should we care so much for what the majority think?

Case: You've been asked to make a vital trade for a major sports team.

- How would you proceed? Would you seek out the advice of others?
- Whose advice would you listen to?
- Would you listen to everyone's advice?

Answer: No. You'd listen to **good** advice. You'd seek out those **who know**.

Socrates: We shouldn't listen to the majority. We should listen to the **wise**.



Why Shouldn't We Listen to the Majority?



Billy: *But, Mom! Like, everyone else was playing quarters!*

Billy's Mom: *And if **everyone** jumped off a bridge, would you jump too?*

[The part of the story that never gets told...]

Billy: *Yes. Yes, I would.*



Dionysian Digging: Relativism



Relativism: The *[t]ruth* of *x* is determined by **beliefs/attitudes**.



Examples:

It is *[t]rue* that it is impolite in Western society to eat with your feet.

It is *[t]rue* that it, in America, you should drive on the right side of the road.

Absolutism: The *[T]ruth* of *x* is determined by **factual conditions of the world**.

Examples:

It is *[T]rue* that the world is not flat.

It is *[T]rue* that water is H₂O.



Moral Relativism



Relativism: *What is [t]rue for you is [t]rue for you, and what is [t]rue for me is [t]rue for me.*

~~Universal [T]ruth~~

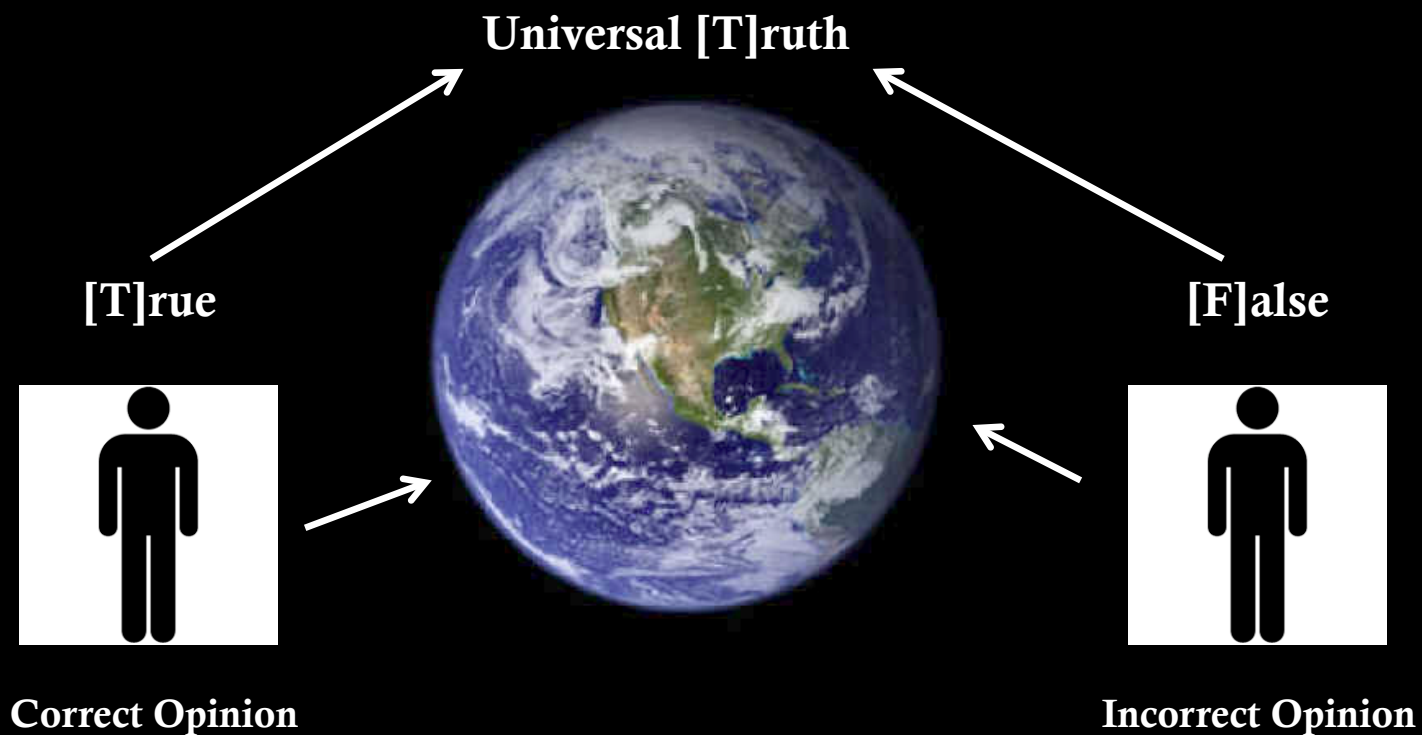


Both are right!

Absolutism



Absolutism: *[T]ruth is objective and universal. What is [T]rue is [T]rue for everyone.*



Only one is right!

Moral Relativism



Question: What about *moral* truths? Are they [t]ruths or [T]ruths?

Examples:

- It is _____ that it is wrong to commit murder.
- It is _____ that it is wrong to engage in incest.
- It is _____ that it is wrong to enslave others.



Is there an objective, definitive answer to any of these questions?

Evidence for Relativism:

- **Consider History:** People have disagreed about moral issues across time.
- **Consider Culture:** Different cultures hold different views on moral issues.

Relativism: Worries



1. Social Practices & Disagreement



2. The Idea of Moral Progress



Relativism: Worries



1. Social Practices & Disagreement



2. The Idea of Moral Progress



Moral Disagreement



How many of you have ever argued with your friends about moral matters?

Abortion?

The Death Penalty?

Physician-Assisted Suicide?

Who is the best James Bond?

Clearly...Sean Connery.



Why do you argue about these issues? What is the goal?

Moral Disagreement



Plausibly, you believe there is some [T]ruth of the matter.

That's why we argue with one another and try to convince others that we are right.

We don't think that what is [t]rue for others is [t]rue for them.

If we did, we wouldn't seriously argue about it.

Imagine: Arguing about whether or not your friend likes cake.

Presumably, whether your friend likes cake is matter of *his* opinion.

You wouldn't try to convince him that he doesn't like cake.

Reason: There is no absolute [T]ruth of the matter. Only relative [t]ruth.

Compare: Arguing about whether or not abortion is morally wrong.

Unlike cake, many of us believe that there is an absolute [T]ruth about this matter.

That is, whether abortion is morally wrong isn't just a matter of belief.

We *do* seriously argue about such issues.

Moral Disagreement



If relativism is true, disagreement is illusory and impossible.

Why Can't There Be Disagreement?

We *think* that we are arguing about an objective matter and disagreeing about its [T]ruth. But, we're not.

If relativism is true, then there is no objective [T]ruth.

Instead, the [t]ruth of x is determined by beliefs and attitudes.

[t]ruth #1: **You believe** that abortion is morally wrong.`

[t]ruth #2: **I believe** that abortion is morally permissible.



We're both right! If relativism is true, [t]ruth is determined not by absolute conditions of the world, but rather by beliefs and attitudes (of persons, of cultures, of countries, etc.).

Moral Disagreement

Moral Criticism: We cannot argue and condemn the actions of others.

Nazism: If relativism is true, then what the Nazis did was morally right.

- Why?
- It's simple: They *believed* that what they were doing was morally right.
- If there is no **absolute standard of morality**, then there is no basis for criticism.



Is this correct?

Do we believe that what the Nazis did was morally right *for anyone*?

It looks like we get pushed to adopt **absolutism**.

- We *can* disagree and criticize the actions of others.
- Morality *is not determined* merely by the beliefs of a particular person, group, etc.
- Rather, there is some absolute [T]ruth about these matters.

Relativism: Worries



1. Social Practices & Disagreement



2. The Idea of Moral Progress



Relativism: Worries



1. Social Practices & Disagreement



2. The Idea of Moral Progress



Moral Progress



I have to admit, it's getting better. A little better, all the time.

What do you think? Have we morally progressed throughout history?

- Eradicating slavery in the United States.
- Increasing equality between genders and races.

Moral “Progress”: Depends on there being some **absolute standard**.

- Slavery was always wrong.
- It was wrong in the 1800s.
- It was wrong in 399 BCE.



If relativism is true: There is no absolute standard.

- Slavery wasn't wrong in the 1800s. It wasn't wrong in 399 BCE.
- Critically, it wasn't wrong because the majority didn't *believe* it was wrong.
- We are not making any moral *progress*.
- Rather, we are just making moral *changes*.

Socrates & Relativism



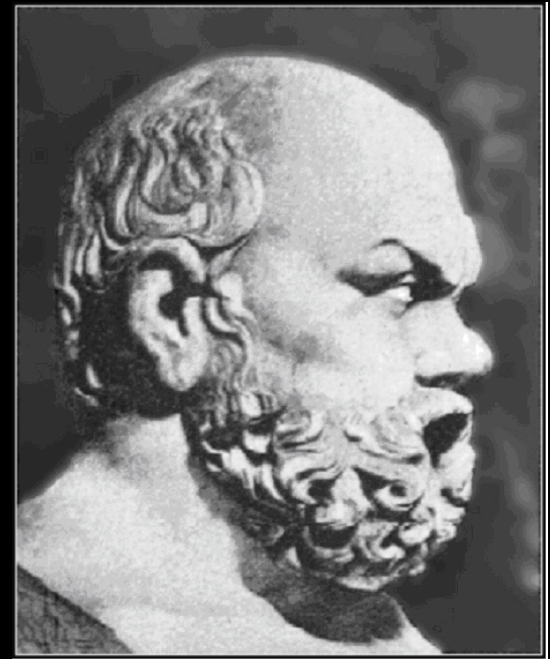
The Majority Argument

We shouldn't care for what the majority thinks.
We should only care for **good** opinions.

Relativism

We shouldn't care for the majority opinion.
Moral matters are not decided by majority rule.
Morality is objective.

Hence, we should seek to examine morality and gain knowledge.



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Crito: Justice

What are you? A quitter?



The Justice Argument



Crito: *Socrates, I do not think that what you are doing is **just**, to give up your life when you can save it, and to hasten your fate as your enemies would hasten it, and indeed have hastened it in their wish to destroy you. (45c)*

Argument:

- It is **unjust** to lay down your life when you can save it.
- It is **unjust** not to stand up to your enemies.

Evidence:

- **Common Opinion:** One should protect one's life.
- **Retaliation:** If you are unjustly harmed by another, you should respond.



STUPIDITY

QUITTERS NEVER WIN, WINNERS NEVER QUIT,
BUT THOSE WHO NEVER WIN AND NEVER QUIT ARE IDIOTS.

Socrates' Response

The only valid consideration...is whether we should be acting rightly in...the escape, or whether in truth we shall do wrong in doing all this. (48d)

Agreement with Crito: This is the *only* argument which *might* persuade Socrates.

Crito: You're acting unjustly.

Socrates: We'll see about that.



Socratic Principle: One should *never* act unjustly.

Do we say that one must never in any way do wrong willingly? (49a)

Remember Socratic rationalism? Everyone does what they think best?

Injustice is the only *true harm* that can befall a human being.

Punishment, death, mutilation...these are all false harms.

Conclusion: You should never act unjustly because it is the greatest harm of all.

Non-Retaliation



One should never do wrong in return, nor mistreat any man, no matter how one has been mistreated by him. (49c)

Socrates' views on revenge fall out of his views on justice.

Rule: Never Harm Anyone, Including Yourself.

Revenge & retaliation involve harming others.
Injustice also involves harming yourself.
Injustice makes you wicked.



Why Relevant?

Socrates doesn't believe he should escape because it would be an act of revenge.
He would harm himself because it would be unjust.
He would harm "The Laws."

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The Laws of Athens



Socrates on Obedience: You should *always* obey the law.

Reasons:

- **The “Laws as Parents” Analogy**
 - The Laws have taken care of Socrates all his life.
 - They have provided him with safety.
 - They have allowed for his education.
 - Therefore, he *owes* them his obedience.
- **The Contractual Argument**
 - Socrates, by remaining a citizen of Athens, has *agreed* to follow the laws.
 - He cannot “pick and choose” which laws he wants to obey.
 - If he had been unhappy with the laws, he could have moved away.
 - By staying in Athens, he has agreed to obey the laws.



The Laws of Athens



This is why it would be unjust for Socrates to escape.

The Laws of Athens are like his parents.
Furthermore, he has agreed to abide by the law.

If he escapes, he is attempting to harm the laws.



This **harm** would violate Socrates' principle to never harm anyone.

Socratic Legacy:

If Socrates were to escape, he would screw up a lifetime of virtuous living.
He would sacrifice everything he has stood for just to save his neck.
Socrates chooses virtue and justice over escaping punishment.

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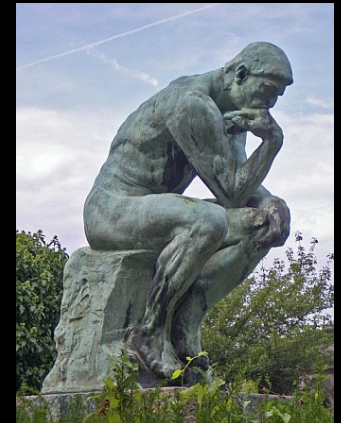
Quick Recap

Today's Lecture



1. Reviewed Socratic “Rationalism”

- Everyone always does what they think best.
- Weakness of the will is impossible.
- Socrates either doesn't harm the youth or he does so by accident.
- Either way, he does not deserve to be punished.



2. The *Crito*

- Dialogue in which Crito argues for Socrates to escape his punishment.

The Reputation Argument:

- Crito: You should care about the majority opinion.
- Socrates: No, we shouldn't. We should care about **good** opinion.

Today's Lecture



2. The *Crito*

Relativism:

- The view that the [t]ruth of x is determined by beliefs & attitudes.
- **Worries:** Moral Disagreement & Moral Progress.
- **Socrates:** The justice of escaping is not determined by beliefs/attitudes.

The Justice Argument

- **Crito:** It is unjust to roll over and let people kill you unjustly.
- **Socrates:** One should never harm anyone else, even if you have been harmed.
- Revenge is never justified.
- Hence, it would be unjust to escape.



Today's Lecture



2. The *Crito*

The Laws Speech

- **The Laws are like parents.**
 - They have nurtured and provided Socrates with many goods.
 - Thus, Socrates owes them his obedience.
- **The Contractual Argument**
 - Socrates, as a citizen, has agreed to obey the laws of the city.
 - This agreement is not consistent with “picking and choosing.”
 - Moreover, Socrates could have left the city if he were unhappy.
 - Hence, since has chosen to stay, he must obey the laws of the city.
 - **Upshot:** It would be unjust to violate his contract and escape.

Have it your way.



What do you think about all of this?

How important is a person's reputation?

To what extent should we care about other people's opinions?

Are moral truths *relative* or *absolute*?

Is Socrates right that it is never just to retaliate?

Is it always wrong to return a harm with another harm?

Are we obligated to follow *all* the laws of the state?

Is civil disobedience an unjust practice?

Have we agreed, by living in the United States, to obey all of its laws?



Fin