

17.03. Introduction to Political Thought

Lecture Outline: Plato's *Crito*

I. The dramatic context and the character of Crito

- A. Crito tries to persuade Socrates to escape into exile
- B. Socrates persuades Crito that he should obey the laws
- C. Crito as the true audience for the arguments of the 'Laws'
Consider Crito's character: tendency toward lawlessness, affection for Socrates and willingness to learn, and thoughtless use of the language of justice

II. Is the *Crito* a defense of political obligation?

- A. Arguments for why Socrates should obey the laws
 1. The laws nourished and educated him (paternal authority)
 2. Disobedience destroys the laws and the city (consequentialist)
 3. He agreed to obey the laws (explicit consent)
 4. He tacitly agreed to obey the laws by staying (implicit consent)
 5. Good for Socrates, not just the city, not to flee (appeal to self-interest)
- B. Problems with these arguments

III. How persuasive are the laws' arguments intended to be? The rule of law as second-best

- A. Hierarchy of ideas of law and justice
 1. Higher lawlessness of reason
 2. Rule of law
 3. Lower lawlessness, from motives of ambition and partiality
- B. Crito as exemplar of the lower lawlessness: motivated by desire for money and reputation, and to help friends and harm enemies
- C. The *Crito* not as a treatise on law but as a case study of Socratic moral education
 1. The laws as a rhetorical device to lead Crito toward lawfulness
 2. The laws' arguments strong enough to persuade Crito but too weak to persuade the reader?

IV. Is the *Apology* a tragedy? Reading the *Apology* and *Crito* together

- A. Why does Socrates antagonize the jury at his trial? At least 3 constraints on him
 1. Must act rightly, in obedience to the best reasons available to him
 2. His actions must help improve his acquaintances and his city
 3. Nothing will improve the others if it is unintelligible to them
- B. Socrates had to receive a sentence he could accept without compromising himself
- C. Socrates's vocation to educate Athens; Plato's dialogues as a replacement for Socrates