

Alex Vargas

Prof. Chiang-Schultheiss

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To Escape or Not To Escape; An Analysis of *Crito*

Crito written by Plato, is a dialogue between Socrates and his wealthy friend Crito. The conversation depicts the future, evil and dishonor that jailbreak will bring about if Socrates challenges the State by contradiction and escape. Although the laws have wronged Socrates, he cannot think he has the right to do to them what they are doing to him. A thorough analysis of *Crito* is necessary to understand that preserving political stability prevails over protecting the rights of individuals through effective use of the elements of argument.

In *Crito*, the asserted claim is classified as a claim of value. Socrates is making a judgment towards escape and disapproving of such action. He subscribes to the idea that “he must do what his city and his country order him” (Plato par.20). Furthermore, escaping from jail would challenge the will of the State, create chaos, an unstable government, and compromise political stability. Although Socrates is aware of the unjust sentence, he will not retaliate because preserving order prevails over the rights of the individual; “and when we are punished by her (State), whether with imprisonment or stripes, the punishment is to be endured in silence...” (Plato par.20), therefore, “we ought not to retaliate or render evil for evil to anyone, whatever evil we may have suffered from him” (Plato par.20). The state must be protected above all and preserved stable.

Plato incorporates various types of support. Among these is the use of posing a hypothetical type of support. By personifying the Laws and the Government, Socrates is able to

carry out a conversation and demonstrate the parent-child relationship every citizen has with their mother country. As the dialogue develops, Socrates converses with the laws and the government of Athens. Throughout this conversation, it is made clear that each citizen has a responsibility with the State in being obedient. Citizens shall convey the same respect to their State and regard them as their Parent because they were “brought into the world and nurtured and educated by us” (Plato par.20), thus, one must not disobey or challenge the will of their parent state, nor may he “do no violence to his father or mother, much less may he do violence to his country” (Plato par.20). By contradicting the State and choosing his own fate, Socrates is challenging and harming his parent, therefore, he must abide by the laws and be in compliance.

Loyalty is also a type of support utilized in *Crito*. “Of all Athenians, you have been the most constant resident in the city...For you never went out of the city... nor did you travel as other men do” (Plato par.22). By electing to reside in the Athens, Socrates entered into an implied contract and so he must obey his state and her punishments. Socrates is never to consider escaping his punishment because not only did he accept Athens as his superior, but also accepted and acquiesced to the laws. It is Socrates’ loyalty to Athens that led him to choose “death to exile” (Plato par.22), and because he so dearly loves his mother country, he will not escape as “only a miserable slave would do, running away and turning your back upon the compacts and agreements which you made as a citizen” (Plato par.22). It is loyalty that outnumbers protecting the rights of the individual.

Lastly, prediction is also another type of support. It is clear that if Socrates elects to follow Crito and escape his fate, he will be considered a “corruptor of the laws”. Should Socrates choose to cheat the State, he will no longer be privileged to reside in Athens and neither will his friends nor family which in turn may also be “driven into exile and deprived of citizenship, or

will lose their property” (Plato par.25). Even if Socrates resigns from Athenian citizenship, there would not be a neighboring state that would welcome him for he is a corruptor of the young and a subverter of the laws. As a result, a life as a fugitive is not worthy or decent and should not be an option, for “your country shall be angry with you while you live, and our brethren, the laws in the world below, will receive you as an enemy for they will know that you have done your best to destroy us” (Plato par.26). Through the element of prediction, Plato successfully obtains to reinforce his stand on protecting and preserving stability.

The warrant although not directly stated, is implied through the defense for the State’s decision. In defending the State, Plato assumes that his audience subscribes to the idea that the State and Laws are infallible, superior and always right. Citizens are subjective to the laws of the state and cannot rebel for the “country is more to be valued and higher and holier far than mother or father, and more to be regarded in the eyes of the gods and of men” (Plato par.25). Since the state is impeccable and can do no wrong, “if she leads us to wounds or death in battle, thither we follow as is right; neither may anyone yield or retreat or leave his rank, but whether in battle or in a court of law, or in any other place, he must do what his city and his country order him” (Plato par.20).

Crito provides a variety of support that allows the reader to understand the importance of preserving stability and avoiding chaos through obedience to the State and the neglect of individual rights. The state is of far more importance than individual rights because she is responsible for providing shelter, education and nurture. Analyzing *Crito* is worthwhile not only because it strongly depicts the elements of argument, but also because it presents a controversial subject that remains intact even in today’s society around the world. *Crito* favors the government over individual rights through support relevant in today’s society.

Work Cited

Plato. *Crito*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. *The Internet Classics Archive*. Web 21 Feb 2009

<<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/crito.html>>.