

Plato, *Crito*. Translated by Harold North Fowler. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960.

Plato (428-348 B.C.) studied under Socrates, and instructed Aristotle. His philosophical system based on ideal forms supported a potent ethical structure. Plato's system proved seminal to all subsequent Western philosophy. Plato founded the Academy in Athens, where he taught until his death.

Crito sits beside Socrates as he sleeps in his prison bed. When Socrates wakes, Crito informs him that the Delian ship approaches, which arrival signals Socrates' execution. Socrates relates his dream, that he will die three days hence.

Crito: Save yourself by fleeing, Socrates. Think of this old friend's reputation if you must. I will be hated for failing to purchase your freedom, since I have the means to do so.

Socrates: Why care what people think? If they could collaborate to do evil, they could cooperate to do good. But they do neither. The crowd cannot conspire; it does not plan. Crowds merely desire.

Crito: Do not worry whether fleeing will injure your friends, Socrates. I will buy your freedom, as well as any accuser's silence. You will be welcomed in another city; I have friends. What you are doing by submitting to this death sentence is wrong. You 1) kill yourself needlessly, 2) abandon your children, 3) are lazy, 4) shame me, 5) shame yourself, 6) act with cowardice, and 7) do evil by dying in this manner.

Socrates: I always deliberate, then act. This circumstance is no different than any previous one. You cannot scare me into changing my mind.

Living Well. How can we examine this matter reasonably? Let us consider the opinions of the crowd. Does an athlete follow the crowd or his trainer? Should not a person aspiring to goodness follow a wise man? The crowd can put one to death, but crowds are not wise. It is not mere living, but living well that matters.

No Compensatory Evil. So let us "investigate in common" the question whether it is right or wrong for me to flee this prison without the permission of the Athenian people. Wrongdoing is a disgrace, regardless the consequences of doing right, even the consequence of death. It is even an evil to wrong those who wrong you. Self-defense is no excuse for doing evil. If we disagree on this point, then we can have no discussion, Crito. We would lack common ground for common investigation.

Social Compact. If I flee without permission, Crito, I destroy the city. How can a state exist if its courts can be ignored by private dissenters? The city bore me, through my parents' marriage, and educated me. Citizens are subjects to the state, not equal to it. Citizens must do as the state commands, though it may lead to the citizen's death. A citizen may attempt to persuade the state that it is wrong, but when the decision is made, that citizen must submit to the city's dictates. A citizen who, as an adult, elects to remain in Athens agrees to obey Athens. As to me in particular, Crito, Athens can justifiably say that I, more than most, made this social compact with the city. My acts speak my consent. I never left town for festivals. I conceived and raised my children as Athenians. I declined to offer exile as my penalty at trial, preferring death. I had seventy years to consider Athens and her laws. I stayed.

Downsides of Flight. If I flee without permission, Crito, I will harm myself and those for whom I care. My friends will be banished and impoverished. The cities I approach will justifiably distrust me. My jury will congratulate themselves, for if I destroy the laws of Athens, do I not corrupt its youth? Even if I go to your friends, Crito, as you urge, I will not live long, my children will be in Athens, and I will be an alien.

Wronged by Men. If I submit to execution, Crito, I die wronged by men, but honoring Athens. I shall avoid injuring family and friends, and Hades will welcome me. Do you agree with me, Crito, or do you wish to respond?

Crito: Crito has nothing to say.