What is Freedom? Should Socrates be Set Free? Plato’s “Crito”

Quick Review of the Apology
SGD of DQs – Side 1: Questions 1 through 3 / Side 2: Questions 4 through 6 – What is the major / provocative takeaway?
Mini-Lecture / Large Group Discussion of The Crito
Active Learning Exercise: How can we respond to “the Laws”?

Quick Review of the Apology

The Legacy of the Apology: How are we to make sense of the message of the “Apology” (especially as it relates to freedom)?

What answers does the Apology provide about the meaning of freedom?

1: Does the Apology provide us with an alternative (or supplementary) conception of what it means to be a good citizen in a free state?

2: Paean to Free Speech? One prominent interpretation of the “Apology” is to read it as one of the great defenses of freedom of thought / freedom of expression ever written.

Problems: Plato was no liberal – we know from other writings that he was not really devoted to free speech. Socrates does not explicitly defend anything like a “free marketplace of ideas,” does he?

2: The Philosophical Life as a Life Liberated from Materialism and Ambition – see Page 32 # - “Men of Athens….”

Connect back to Freedom of Thought / Speech: it is clear that Socrates believed there was a duty (to oneself and to one’s community) to follow reason wherever it leads. There is a sense in which this provides us with a conception of freedom of thought/speech. For Socrates and Plato, though, this was much more a matter of duty than rights.

Key Ideas in “The Apology”

Old Charges Against Socrates: “Socrates is guilty of wrongdoing in that he busies himself studying things in the sky and below the earth; he makes the worse argument the stronger argument; he teaches the same things to others,” 22-23.

The Riddle of Oracle @ Delphi: Chaerephon – went to Delphi…24

Socrates Attempt to Refute the Oracle: Page 24-25 (Politicians, Poets, Craftsmen, Orators)

Results of the Quest: unpopularity, poverty, anger, no time to participate in politics

What the Oracle Must Have Meant: I am wise because I realize that “wisdom is worthless”
On His Old Accusers: ambitious, violent, and numerous (26) – represent different groups I have examined (poets, politicians, etc.)

New Charges Brought by Meletus: “Socrates is guilty of corrupting the young and of not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other new spiritual things.

On His New Accusers: They deal frivolously with serious matters – piety matters, the morality of the young matters. You have given no thought to the matters about which you bring me to trial (28). If you cared about these matters, why haven’t you tried to teach me?

Democratic Pandering of Meletus: all people on the jury (all Athenians) improve the young; only Socrates corrupts the young (27).

Socrates reveals the Contradictions in the Piety Charge: 30-31

To Behave in Ways that Might Lead to One’s Death is NOT Necessarily Shameful: Courage in Battle, Pursuit of the Truth (Another Example of thinking we know what we know not – is death bad?)

Would Rather Die than Give Up PHILOSOPHY: See page 32 – “”Socrates, we do not…”

Duty to God

Benefit to the City / In Killing Me, You will Harm yourselves

I am God’s gift to you

Socratic “Teaching”: Care less for your body / wealth than for your Soul – the kind of liberation Socrates encourages is a LIBERATION FROM OBSTACLES TO VIRTUE / EXCELLENCE. “The greatest good for a man [is] to discuss virtue every day.” / the “unexamined life is not worth living.” (39) (I AM NOT A TEACHER – 35)

Why Socrates Avoided Political Engagement: Divine Sign said stay out of it – why? JUST MEN have no PLACE in UNJUST POLITICS: “no man will survive who genuinely opposes you or any other crowd and prevents the occurrence of unjust and illegal happenings in the city.” 34 (PUBLIC / PRIVATE – Same Man: “Throughout my life, in any public activity I may have engaged in, I am the same man as I am in private life.” (35)

PROOF: Arginusae Incident (34) / Leon of Salamis Incident (35)

No Pitiful Dramatics in this Defense – Just Rational Persuasion

VERDICT: Conviction – 280-220

SENTENCE PROPOSAL: Death

COUNTER PROPOSAL: Free Meals in the Prytaneum (38)

VOTE on SENTENCING: 360-140
Socrates on Why He Lost: “I was convicted not because I lacked….“ 40 – CRITIQUE OF DEMOCRACY

Vengeance: My death will not allow you to avoid self-examination (40)

My Sons – Do as I’ve Done: “when my sons grow up….“ 42

Small Group Discussion of Crito DQs
Most Provocative?

Mini-Lecture / Large Group Discussion of The Crito

The Setting / Situation

Some Ultimate Questions in The Crito

Ultimate Question 1: would it be just for Socrates to escape?

Ultimate Question 2: what does Socrates’ response to Ultimate Question 1 indicate about his views of freedom?

Ultimate Question 3: do you think Socrates’ arguments in response to UQ 1 and the views of freedom suggested by them are compelling? Why or why not?

Ultimate Question 4: is the central teaching of “the Crito” consistent with the central teaching of “the Apology”? 

Crito’s Arguments for Socrates’ Escape

Reason 1: I will be deprived of a friend (as will many others).

Reason 2: Many people will think I failed you as a friend because I did not liberate you.

Reason 3: “I do not think what you are doing is just.” 45

Reason 4: you are betraying your sons.

Socrates’ Response

Our Task: examine this matter in a reasonable way – not motivated by personal interest or bias or fear or emotion.

Response to Reason 1 – Deprived of a Friend?
Is this a totally reasonable position or is it a position that is shaped by interest and sentiment?
Response to Reason 2 – the majority will think I failed you: ATTACK on the wisdom of the majority (see many examples in the text). There is a distinction to be drawn between POWER & RIGHT. Offers the following analogy:

Physician / Trainer: Body
Wise Person: Soul (and the Well-Being of the Soul is far more important).

Response to Reason 3- you are committing an injustice (See Below)

Response to Reason 4 – it is not fair to your sons?
Is this a totally reasonable position or is it a position that is shaped by interest and sentiment?

Reason 3 – It is unjust

Part A: Never Do Harm: the City of Athens has proposed to harm Socrates, but it is never right to do harm in turn. (HASN’T Really proven that what he’d be doing is a Harm, but he will try…)

Part B: Honor Your Agreements: “when one comes to an agreement that is just with someone, one should fulfill it.” --- “if we leave here without the city’s permission, are we harming the people whom we should least do harm to? And are we sticking to a just agreement, or not?” (50)

Part C: Enter “The Laws”…

ACTIVE LEARNING EXERCISE: a major portion of the “the Crito” consists of Socrates constructing what he imagines “the laws and the state” might say if they came and confronted him as he was contemplating escape. Speaking as “the laws,” Socrates offers several reasons why the decision to escape would be unjust. Crito does not offer much in the way of resistance to Socrates’ arguments. This active learning exercise is intended to provide you with the opportunity to fill in that void. Imagine you were in the room with Socrates and Crito and your role was to offer counter-arguments to Socrates’ presentation of the arguments offered by “the Laws.” Below, I have listed the seven major arguments offered by “the Laws.” Your group will be discussing the one that is circled. Find the other members of your group. For the next few minutes, come up with the best arguments you can in response to “the Laws.” At least some of your arguments should be related to the concept of freedom.

1----To Break the Law is to Destroy the City: Do you not by this action you are attempting intend to destroy us, the laws, and indeed the whole city…?” (50)

2----The Law as Parent / Educator / Master: “Did we not, first, bring you to birth, and was it not through us that your father married your mother and begat you? Tell us, do you find anything to criticize in those of us who are concerned with marriage…or in those of us concerned with the nurture of babies and the education that you too received?...Very well and after you were born and nurtured and educated, could you, in the first place, deny that you are our offspring and servant, both you and your forefathers?” (51)
3 ---- Those Who Care for Virtue Obey the Law: “Do you think you have this right to retaliation against your country and its laws? That if we undertake to destroy you and think it right to do so, you can undertake to destroy us, as far as you can in return? And will you say that you are right to do so, you who truly care for virtue? Is your wisdom such as not to realize your country is to be honored more than your mother, your father, and all your ancestors, that it is more to be revered and more sacred, and that it counts for more among the gods and sensible men, that you must worship it, yield to it, and placate its anger more than your father’s? You must either persuade it or obey its orders, and endure in silence whatever it instructs you to endure…one must obey the commands of one’s city and country, or persuade it as to the nature of justice.” 51

4 ---- Right of Exit: “Even so, by giving every Athenian the opportunity, once arrived, at voting age and having observed the affairs of the city and us the laws, we proclaim that if we do not please him, he can take his possessions and go wherever he pleases. Not one of our laws raises any obstacle or forbids him, if he is not satisfied with us or the city, if one of your wants to go and live in a colony or wants to go anywhere else and keep his property,” 52.

5 ---- Your Plan to Escape Sounds more like the plan of a Slave than a Free Man: “you pay no heed to us, the laws, as you plan to destroy us, and you act like the meanest type of slave by trying to run away, contrary to your commitments and your agreement to live as a citizen under us.” (53)

6 ---- Honor Your Commitments Argument: “you are breaking commitments you entered into without compulsion” (53)

7 ---- You Will Confirm the Jury’s Decision if You Leave: “you will also strengthen the conviction of the jury that they passed the right sentence on you, for anyone who destroys the laws could easily be thought to corrupt the young and the ignorant. “53.

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