

Study Guide on Plato's *Crito*

"The unexamined life is not worth living for men" (*Apology* 38a, see also 41b ff.). How does Socrates embody this truth in the *Crito*?

What assumptions about morals, justice, and the state does Crito reveal in his argument that it would be wrong for Socrates to stay in Athens?

Evaluate Socrates' examination by the laws (50a ff.¹).

- Is it clear that the laws should be honored, revered, and obeyed more than one's parents (51a–b)?
 - Why do we honor our parents?
 - Do we owe more to the city? What would be the reason for this greater duty—from where would it spring?
- How is the claim justified that to use force rather than persuasion against the city would be impious (51b–c)?

Give the three ways in which it is wrong to disobey the laws of the city, according to Socrates (51e). Are all three convincing?

Socrates tells Crito that they need not be concerned with what the many think (44c–d). Yet when he is listing the consequences of escape, he chooses to include a few that pertain to common opinion (52b–54d). Is Socrates being inconsistent, or can these passages be reconciled? Explain.

Why does Socrates give a voice to the Laws of Athens? Is it more persuasive to present his case in this way than to explain his reasoning directly?

Who does Socrates seem to think will benefit most from his decision not to flee? Socrates himself? The city and its laws? Those who will see and follow his example? Is Socrates more attentive to his own piety, or the legacy he will leave behind?

¹ John M. Cooper, editor. *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co, 1997. (All references in parentheses are to the standard Stephanus pagination for Plato's dialogues.)



In the *Apology*, Socrates states that he would not cease to practice philosophy, even if the Athenian court forbade him. Can this be reconciled with Socrates' position in the *Crito*? How can Socrates be willing to disobey that "unjust" decree of the laws (if it were made), but unwilling to flee from the unjust sentence?

Suggested use: This study guide includes a few questions and observations about Plato's *Crito*. Among possible uses, one could consider these comments while reading the work; or one could use them as starting points for a classroom discussion.

