

Class Four - Apology (28b-end) and Crito

Philosophical Perspectives - Ryan Simonelli

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1 Brief Chronology and Context of the Second Half of the *Apology*

- After defending himself against the charges raised by Meletus, Socrates offers a general defense of his occupation as a philosopher and elaborates his divine mission as a service to the city.
- The jury convicts him with the proposed penalty being death, and he then has an opportunity to argue for a different penalty.
 - He first suggests, in a proposal that is clearly not to be taken seriously, that what he really deserves is to be given free meals like the victors at the Olympic games.
 - He rejects imprisonment, being imprisoned until a fine is payed (that'd be the same thing as imprisonment, since he has no money), and he also rejects exile.
 - * Exile was often offered as a counter to the death penalty in Ancient Greece (we'll see this is *Oedipus*). So, there's some reason to think that the jury might have accepted exile as a counter-offer.
 - * But Socrates rejects exile because accepting it would require him to stop his activities as a philosopher, and this is something he is not willing to do.
 - His actual counter-offer is that he pay a fine. He first proposes that he himself pay a fine of one mina of silver, but then suggests that his rich friends, such as Plato and Crito, could pay thirty minas of silver, and that's his finally proposal.
 - * This was actually not an insignificant amount of money. So, Plato seems to want us to think of this as a genuine offer.
- The jury votes again and convicts Socrates to death. Socrates accepts the penalty, says that putting him to death will not do them any good as more people will come out to do question them as he did, and explains why he doesn't fear death.

2 Socrates's Defense of His Occupation and Service to the City

- **A Dangerous Occupation:** Socrates acknowledges that his "occupation," going around and exposing people's lack of wisdom, is what is leading to his likely death, and he wants to defend this occupation.
- **Virtue of Over Survival:** Socrates takes it that one's actions should only be guided by what one takes to be right or wrong, not whether they might lead to one's death.
 - **An Example from the *Illiad*:** Clearly, the heroes at Troy were not in the wrong to bravely go into battle, even when they knew they were likely to die.
- **An Analogy:** Just as it would be shameful to abandon one's post in war in fear of death when one's military superiors have ordered one to stay, it would be shameful for Socrates to, in fear of death, abandon his philosophical post where he is "stationed" by his divine superior—the god. (28d-29a)
- **A Service to the City:** Socrates takes it that he is a "gift" to the city by a god, doing the city a service. (30e).

- **Some Evidence:** His manner of activity—neglecting all his own affairs, living in poverty, etc.—don't seem like the result of human nature. So it seems like he must be divinely inspired. (31a-b)
- **Question:** Earlier in the *Apology*, Socrates says that he only possesses “human wisdom,” not the sort of higher wisdom that he is characterized (in *Clouds*, for instance) as taking himself to have. Do these remarks on his “divine sign” and his claim that he is a gift to the city from the gods (which he seems quite confident) contradict his earlier apparent humility on such higher matters?
- **A More Secular Defense of the Philosophical Life:** “[I]t is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you here me conversing and testing myself and others, for *the unexamined life is not worth living*,” (38a).
- **Question:** Socrates says to the jury that, if he says this secular thing, “you will believe me even less” than if he says he must philosophize because otherwise “means disobeying the god,” (38a). Is this somehow insulting to the jury? Is he trying to convey something to them here? Do we think it's possible that Socrates's secular reason to philosophize is in fact just as important for him as his divine mission?

3 Socrates's Argument One Should Not Fear Death (29a-29b, 40b-41d)

- **Modesty Again:** To fear death is “to think oneself wise when one is not, to think one knows what one does not know,” (29a).
 - People act as if death is “the greatest of all evils,” but, for all we know, it could be “the greatest of all blessings,” (29b).
 - One should not “believe that one knows what one does not know,” (29b).
 - So, one should not fear death.

Socrates elaborates this point at the end of the *Apology*, providing a bit more of a substantial argument for the conclusion that one should not fear death.

- **Two Possibilities:** “Either the dead are nothing and have no perception of anything, or it is, as we are told, a change and a relocating for the soul from here to another place.”
 - **Possibility One:** Death is like a dreamless sleep.
 - * A night when one sleeps soundly is among the most pleasant days or nights one can have.
 - * Since we do not experience the passing time in such a state, being in such a state for all eternity would be the same to us as being in it for a single night, which, once again, we know to be pleasant.
 - * So, if possibility one obtains, death is not bad at all.
 - **Possibility Two:** After death, we go in another place. The story of Greeks is that this place is the underworld, often referred to after its patron god, Hades—where we go on existing with others who have died and gone on to this place.
 - * It'd be pretty cool to hang out with great musicians and poets like Orpheus, Hesiod, and Homer or great adventurers like Odysseus.
 - * Socrates could continue philosophizing (and do it with these cool people), and he couldn't be put to death for it, since he's already dead.

Since, in death, either possibility obtains, and neither possibility is to be feared, death is not to be feared.

- **Some Questions:**
 - Regarding the first possibility, might it be that we regard nights in which we sleep soundly as pleasant because we are well-rested when we wake up?

- Is it reasonable to suppose that these are the only two possibilities? Is it not also possible that something happens when you do, but what happens is not like what we are told? How can we rule out the possibility that, in death, we suffer terribly by ourselves for an eternity?

4 Context and Opening of *Crito*

- Taking place about one month after Socrates's trial.
- Socrates is held in a prison before being put to death, which is to happen when a ship returns to Athens.
- A friend of Socrates, Crito, who knows the ship will be returning that day, tries to convince Socrates to escape.
- Crito tells Socrates that he can get him out easy. He and Socrates's other friends have money, and a few simple bribes should deal with any potential trouble that could come to them upon Socrates's escape. He says Socrates could go to Thessaly.
- Clearly, what's keeping Socrates from going is not such practical matters. It's a matter of principle, and Crito will have to convince Socrates that running away is the thing to do.
 - **Crito's Basic Argument:** It's not just about you!
 - * Think of your sons: you're betraying them.
 - * Think of your friends: beyond just the fact that we're going to miss you, we'll feel terrible shame if we don't prevent your death. *The majority of people will think we're terrible for not getting you out!*
- Socrates first argument is against caring about the opinion of the majority.

5 The Argument for Not Caring About the Majority Opinion

- One should value good opinions—the opinions of wise people—rather than bad opinions—the opinions of foolish people. “Wise” and “foolish” here are to be understood as *relative* to discipline.
 - An athlete should only listen to the opinions of a doctor or trainer, not those of masses who don't have knowledge of athletics—listening to the opinions of the majority will cause him harm.
 - * Think of the fanbases of sports teams, where everyone has an opinion about what the players should do. Should the players listen to these opinions? Clearly not.
 - Likewise, for the part of us concerned with justice and injustice (which is much more valuable than our body), we should not listen to the majority.
- **An Obvious Counterpoint:** But “the many are able to put us to death,” (48a)
- **Response:** Sure, but (as we should recall from the *Apology*) the virtuous life is more important than simply life. So, we should let ourselves be directed by virtue, which is not dictated by the majority opinion, before simply being concerned with life, which may be.
- **A First Conclusion:** Whatever may compel Socrates to stay and face death, it's not simply that the majority has convicted him—he is willing to go against the opinion of the majority if there is good reason to do so.
- **Question:** We've seen a few times now Socrates make an argument on the basis of an analogy with a single example. Isn't this argumentative strategy very weak?

6 The Argument(s) of the Laws

- **A Preliminary Argument (49a-50a):**
 - It is never right to wrong or harm someone, even when one has been wronged or harmed oneself.
 - When one has made an agreement, one should fulfill it.
 - So, if leaving the city without permission would be doing harm and violating an agreement, one should not leave.
- **The Main Argument of the Laws:** Socrates imagines a dialogue between him and “the laws and the state,” thinking of the laws as personified, where these laws make the following point:
 - **A Basic Democratic Principle:** The basic principle of living in a democratic city is “persuade it or obey its orders,” (51b). By disobeying the orders after failing to persuade it, he’s undermining the most basic principle of democracy. To do this, is to “bring violence to bear” (51c) against his country.
 - **Tacit Agreement by Living:** Socrates has never left the city, and he could have for seventy years. He’s had children in the city. He’s thus implicitly agreed that to be bound by its laws.

We might thus reconstruct the following argument from the laws:

1. If leaving the city without permission is doing harm and violating an agreement, one should not leave.
 2. For Socrates to leave the city would both harm his country and violate an agreement with it.
 3. So, he should not leave.
- **Secondary Argument: A Life of Hypocrisy is Not Worth Living:** Socrates has already said that the philosophical life is the only life he would live. But it seems that this life, as Socrates understands it, could not be lived hypocritically.
 - What would he say in his conversations about “justice and the rest of virtue” if he was a “destroyer of the laws” (53b), having unjustly violated his basic agreement with the laws of the state?
 - He just gave a big speech in court about how death was not to be feared, and how the risk of death should not deter one from doing what is right. But how could he maintain this if he fled?
 - **Question:** In the trial of Socrates, it seemed that persuasion was impossible largely because the members of the court wouldn’t be swayed by the truth. Does the democratic principle of “persuade or obey” still hold, even in cases of corruption?
 - **Question:** Isn’t harm, in the first instance, something that is done to *people* rather than *institutions*? What is the relationship between harming the state and harming the people who live in the state? Is the former only wrong insofar as it implies the latter? Is it possible to do the former without doing the latter?

7 Some Further Questions

- Given what Socrates says in the *Apology* and *Crito*, what is his stance on civil disobedience? Can it ever be just to violate the laws of the state, for instance, in an act of protest?
- Given that Socrates’s choice to stay and face death, what should we make of his supposed god-given duty to philosophize? Is not the law of the gods above the law of man? Wouldn’t it better for him to stay alive so that he could continue to philosophize? Is not his acceptance of his death an abandonment of his post, to which he’s been ordered by the god to stay?