

Socrates in apology and crito



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ The irreverent, disobedient Socrates of the Apology is inconsistent with the Socrates of the Crito. ” Construct an argument supporting or refuting this claim. Be sure to incorporate textual evidence. In Plato’s Apology, Socrates comes off as a defiant and disobedient man with little respect for his accusers and even for the jurors on whom his fate depends. This may seem in stark contrast with the stoic Socrates in Crito who would rather accept the death sentence than let his friend Crito help him escape from prison.

However, this superficial inconsistency is in fact just different manifestations of Socrates’ conviction in upholding justice as the most important guiding principle of how to live his life. As a result, the perceived contradiction in the manner that Socrates carries himself in the 2 dialogues stems from the different contexts in which this belief applies. Socrates views justice as a set of rules to maintain a harmonious relationship between the people, the city, and the Gods. He strongly believes that one should never commit an unjust act, since he says that much, “ In no circumstances must one do wrong” (Crito 49b).

Socrates also thinks that it is unjust to violate the orders of one’s superiors, mortal or immortal, and the agreements that one made with others, “ provided that they are just” (Crito 49e), i. e. for the harmonious relationship between people, the city, and the Gods. In Apology, he uses this to defend the way he leads his life. Because of what he was told by the oracle of Appolo at Delphi, he has been trying to find men wiser than he is and in the process becomes unpopular by pointing out that “ the people with the greatest reputations were almost entirely deficient” (Apology 22a).

This, according to Socrates, is just since he believes the oracle is the Gods' way of showing men that "human wisdom has little or no value" (Apology 23a). He also believes that one must follow their convictions no matter what the price, even death. When questioned if he has any qualms about living a life that leads him to the death sentence, Socrates responds that it is a mistake to think that "a man who is worth anything ought to spend his time weighing up the prospects of life and death" (Apology 28c).

Socrates stands by his principle. When he was on the city Council, he opposed the en bloc trial of the ten naval commanders, citing "it was my duty to face it out on the side of law and justice rather than support you, through fear of prison or death, in your wrong decision" (Apology 32c). To him, being just is the most important thing, surpassing even the desire to live. His decision to accept the death sentence in Crito is also motivated by the same conviction of being just.

Through arguing with Crito, Socrates comes to the conclusion that it would be unjust of him to break the Laws of Athens even after he was wronged by his fellow-men. That is because the Laws "... brought him into this world, ... reared him; and ... after promising obedience, he is neither obeying us (the Laws) nor persuading us the change our decision" (Crito 52a). After unsuccessfully convincing the jury in Apology that he is innocent and in fact the benefactor of the city, Socrates accepts his sentence as prescribed by the agreement between him and the Laws of Athens, since the agreement was just.

Moreover, breaking the agreement is unjust since the city will be "turned upside down, if the legal judgments which are pronounced in it have no force

but are nullified and destroyed by private persons” (Crito 50a). Again, he sticks to his principle of justice above all else, even death. He told Crito: “the really important thing is not to live, but to live well” and “to live well amounts to the same thing as to live honorably and justly” (Crito 48b). Not even family matters can compare with justice: “do not think more of your children or of your life or of anything else than you think of what is just” (Crito 54b).

The Socrates in Apology and the Socrates in Crito indeed hold the same conviction and act on the same principle. Nevertheless, one might argue that Socrates' demeanors in Apology and in Crito are worlds apart. As arrogant and aggressive as he was in Apology, mocking his accusers (Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon), refusing to propose an emotional appeal in front of the jury, and suggesting that he should be treated like a “victor in the races at Olympia” with “free dining in the Prytaneum” (Apology 36d), he was very stoic and calm in Crito.

Knowing that he will have to end his life the next day, he sleeps well, talks of his impending death without emotions, and patiently reasons with Crito why he will not attempt to escape from prison because it would be unjust to do so. This superficial inconsistency is in fact not an inconsistency at all. In both situations, Socrates' defiance is directed towards injustice and death, which he does not deem important at all. Again, this goes back to his conviction of living justly.

He views death as an unknown entity, hence not necessarily a wicked thing. After knowing that the death sentence is inevitable, he says “I suspect that this thing that has happened to me is a blessing, and we are quite mistaken

in supposing death to be an evil" (Apology 40c). In Crito, he reasons that escaping death indeed would be the wicked thing: " in that place beyond when our brothers, the Laws of Hades, know that you have done your best to destroy even us (the Laws), they will not receive you with a kindly welcome" (Crito 54c).

Socrates' contradictory manners are the results of the same principles that he sticks to. Socrates portrayed by Plato in Apology and Crito is indeed a man with conviction of living justly. Not hostility from his fellow-men, not death, not the thoughts of leaving his children, can change his mind about pursuing justice. We may never know if Socrates is that unfailing with his beliefs in real life but judging from the two dialogues, he is consistent in his beliefs and actions no matter what the circumstances are.