Socrates: Was He Right To Stay In Jail

Was Socrates really doing the right thing in staying in jail?

Each one of us has been accused of an act at some point in our lives. Yet those accusations have been terribly mistaken and sometimes there is so little that a person can do to fix that. In this case we are talking about the wonderful philosopher, Socrates, a person of many beliefs and ideas. He was a man who dearly believed in justice and doing justice to others. After reading Plato’s Crito, I have concluded that Socrates made the right decision by rejecting Crito's offer of escape based on his ideals about justice.

According to Socrates, it is never acceptable to commit an injustice, even if an injustice is being committed against you (Ultius). When faced with the question of whether it is ever okay to act unjustly, the answer is 'no' based on-premises Socrates describes. Socrates teaches his lesson on unjust acts while he is prison awaiting execution (Ultius). His friend Crito comes to him with the intent of helping him escape prison and live peacefully in exile. Crito knows ahead of time that Socrates will not want to escape, so he goes prepared with arguments on why he should escape. However, Socrates is prepared with his own take on what it means to act justly (Ultius). Socrates offers Crito such a solid argument against escaping that Crito agrees with Socrates that it would be best to remain in prison. The arguments that Socrates describes against acting unjustly in all situations are based on three premises. Individuals should live rightly, individuals should never commit an injustice, and lastly, Socrates states individuals should keep agreements and avoid injustice (Ultius).

Socrates argues that laws exist as one entity. To break one law would be the same as breaking all the laws and doing this would cause harm to the existence of the laws (Ultius). Socrates asserts that breaking a law would be no different than a child striking their parent. Socrates uses these arguments to convince Crito that escaping from prison is unfounded (Ultius).

A response like this still does not suffice for a reason to escape. Even if one doesn’t agree with a few laws of one’s city, it doesn’t give you the right to break them. If one doesn’t agree with them and they don’t want to leave the city, then that’s tough luck. One is still obligated by law, and in Socrates' case, by morals, to follow the laws of a city. If Socrates' life was that valuable to him, he should have accepted exile when he was given the chance in court. But he wanted to die with pride, or standing up for what he believed in. He didn’t believe he should have been punished for the law he broke, he thought he should have been rewarded. He also wouldn’t agree to say that he would not break this law again. He could have just got off with a small fine, but he pushed his limits, and would not back away from his views. So, he decided he would rather be put to death in Athens, wrongfully, then to leave it in exile (Ultius).

He made the right decision by rejecting Crito because he was setting an example of good moral behavior. He always tried to see himself as how other people saw him, and he was trying to make his entire life an example of what he taught. He saw it as good behavior because he held Athens' intentions and opinions in high regard and felt that Athens was his role model (Ultius). He didn't escape because that would run against the grain of all his teachings about virtue and justice.