

Milo Art

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Did Socrates Have to Die?

For this essay, I argue that Socrates had to die for him to stay just. Though I'm not all convinced that parts of Socrates's argument can be generalized to the public, he does a tactical job explaining why his argument is logically sound for his situation. To support my thesis, I will first show how Socrates argues for compliance based on the necessary relation between action and implicit agreement. Second, I will show how Hobbes argues for social covenants based on the necessary relation between human nature and human survival. I introduce Hobbes here because he gives a more coherent argument for the concept of the social contract which Socrates seems to agree with. Finally, I will consider an opposition that says the laws breached the contract which voids Socrates's obligation, and counter this by arguing for a situational linear relationship between Socrates and the laws based on the facts that Socrates presents of himself.

In the *Crito*, Socrates claims that by remaining in the city and using the city's resources, he agreed to obey the city's laws. There are three parts to this claim: *If* Socrates remained in the city *and* Socrates used the city's resources, *then* Socrates agreed to follow the city's laws (51e). We can conclude that the first part is true because the text talks about how Socrates stayed in the city without much travel outside of it. It emphasizes how he stayed even longer than anyone else (52b). The text also adds context about how Socrates raised children in Athens and participated in social interactions throughout the city (52c). Socrates not only claims that he remained in the

city, but he makes it sound as if he enjoyed staying in the city. The enjoyment which he emphasizes suggests that he really did make the choice to stay in the city.

We can conclude that the second part to Socrates claim is also true because the text talks about how Socrates got an education via the laws' orders (50d). Here is where we need to consider who the parties to this agreement are. It is Socrates who made an agreement with the laws. So, when I say 'using the city's resources' I mean resources provided by the laws. Though Socrates would likely think that all resources of the city are provided by laws, I want to differentiate produce grown in the city from education necessitated by law. Produce would be grown whether laws demanded it or not. However, education is not something directly linked to survival. Without laws, it is quite possible that Socrates would not have been educated. Considering that knowledge, thus education, is of great value to Socrates, he likely accepted with gratitude. The gratitude suggests that he really did use the laws' resources to their full extent.

Therefore, if he stayed in the city and used the resources of the city, Socrates's claim states that it must follow that he agreed to obey the city's laws. The city's laws state that if Socrates could not convince the majority that he is innocent, then he must adhere to the punishment set by the court (52a). He could not convince the majority that he was innocent, and the punishment set was for Socrates to face death. So, according to his argument and his particular situation, the just thing for Socrates to do was to die as the court ordered because that was his agreement to the laws.

The conditional connection between the conjunction and agreeance is better understood through the social contract argument that Hobbes provided in the Leviathan. Hobbes claims that human cooperation through covenants is the only way to assure societal survival (Pursley). He came to this conclusion by considering how humans are allegedly selfish, competitive, vain, and

anxious beings. Not only this, but humans also have varied strengths and abilities, power in numbers, and there is a relative scarcity of goods. Because of these things, Hobbes says that we would destroy our societies if we only adhered to our own self-interests. To avoid chaos, Hobbes suggests the concept of a social contract (Pursley). This contract entails that we enter implicit agreements by borrowing and trading amongst each other. If we take from someone else, we are obligated to also give back in some way. To keep away the fear that someone will break the covenant, Hobbes suggests that a powerful sovereign is necessary to enforce the agreements in a more explicit way (Pursley).

When comparing the two arguments, we see that Hobbes's argument demonstrates a connection between taking from someone and entering an agreement to repay it back. This matches Socrates's belief that he entered an agreement with the laws whenever he accepted education from them. Since he took education, Socrates was indebted to repay it by following through with the laws' demands. Socrates would also agree that if he broke this agreement chaos would follow as Hobbes suggests. Chaos would destroy the city which Socrates has loved his whole life. Thus, obeying the laws was not only agreed on, but also a just action to take.

However, comparing the two leads us to the thought that if this is nothing more than a contract of some sort, shouldn't both parties adhere to the contract. This counterargument questions the validity of Socrates's argument. We have proven that Socrates did indeed stay in the city with enjoyment, and he also gratefully used the city's resources. Now we must consider if that in fact does entail an agreement to obey the laws of Athens. The counter suggests that there is more needed to make this conditional statement true.

When structuring a contract, there are four basic parts: at least two parties, purpose, consideration, and specified obligations. Two parties have certainly entered into this agreement:

Socrates and the laws. Socrates's purpose for entering into the agreement is to remain just. The laws' purpose for entering into the agreement is to regulate the city. For consideration, Socrates put in his obedience. The laws put in education for Socrates. Lastly, Socrates's obligations are to comply and follow through with lawful rulings. The laws have no agreed upon obligations.

This is where it is instinctual to say that the laws breached contract, thus voiding Socrates's obligations. If this is true, that both parties must have obligations and must follow through with those obligations in order for the other party to remain obligated, then Socrates would not have to die. He could flee and remain just.

It is important to reiterate that I introduced Hobbes's argument to gain clarity and to further the coherency of Socrates's argument. I did not introduce it to illuminate the nuance differences. In Socrates's argument, he is arguing that agreement can be made through implicit actions. Hobbes's may also agree with this, but his argument focuses more on explicit actions. The terminology used between the two reflects this difference. We think of agreements as more subtle while contracts have more definition in their reach. We may have a general agreement that sharing is what we should do, but when my boyfriend reaches for my plate, I may argue that I did not commit to sharing my fries.

I make this distinction, not because I think either Socrates or Hobbes would validate the anti-fry-sharing argument, but because it emphasizes the difference in terminology. When we think of a contract today, we tend to apply strict rules to it that Socrates may not have been concerned with. It is entirely possible to say, 'I agree to follow your rules even if I receive nothing in return.' That is the sort of agreement Socrates seems to have made with the laws. I do not think this is the sort of agreement that everyone would agree to. Many people may even strongly disagree with such an arrangement. However, Socrates believes that this is the sort of

agreement that is appropriate for him and the laws. Therefore, the laws did not breach contract/ break the agreement because there were no obligations placed on them. In this case, Socrates remained obligated to obey the laws no matter what the laws did to him. To remain just, Socrates had to die.

Bibliography

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