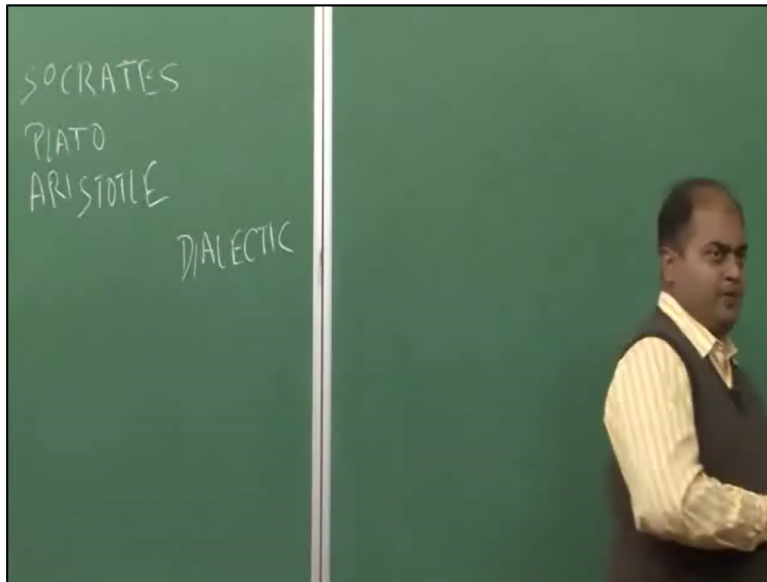


Ethics
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Module No. #01
Lecture No. #01
Introduction to Ethics – ‘Crito’ - A Socratic Dialogue

Hello, welcome to another lecture on the course, Ethics. Today, we are going to talk about, Platonic dialogue, the dialogue written by Plato, that is called, titled Crito. Now, Ancient Greece is where, Moral Philosophy as such started, many, many, centuries back. Let me give you a brief about, the Greek Philosophers, with whom, Moral Philosophy started.

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Okay, we have, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. These names are very, heard of names. Socrates was with whom, the Moral Philosophy begin, as a discourse. In fact, in certain terms, he is called the Father of Philosophy, in the Western tradition. Plato was the disciple of Socrates. And, Aristotle was the disciple of Plato. Now, Socrates, never wrote anything. He has never systematised his Philosophy. He has been, what we would call, common, the street Philosopher. He has been, in the sense of the phrase, the seeker of truth.

The method of Socrates, has been to indulge in something called, Dialectics. Now, a Dialectic is a means of conversation, in which the objective is the truth. And, gradually over a conversation

between two or more agents, the knowledge body is evolved. Now, coming to Crito. Crito is a dialogue, written by Plato, with Socrates, who plays as the main character in the dialogue. Now, Socrates, as I have mentioned earlier, has never written anything.

He has, in fact, been a street Philosopher, but his disciple and the pupil Plato, has been an extensive system builder. And, he has put forth, entire systems of Philosophy, which are valued even millennia after, it is being written. Now, Plato has true to a sincere disciple, has wrote place in which, Socrates has been, the protagonist. Now, Crito is one such play. The story of Socrates goes this way. Socrates was searching for the truth. He was a seeker of true knowledge.

So, he started conversing, engaging young people, in debates. That, something like, what do you understand by courage. Only, while in the fashion of Dialectic to arrive, that well, anybody who claimed, that they knew, values or any such knowledge claims, were actually not very sure of it. So, Socrates in the history of Western Moral Philosophy, Socrates searched for reason, as the basis of values.

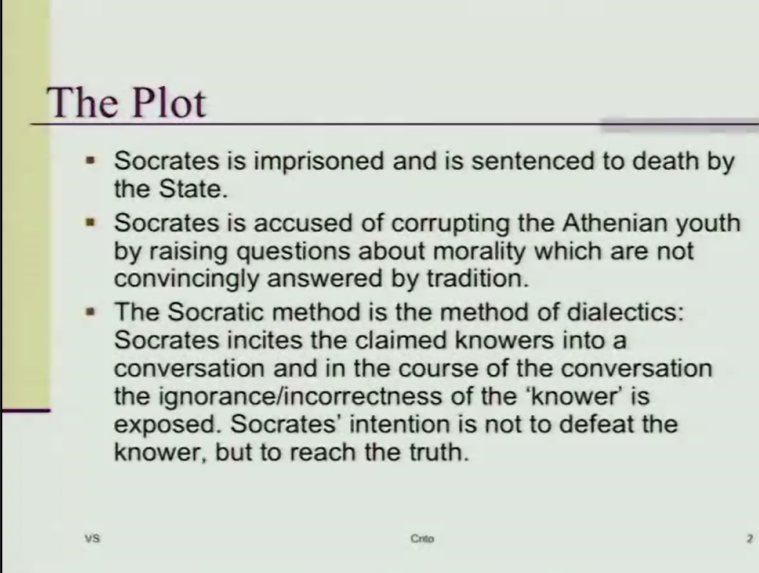
Now, let us remind ourselves, at a time when, Socrates was living, there was a time, which was dominated by tradition, and by religions. So, all our moral values, have been coming from, either tradition or religion. Now, Socrates look for something else, as a basis of values. Socrates looked for reason, as the basis of values. Now, this new search, incited a lot of thinking from, the story of Socrates, goes this way.

Socrates was, if I may say, a street Philosopher, going around, looking for, answers to values. Now, Socrates did not rely on, tradition or religion, for answers to the domain of values. In fact, Socrates was keen on seeing reason, as a source of arriving at one's values of, reason being the paradigm of human knowledge. Now, considering this, when Socrates engaged in his, what is now known as Dialectics.

There was upheaval in the state. The Statesman decided that, Socrates was a threat to their state. That Socratic way, was actually spoiling the Athenian youth. So, they actually imprisoned him. They imprisoned him on charges, close to sedation. And, as per the laws, at that time, Socrates

was not only imprisoned, but sentenced to death.

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The Plot

- Socrates is imprisoned and is sentenced to death by the State.
- Socrates is accused of corrupting the Athenian youth by raising questions about morality which are not convincingly answered by tradition.
- The Socratic method is the method of dialectics: Socrates incites the claimed knowers into a conversation and in the course of the conversation the ignorance/incorrectness of the 'knower' is exposed. Socrates' intention is not to defeat the knower, but to reach the truth.

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Now, followers of Socrates, and friends of Socrates, who were also wealthy and well endured, wanted to save Socrates, from what many thought, was an unjust act of the state, in imprisoning and sentencing to death, Socrates. So, Crito was one such friend of Socrates, who decided on teaming up, to help Socrates, escape from the prison. Now, whether, Socrates agreed to escape or not was a question, that was answered eventually by time.

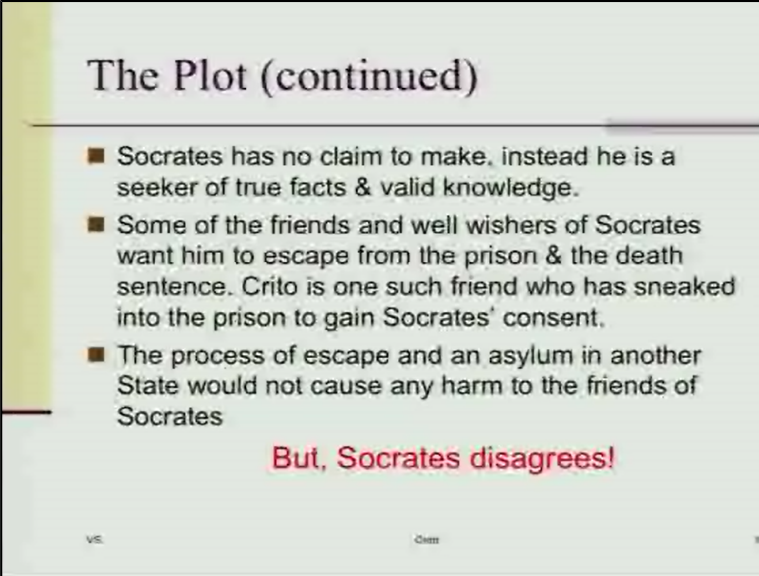
But, yes. As you could guess now, that Socrates did not agree to be allowed, or agree to be a part to the escape plan, proposed by Crito. Anyway, now, move to the slide, to know about, what is the basic plot of the play. Now, the plot is, when Socrates was imprisoned. And, Crito has made his way, to the prison of Socrates to help him, or to discuss with him, the strategy of escape. Let me read out the plot. Socrates is imprisoned, and is sentenced to death, by the state.

Why? Socrates is accused of corrupting the Athenian youth, by raising questions about morality, which are not convincingly answered by tradition. The Socratic method, is the method of Dialectics. Socrates, incites the claimed knowers, into a conversation. And, in the course of the conversation, the ignorance, or the incorrectness, of the knowers claims, is exposed. Socrates intention, is not to defeat the knower, but to reach the truth. So, as we can see that, Socrates was not a hell-bent on defeating others, or wanting to show his superiority, in the skills of

argumentation, like the sophists of those time did.

But, Socrates wanted to arrive at knowledge, which was beyond doubt. And, for that, he engaged the claimed knowers, into conversations. Which, later was called Dialectics, in to Conversations, which led him to arrive, or led them to arrive that. Well, there is perhaps, the claim knowers also, are not very sure about their claims. Now, this is to be noted that, it was not a malafide intention of Socrates, to defeat others. But, just as a seeker of truth, and to eliminate all knowledge, which is in the realm of doubts

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The Plot (continued)

- Socrates has no claim to make, instead he is a seeker of true facts & valid knowledge.
- Some of the friends and well wishers of Socrates want him to escape from the prison & the death sentence. Crito is one such friend who has sneaked into the prison to gain Socrates' consent.
- The process of escape and an asylum in another State would not cause any harm to the friends of Socrates

But, Socrates disagrees!

VS. Crito

Socrates, that way, has no claim to make. Instead, he is a seeker of true facts, and valid knowledge. Some of the friends and well-wishers of Socrates, wanted him to escape from the prison, and the death sentence. Crito is one such friend, who has sneaked into the prison, to gain Socrates's consent. The process of escape, and an Asylum in another state, would not cause any harm to the friends of Socrates. But, Socrates disagrees.

Now, this is where, the first moral dialogue, in the tradition of western Philosophy, starts. Now, Socrates is of the opinion that, well, you should not escape from the prison. And, he should wilfully take the punishment, that the state has given it to him. And, this on very rational moral grounds. Now, at that time, in the point of world history, this was quite a novel concept, that to be rational, is to be moral, and to be moral, is to be rational.

This is the dictum that, Socrates propelled. Now, by going through this dialogue, we are trying to see, the first formal discourse, that took place in the domain of morality, in world history, especially in the history of the western world. So, now coming back to, because the entire course, would be talking about, Moral Philosophy. And, some of the times, from the western tradition. We need to see, how it evolved, as a discourse. Okay.

Now, as we see that Socrates disagrees, that even though, the process of escape from the prison, was guaranteed. And, it was also guaranteed that, there would be a comfortable life waiting for him in the country, which grants him Asylum. And, also that, in this process, none of his friends would be endangered. So, having these preconditions, one would naturally like to escape. Now, mind you, Socrates that time, was 70 years old.

So, Socrates still thinks, that well, it is wrong, that for me to escape from the sentence, that the state, I belong to, has given me. Now, let us look at the situation. The situation is one, think that, I have been unjustly sentenced to, that I have friends, who can without any notable damage to them, help me escape, and grant me Asylum in a country. And, three that, I would think that, I have many more useful Dialectics, or to engage with people at large, even in the country, which grants me Asylum.

Having these three conditions, does not it become obvious that, I escape. That, I escape from my punishment, which is unjust. I escape to a country, which is welcoming me. I escape via means, that caused no harm to the other. Why should I not escape? Perhaps, this seems quiet queer situation. But then, let us see, what reasons Socrates gave us, gave Crito, for denying his offer of help, and voluntarily embracing death.

And, in death, he lives on till today. In death, his dialogues have become immortal. His conviction in his claims, in his methods, has become a legend. And, that is why. Because, perhaps he chose, to live by his conviction, and die by his conviction, then to live without his conviction. That, even now, more than 2000 years from then, we still read about him. Now, let us look at the reason, why Socrates disagrees with Crito.

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Why? (Socrates' claims)

- Such questions should be settled by reason and not by the view of the majority (either of well wishers or of everyone.)
- First claim:
...we ought never to harm anyone. Socrates' escaping would violate and show disregard for the State's laws.

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Well First, Socrates is of the claim that, even though, the majority of his friends and people, would like Socrates to escape. Because, all of them see Socrates, perhaps as a gem, as a jewel, who of humanity, who would encourage the youth. Not only the youth, but encourage everyone, to unbeaten tracks of knowledge, because of his Dialectics, and his unusual for that time methods of questioning.

However, even though, everyone or majority of the people would wish that, Socrates escape, and survive for the betterment of humanity. Socrates pays no heed, to the view of the majority, even if it is well-wishers or friends. Socrates has very bluntly denied, the opinion of majority, as an opinion of coincidence of chance, that the majority opinion, can never be a determinant of, what is right, or what is wrong.

He gives an example, throughout this dialogue. This dialogue would be available, at the project Gutenberg's websites. So, those of you, who were interested in, going through the details of play, can access it, on the project Gutenberg, which is available on the Gutenberg website. Okay. Now, coming back to Socrates claim. That well, the claim that Socrates makes is that, majority should not matter.

And, that important decisions, or value decisions, the decision that he takes, has to come from

reason, and not from the view of his friends and people at large. Well, he gives us this example, that if we have to learn, say some art, like gymnastics, would we not go to the expert to learn gymnastics, rather than listen to the advices of, all so many people, who are ready to advise about gymnastics.

We would like to listen, to the advice of a gymnast, or of an expert, who is himself perhaps a gymnast, or has been a gymnast, or who has proficiency in that field. So, is not the opinion of that person, that expert, more important, than the opinion of people at large. Well, if most of us, would prefer the expert. Now, Socrates is of the opinion that, well moral philosophy is also such a view that well, we should where knowledge is arrived at, by conversing with the expert, rather than listening to the view of the majority.

So, Socrates tries to reason with Crito, who being a warm and personal friend, wants Socrates to escape, has planned the escape, and appeals to Socrates for, with various reasons, that humanity would be benefited with his continued existence, that he has duty towards his children, that he has duty towards his friends. So, with so many appeals, which Socrates fundamentally dismisses that well, these appeals are not something, that he would heed to.

Now, the first claim, that Socrates makes is that, we ought never to harm anyone. Socrates escaping would violate, and should disregard for the state laws. Now, coming back to Socrates, first his claim was that well, he should never harm anyone. And, escaping cowardly or secretly, is showing utter disregard for the state's laws. Now, is not it, that this state, that he has been a part of. And, Socrates has lived in his state, for over 70 years, and has been very rarely been out of the state.

That, whenever he has been, whenever somebody is a part of a state, chooses to be a citizen, or chooses to continue to be a citizen of the state, he has tacitly approved, the agreement between, or entered into an agreement between, the individual and the state. Now, Socrates makes a claim that well, by being a part of Athens, for such a long time, he has tacitly agreed into the state. He has never participated, in any civil disobedience movement. And, he has largely been happy, about the state of affairs in Athens.

So, this long tenure of un-rebelled stay, is an indicator, of his contentment, or his acceptance of the laws of Athens. And today, when the laws of Athens, require him to be hanged till death, so be it. He shall stick to these laws. So, by breaking, by escaping from this predicament, it is breaking a commitment, which according to Socrates, is simply wrong. So, Socrates tries to justify, in this way also that well, whatever commitment has been made, implicitly or explicitly, breaking it is wrong. And therefore, his escape, is a breaking of the commitment of Socrates with the state.

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Second claim:

...if one chooses to (or continues to) be a citizen of a State, then one tacitly agrees to obey its laws, that is, makes a commitment; and by escaping he would break a commitment – which is wrong

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Now, let us look at the final claim that, why Socrates finds it wrong, for him to escape. He says, that the society or state, is virtually one's parent and teacher. And, one ought to obey, one's parents and teachers. Now, if Socrates claim is again bent on this, notice. Please keep in mind, that this is a time, when city states are very small in size. And, Citizens, and Kings, and the Rulers, were very close to each other. And, who were not insulated by any barriers. So, as much as the family, the society was also a part of, up-bringing a human being.

So, this kind of an upbringing, entails a commitment, according to Socrates. The commitment is to be honoured. Because, one has been and brought up by the society too. And, so it is almost a filial parental obligation. So, unless and until one has rebelled in principle, or in ethos of the, or the Philosophy of the, bringing up entity in the parents, or the family, or the state. Then, one is

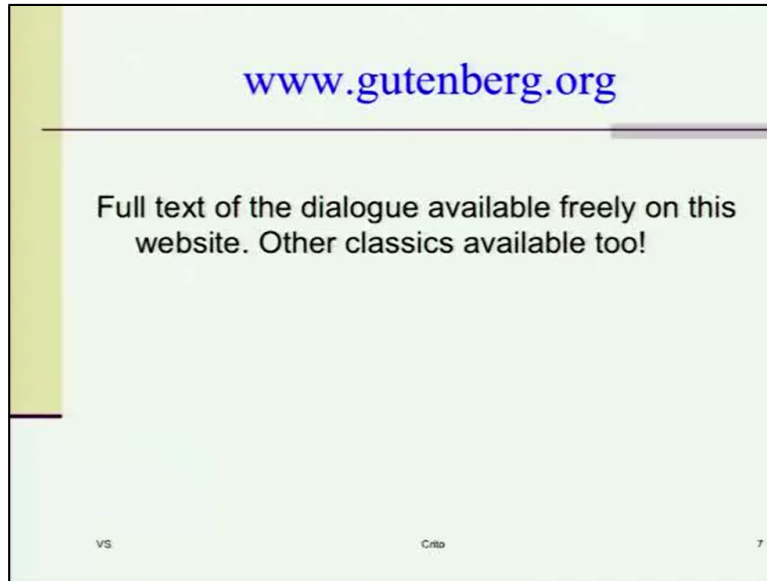
not justified, in escaping from, once tacitly made agreement, only because that agreement clause proves to be, detrimental to one, right now

This, according to Aristotle, would be an unprincipled way of behaviour. And, this unprincipled way of behaviour is what, Socrates stands against. He is trying to look for principled behaviour, that what are the principles of correct behaviour. Now, for him, this is clearly incoherent and inconsistent behaviour, that one continues to be a part of an agreement, till one is in game. And, the moment, one is not in game, or stands to lose something, ceases to be a part of the agreement.

This, according to Socrates is clearly, a behaviour that is wrong. And therefore, when Crito and his friends, when they offer an escape route to Socrates, he simply refuses to join them, justifying himself in this dialogue. And, justifying it to Crito, that he is obliged to his state. And, even though he may not agree with the sentence, that is awarded to him.

But, if he has entered to, in the part to an agreement, with the state, tacitly or explicitly, he is bound to follow it. And, that is the right way, to deal with any commitments made. So, Socrates chooses not to escape. And, the saddened Crito, leaves the prison, leaving Socrates, to be sentenced to death, which he does, by taking the hemlock, and slowly perishing. Please take a look at the presentation slide.

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If you are intrigued by this, brief rendering of Plato's dialogue, then you are more than welcome to visit, www.Gutenberg.org. And, the full text of the dialogue, is available freely on this website. And, there were host of other classics available, at this website too. Now, this is very briefly, rendered the story of the death of Socrates. Now, it is for you to judge that the, whether Socrates died for the right reasons, or was it a mistake.

Was he justified in making the choice, of not escaping and dying. Or, was he not justified in it. But, what is essential here, to note, and to carry forward, and why perhaps, this dialogue and this text, has been going on for ages. It is because, it raises a very crucial question, that is, what is the basis of values. How does one decide the right course of action? And, Socrates tried here to show that, reason, is the basis to decide on the right course of action.

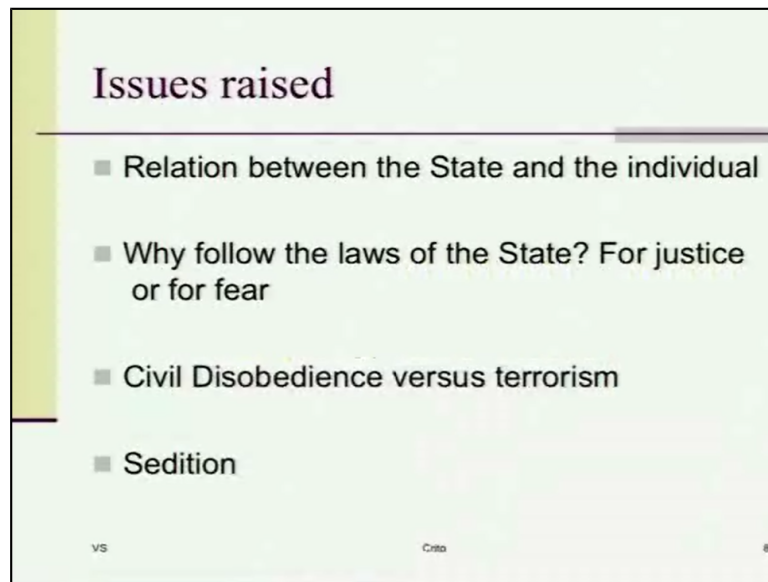
Reason is the basis of moral life. And, sadly in this case, even the justification for, letting it go. So, with this, begin the tradition of Philosophising values in the western tradition. Values were no more that, which came along from tradition, or that it was ordained by governments, or states. It began to be an issue, to be discussed, and resolved, with the aid of reason amongst people, to lay the foundation of new values.

This, of course, the time of Socrates and Plato, was time of Elitism, when there was a ruling class, supposed to be attaining that position, on the credence of their achievements, both in

knowledge and in the realm of war. But, gradually, this goes into today's democracy, where our sense of right and wrong, the government sense of permissible and non-permissible, are not simply taken down, either from tradition, or from religion.

Instead, it is put into the public fora, for active debating. And then, we arrive at, or we have the values that, the state would permit, or would try to restrict. Now, what are the other questions, that the Socrates's dialogue, lays into prominence.

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The issues raised are primarily, issues that are even concerned today. This text is a classic. And, it is still read. Of course, we went through the translated version, of course, it is still read over millennia, over its inception. Because, it raises some crucial issues, which are still are perennial to the human predicament, or the human experience. It is basically the relation of the state, or the collective and the individual.

How much of an obligation, does the individual to have, towards a state? Is there a contract? Is there, what kind of an arrangement, between the state, and the individual. By state, we could also mean, the collective, the society. Where does this balanced in equilibrium lie? Why, follow the laws of the state? Whichever state we are in, whichever organisation we are a part of, whichever order we are a part of, we tend to follow its rules.

Why do we tend to follow its rules? We tend to follow its rules, because we have committed ourselves as a part of a contract. The contract, that is made tacitly, because when we choose to join an organisation, state, institution, country, nation. We also vote, or for its policies. And, we accepted. Now, this of course, flies in the face of the claim, that many times, our choices are not real choices?

The country we are born, and the religion we are born, in the job or in the organisation, we have to take up. Because, we have nothing else at hand. Are we really not, the domain of choices, but more of a compulsion. However, even if there is a compulsion, do we not always have a choice, either to express our descent, if there is some, or to suppress it. Now, Socrates's claim, in Plato's words, is to keep expressing one's views, and even to the peril of one's life.

So, why follow the laws of the state is? Well, there can be two reasons. We follow the laws of states, because the laws are just, and we agree with it. Or, the laws, not following the laws, could be punishing us. So, what is an ideal relation between, the state and the individual. And, if coming to the third point, Civil Disobedience versus Terrorism. Now, how do you express your descent, with the state? Do you express it, by being silent, and leaving the state, by not following the rules, and doing something against the Law?

How is it that, your disagreement with the laws, can be civil disobedience at one end, and almost terrorism at the other end. Interesting parallels can be drawn, to the Indian independence movement, where Indians, our ancestors were fighting, for self-determination of their own country. Now, there was a British rule enforced by the colonisers, which the natives, our ancestors did not agree.

Some of them chose, to break the law voluntarily, and yet to accept the punishment, that it brings along. For example, Mahatma Gandhi's salt law. The fact that, most of the people found the law, immoral, was justification enough for it, to break it. And then, to accept the punishment, that came along with it. Now, this was with the mission, provoked the conscience of the ruler.

The other alternatives, or the other end of the spectrum, where people like Bhagat Singh, who

also took up the violent means, to express their unhappiness, with the present ruling class. Now, these are extreme cases of venting out, one's reaction to the laws by which, one is governed in one state. So, Socrates here also, in a way, in a subtle but powerful way, expresses his disapproval of the laws, by conforming to it, but raising the flag eternally.

Well, this state proves that, by stifling Socrates's voice, and later his life, the state is only digging its own grave, and seeing its own decline in the future. So, with this, I would like to leave you, with the questions, that Socrates dialogue raises. And, if in case, you would like to read more about the dialogue, have go into details, you are welcome to visit the Gutenberg website.