

## Citizenship: The Legality of Breaking the Law

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### Abstract

This paper discusses the role and function of model citizens and argues that model citizens (for example, Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela) stood up for what they believed in, and in the end they improved society for the rest of their fellow citizens. They may have broken the laws, but they did what was necessary for the betterment of civilization. A comparison of the arguments of Crito, Antigone and Socrates is presented. Crito supports breaking the law in order to save Socrates, which would keep the future bright for aspiring scholars. Socrates himself does not wish to be saved because he believes the best model of citizenship is composed purely of respect for the law. On the other hand, Crito's dedication and bravery and his model of citizenship offer the best arguments/solution. Crito's model of citizenship is the best model for modern day citizens to follow since his actions resemble both bravery and critical thinking.

**Key words:** Model citizen, Crito, Antigone, Socrates, ideals of citizenship.

### Model Citizens

Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela. These are names every child in the American public school system learns by the time they are in sixth grade. Great people, revolutionary movements. It is not new or surprising to group them together. They all had unique goals, but a common factor among them was civil disobedience. Each of these outstanding people spent their share of time in jail. And yet, they are remembered favorably throughout history. However, at the time of their action, those in power viewed them as nuisances. The great British powers would not have described Gandhi as an inspiration, and the leaders of South Africa definitely did not see Mandela in any positive light. But I see all of these people as model citizens. They stood up for what they believed in, and in the end they

improved society for the rest of their fellow citizens. They may have broken the laws, but they did what was necessary for the betterment of civilization.

### **Crito and Antigone**

Crito and Antigone have multiple similarities. For example, both of them had a strong desire to break the law. Both of them also had high incentives to break the law. Crito wanted to save his wise friend Socrates, and Antigone simply wanted to give her brother a proper burial. It may be admitted that yes, Antigone broke the laws for a noble cause. She followed her heart and sought to uphold the laws of the gods<sup>1</sup>. However, she cannot be our best model for citizenship for numerous reasons. Primarily, in this day and age, not everyone follows the same god or gods.

### **Ideals of Citizenship**

If the best form of citizenship meant each person was to decipher each and every law in the context of their own religion, our world would be in chaos. For example, how is a religion defined? A group of three people could potentially come together, say they have formed a religion and begin committing gruesome crimes, all in the name of religion. Does this mean Antigone should have endured the pain and agony of knowing her brother would not be properly buried<sup>2</sup>? No. Antigone still made the most appropriate choice for herself as Creon was overcome with hubris and paranoia<sup>3</sup> to be sensible. Nonetheless, where Antigone's model falls short and Crito's ascends is in practicality. As citizens, although we will from time to time face a difficult decision between religion, our feelings, and law, our main focus should be placed on something higher; the greater good. This is why Crito's ideals of citizenship surpass Antigone's.

Crito is a man of sizable wealth<sup>4</sup> and staunch loyalty, he is also no fool. Crito knows that Socrates is wise and a positive influence in the world. Crito believes that when it comes down to it, it is worth it to break the law, especially when the law is simply based on opinions and slander<sup>5</sup>, as Socrates himself states is so in this case. Crito realizes that the public's view may be

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<sup>1</sup> *Antigone*, 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Antigone*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Antigone*, 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Crito*, 102.

<sup>5</sup> *Crito*, 101.

skewed<sup>6</sup> and that it has become necessary to break the law, in order to uphold good citizenship and make the world better, as Socrates has potential to do. Crito believes this is the courageous thing to do and does not want Socrates to stain his own name<sup>7</sup>.

### **Crito's Model of Citizenship**

Crito's model of citizenship involves seeing past the black and white of the law in order to assist in the effort to promote the greater good for the people around them. In the moral development process, it is easily seen that the recognition of the necessity to break rules comes after a strict adherence to rules. Crito's model of citizenship involves breaking the law if and only if it is for the greater good of society. I find this admirable because in order to do this one must know and be aware of what the greater good of society actually is. Therefore, the possibility of breaking simple laws for trivial reasons is eradicated. In addition, it takes courage to fight society for the greater good. Socrates even mentioned that on his search for knowledge he may have become hated, as he realized he was wiser than many, but it did not matter because he was doing it for the gods<sup>8</sup> and the greater good they had intended.

### **Crito versus Socrates: Good Citizenship**

Crito's model of citizenship is similar to that of the admirable people named at the beginning of this paper. However, Socrates is quite different. Socrates refuses Crito's offers of escape on the basis of respect for Athens<sup>9</sup>. In doing so Socrates is saying that since he used the benefit of Athens and its society, he has no right to defy the laws, whether or not he believes them to be just. I understand this perspective fully, however, Socrates is missing a large part of what good citizenship should really be about. Good citizenship is not solely about being a part of society, but improving it for others as well. As Crito points out, by not escaping, Socrates is betraying many people<sup>10</sup>. Foremost, he is betraying his students and followers. He is showing that it is okay to die for education. While it may be noble to die for a cause one believes in, is it

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<sup>6</sup> *Crito*, 102.

<sup>7</sup> *Crito*, 103.

<sup>8</sup> *Apology*, 70.

<sup>9</sup> *Crito*, 109.

<sup>10</sup> *Crito*, 103.

not more noble to integrate that cause into society, so people are able to freely pursue it without having to die?

### **We are Citizens of Many Different Things**

As humans we are citizens of many different things, on many different levels, all at the same time. We are citizens of our country, of our ethnic nation, of our home community, of our school community, and of our church. It goes without saying that one should model good citizenship, but how to do so is where the question lies. Antigone acts on the basis of religion and what will lie best with herself and the gods, discounting the law. While this is a noble cause, she does not keep in mind the good of the rest of society, which Crito does. Crito supports breaking the law in order to save Socrates, which would keep the future bright for aspiring scholars. Socrates himself does not wish to be saved because he believes the best model of citizenship is composed purely of respect for the law. I admire Crito's dedication and bravery and believe his model of citizenship is the best. Crito's model of citizenship is the best model for modern day citizens to follow since his actions resemble both bravery and critical thinking.

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